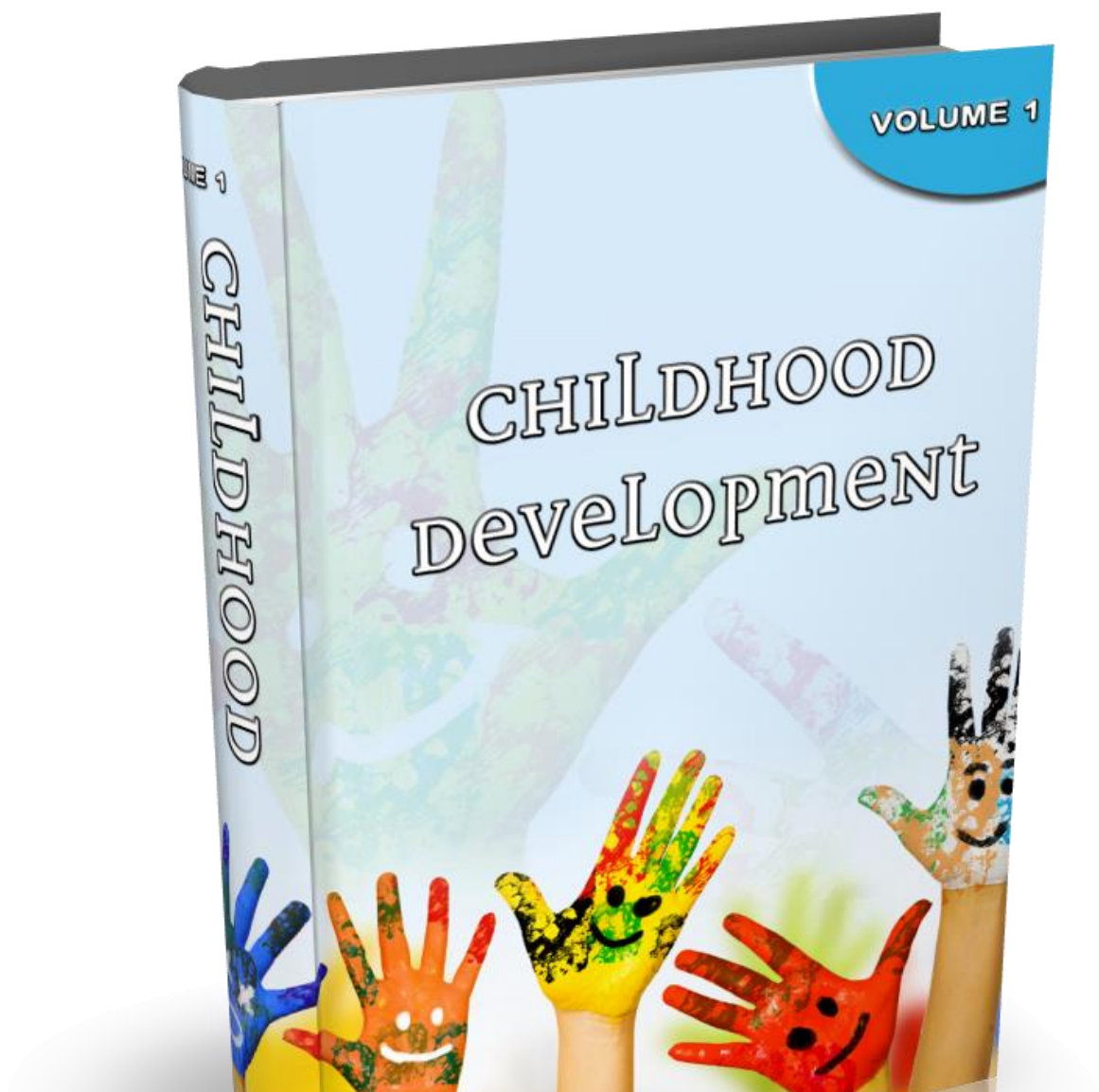


Childhood Development Volume 1



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Child Development Before Birth

A new, genetically unique human being is formed when the sperm penetrates the ovum. We call it conception. The sperm and the ovum each have 23 chromosomes. Each replicates, and the DNA strands align.

This brand new human being at conception is microscopic in size but possesses everything needed for life to continue in a proper environment and with proper nutrition. The embryo makes the trip from the fallopian tube to the uterus in about six days.

The baby's heart begins to beat about three weeks after conception, and the brain begins to function at about six weeks after conception. All systems are fully formed and functional by eight weeks after conception. All that is left is for the baby to grow and the systems to mature.

According to recent studies, the baby begins to hear and respond to sound (particularly the mother's voice) about 16 weeks after conception. This, amazingly, is about two months before the ears are completely formed; so it seems that there is more to hearing than scientists know at this time. The baby now begins to learn the language of the mother (the mother-tongue).

It's important for the mother to talk to the unborn child, as well as to read to him, sing to him, and introduce him to music, beginning no later than at the end of the 16th week of pregnancy. It's best to avoid loud music because sound reaches the womb almost totally undistorted. Loud music has been proven to produce strong kicks of protest from the fetus.

We know that long before birth, the baby in the womb is aware of his mother's distress. After an earthquake in Italy, monitors revealed that the unborn babies remained in a hyperactive state for several hours after the quake ended.

