



Growing Together

Newsletter for
parents of preschool children

Social Skills

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 at all times.

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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Parenting

Increase your self-confidence as a parent

Being a parent is a tremendous responsibility.

Parents are expected to feed and clothe tiny, helpless human beings, to teach them to get along in the world, and to encourage them to like themselves and others.

These and many other responsibilities often lead parents to question themselves and their abilities. Many times, parents feel they just don’t measure up to the job they’re required to do.

Sometimes these feelings can chip away at parent’s self-confidence and affect their ability to interact with their children. Therefore, one of the most important things parents can do is build their own self-confidence.

One way to help improve self-confidence as a parent is to evaluate realistically the job they’re doing.

Here are three steps to help improve self-confidence:

First, don’t expect yourself to be perfect. The picture of a “perfect parent”—one who is always kind, patient, loving, intelligent, in control, and so on—is impossible to fulfill.

For example, parents who are always patient may not be preparing their child for a world of impatient people.

Failure is difficult enough to deal when it is real. But trying to be perfect is simply inviting unnecessary failure.

The important thing is not perfect behavior at all times, but growth toward doing things better more often.

A second factor in realistic self-evaluation is to compare your behavior as a parent to your own past performance rather than to some other person’s parenting.

Instead of feeling like a failure because you did not spend three hours a night working or playing with your children like the parent next door, praise yourself for spending a half hour more with them this week than you did last.

Finally, be specific about your self-evaluation. If you try a new method of discipline for a week and it fails miserably, do not simply decide that you are a failure as a parent.

Tell yourself that you did a good job of sticking to the new plan or that you are a pretty good parent for caring enough to try something new, even though it did not work.

Make your failure easier to accept by praising your success.

Then move on. □

Learning to love math

I hate math. I have always hated math. I manage to do enough to figure out my bank balance and calculate how to cut a recipe in half, but the finer points of advanced math remain beyond my grasp.

When it came to the sciences that required some tricky math, I managed to memorize my way through, but I am the first to admit that abstract mathematical thinking is not my strong suit.

Having lived without this skill for my whole life, what's the problem with the attitude conveyed in my first sentence? The problem is that such an assertion from parents could well sour the thinking of the kids around us.

Researchers say that even math-phobic parents can raise kids who enjoy and excel in math, but that requires stopping the negative talk about math and mixing math games, questions, and observations into daily life, in the same way that they do reading and spelling.

Current research continues to indicate the importance of math to children's success. A recent study indicates that math skills when children enter kindergarten are even stronger predictors of later school success than reading skills or even the ability to pay attention.

And yet the most recent results in international student assessment show that American students continue to lag behind global peers, performing below average when compared with children in more than thirty other industrialized nations.

So, besides avoiding the negative personal attitudes about math, there are many simple things that parents can do in the early years to foster

understanding about numbers and spatial relationships.

Very young children can learn to recite number by rote. Many a four-year-old can rattle off a string of numbers all the way up to fifty, but is flummoxed when asked to put a cookie for each of her friends on the plate.

Table setting helps with this one-to-one correspondence, needing a plate, fork, and knife for each member of the family.

Helping children make connections between numbers and sets of objects—like giving five Cheerios for the number five—is far more meaningful in establishing math concepts.

(How about saving an egg carton, marking a different numeral in each of the cups, and asking your youngster to put the corresponding number of Cheerios in each cup? That's a fun, math-rich snack!)

Simple block-building games, encouraging children to replicate your stack of blocks, can teach spatial skills. Learning spatial relationships (like bigger and smaller or light and heavy) is linked to math skills.

Think about all the items in your kitchen cabinets that could support this kind of learning play, like nesting measuring cups or lining up different sizes of packages.

Help your kids find the patterns that are embedded in picture books, like the red-stripe, green-stripe, blue-stripe on the snake. Patterns are basic to math concepts.

Make a game of finding geometric shapes around the house or when out in the car.

Here's a fun outdoor game full of math. Draw a number line with chalk on the sidewalk and ask your child to hop to the number 4, and then to hop to the number that is two more, and then to the one that is three less, and so on.

Before long, you'll forget that you hate math, and your youngster will be well on the way to math proficiency! □

Games & Activities

Draw a house

Here's a game that works well for two children—or many children at a party.

You'll need a large piece of paper suitable for drawing for each person, and a blindfold.

Each person uses a crayon and—while blindfolded—attempts to draw a picture on the paper which is taped to a wall or other surface.

Before beginning, decide what picture is to be drawn—a house, for example, a dog, a person, a tree. Something harder? A cow?

Make sure the artists know how to find the edges of the paper to avoid drawing on the wall. And set a reasonable time limit to create their picture.

