



Growing Together

Newsletter for
parents of preschool children

Social Skills

Good manners start early—at home

The basics of good manners for children are:

- Respecting other people's property and privacy.
- Behaving well at the table during mealtime.
- Not being rowdy in public.
- Not interrupting or contradicting.
- Not demanding one's way all the time.

Choose the manners that are most important to you and your family and concentrate on those.

If you starting teaching manners consistently and with purpose in the preschool years, they should be a habit by the time a child enters school. □

Nutrition

Make breakfast a pleasant time of day

How can parents get children to eat a wholesome meal and still get out of the house on time?

- Be creative. For toddlers, straws, colorful plastic spoons, a special bowl or a fancy cup can turn a picky eater into a good one.

A little table and chair set up in the kitchen may be preferable to always being under scrutiny where the adults sit.

For infants who can sit up in a high chair, finger food such as dry cereal or scrambled eggs in a wafer cone can keep their hands busy while you spoon in their baby food.

Cups with plastic tops can prevent spills as infants slowly but surely master the important task of drinking from a cup.

Avoid battles by offering a variety of foods and praise any attempts at self-feeding.

- Think small. Little children are overwhelmed by bowls of oatmeal that seem to have no bottom or a stack of French toast that never disappears.

Small portions of varied foods such as a fruit cup and silver-dollar-sized pancakes will have them licking off the syrup and asking for more.

Allowing even babies to mix their



own dish of oatmeal and applesauce increases the odds that they'll finish it.

- Try anything that works. The mother of twins admits, "My girls never did seem interested in a big dinner. So, the next morning I would reheat their favorite leftover — spaghetti and meatballs — and serve it to them for breakfast. It worked every time."

Many a toddler eats peanut butter and jelly for lunch and breakfast. One mother reports that the only time of day her child eats green vegetables is in the morning ... "when he's too sleepy to fight about it."

Minimizing food choices in the morning reduces the amount of time you need to stand by the kitchen cabinet while you point to each cereal to a resounding chorus of "No!" Using some ingenuity in how the food is presented also helps. □

Providing good role models

How can parents teach their children to be responsible? By being good role models themselves.

- **Be predictable.** Children need to know the rules. In a world full of contradictions and change, a parent should be predictable.

If a child makes a mistake, he needs to know what to expect. Parents' position should be clear. A few rules, firmly enforced, are more effective than many rules, loosely enforced.

- **Be respectful.** No one likes to be ridiculed or embarrassed. Within the heart of every child is the potential of greatness. Don't squelch it.

Respect the opinions of children and recognize their intelligence. When making plans involving them, ask for their views and give consideration to their preferences.

Treat children as though they are important because they really are.

- **Be dependable.** As children grow, they need less from their parents and more from themselves, but one need they will always have is dependable parents. They need to know they can count on their parents. Parents are the roots of their changing world.

- **Be an example.** Avoid hypocrisy. If you tell a child not to smoke or use drugs but you smoke or use drugs, what behavior can you expect?

Children love honesty. Living truthfully and acting truthfully are powerful examples.

With children, one living example is worth 10,000 empty words. Children mirror their parents. See them and you see yourselves. □

What to do when parents and grandparents disagree

If there are disagreements between generations about child-rearing, there are several things to consider:

- How important is it? If children seldom see their grandparents, a simple conversation about different rules at different houses may suffice.

If there are major differences and children spend a lot of time with grandparents, the situation will have to be addressed.

- Many parents are understandably insecure in their decisions about rearing children. An authoritative grandparent may make it hard to stand up for one's own beliefs.

- Some grandparents who were strict with their own children prefer to simply "enjoy" the grandchildren, indulging whims and undermining discipline.

- Grandparents who've struggled to raise their children may see different child-rearing methods as disapproval of their own practices or a repudiation of their values.

When differences of opinion about children are impossible to resolve or in cases where there are problems of sickness such as untreated alcoholism or a severe mental disorder, hard choices must be made.

It is painful for grandparents and grandchildren to be cut off from each other, but there may be no other solution.

In some cases, however, visits may be made with the parents or a responsible third party present.

Often differences between generations are the product of misunderstandings and faulty communication. A frank discussion of the parents' philosophy of child-raising can often lead to a sharing of ideas.

Between the two extremes of response—suffering in silence or denying all contact—there is usually a meeting ground.

- Parents should discuss between themselves their philosophy, goals and plans for their children. Disagreements should be ironed out before approaching grandparents.

- If there is a particular child development book or resource you are consulting, provide the grandparents with a copy.

- Decide whether there is one specific area of disagreement, such as television viewing or going to church, or if there is a strikingly different philosophy.

- Meeting without the kids on neutral ground may lend itself to a productive discussion.