Babies can hear in the womb. They are sensitive to the mother's emotions. It is important that communication between the mother and the unborn child begin as early as possible.

The Newborn From Birth To Six Months

They are amazing little miracles! Here he is, this brand new, completely unique little human being. The newborn has been curled up in the womb for months and the space seems to have gotten smaller and smaller as he has gotten larger and larger. It is natural for the newborn to remain in a very curled-up position for a while and to prefer being wrapped securely. He'll straighten those arms and legs out soon enough.

Newborns have reflexes. One of the first reflexes that you'll see is the "Moro," or startle reflex. In response to a loud noise, he will arch his back, extend and stiffen his arms and legs, and cry. He can have this startle reaction even when he's asleep, but it goes away within a few months.

Your newborn has other natural reflexes. The Babinski reflex is when the baby's big toe bends back and the other toes fan out when the sole of his foot is firmly stroked. The step reflex is another newborn reflex. When the baby is held in an upright position and his feet touch the floor, he will have a reflexive stepping motion. The tongue-thrust reflex is when he pushes his tongue out when something is placed on it.

Newborns and those who care for them are ruled by the baby's needs for nourishment and sleep. While he was in the womb, the baby was constantly nourished. He was never hungry. After birth, the constant food source has been eliminated, and the baby is hungry. A newborn needs to be fed every two or three hours around the clock. The good news is that in about a month, the baby will need to be fed less often; and by the time the baby has been in this world for about three months, he will likely have developed an eating and sleeping routine that those who care for him will really appreciate.

Infancy

The important thing to remember is that infants are individuals — completely unique individuals. They do not all develop at the same rate. They don't achieve certain "milestones" at the same rate. That doesn't mean that there is anything "wrong" with them. It simply means that they haven't read the same child development book that their mommy has and they are intent on doing things, reaching milestones, at their own individual pace.

There are four basic areas of development: physical, intellectual, social, and emotional. Remember that babies develop at their own rates, and the milestones listed below are in no particular order.

Physical development between birth and six months of age includes: * Developing his own eating/sleeping/waking schedule. * Growing very quickly and doubling his birth weight quickly. * Gains control of eye movement and can focus on single objects. * Gains the ability to hold his head up, roll over without help, pull himself into a sitting position, and sit alone for a moment. * Learns to grasp objects.

Intellectual development between birth and six months of age includes: * Begins learning through his five senses. * Begins to vocalize by cooing and babbling in syllables.

Social development between birth and six months of age includes: * Can distinguish his main caregiver (mother) from other people in his world and may indicate a distinct preference for her. * Imitates movements * Studies faces * Smiles * Laughs out loud * Smiles at himself in a mirror

Emotional development between birth and six months of age includes: * Showing excitement * Showing pleasure * Develops different cries to signify hunger, physical discomfort, and boredom * Showing fear when confronted with strange objects, people, or situations

Babies develop physically, intellectually, socially, and emotionally at different rates. Some infants will speed ahead in one area and lag behind in others.

Infancy From Six Months To One Year

Each baby develops at his or her own rate. There is nothing written in stone that says that a baby **MUST** reach a particular milestone at a particular age or be declared an "incompetent" infant. Babies are individuals, and each one perceives the world and reacts to it from his or her own unique point of view.

Big changes are made between six months and one year of age. At six months, an infant is considered, well, an infant; but by the time he or she is one year old, the rank is pushed up to "toddler."

There are certain milestones that most babies achieve during a certain period of development. That doesn't mean that they must reach these milestones in any particular order. We can divide infant development at this stage into four categories: physical, intellectual, social, and emotional. Moral development does not begin until a little later.

Milestones that may be achieved physically between six months and one year are: * Learning to pull himself to an upright position * Learning to crawl * Learning to stand alone * Learning to walk * Begins to put everything into his mouth * Begins cutting teeth

Milestones that may be achieved intellectually between six months and one year are: * Begins learning through the five senses * Likes to put things in (his mouth, a cupboard, a box) and take them out * Repeats the same behaviors over and over * Begins to understand names of common items

Milestones that may be achieved socially between six months and one year are: * Will begin to imitate speech * Will begin to imitate behaviors * Will associate food with social interaction

Milestones that may be achieved emotionally between six months and one year are: * Develops fear of separation * Recognizes the difference between the familiar and the unfamiliar (places, people, and things)

Babies between six months and one year require a great deal of physical contact with their primary caregiver to insure proper development in all areas in the future.

The Wonderful Ones And The Terrible Twos

Children who are between the ages of one year and three years are referred to as a group as "toddlers," but there is a great deal of difference between a one-year-old and a three-year-old. Here we'll just discuss onesies and twosies.

The main job of a one-year-old as he progresses to being a two-year-old is to establish self-awareness, develop speech, become responsive to others, and begin to get the basics of self-control.

When a child is between the ages of one and two, parents can begin to take note of indications of developmental problems. Excessive adaptability problems become apparent; withdrawal, passivity, fearfulness; obsessive head banging, finger sucking, rocking; lack of interest; and being overly rebellious. If any of these extreme behaviors are noted by parents, they should be discussed with the pediatrician.