When everyone has had a turn, all the artists can decide which drawing looks most like the subject that was chosen. □



Dealing with misbehavior

More than a few parents have expressed their feelings about their child by saying “I wish I knew what to do about my child’s behavior.”

It would be nice to have a simple solution—like a magic wand—for parents to use when they feel frustrated by their child’s misbehavior.

Unfortunately, the reasons why children misbehave are too complicated for a simple solution.

We become aware of this complexity when we try to change the way a parent and child interact. For example, most of us can appreciate how hard it is sometimes for a parent to control his or her temper after a child has misbehaved.

Even a simple analysis of such a negative interaction between parent and child would have to consider the characteristics of the parent, the child, and the specific situation in which the interaction occurred.

To make matters more complicated, each of these characteristics change from year to year, from week to week, and even from one time of day to another.

It is also important to bear in mind that:

(1) What works for one parent in disciplining a child may not work for another parent with the same child.

(2) What proves to be an effective discipline strategy with one child may be ineffective or inappropriate for another child in the same family.

(3) An approach that has worked well in one situation may not bring about the same desired result with the same child in a different situation.

It helps parents to feel better about their children’s misbehavior when they remember that it is normal for young children to misbehave occasionally.

It is also normal for parents to make mistakes and to lose their temper from time to time.

If you are thinking that you must be the only parent who can’t handle misbehavior, then it is time to relax and realize you are not alone.

Don’t be too hard on yourself—try to take a good look at the situation.

If you feel an extreme sense of “aloneness” in dealing with your child’s misbehavior problems, you might consider joining a parent support group or parent education class in your area.

Sharing concerns with a good friend or listening to the problems other parents are having can help remove that sense of aloneness.

There is more than one approach to dealing with discipline problems, and your local library can help you find books and articles that discuss various methods.

By becoming familiar with a variety of strategies for dealing with misbehavior, parents will be able to choose the approach best suited to the child, the parent, and the specific situation in which the misbehavior occurred. □

Discipline

The rule for ‘when/then’

Most parents would agree that they get tired of saying “no” to their children. Some days it seems like all they say is “no.”

Sometimes it seems like children know that if they keep asking, eventually parents will get tired of saying “no” and change to “Oh, I suppose so,” just to end the confrontation.

Here’s an alternative, and you can use it as a rule.

If you’ve been trying to get your child to pick up his toys, and he wants to watch a video instead, for example, the rule works like this: “**When** you’ve picked up your toys, **then** you can watch the video.”

Here’s another example: “**When** you’ve picked up your clothes, **then** you can go play with Jim.”

Be sure to keep the sequence in the right order because younger children may misunderstand if the statement is backwards.

Children can understand how when/then statements work, and this kind of training helps them learn to take responsibility for their own actions. And parents can avoid repeating the word “no.” □

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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>4 Save the daily newspaper each year on your child's birthday to give to her when she's grown up.</p>	<p>5 Hard-boiled eggs, toast and jam for a snack.</p>	<p>6 Look for things in the kitchen that are: BIG Little</p>	<p>7 Purple Heart Day Read about this at the library.</p>	<p>8 Read "The Country Mouse and the City Mouse." </p>	<p>9 Take a walk and look for blooming plants. </p>	<p>10 Draw -- and color -- a picture on a paper plate.</p>
<p>11 Have a tea party outside!</p>	<p>12 "A" is for August. Name four more words that start with the letter A. (Hint: There's one in the next box!)</p>	<p>13 What do you do with an abacus? Look it up.</p>	<p>14 Orange and banana slices for a snack.</p>	<p>15 Put the baby in a stroller and go for a walk. </p>	<p>16 Watch the setting sun. Plan ahead. What time should you start watching?</p>	<p>17 Eat lunch outside. </p>
<p>18 Go out for breakfast.</p>	<p>19 Practice saying the days of the week. What's today? Sunday Thursday Monday Friday Tuesday Saturday Wednesday</p>	<p>20 On a rainy day, play BINGO with some friends.</p>	<p>21 Senior Citizens Day Go to lunch with some senior citizens. </p>	<p>22 Name baby's clothes as you dress her: shirt, socks, shoes...</p>	<p>23 Close your eyes when you chew. Singalong: "The Star Spangled Banner" </p>	<p>24 Go for a walk. Take along a paper bag and pick up litter.</p>
<p>25 Sing in the bathtub.</p>	<p>26 Women's Equality Day</p>	<p>27 Name four words that rhyme with "chair."</p>	<p>28 Put some brightly colored sponges into the tub at bath time.</p>	<p>29 Check the batteries in your smoke alarm(s).</p>	<p>30</p>	<p>31 Learn a new word. • island • gosling • snow cone</p>