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Growing Together

Newsletter for parents of preschool children

Games & Activities

Yarn tangles

This is a good game for a rainy day. It works best with teams of players.

Each team member gets a different color ball of yarn and each team gets a chair.

Allow teams two or three minutes to wrap or tangle their yarn around the chair. They are not allowed to move or lift the chair or to make knots.

At the end of the time allowance, the timekeeper calls "Stop!" and each team moves to a different chair.

When the timekeeper calls "Go!" each team begins to remove/rewind the yarn from their new chair. It works well if each team member rolls up one color of yarn.

Once again, players are not allowed to move or pick up their chair.

The first team to untangle the yarn from their chair and roll it into different balls is the winner.

After playing this game once, kids get the hang of it and can choose up new teams and play again. New rules can be added … or old ones subtracted … to make the game more fun/difficult.

Parenting

Hang on!

Most parents know what it is to worry about how well their children are doing. Most parents also know how good it is to enjoy and savor their children's growing up experiences.

In every child's growing up, there are ups and downs. One day you think she'll surely be President. The next day you think you'll be lucky if she manages to stay out of jail!

These swings between good and bad feelings about your child are all part of the business of being a parent.

Being a parent is a truly great experience, but at times, it can cause you exasperation!

Be assured that such wild swings in feelings are perfectly normal. Like most other parents, you probably also wonder sometimes if you're doing the right thing.

In fact, it may encourage you to know that:

1. Almost every parent has felt what you are feeling now;

2. There are so many good things about your child's growth and development which can give you pleasure;

3. One or two problems now won't affect your child forever.

You can get from this stage in your lives to the next stage by:

1. Living with your child's developmental problems from day-to-day;

2. Enjoying her, laughing with her, holding her close when the dark moments close in upon both of you, and

3. Simply getting through the ordinary routines of each day.

If you ever feel being a parent is getting too difficult for you, talk to a close friend or relative or other parents who can share their experiences.

Whatever you do, don't mentally bite your fingernails or waste your emotional energy in wondering if you are a "perfect parent", whatever that may mean.

Don't hover over your child. Don't constantly ask yourself, "Is she doing all right?"

Don't pressure your child into performing at ever-higher levels. Don't make her feel that you love her only if she performs well. She should know that you love her because she is your child.

Above all, let your child know in a hundred different ways that you love her. The knowledge that she matters, that she is loved for herself alone, is the greatest gift you can give your child. ❑

Boosting parents' self-confidence

At one time or another, almost all parents question their self-confidence.

Parents wants to be able to act decisively and confidently, but the influence of neighbors and relatives and what they will think can be upsetting.

Here's an idea that may help.

Most decisions revolve around two categories—**needs** and **wants**—and it is important to determine which is which.

Needs must be responded to in the interests of children's development.

Wants may be considered but they may also be rejected in the interest of health, safety, or family priorities.

So, while children **need** good food, they may **want** only ice cream.

Parents who feel obliged to satisfy all their child's wants may discover they are harboring a little tyrant.

Many parents are afraid of losing their child's love if they deny them all they want—children do often become frustrated and sometimes angry when thwarted.

Yet is impossible to satisfy 100 percent without parents becoming irritated and indignant.

A compromise is, first, to recognize the difference between needs and wants.

Then, if you feel secure in your love for your child, you can accept the consequences of your decision—without fearing your child's rejection or criticisms from relatives or neighbors. ❑

The Important Questions

I recently read an article written by a pediatrician in which she enumerated the myriad questions that parents ask.* She said that parents of babies and young children ask the most, not surprisingly, as they are plunged into the experience of caring for their children without a huge backlog of information.

Probably Siri gets some of these same questions: Is my child eating enough? When will my child sleep through the night? What is this rash? Should my baby's poop be _____?

Parents ask questions about articles of clothing, potty training, biting, strollers, toothpaste, water, sunscreen, bug spray, naps—the entire gamut of the details of daily life.

The doctor commented that she really understood why all these questions about the minutiae might help parents feel more likely to be able to handle the overwhelming task of being responsible for a human being.

However, she went on to comment that she does not get questions about the things that can actually make a difference in helping children grow up to be healthy, happy and successful as independent, productive, compassionate people.

Let me outline here for you the big questions she wishes parents **would** wonder about.

1. How can I nurture my child, and be sure he/she feels loved? Since this is the key to future happiness and success, this is really a prime question, and involves more than saying, "I love you."

2. How can I teach my child to be polite, respectful and kind? Although parents do ask about teaching kids to be quiet and do what they are told, there is much more involved in giving the kids the interpersonal skills they need to function in the social world of relationships, in school and the workplace, and become a contributing member of the community.

3. How can I help my child be interested in learning about the world around him/her? Encouraging the natural curiosity of children is not so difficult, and can be part of daily life, conversations and activities.

As children come to understand that the world is a big and fascinating place, they want to find their place in it.

4. How can I play with my child, and be sure she/he is getting enough playtime and downtime?

Commenting that she has <u>never</u> been asked this question, the doctor goes on to say that most kids are not getting the creative free play experiences that lead to mental and physical health and so much else.

5. Probably related to this, her next desirable question is, how can I be sure my child is getting a healthy diet and exercising enough? These are the only sure things for current and future health.

6. Lastly, how can I best support and encourage my child? "This is about being specific with praise, about figuring out a child's strengths and weaknesses, about knowing when to push and when to let things go, about advocating and finding advocates."