Physical development between one and two years includes: * Learning to walk * Learning to climb * Pushing and pulling objects * Stacking one object on top of another * Removing clothing

Intellectual development between one and two years includes: * Begins to explore the world around him * Used all five senses to learn about his world * Begins to learn and say names of simple objects * Can form simple one- or two-word sentences * Begins to enjoy and maybe imitate simple melodies and rhythms

Social development between one and two years includes: * Becoming possessive of his own possessions * Enjoying interaction with familiar people * Waves bye-bye and begins to accept separation

Emotional development between one and two years includes: * Begins to develop trust * Throws temper tantrums * Is usually happy but can become angry * May become frustrated

Morals begin to develop at about age two and are indicated by the child becoming sensitive to and seeking the approval of the adults in his world.

The Terrible Twos And The Terrific Threes

There's a very good reason why we often refer to two-year-olds as the "terrible twos." They are discovering themselves. They discover that it is possible for them to make their own choices about food, clothes, sleep, and play. The two-year-old is aware of becoming a separate and distinct human being.

The good news is that the terrible twos only last for about a year, and even better news is that they are followed by the terrific threes.

Indications to parents that there could be a problem in normal development are if the child becomes either too easily adaptable or too aggressive. Both extremes indicate problems and should be discussed with the child's pediatrician.

There are five general areas of development: physical, intellectual, social, emotional, and moral. There is, of course, no specified or RIGHT order in which children develop. Remember that each child is an individual, and the following is only a general outline of the development expected of two- and three-year-olds.

Physical development:

- * Coordination improves and physical activities include: running, climbing, kicking and throwing a ball, pulling and pushing objects, etc.
- * He handles and manipulates small objects like buttons, zippers, pencils, etc.
- * He feeds himself with a spoon.
- * He helps to dress himself.
- * He can build a block tower of six or seven blocks.
- * Will gain control of bowels and bladder.

Intellectual development:

- * He is very curious and explores the world using all five senses.
- * He can make sentences of three or four words.
- * He can sing simple songs.
- * He can keep simple rhythms.

Social development:

- * He is still wary of strangers and clings to his mother.
- * Attempts to imitate adult activities like washing dishes, mopping floors, applying makeup, shaving, etc.
- * He can participate in simple group activities like listening to a short story.

Emotional development:

- * Begins to assert himself and says "no" frequently.
- * Shows emotions by laughing, squealing, throwing temper tantrums and crying hysterically.
- * Develops fear of such things as animals and loud noises.

Moral development:

- * He wants to "be good."
- * He still can't keep promises.

The Terrific Threes And The Frustrating Fours

Three- and four-year-olds are fascinating. They are, for lack of a better word, "becoming." They are beginning to show their own unique personality. They are beginning to develop their sense of "self."

Three- and four-year-olds begin to distinguish between fact and fiction, between what is "real" and what is make-believe. They begin to sort through, distinguish between, and categorize feelings, thoughts, and actions.

There is no specific timetable for development and development is not a "one-size-fits-all" situation. Children develop in different areas at different rates. Development is divided into five general categories: physical, intellectual, social, emotional, and moral. It is perfectly normal for children to make greater advancements in one area at a time.

Physical milestones:

- * He'll be able to ride a tricycle.
- * He'll be able to climb a ladder.
- * He can scribble with a pen, pencil, or crayola.
- * He begins to dress himself.
- * He can feed himself with either a spoon or a fork.
- * He is mostly toilet trained.

Intellectual milestones:

- * His imagination develops and he likes to assume "play-like" grown-up roles as mommy, daddy, fireman or superhero.
- * He is curious and asks a lot of questions.
- * He begins to understand the cause/effect concept.

Social milestones:

- * He can now accept separation from his mother calmly.
- * He begins to interact with other children his own age.
- * He begins to notice and imitate the differences in the way men and women behave.

Emotional milestones:

- * He is becoming sensitive to the feelings of others.
- * He is becoming more independent.
- * He wants to please the adults in his world.

Moral milestones:

- * He begins to understand the difference between right and wrong.
- * He wants people to like him.
- * He is gaining self-control.

The Preschooler

Sometimes it seems that the lines between being a toddler and being a preschooler are a bit fuzzy. Which is which? Many (most) of today's children begin going to day care almost from birth. The transition from day care to preschool can be nearly imperceptible to the child.

From the child's point of view, yesterday he could go play with the blocks if he wanted to, but today he must sit still and do what the teacher says. It can be frustrating, but parents can help with the transition.

Your preschooler is about to spread his wings and fly, and it is up to you to prepare him for what he will find out in the world. You have to teach him to help keep

himself safe, but you have to do it without scaring the pants off of him. Parenting just got a little more complicated.

The way that your child interacts with the family and the degree of security that the child feels in family relationships will have a great deal to do with how he interacts with his schoolmates and his teachers.

It's important to continue to read to the child. It's also important to encourage the child to take part in and "help" with simple household chores. The child needs some "experience" to do well in school, and that experience includes playing with other children. Make play dates for your child and take advantage of "mother's day out" programs if the child is not enrolled in day care.

Immediately stop talking baby talk to your preschooler. He needs command of the language and in using real grown-up words to describe common items.

Discipline is important now. The child must learn that when he disobeys the rules, there are consequences to his behavior.

