



Growing Together

Newsletter for
parents of preschool children

Health & Safety

Drink more water

If you've noticed that your child is cranky or tired during the day, her body may be telling her to drink — drink water, that is.

Water is one of the most important nutrients for the body.

It carries other vital nutrients and waste products throughout the body, helps regulate body temperature, and performs other vital functions.

Encouraging children to drink water throughout the day may help boost their stamina and keep their moods on an even level.

It's a good idea for parents, too, to drink more water! □

April 2009

Vol. 25 No. 4

Parenting

Spending time with children

Most parents value spending time with their children. But all too often our lifestyle doesn't lend itself to "togetherness." Even when we plan special times with our children, things don't always go smoothly.

Here are some tips for helping make the time spent together happy and productive for all:

- If you spend time at work during the week and your child spends the majority of time in school or at childcare, staying home and having an unstructured day during the weekend might be a better way to nurture a relationship than going to see a movie.

A relaxing time doing what you all enjoy—which may be as simple as fixing pancakes for breakfast or going on a hike—may be the best use of your time.

- Do something with your children that you like to do. If you do something you enjoy, the pleasure is often contagious.

What about a game of miniature golf? Go swimming together. Play a game of croquet.

- Consider the basics: hunger and sleep. It's difficult to have fun with a tired or hungry child

(or adult, for that matter).

Try to keep naps on schedule. Eat an early lunch if you're going out for the afternoon, or take along a simple lunch or snacks.

- Sometimes let children join in your projects. The adult world is appealing to children. After all, children want more than anything to be "big." They also want to spend time with their parents.

For example, while you're making dinner, put a plastic tablecloth down on the floor. Give your youngster a pan of water (not very deep) and some potatoes to wash with a vegetable scrub brush.

- Make a short list of four or five activities you can all participate in. Then let the kids choose the one they'd like most.

This helps them feel like they are part of the family, and that their preferences are considered.

We need to manage ourselves to make time for what's important to us. But that isn't always easy.

Kids are kids for only a short time. Building a strong relationship with them now means you can enjoy the rewards for a lifetime. □

Learning new words

The ability to understand what is heard is called receptive language.

At age 16-18 months of age, this language is still growing faster than expressive language, which is called speech.

At this age, Toddler is using mostly single words. The bulk of these words are nouns like “milk,” “ball,” or “dog,” but she can also use adjectives like “hot,” verbs like “want,” and “go,” or even questions, such as “whadda?”

These words represent thoughts and serve as actual sentences. “Car” may mean, “We’re going for a ride, and I can’t wait to look out the window to see the world!”

The first two-word sentences are pieced together with the words said together but not really connected, as “Boy. Run.”

You will notice that Toddler talks at least as much to herself as to other people. She may appear astonished when someone responds to this self-talk.

Receptive language is learned mainly in a social context in which feelings and actions coincide with objects, people, and their gestures.

When Dad says, “Come here,” he holds out his arms to receive Toddler.

When Mother says, “Give it to me,” she reaches out to accept the object.

When Mother holds a cup to Toddler’s lips, she says, “Drink your juice.”

In other words, Toddler’s receptive language is the product of simple associations that have been going on since she was about six months old.

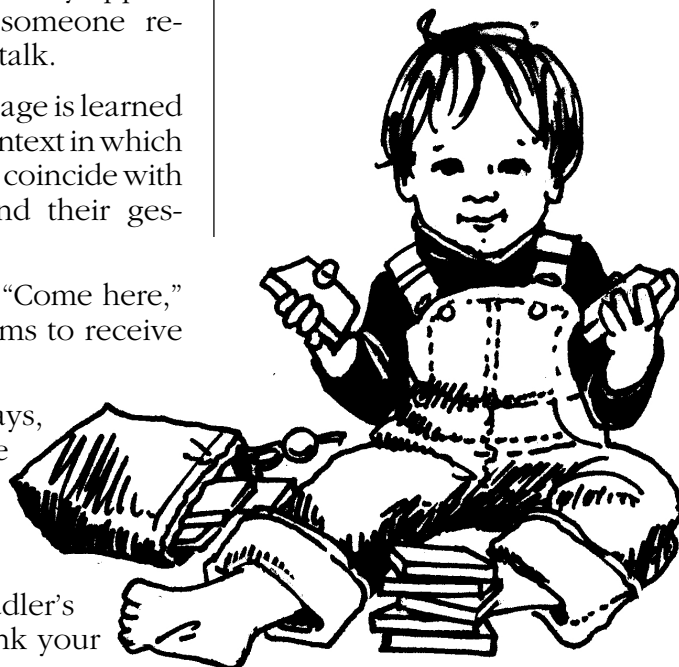
Imitation plays a big role in the life of the toddler. She uses it for learning new words. Parents says, “See the monkey,” and Toddler echoes the word “monkey.”

Or Toddler points to an object and her parents or caregivers supply its name.

There is a snowballing effect in learning language—the more a child is able to speak, the more she learns to speak.

Once Toddler discovers this power of speech, she has a new style of behaving and dealing with her world.

She demonstrates this mastery by talking with the adults in her life. And generally they love it! □



Growing up is hard to do

As a child grows up during the preschool years, she may seem unpredictable and hard to understand. She may get very excited about an activity, only to leave it suddenly without explanation.

Sometimes you may have to tell her the same things a hundred times (it seems like). Still she forgets to do what you’ve asked.

She can be adorable one minute and then whiny or pouting the next. And she may—for no apparent reason—begin to be afraid of all sorts of things that never bothered her before.

In other words, your child is experiencing some rough spots that are normal on her journey to growing up.

Your preschooler is no longer a baby. You have expectations of her taking some responsibilities for herself. This is good. Most of the time she probably is proud to be able to do things for herself.

