



Growing Together

Newsletter for
parents of preschool children

Behavior

Teaching honesty

“Honesty is not inborn,” notes educator and author David Carroll.

“Unlike perseverance, say, or courage, which some youngsters display at amazingly early ages, the wish to treat other people fairly and squarely has to be taught,” he says.

Parents and other significant adults need to consistently shape their children’s understanding of the three aspects of honesty.

First, there is the honesty of possessions—not taking what belongs to another person.

Second, there is honesty of words—learning to speak truthfully.

Third, there is the honesty of behavior—not cheating or victimizing others.

Thomas Jefferson so valued honesty that he declared: “Honesty is the first chapter of the book of wisdom.” □

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Developmental

Raising responsible kids

Children need adults to care for them. In the beginning, parents must do everything for them. But as they grow, adults need to teach them, and then let go so they can grow.

Allowing children to try, perhaps to fail, and then try again is one way to help them grow. Here are some others:

- Experiment a little. Much of a child’s self-esteem comes from his belief that a parent values his ideas and goals.

Allow your child to experiment—with blocks, playthings, arts and crafts, items to be recycled—even if it means making a mess every now and then.

Little fingers learn to manipulate items, turning whims into reality. What a great start for creativity and an I-can-do-it attitude!

- Answer questions. Children who can do many tasks well usually understand the workings of the tools they use. Someone has answered their questions along the way.

Be a parent who answers a child’s countless questions. Explain, explain, explain. If he knows how the toilet works, for instance, he’ll be more likely to use it correctly.

- Let him try. As you work with your child on a task, stop and ask yourself, “Could he try this?” For instance, as you wrap a gift for a friend’s

party, allow your child to peel off the price label, or hold the paper down as you tape.

Monitor yourself. Could your child be helping here instead of just watching you do it?

- Don’t interfere. When your child is trying to plant a seed in the back yard and all appears to be a disaster, don’t take over the project.

More important than a perfectly planted seed is the feeling of accomplishment, of having done a task on his own.

- Admit mistakes. When a parent admits his or her own failures, a child realizes that everyone struggles to do things correctly.

Adults know failure is a part of success. Teach your child to overcome frustrations by acknowledging setbacks as you encounter them.

“Uh-oh. I put three cups of sugar in this cake.” Now you have a chance to show calm in the face of adversity. Show him how you try to solve the problem by talking about your problem-solving technique: “Maybe I should just increase the recipe.”

While children mature at different rates, most are helped (or harmed!) by what parents do and say. By our very words and actions, we may encourage or discourage children to take on increasing responsibilities. □

The fine art of ignoring

Recently I had an e-mail from a parent of a 13-month-old, asking for advice on what to do when the child insisted on pulling off her bib or swatting away the mother's hand when she was feeding her. The mother's final sentence was: "It seems the attention I give to any of these behaviors just causes her to want to do it more."

And therein lies the truth about a powerful tool that parents have to use: the fine art of ignoring.

Before we get to the strategies of ignoring, first a word about young toddlers. The name of the game for children at this age is autonomy and independence. When she "gets" the words, she will say, repeatedly, "Me do it!" That is the process being demonstrated here.

Rather than thwart such attempts at independence, parents are far better to work with them, or at least do no more than redirect the child from the really annoying behaviors. So, the attempts to pull off the bib are best met with a change of interest, something else to do or think about.

The swatting of the parental feeding hand will cease when the toddler is given her own spoon to try to manipulate during meal-time, the work at practicing manual dexterity will be far more absorbing.

In addition, parents of toddlers do well to remember that these youngsters are one-track-mind scientists, deliberately experimenting to check out their effects on others, so that annoying behaviors are used as a tool to check out whether the parental response will always be the same.

This makes happy co-existence challenging, but not impossible, especially

when we consider the importance of targeted ignoring.

When children get a response to behaviors, desirable or not, those behaviors are reinforced and strengthened, increasing the likelihood of the actions being repeated.

If the behaviors are annoying but not dangerous, a parent's most helpful response is none at all, a deliberate ignoring of the events.

If children are using the actions to get attention, they are getting none for those particular activities. If they are using them to exert power and control over a parent, they discover that they can't manipulate the parent into an exchange.

And what with so many things to explore and so little time, actions that don't receive the desired response, or even any response, will likely soon drop away.

Now ignoring means just that—no attention at all, either verbal or non-verbal. It means the adult fixes attention on something else entirely. One caution: ignoring for just so long, and then breaking down and paying attention to the behavior works very hard against the parent's goals: this is what psychologists call "intermittent reinforcement."

And unfortunately, that is the one sure-fire way to keep and strengthen behaviors. So, parents who are ignoring need to be resolute and focused on their goals.

Ignoring is only fair when used to target specific behaviors, and when the adult is careful to show positive

attention to the times when children are behaving well, or doing desirable things.

Ignoring the less desirable and paying attention to the desirable need to go hand in hand.

One more inelegant phrase: don't sweat the small stuff. Parents of toddlers will have many more important issues to deal with in the years to come. □

Language

Negative words

There are many unsavory words that attract the attention of young children such as stupid, idiot, dummy and various "bathroom" words.

The first is because they have been told not to use them. The second is because they do not hear the words regularly used by their parents or caregivers.

It is easy to use a negative word when we feel discouraged or frustrated, but there are some good reasons to avoid this:

- Insulting words make people feel bad; and the use of unflattering words reflects a lack of high standards and values.

For example, "That stupid, dumb door needs some oil," could become, "That squeaky, noisy door needs some oil."