Preadolescence

Ah, yes! The "tween" years have arrived. Remember that sweet and adorable 10-year-old? He has ceased to exist. He's been replaced by a preadolescent that you hardly recognize as the same child that you've raised up to this point in time.

The preadolescent years (12-14) are a tumultuous time in the human life cycle. Your child is no longer a child, and yet you can't call him an adult. He doesn't even qualify

as a teenager. It's that "awkward" age between childhood and the teen years, or what has come to be called the "tweens." Your parenting skills are going to be sorely tried!

This is the time of life when your child is about to be presented with all kinds of choices. Big choices! Important choices! He'll be faced with peer pressure to try alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs. He'll also be faced with peer pressure to engage in sexual activity. It's during these "tween" years that your child is most likely to develop eating disorders and become depressed.

It's important that parents discuss choices openly and honestly with their "tweens." You'll need to approach these subjects with care. Your "tween" is super concerned about body image now. He's moody and preoccupied. He's anxious. Schoolwork has become more demanding, and he's fixated on his relationships.

Try to encourage your "tween" to stay physically active. Family meal times become more important than they have ever been before. You need to lead but not drive your preteen-ager, and you really need to listen with both ears when your preteen talks. His opinions need to be respected.

It's time to give him the tools he needs to resist peer pressure, and a good, solid family support system is the best tool he can have.

The Adolescent

Those considered "teenagers" are between the ages of 15 and 20 years old. A lot of changes take place during these teen years. The 15-year-old has no experience at just being a teenager, while the 19-year-old is ready to leave the tumultuous teenage years behind.

If you prepared your teenager well during the preteen years to handle the choices and peer pressure that he will face during his teen years, he'll probably do just fine. It's important to remember that your teenager is now on the verge of adulthood. He's not an adult, but he's no longer a child that you can control, either.

The teenager's body is going through dramatic changes. It's changing from a child body to an adult body. The hormones have gone wild. Your teenager is going to be moody and difficult to live with, but you do need to remember that it really isn't all the teenager's fault, and sometimes his control (or lack thereof) is being driven by hormone fluctuations that are out of his control.

Patience and consistency are the watch words during this time of your child's life. Lay down firm but fair rules of behavior so that your teenager has guidelines to live by when his raging hormones make it impossible for him to trust his own judgment.

Get your teen the help that they need. If they have acne, then take them to a dermatologist. If they are having serious relationship difficulties, then get them to a therapist.

Don't just hand your teenager the "things" that he deems necessary to his very survival. See to it that he learns that work translates into money and money translates into "stuff." Giving your teen all the "stuff" they want won't be doing them any favors.

Does Birth Order Really Matter?

There is a great deal of real but not particularly scientific evidence that birth order has a great influence on who we turn out to be as adults. If you understand how birth

order affects a child, you will be better able to understand and effectively parent your own children. You might even understand yourself a bit better.

Now, it's important to note that people don't just neatly fit into categories of any kind, and they don't all fit neatly into birth order categories. The following observations are based on generalities and not specifics, but still, they might be helpful.

First Children: Typical first children in a family assume responsibility. They are rule keepers/enforcers and they are organized, as well as driven, bossy, approval-seeking, self-critical high-achievers. There's a mixture of good and bad if I ever saw one!

Way back in 1874, Francis Galton studied and published a report about the lives of 180 eminent scientists of the day. He discovered that 48% of them were first children. During the 20th century there were more first-born children who were Nobel Prize winners, composers, presidents of countries, astronauts, and prominent personalities. First-born children usually score higher on standardized IQ tests than middle children or youngest children in the birth order.

Middle Children: My mother said that middle children had "middle child-itis." She was a middle child, and she always said her mother said, "You two older kids do this and you two younger kids do that," and she was caught both ways. Middle kids are usually adaptable. They make great friends and spouses.

Youngest Children: The "baby-of-the-family" is inventive and often more aggressive. Children who are the last born in a family are very often irresponsible and rebellious. They more often feel "picked on" and inadequate. But last-borns are also more creative. They are risk-takers. They usually have a great sense of humor and have outgoing personalities.

New Parent Syndrome

I'm not sure if anybody has ever put a name to the feelings that most new parents have. I'd like to call it the "new parent syndrome." Let me describe the situation and the symptoms, and you can decide for yourself if you are really suffering from new parent syndrome.

There's a new baby in the house that is six months old or younger. The baby, it seems, has needs that are constant and unrelenting 24 hours a day, seven days a week, including weekends and holidays. There is NO relief for Mommy or Daddy. Does that pretty much sum up the situation?

The parents feel tired...make that exhausted. There doesn't seem to be any part of the people they were who survived this parenthood thing, and both parents are likely wondering if they can survive another 18 years (at least) of this. The two parents haven't had a moment alone since the baby was born. Something has got to give!

Exactly! Something has got to give. It's time to hire a babysitter and take an evening off. It's time to look into "mother's day out" programs at local churches and civic centers. It's way past time to get this parenthood thing into perspective.

Parenting is, without one doubt, the most important job that either parent will ever have in their lives, but it's not the only job. The objective of parenting is to work yourself right out of a job. The idea is to raise this tiny little unique human being to be a self-sufficient, self-supporting individual who doesn't "need" you to take care of him. Start by taking a few hours off. Give yourselves a break.