Focusing on the smaller questions may satisfy some parental anxieties, but asking the bigger questions is what builds health, resiliency and happiness. ❑

* Claire McCarthy, Six Questions Parents Should Really Be Asking Pediatricians.

Nutrition

Dealing with a picky eater

Q: My two-year-old son is a very picky eater. Do you have any advice to help increase the number of vegetables he will eat?

A: Dealing with a picky eater can be difficult for parents, but be patient.

Continue to offer a variety of new foods, and avoid getting into power struggles. Some helpful hints include:

• Remember, your responsibility ends with the serving of nutritious foods. You cannot make your son eat. He must decide that for himself.

• Keep a regular schedule of meals and snacks. Don't allow your son to make you a short-order cook.

• Avoid serving snacks close to mealtimes. New foods seem most attractive when a child is hungry.

• Place small "one or two bite" portions of the new food on your son's plate—alongside more familiar foods—at each meal.

• Be patient. Make no comment whether or not your son eats the new food. After five or ten exposures, the food may not seem so "new."

Then he may decide to try it on his own. If he does, begin serving the new food on a regular basis.

• Invite your son to help prepare meals. Children are more likely to eat foods that they've helped prepare.

• Be a good role model. Children notice what their parents eat. So, eat your vegetables and your son may, too ❑

Language

Give children words

The ability to understand words, both written and spoken, is highly valued in our culture. We need to be able to speak and to read to succeed in almost everything we try to do in life.

Since children learn new words by hearing them and by seeing them, parents and caregivers can do much to add to children's vocabularies.

For very young children, this can be done by naming objects that they see and come in contact with every day. Identifying and naming objects does sound a lot like talking to oneself, but it is a worthwhile endeavor.

For example, "This is your *shoe*, and I'm going to put it on your *foo*t." Or, "Let's put these *blocks* away in this *can*."

Children need to hear the same words over and over, and this can seem tiresome until you get in the habit of maintaining a one-sided running conversation!

When children begin to talk, they may not pronounce words correctly. Instead of always correcting them, you can simply repeat the word in a sentence, using the correct pronunciation. Once you learn how to talk, it's hard to remember how hard it was in the beginning!

Older children love to hear big words, even though they might not understand what they mean. So, don't be afraid to introduce new and fascinating-sounding words in your conversations. "This sandwich isn't just big, it's *stupendous!*" "This ball will roll faster as it gains *momentum*."

Teaching children to be curious about their world—and the words that can tell them about their world—can start° them on a journey of discovery of their own. ❑

Academics

Practicing ABCs

Here's an easy, fun way to practice making letter and words. Start with a big pan, like a roasting pan. Pour a thick layer of salt into the pan and shake it from side to side until the salt is spread evenly. Now you're ready to write.

Children get the "feel" of letters better when their fingertips shape them than when a stubborn pencil point does. They can make letters as big as they like without wasting paper.

And if they are unhappy with the way something looks, they don't have the frustration of scribbling over it or the tedious job of trying to erase.

All they have to do is give the pan a shake. The mistake disappears and there is a clean "page" on which to start over. If your child is too young for writing, he can make swirly designs with fingers or cookie cutters.

For those kids who love tiny bulldozers and dump trucks, the salt's fine, dry texture works better than sand for moving, dumping and piling up. It's also a lesson in quantities to fill up and empty various sizes and shapes of containers, bowls … and teacups.

Look at the salt as a new kind of creative surface … and think up a new challenge for the kids at your house. ❑

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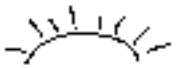
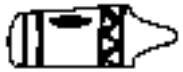
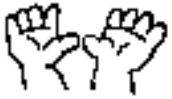
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1 Hard boiled eggs for lunch.
2 Read a favorite fairy tale. 	3 Draw a map of your bedroom.	4 Find out what time the sun gets up? 	5 Construct a garage out of blocks—for two cars.	6 Go on a "sound hunt." Find things that make different noises.  doorbell, vacuum cleaner, lawn mower ...	7 Can you make a dinosaur out of clay?	8 Can people fly? Why not? 
9 Pudding on a cookie sheet is a fun (and edible) way to fingerpaint.	10 Lay down on the floor on your back and do "bicycles" in the air to music. 	11 Eat some banana pieces with your cereal.	12 Color extravagantly on newspaper with crayons. 	13 Draw a map of the street/ place where you live.	14 Flag Day. 	15 Baseball anyone? How about putting together neighborhood teams of moms, dads, kids and anyone else who wants to play? Only takes 2 teams!
16 Father's Day 	17 Get out some old buttons and sort them by color. (Not for kids under two.)	18 Look at a thermometer. What's the temperature today? Is that warm or cold?	19 What makes a flashlight work? Take one apart and see. (Adult supervision, please)	20 First day of Summer.	21 Go camping in the back yard. 	22 Kids make a dessert using yogurt.
23 Fingerpaint this afternoon 30 Count all the 2's on this page.	24 • Set up the wading pool. • Make safety rules. • Adult supervision at all times. Splash, splash!	25 Learn how to be a good observer. Take a walk. Stop. What do you see in front of you, behind you, above and below you?	26 What did you enjoy eating today? 	27 If you were a crododile, what would your name be?	28 Make a list of three things you'd like to do tomorrow. 1. 2. 3.	29 Why do people hold hands with one another? 

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