Taking a few seconds to make statements that are as positive as we can make them has a positive effect on everyone—speakers and listeners alike. □

Rules that can work for you

Discipline is more than punishment for misbehavior. It is the means by which we teach our children good conduct now and for the future.

Every mistake a child makes can become an opportunity for new learning. Here are four rules that can guide you:

- **Accentuate the positive.** Let your child know you appreciate her doing things that are important to you. For example, thank her for helping you keep the house neat by picking up her toys and clothes.

If she forgets, gently remind her that it makes your work harder when you have to do all the work yourself. And ask for her help.

Compliment her when she takes responsibility for herself in any way, even if her efforts are awkward.

Point out the times she does things the way you have told her. For example, thank her when she asks for something instead of whining.

- **Minimize the negative.** Pay more attention to the things your child does well than to her mistakes.

Without thinking, we often take for granted those behaviors of others that please us. Then we exaggerate out of proportion the things that they do wrong.

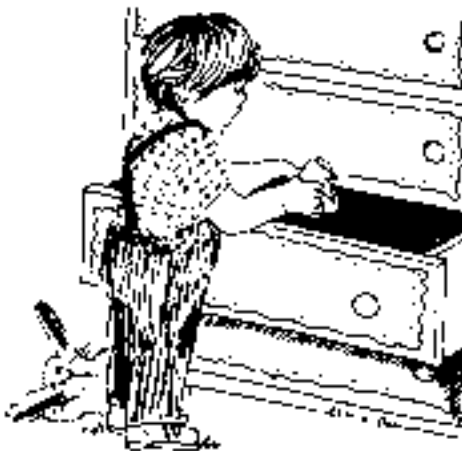
This approach can backfire because children tend to repeat those behaviors that get the most attention.

For example, the more you ask her to stop an annoying habit such as playing with her food, the more she may do it.

Try ignoring it instead. Then when you notice her eating neatly, compli-

ment her. It won't take long before you begin to see a change.

- **Explain your expectations.** Let your child know what you expect of her. Try to keep your expectations fair, reasonable and sensible. Explain them to her.



If she knows what you expect of her, it will be easier for her to please you and avoid your disapproval. You will prevent unnecessary misunderstandings and hurt feelings.

For example, explain that you expect her to be in bed by a time that is acceptable to you. Let her know that she can lie in bed quietly for a short time before going to sleep.

Offer to read or tell her a story. Or just talk with her during that time if she wishes. But explain that you will not want to spend time with her if you have to remind her several times every night that it is time to go to bed.

Let her know what you can expect as well as what she can expect when she does not fulfill her part of the bargain.

- **Be consistent.** Decide what is important to you. Then try to be

consistent in your expectations and responses.

For example, suppose you set a rule that you do not want her playing on the living room sofa with her shoes on.

Don't let her do it one day when you are feeling good and yell at her the next because she's getting on your nerves.

Try to remind her, gently but firmly, that you do not want her to do it.

Ask her to leave the living room until she can do as you ask. Thank her when she remembers to take off her shoes.

It's not always easy to behave toward our children as we would want. Try to accept yourself as you are, and do the best you can. No one can be kind, considerate, fair, patient and respectful all the time.

Be as understanding of yourself as we have asked you to be of your child. Just by trying you will succeed. And your child will learn from your example. □

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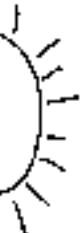

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Articles in Growing Together refer to both boys and girls. For simplicity, the pronouns "he" and "she" are used interchangeably unless otherwise noted.

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Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<p>5</p> <p>Tell your fellow family members what you like about them.</p>	<p>6</p> <p>How is an apple different from a banana? Count the ways.</p> 	<p>7</p> <p>How would you walk if you had three feet?</p>	<p>8</p> <p>Build something different with your blocks.</p> 	<p>9</p> <p>Learn how to take your pulse. What is it?</p>	<p>10</p> <p>Make a homemade card for Mom for Mothers Day.</p>	<p>11</p> <p>Practice listening—close your eyes—what do you hear?</p> 
<p>12</p> <p>Mothers Day. Gave mom a flower or a kiss or a hug or all three!</p> 	<p>13</p> <p>Grapes, crackers and cheese for a snack.</p>	<p>14</p> <p>Help water plants.</p> 	<p>15</p> <p>If you had a big white horse, what would you name it?</p>	<p>16</p> <p>Have a bubble bath with LOTS of bubbles!</p> 	<p>17</p> <p>Count the number of steps it takes to go from the front door to the back door.</p>	<p>18</p> <p>On a windy day, try flying a kite. Armed Forces Day</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>First day of spring! Go outside and listen to the music of the birds.</p>	<p>21</p> <p>Wear something yellow today.</p>	<p>22</p> <p>Choose a topic for conversation at dinner.</p>	<p>23</p> <p>Look for circle shapes outside.</p>	<p>24</p> <p>Take a ten-minute walk with someone.</p>	<p>25</p> <p>Go to the library and look for a book about the sun.</p> 
<p>26</p> <p>Indianapolis 500 Mile Race today! Make a noise like a mighty engine.</p>	<p>27</p> <p>(Memorial DaObserved) <i>Let us remember those who have gone on before us. And let us thank God that such men lived.</i></p>	<p>28</p> <p>Tomato juice for breakfast.</p>	<p>29</p> <p>Trace your hands with a crayon and use a different color to trace your feet.</p> 	<p>30</p> <p>Do you have dandelions in your yard? Count them.</p>	<p>31</p> <p>Is there some yard work that is needed?</p>	