It does get better, and it does get easier. You're just suffering from new parent syndrome.

The Angry Child

Dealing with angry children is no picnic for parents or teachers. It's not a whole lot of fun for the angry child, either. There is really no point in blaming the child for being angry. There is almost always an underlying cause of every child's anger, and it is the responsibility of the adults in his world to uncover that cause and "fix" it if it can be fixed.

First, anger is a natural emotion that isn't "evil." People get angry about all kinds of things. A lot of words that sound better are often used — irritated, indignant, "hot under the collar," annoyed, etc. All of those terms sound more civilized than "angry," but they all basically mean the same thing.

Sometimes children have a difficult time explaining their anger. An adult can say that it made him angry when somebody cut him off in traffic, but a child might not be able to identify a specific incident. Maybe he is being bullied at school and he feels like it is his fault. That feeling of being responsible for something completely out of his control makes him seem angry.

Sometimes what appears to be an angry child is actually a frustrated child or a child who is having a physical problem.

It turned out that one "angry" child I recently saw was simply having a vision problem. He couldn't read what he couldn't see. Because he was a CHILD, he didn't realize that he had a vision problem. An optometrist was able to resolve the child's anger issues.

Children can suffer with allergies that can affect their mood and their sense of well-being. Sometimes anger issues can be solved with a trip to an allergist.

There is always a reason a child is angry. They aren't just "angry" without cause. Find the cause of the anger, fix it, and the anger will resolve itself.

The Frustrating Fours And The Fantastic Fives

It's a tumultuous time, those fours and fives! Your little darling is making the trip from toddlerhood to childhood. He's no longer a "little baby," and he isn't likely to let you or anybody else forget that he is a "big kid." He demands the respect due his new station in life, and it can get really frustrating for parents. You'll often hear the words "I'm a big girl now" or "I'm a big boy now."

Four- and five-year-olds usually grow physically at an alarming (for their parents) rate. Muscles develop. Four- and five-year-olds seem to become perpetual motion machines. They never stop. Some four- and five-year-olds even begin to become physically aggressive by taking toys away from younger children, hitting, or biting.

Four- and five-year-olds have discovered language and the power of language. They have a good vocabulary now of between 1,500 and 2,000 words. They've also learned that words can "shock" adults and they love the feeling of power that using "bad" words or bathroom language can evoke.

Four- and five-year-olds have superactive imaginations, and they might have imaginary friends or engage in a fantasy life. They talk — and talk, and talk, and talk. They also ask questions at about a mile a minute. The favorite one is, "But WHY?"

They've learned to play with and interact with other children. They develop relationships. They rely more on words to solve problems than on physical actions

like snatching, hitting, pushing, etc. But they can also resort to name calling, and they can be bossy.

The four- to five-year-old is developing morality. He understands the difference between right and wrong, and he wants to do right. When he fails to do right, he is very likely to blame that failure on another person. (It wasn't HIS fault.)

Loving A Child Wisely

Parents love their children. The natural instinct of all parents is to keep a child safe; to provide a safe environment and protect the child from the world. It's what I call "animal instinct." You see the same kind of protection of the young in all kinds of birds and animals.

Animal instinct is a wonderful thing, really. It's not wise to get between a mama bear and her cub; you might not live to tell your story. Protection of the young is the reason that all species continue to exist. Without protection of the young, all life would eventually die out.

But animals are usually a lot smarter than humans when it comes to knowing when protection turns into spoiling and enabling. That mama bear will protect her cub as long as the cub needs protecting. She will teach the cub to protect himself, and when he gets big enough, he will be required to take care of himself without any help from his mama.

I see parents lavish "things" upon their children and call it "love." It's not love. Giving a child so much that there is no need for him to ever learn to work for what he wants and provide for himself is a sure way to raise an incompetent adult who

thinks that the world somehow owes him a living. The prisons are full of grown-up children who weren't loved wisely.

The idea of being a good parent is to work yourself right out of a job. The idea is to raise a totally competent human being who can take care of and provide for himself without expecting (or requiring) any help from mommy and daddy. That's the way parents love their children wisely!

Teaching Good Manners

Good manners makes other people like a child, but maybe it's more important that good manners make a child like himself and give him confidence. Nobody wants to embarrass themselves by committing a faux pas. So the question is, how does a parent go about teaching a child good manners?

Actually, teaching good manners begins early and almost naturally. We teach our little ones to use the "magic words" ("please" and "thank you") as soon as they master "mama and dada."

Young children imitate what they see the adults in their world do. Imitation is the way children learn. If they see their parents using basic good manners, they will use good basic manners themselves.

But the finer points of good manners must be instructed. When instructing a child in using good manners, it is important to use positive teaching techniques rather than negative reprimands.

Good manners sometimes are governed by the words we choose to express thoughts. Your little darling might say, "YUCK! I hate this slimy green stuff!" Wait to correct him and at a later time and in private you tell the child that it would be more polite to say, "I really don't care for spinach."

It takes time and patience to teach a child to have good manners. You aren't going to cover the spectrum of good manners in a day of instruction, no matter how intense. Teaching good manners goes on and on. As situations are presented, you teach the child the most polite way to handle them.