But there are times when she wishes someone else would take care of her responsibilities. This shows up, particularly, if there’s a younger child in the family from whom less is expected.

Try to understand how your child feels. And let her know you understand her feelings. “You don’t want to put away your toys now. You’re tired, and you wish I’d do it for you. Let’s pick them up together.”

By putting yourself in your child’s shoes, you can help her get through the occasional rough spots in her life. □

Clear messages

A friend mentioned her grandson who was having a difficult time adjusting to a new sibling. His mother explained to Nathan clearly and repeatedly that he could not hurt the baby.

After the last incident, she told him firmly that the next time he hurt the baby, he would have to spend time alone in his room.

Several days later she heard Nathan calling: "Mommy, Julia's crying, and I'm going to my room." Obviously Nathan had received the message that Mom was serious, that the baby was not to be hurt, and hurting the baby would have absolute consequences.

When parents give such definite messages to children, it is easier for youngsters to develop self-control. They come to understand that this is the way things work in their worlds, with clear expectations and boundaries.

Alas, many children do not receive such clear messages. Somewhere along the line, many parents confuse authoritative firmness with authoritarian harshness.

Having no desire to disrupt the parent-child relationship by arousing children's anger and resentment, they do what they can to avoid the appearance of being in charge.

They suggest, with a faintly pleading tone, that it would be "nice" to behave in a particular way. They smile winningly, hoping that such signs of pleasantness will convince children to do the right thing.

In the process, they weaken

and dilute the messages they want to send. Children find themselves on the receiving end of communication with so much static and confusion that they are left to interpret, usually wrongly, what it was that a parent was trying to say.

Children come into this world with not one whit of understanding about it. They are admirably equipped to learn about its physical properties as they actively explore, using all their senses and manipulative abilities.

If they use these same senses to try to figure out the rules of social behavior as explained in the ambiguous messages of some adults, their ears and their eyes may give them conflicting information.

The words may sound serious, but the tone and facial expression are contradictory. Or the words may be weakened in meaning because there is no concrete evidence of follow-through.

When parents threaten a certain response and do not follow through, children don't see a clear connection between the words and the reality.

All this complicates their learning and understanding. Much more exploration, potentially painful for both adults and children, will be needed in cases where adults give children unclear messages.

In Nathan's case, he couldn't yet control his own actions, but he was confident enough of what his mother's would be that he

went to his room.

Part of sending an unambiguous message is being confident that this is necessary and appropriate information.

Yes, children have an amazing capacity to learn, and yes, they are capable of great understanding on their own. But they have an absolute need for adults to guide and demonstrate appropriate ways of interacting within the family and in the world beyond.

That parenting role is essential and irreplaceable. So we must watch what we say and how we say it. Is the message clear? □

Something New!

"Grandma Says" is a twice-monthly special message that includes general parenting tips, words of encouragement, and children's book reviews. To receive your free issues, go to: www.GrowingChild.com/FreeGrandmaSays and enter your e-mail address.

Growing Together is published by Growing Child, Inc., 2336 Northwestern Ave. W. Lafayette, IN 47906 ©2009 Growing Child, Inc. Telephone: (765) 464-0920. Customer Service: 1-800-927-7289.


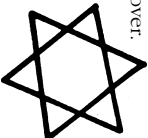

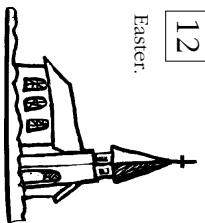


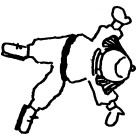


Growing Child also publishes: **Growing Child** (birth-six years), and **Growing Up** (grades K-12).

Growing Together issues may be reproduced in part or in full by participating organizations.

Articles in **Growing Together** refer to both boys and girls. For simplicity, the pronouns "he" and "she" are used interchangeably unless otherwise noted.

www.growingchild.com

April, 2009

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|--|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| <p>5</p> <p>Palm Sunday.</p> | <p>6</p> <p>Everyone get together in front of a large mirror and make funny faces.</p> | <p>7</p> <p>Make a cow out of clay.</p>  | <p>8</p> <p>Look at a picture book and talk about what you see.</p> | <p>9</p> <p>Passover.</p>  | <p>10</p> <p>Good Friday.</p> | <p>11</p> <p>Play with a toy telephone. Call a friend, a parent, a playmate, or grandparent.</p>  |
| <p>12</p> <p>Easter.</p>  | <p>13</p> <p>Wear something with stripes in it today.</p> | <p>14</p> <p>Count all the stuffed animals in your house.</p> | <p>15</p> <p>Make some different size smiley faces with an orange crayon.</p>  | <p>16</p> <p>Talk about right and left.</p> | <p>17</p> <p>Who is your favorite cartoon character?</p>  | <p>18</p> <p>Is it hot or cold outside? How do you know?</p> |
| <p>19</p> <p>What fits into what? What bowls, pans, cups do you have that nest inside of each other.</p> | <p>20</p> <p>Fruit yogurt makes a great snack or dessert.</p> | <p>21</p> <p>Dance "The Twist."</p>  | <p>22</p> <p>Earth Day. Help pick up litter in your neighborhood.</p> | <p>23</p> <p>How tall are you? Who is tallest in your family?</p> | <p>24</p> <p>Visit a flower shop and look at all the beautiful flowers.</p> | <p>25</p> <p>Put together a puzzle.</p> |
| <p>26</p> <p>If the sun is shining, go for a walk. If it isn't shining, jog in place inside.</p> | <p>27</p> <p>Start some seeds in a window garden.</p>  | <p>28</p> <p>What is your favorite food?</p> | <p>29</p> <p>Listen to some classical music.</p> | <p>30</p> <p>What's a bagel? What do you do with it?</p> |  | |