

VOLUME 2

CHILDHOOD Development



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CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT VOLUME 2

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Choosing A Preschool



*If you want to see what children can do,
you must stop giving them things. - Norman Douglas*

There are hundreds of preschool choices out there. Parents can easily feel completely overwhelmed when it comes time to choose a preschool for their youngsters.

The very first thing that parents can do in the process of choosing a preschool for their child is to talk to their friends, neighbors, and relatives about the preschool choices in the area. You can find out about the experience that other children have had in the various preschools.

The second thing that parents can do when they are trying to choose a preschool for their child is to get a list of all of the available preschools in their area. This list is readily available online. The National Association for Early Childhood Education, or NAEYC, compiles the list, and it is updated regularly. The NAEYC is a nonprofit organization.

With the recommendations of friends and family and a list of credited preschools in hand, parents should visit the preschools that they are considering. Ask the administrators of the schools in which you're interested to spell out their individual philosophies and teaching methods for you. There are many different approaches to early childhood learning, and you need to be comfortable with the method that will be used for your child.

Almost all preschools welcome the parents of their perspective students to come for a visit during regular hours. If you are not welcome to visit when you want to visit, that's a big red flag.

When visiting preschools, you'll need to be an effective observer. Sit quietly and do not try to talk to the teacher or the students, but do take note of how the teacher related to the students — and how the students relate to and react to the teacher.

All preschools aren't the same. You'll need to find the preschool that is the best "fit" for your child.

Soothing Worries Of Toddlers

Kids worry. Kids worry about all sorts of things — new experiences, separation, death (particularly of a parent), or violence, for example. Worry can be general or specific. Kids can express fear and worry about animals, airplanes, water, clowns, and the list goes on and on.



A baby will make love stronger, days shorter, nights longer, bankroll smaller, home happier, clothes shabbier, the past forgotten and the future worth living for. -unknown

As parents, we want to help our little ones deal effectively with their fears. We don't want them to go through life "afraid of their own shadow." On the other hand, we do want them to be aware of danger so that they can avoid it. It's a lot like walking a tightrope when you need to dispense comfort and caution at the same time.

Fortunately, there's help for us bewildered parents out there. There is nothing more comforting to a toddler than physical contact with his mother and the sound of her voice. One way to deliver both forms of comfort simultaneously is by reading to the child. There are many children's books that help comfort a child and help to decrease his worry. Here are three suggestions for books to comfort your toddler:

* "Pat the Bunny," by Dorothy Kunhardt: This book features different shapes and textures to touch and feel. There are flaps to lift and a mirror so the child can see his own reflection.

* "Goodnight Moon," by Margaret Wise Brown: This book features soothing poetry and promotes feelings of safety and peace.

* "Can't You Sleep, Little Bear?" by Martin Waddell: A young bear is afraid of the dark. He overcomes his fear with the help of the big bear that cares for him.

Soothing Worries Of Preschool Children



Humans, I've decided, are born with the ability to worry. Worry isn't a behavior that needs to be learned. Worry is an innate ability of human beings. In a sense, worry is a self-preservation factor; if we didn't worry about being run over by a car, we wouldn't look both ways before crossing a street. There is, however, a big difference between prudent caution and unreasonable fear.

As parents, it's our responsibility to help soothe the fears of our children. We want them to be prudently cautious and aware that dangers exist, but we don't want them

to be paralyzed with fear. Hitting that happy medium between teaching our children to be careful without being fearful requires patient consistency and it starts at birth.



With infants, we can comfort them easily by holding and feeding them. As those infants become toddlers, we can comfort them by touching them, talking to them, and reading to them. As that toddler gets to the preschool age, he is able to begin to express his fears and worries in words. When a child voices his worry, the parent needs to address that worry without laughing at or ridiculing the child. The worry is real, and he's looking to you to relieve that worry.

Several books can help you deal with the fears and worries of your preschool-age child. Here are two of the very best:

1. "The Little House," by Virginia Lee Burton: A little house in the country is taken over by a growing city. Eventually though, the little house is able to return to where it belongs. The underlying theme is that changes can be scary, but eventually life returns to normal.
2. "Outside over There," by Maurice Sendak: This book explores children's inner fears and worries. A brave girl saves her younger brother from goblins. This is a story of a strong, resourceful child using her creativity to confront and overcome evil.

Is Make-Believe Healthy?



Young children take life literally. They view all situations as "good" or "bad." Water is either "hot" or "cold." Young children do not assign "degrees" to any situation, and in the young child's world, everything is real. The three-year-old has absolutely no doubt that Sponge Bob or Dora the Explorer really exists. These characters are just as "real" to the child as Mommy and Daddy. Santa can circle the globe and visit every child on the planet in a single night and the Easter Bunny can deliver baskets of colored

eggs just like Daddy can make the car go and Mommy can make food magically appear.