And when you know that your child knows how to use good manners, you need to expect him to use those good manners all the time. Good manners can become a good habit and help your child to become confident in himself in social situations.

Inspiring High Self-Esteem

This is one of those high-wire acts of parenthood where you are working without a net. You want to raise a well-adjusted, self-assured child, but you don't want to raise arrogant, spoiled, think-they-are-better-than-the-rest-of-the-world children.

So how does a parent hit that happy medium between raising a fearful insecure child and an arrogant spoiled brat? It's tempting to say, "Very carefully," but I won't say that. Here are some points for parents to consider:

Don't let children win every time: When you do let children "win," make sure that they have tried hard and put forth plenty of effort. "Winning" without trying gives a child an overly inflated sense of self-worth.

Give value to your child's opinion: So many times children are simply ignored in conversations between adults, even when the decisions reached will impact the child. Let your child know that his opinion is worthy of consideration. However, you don't want to let the child dictate what will be done. Adults make decisions, but children's opinions count.

Praise a child but only when he's earned the praise: Don't lavish praise upon a child for anything that he didn't give his best effort. Then — whether he wins or loses — praise the child for putting forth real effort. Effort is praised, not winning or losing. On the other hand, you never, ever berate a child for losing if he gave the task his best effort.

Reserve the highest praise for when your child has performed a generous act or shown real compassion for another living thing.

You remember those schoolyard bullies from your own school days, don't you? They are the children of parents who lavished unwarranted praise upon them and gave them an inflated sense of self-worth. They think they are better than everybody else because they were raised to believe they were better than everybody else. The victims of the bullies are those with low self-esteem. The idea for parents is to raise a child with high self-esteem, but one who isn't overconfident to the point of becoming a bully.

Dealing With Separation And Loss

Children do not deal with separation and loss in the same way as adults. Adults, for example, recognize the difference between a friend moving out of town and a friend dying. Young children, on the other hand, simply view both situations as loss.

Here are some important points to consider when you are helping a child deal with separation and/or loss:

1. Children have three questions that they want answered ASAP when loss or separation occur: Is what happened my fault? Will it happen to me? How will what happened affect me? All three questions need to be answered in terms that the child can understand.

2. Don't use words that make death or separation more palatable to adults. Children are literal. Don't say words like "sleeping" or "resting." You might make the child afraid to go to sleep. Explain the situation in literal terms to children.

3. Give the child an opportunity for closure if it is possible. If his friend is moving away, take him to visit and give him the opportunity to say goodbye. The same thing is true for a death. Prepare the child for what is to be.

4. Listen to what the child has to say about the separation or loss. He has an opinion, and it's important that the opinion be given validation.

5. Remember that from the child's point of view, stability and continuity are of the utmost importance. Children do not like major changes to their worlds. Changes make a child feel threatened. Point out that you are there and that you love him. Tell him how his world has not changed and list the ways that his world will remain unchanged.

Children, particularly young children, need to be guided through separation and loss situations with patience and love.

Sibling Rivalry

"Mom! I had it first!"

"Mom! Make her get out of MY room!"

"Mom! She's BREATHING on me!"

Sibling rivalry when it is happening in your home isn't funny, but you will learn to laugh about it sooner or later — probably later rather than sooner. What can you do about sibling rivalry? Is there anything that CAN be done about sibling rivalry?

"Sibling rivalry" has been around a while. It's the term that best describes the situation between Cain and Abel in the Bible — and we all know how THAT turned out.

Sibling rivalry is natural. Siblings usually swing back and forth between "best friends" and "sworn enemies." Sometimes when siblings grow up, they do bury the hatchet and actually become friends — sometimes, but not always.

The only thing that parents can do about sibling rivalry is to be as fair as possible when dealing with disputes and competitions and to stay out of the dispute as often as possible. Let the kids work it out unless the solution has blood involved.

It's best to include the kids in the resolution of a situation rather than just imposing your will or making your "best judgment." The first thing to do is to separate the kids and give them both time to calm down.

The second thing to remember is that it does take "two" to make a fight. One child cannot fight without an opponent, and the odds are that both parties to the disagreement bear some responsibility. Blaming the older child "because you are the oldest and should know better" is unfair and gives license to the younger child to annoy and aggravate the older child.

Try to turn a sibling rivalry dispute into a win/win situation. Look for a solution that gives both parties something. Teach the kids to negotiate and compromise. It could keep you from having to play referee so often.

Choosing A Baby Sitter

Choosing someone to care for your most precious possession (your child) in your absence is a major decision and should not be entered into lightly. You know that you will take care of your children and keep them safe. Transferring that responsibility for your child's very life into the hands of another person is absolutely terrifying for some of us.

First of all, where does one look for a baby sitter? Is the teenager who lives down the block responsible and mature enough to take care of your little one? Does she know CPR? Is she cool enough to handle a crisis?

The best way to find a competent baby sitter is to ask your friends. Ask the people with whom you attend church or those you know through civic organizations. If they have kids, they hire sitters from time to time, and they are the people who are in the best position to know who is a competent baby sitter and who is a better than just competent baby sitter.

The things that you need to do before you leave your child with a sitter, no matter how highly recommended he or she comes, is to have a face-to-face meeting, with the children to be cared for present. Note the interaction between the sitter who is being considered and the child or children. You can spot a phony a mile away. All moms can. Note how the children relate to the person being considered. Get references and check them.