Whether you are the parent or the grandparent, state your case, then listen. The other generation may have some good ideas. □

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.

Food for thought

Yes, I'm a grandma, and have therefore I've been around a while. Yes, I know the world has changed and is constantly changing, and it behooves us all to adapt along with it.

My career spent in early education also convinces me that some truths are unchanging, and today's parents would do well to ponder them. So, with that understanding, let's consider—with love and support—some important places where parenting today may err in some directions that are not best for children.

1. It is not a parent's job to create children's academic curriculum vita from infancy on. Families are often in a frenzy of lessons and activities, all designed to give their children the necessary credentials to look good when applying for admission to Harvard.

It is important that parents understand that their real task is to provide an environment that stimulates children's interest in the world, and then offer some opportunities for children to explore and develop their interests and abilities, in whatever direction they choose.

This can be a leisurely process, not necessarily involving enrichment activities every day of the week. This should surely take some of the pressure off family time and finances. P.S. Every child does not need to have Harvard as a goal.

2. Parents are not always obliged to explain themselves or their decisions to children. From some of the manifestos I hear being offered to kids, many parents have clearly misunderstood the idea that children need explanations.

YES, they need to understand why some actions are right and others wrong, but NO they do not have to approve of, or even understand, every

parental judgment. Parents are the big people, and they do have a more all-encompassing viewpoint than do young children.

3. There is actually no on-going public contest to see who can be the most nearly perfect parent, although many parents behave as though they believed that such a contest exists.

Recently we sat behind a family at a children's theater, where the father talked (quite loudly and with self-conscious awareness) with his daughter. The child, seeming to understand that this was for public view, kept looking at him with a puzzled expression.

Children deserve adults who behave authentically with them, treating them with respect, not parents who are using them as foils to demonstrate the parent's wonderfulness.

The discovery of just how interesting their children are rewards parents who interact as genuine persons.

Sometime in our recent past, parents seemed to get the false impression that they had to devote every waking minute to the care, protection, and entertainment of their youngsters.

In fact, children thrive when parents are busy developing their own lives and interests, as well as carrying out the responsibilities of parenthood. Children need time on their own, to explore, experiment, think, take a few risks, and hang around with others their own age.

When kids name parents as their best friends, something has gone off-track in the parent-child relationship. Both parents and kids need to have separate, as well as interconnected, lives. Maybe these ideas will offer you something to think about. □

Brainstorming at an early age

Children are naturally curious and creative. Adults can encourage that creativity by asking children open-ended questions about everyday activities—"What would happen if we left the ice-cubes out on the counter?"—and every-day objects.

Simple games featuring these objects and activities can be fascinating and fun for kids. Here's how to play:

Name a specific object—a pancake turner, for example. Then ask, "How many different ways can you think of to use a pancake turner?"

Or mention a daily activity: "What would happen if we stayed in bed all day?"

Mention a few unorthodox examples yourself to illustrate the wide range of possibilities.

After a few rounds, kids will want to name the object and the activity themselves. □

Growing Together

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www.growingchild.com

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Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday



If there's snow where you live, go outside and make a great big, huge snowball.



Go to the library and look for a book about prairie dogs.

5

Take a walk in the park.

6

What color is snow in:

North Dakota?
South Dakota?
Florida?
Maine?

7

Hirja.

8

What's the weather like today?

___ sunny
___ cloudy
___ rainy
___ snowy

9

Tell someone that you love them!



10

Play "pin the tail on the donkey" using a PEN instead of a PIN.

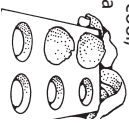
11

Play with a toy telephone. Call a friend, or a parent, or your grandparents.



12

Make some fruit muffins. After they're cool, put some in a basket and take them to a friend's family.



13

Sing "Jingle Bells." What is a one-horse open sleigh anyway?

14

Close your eyes and listen to the sounds from the kitchen. What's going on out there?



15

Make a holiday gift for your grandparents.

16

Crawl around on all fours—what animal noises can you imitate?



17

Make some cookies and decorate them with "sprinkles."

18

Make a donation of staples (canned or dry food, paper products) to a local food pantry.

19

Draw a picture of a snow woman and her dog.



20

Donate some "too small" clothes to a local charity.

21

First day of winter.

22

Count three things: three books three knees three trees



23

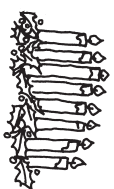
Take a big cardboard box and cut out both ends—now you have a tunnel to crawl through.

24

How many of Santa's reindeer can you name?

25

Christmas.



26

Kwanzaa begins.

27

Play "Follow the Leader"

28

Sit by the window and enjoy the sunshine.



29

Use a pair of aluminum pie tins as cymbals and play along with a CD.

30

Play hide-and-seek with the whole family...

31

New Year's Eve!