Be sure that you leave emergency contact information with the sitter. Be certain that you give explicit instructions about food, bedtimes, etc. Call home at least once while you are absent. A constantly busy phone is an indication that the children aren't being cared for.

Childhood Nutrition

The nutritional needs of children are not the same as nutritional needs for adults. The nutritional needs of babies from birth through the first year of life are pretty well covered by the formula they are fed and the introduction of foods as recommended by their pediatricians.

As children grow, they learn eating patterns and develop food choices by what they learn from their parents. They develop tastes for foods that are served at the family dinner table. You should never force a child to eat a food, but it is fair to insist that they at least taste the food. ("If you don't like it, you don't have to eat it.") This approach gives children the opportunity to adjust their food preferences to include healthy food choices.

Young children want to imitate their parents. If they see mommy and daddy eating vegetables and fruits and talking about how good these foods are, they will CHOOSE to eat those healthy foods.

My mother was a picky eater and "didn't eat" a whole list of foods. I never knew it until I was grown. My mother and father simply did not make an issue of my mother disliking certain foods.

It's important that portions are related to the level of activity. We've become a nation of fat children. Children need physical activity that corresponds to the calories in the food that they consume. So "how much" is just as important as "what" is eaten.

Try hard to limit "junk food" and "fast food." Sit-down meals that have been prepared with the child's nutritional needs in mind, served in the correct portion sizes, will teach the child to eat right from an early age and prevent weight problems and unhealthy food relationships in the future.

Childhood Sleep Issues

From the time a baby is born until he is about six months old, he requires more sleep than an adult — a lot more. Newborns may sleep between 12 and 18 hours out of every 24-hour period. After a child is about six months old, his sleep requirements are a bit higher, but very similar to an adult's sleep requirements.

It is of the utmost importance that parents help the child to establish a regular sleep/wake schedule as early as possible. This will make life easier for everybody in the household, including the baby. Babies, even as young as six months old, like continuity.

A regular "go-to-bed" time and a regular "get-up" time as well as a regular "naptime" will help to prevent all kinds of sleep-related problems.

There are lots of reasons why children can have sleep problems. Some of the problems are caused by physical discomfort or illness. Some sleep problems are caused by emotional or developmental problems that might seem totally unrelated to sleep. If your child is consistently unable to sleep (and consistently is the operative word here) it is best to talk to your pediatrician about the problem and have him or her help you resolve the issue.

The thing to remember is that when humans are tired, no matter how old or young they are, they sleep if they aren't having mental, physical, or emotional pain. Sleep is natural; it isn't a behavior that must be learned.

If you have worked to establish a regular schedule for your child (eliminated all of the foods and drinks that might prevent sleep, read him a story and tucked him in), and sleep continues to be a problem, it really is time to seek professional help. The lack of normal sleep is a symptom, not a disease.

Play Is Childhood Work

Through play, children develop into adults. That's just the way it works. Children develop all of the important skills of life through play. Education gives them information, play is the way they apply that information to life.

Play is not just physical, and the purpose of play is not just pleasure, although play can be both physical and pleasurable. An active play life for a child includes the testing of and enhancement of his physical abilities (learning to climb, run, jump, etc.).

Play also includes learning about human interactions and relationships. The child learns such important life skills as communication, negotiation, and compromise when he is playing a game with other children.

Most friendships begin with play for children and even for adults. Think about how your own friendships develop — mutual interest and mutual pleasure (play) is key to the friendship growing and developing. The same is true for children.

And play stokes the imagination and fosters creativity — coloring in a color book or cutting out shapes, drawing pictures, all of these things bring the child's natural creative ability into focus for him.

Play can be serious business for children, although they would never classify it as "serious." My six-year-old son told me that he didn't want to go visit the child of a friend of mine because, "he doesn't know how to play fair." Children have their own set of standards that are mostly a mystery to adults, but there IS a system in place that matures through play into a set of adult standards.

An adult can watch children at play and simply miss all of the important "stuff" that is taking place between the children. The kids are determining a "pecking order," establishing boundaries, and developing their physical abilities as well as their creativity and their imaginations. And you thought they were just playing! Play IS the work of childhood.

Warm Weather Safety Tips For Children

Ah summer! That's a word that every kid knows and loves. Warm weather means outdoor fun — swimming, baseball, riding bikes, jumping on trampolines, etc.

Summer, from a kid's point of view, ranks right up there with Christmas — and it lasts longer!

You get the picture. Kids love summer, and summer was just made for kids. You want your kids to love every minute of their summer vacations, and the best way to do that is to take the steps needed to prevent accident and injuries from happening. Nothing brings summer fun to a sudden halt faster than a trip to the emergency room!

Safety Tip #1: Put layers of protection around your backyard pool, whether it is an above-ground or in-ground pool. The pool is a major attraction to kids — your own, and every kid within several blocks. Place barriers completely around the pool. Install door and pool alarms and certainly carefully monitor the children when they are in the pool.

Safety Tip #2: Make rules about using the trampoline and enforce them. **NO SOMERSAULTS, AND ONLY ONE CHILD ON THE TRAMPOLINE AT A TIME!** Be sure that there is a shock absorbing pad that completely covers the springs. Kids under six should not be allowed to jump on a full-size trampoline.

Safety Tip #3: Safety equipment (helmets, knee pads, and elbow pads) should always be used when children are skating, riding bikes, skateboarding, horseback riding, riding scooters, riding all-terrain vehicles, etc.

Safety Tip #4: Remove all places that children might choose to hide during a game of hide-and-seek, like old cedar chests, latch-type freezers and refrigerators, iceboxes in campers, clothes dryers, and picnic coolers. These kinds of things can become deadly for children who get trapped in them.

The most important safety tip for parents to keep their kids safe during the summer months is to use plain old common sense! Light-colored loose clothing, plenty of fluids, sunscreen, etc.

Cold Weather Safety Tips For Children

"Snow day! Snow day!" Those are beautiful words to school age children! School has been cancelled because the weather and road conditions have made it impractical and even unsafe to hold classes. The kids see it as a free and unexpected vacation day, and one that should be filled with as much outdoor activity as can possibly be squeezed in.

It's up to parents to keep their kids safe during extremely cold weather — on all days, and not just snow days. Children are more susceptible to cold weather injuries and problems caused by cold weather than adults. And kids don't always present symptoms of a cold weather problem in the same way that adults do.

For example, when an adult experiences hypothermia, he will exhibit signs like shivering, drowsiness, memory loss, confusion, clumsy hands, or slurred speech. But children when experiencing hypothermia might just seem to have less energy, and cold, bright-red skin.

The trick to avoiding hypothermia and frostbite is to dress warmly and dress in layers of clothing. Many layers provide much more protection than a single layer. During bitterly cold weather, adults as well as children should wear:

- * A hat
- * A scarf or knit mask to cover face and mouth

- * Sleeves that are snug at the wrist
- * Mittens (they are warmer than gloves)
- * Water-resistant coat and boots
- * Several layers of loose-fitting clothing

Some general bitterly cold weather safety tips are:

- * When sledding, children should wear helmets — always!
- * Children should be taught how to recognize icy patches and to avoid them.
- * Nobody should go it alone. Always have a buddy system in place.
- * Teach children what to do in case of a cold weather emergency. Provide them with cold weather survival skills.

ADHD

ADHD is an acronym for Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. ADHD is a behavioral problem that disrupts and delays normal development. Most often ADHD is diagnosed in children, but more adults are now increasingly being diagnosed with the problem.

ADHD is a chronic problem with no known cure. Almost all children who are diagnosed with ADHD continue to have the problem when they become adults. Those who are diagnosed with ADHD present a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity, forgetfulness, and poor impulse control. They are impulsive to the extreme and are easily distracted.

ADHD is not a modern disease. It's been around a while. As a matter of fact, Hippocrates described ADHD in a patient back in 493 BC. In his writings, he described a patient as having "quickened responses to sensory experience, but also less tenaciousness because the soul moves on quickly to the next impression." Hippocrates called the condition an "overbalance of fire over water." Hippocrates treated the disorder by recommending "barley rather than wheat bread, fish rather than meat, water drinks, and many natural and diverse physical activities."

Hippocrates might well have been onto something. Diet has long been considered as a contributing factor of ADHD, with researchers particularly concentrating on the ingestion of artificial food additives and food coloring.

Head injuries are also considered a contributing factor to ADHD.

There is a great deal of controversy about the diagnosing of and labeling of children with ADHD. Some say that the diagnosis of a brain disorder becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy when the child views himself as "brain damaged."

The treatment regime of a person who has been diagnosed as suffering from ADHD is most often a combination of medications, behavior modification, changes in lifestyle, and counseling.

More than twice as many boys are diagnosed with ADHD than girls. It's unclear whether males are more susceptible to the problem, or whether girls are simply underdiagnosed.

The Gifted Child

When it's determined that a child is truly gifted, it presents a mixed bag of emotions for the parents; a large portion of pride, and a larger portion of fear. It's understandable. Very gifted children are like all children in many ways, and completely different from other children as well.

The very gifted child needs two things: they need to find a level of comfort with being who they are and with the ways in which they are different from other children of the same age, and they need to develop their very great potential.

Parenting a gifted child during the early years is fairly simple. They don't yet need to go out and try to "fit in" with the rest of the world. For example, if a two-year-old can read, parents can simply supply him with books. If a three-year-old is comfortable playing with toys designed for much older children, the parents can simply supply those toys. It becomes more difficult as the gifted child matures.

One of the most difficult aspects of parenting a very gifted child is that the child speeds far ahead in one or two areas of development but may well lag sadly behind in other areas. For example, a gifted child who is five years old might well read like a 12-year-old, talk like a seven-year-old, play chess like an adult, and share toys like a two-year-old.

The rest of the world doesn't "get it" that the very gifted child who is 16 years old and getting his college degree in quantum physics doesn't have a driver's license yet and had never been on a date. He isn't happy; he's miserable. He feels like a misfit — and in the world of his peers, he is a misfit. That's why it is so very important for parents to recognize the problem and provide the gifted child with the opportunity to associate with those who are like himself. There are camps for gifted children

where they have the opportunity to meet and develop relationships with other gifted children.