In my opinion, make-believe is not only healthy, it is essential. Make believe helps a child to make sense of the world around him. He assigns his perceptions of a person, place, or thing with the help of make-believe.

There are those who advocate removing all make-believe from childhood. These experts tell us that make believe causes children to delay their perception of their reality. Shame on them! Too much "reality" isn't good for adults much less little kids.

Grown-ups attend movies and plays and get caught up in the action on the screen or on the stage. Just for a moment, they believe what they are seeing and hearing. Adults, of course, can separate fact from fiction and fantasy from reality. Kids will

learn to make those distinctions as they grow older. Meanwhile, that fantasy is helping them learn how to deal with life in a safe and nonthreatening way.

As long as the make-believe is healthy and doesn't desensitize the child (make killing seem good and evil seem desirable), I see no harm in make-believe.

Children Are Not Small Versions Of The Parents



"Growing apart doesn't change the fact that for a long time we grew side by side; our roots will always be tangled. I'm glad for that."
— Ally Condie

Two musically gifted parents can produce a child that can't "carry a tune in a bucket." Two artistically inclined people can conceive a child that can't draw a straight line with a ruler.

Children are not just small versions of their parents.

Children are individuals, and parents who insist on forcing their own likes, dislikes, interests, and abilities on their children are making a huge mistake. They are robbing the child by denying him the room to grow into who he really is, and they are robbing themselves of making that amazing journey with their child.

The pressure applied by parents on their children to become younger versions of themselves begins early on. The grandmother says that the child's daddy could sit alone by the time he was four months old, so the child's parents being pressuring the child to live up to that standard — and it never stops for some children.

If Dad was good at football, then there must be something wrong with his SON if he isn't good at football. If Mom was a cheerleader in high school, then her DAUGHTER is pushed from early childhood to becoming a high school cheerleader.

Just because Dad went to Harvard doesn't mean that Junior should go to Harvard. Just because Mom is a great cook doesn't mean that her daughter needs to even learn how to cook.

Parents and children both lose when the parents try to make their children into smaller and younger versions of themselves. It's so much better for the child to be given the space and the opportunity to develop into the adult that they were born to be. It's more interesting and more rewarding for the parents as well.

Extended Family Relationships



"They" say that it takes a village to raise a child. Maybe "they" are right. I can tell you that it's better for the child to have an extended family and good solid relationships with members of their extended family.

When I was growing up, my mom insisted that I address all adults with a title preceding their name — aunt or uncle, Mr. or Mrs. So I was surrounded with aunts and uncles and quite a few "Mr.s" and "Mrs.s." I think I was about 10 before I actually straightened out who I was related to. I knew that any one of the adults in my world would take care of me. I also knew that if I didn't behave myself, any one of the aunts or uncles would "rat me out" to my parents.

I learned from all of my extended family. My grandmother taught me to cook. My Uncle Joe taught me to fish. I loved it when my grandfather told me stories about when he was a boy. Each one of my extended family members added something to my childhood. I was lucky!

Today we live in a mobile world. Families are scattered from here to there. Extended family relationships are often difficult to maintain. However, I say that those extended family relationships are so vital to a child that it is worth the extra effort that parents must put forth to keep those relationships alive and thriving.

Relationships can grow even if there are miles between the aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents and the child. Telephone calls that are regular and frequent help to keep the lines of communication open. Email and chat on the computer have opened up whole new ways for families to maintain contact.

It's so vital for a child to have good solid relationships with their extended family that the expense in time and money for the parents is a worthwhile investment in the child's future.

Helping A Child Deal With Anger

We all get angry from time to time. Anger is just part of the human condition. It isn't "bad" to be angry. Now, some behaviors that are the result of being angry can be "bad," but it isn't the anger that's "bad."



The same thing goes for children. Of course, children get angry — they're humans, and sometimes other people (especially other children) or situations can just make them MAD.

As parents, we must instruct our children what appropriate behavior is in the face of anger. It's a concept that a lot of adults have a problem with so starting early is a good idea.

The first thing that the child needs to know is that you don't think that he is being "bad" because he is angry. He needs to understand that you are not angry with him because he is angry. He needs to know that it is perfectly all right for him to get angry.

Then the child must understand that his behavior when he becomes angry IS the problem. He has to be taught to control himself and not hit or bite when things aren't going his way.

Let the child know that you understand how he feels by acknowledging the reason for his anger. You might say, "It must have made you really angry when Bobby took that toy away from you."

Then you need to turn the focus of the conversation toward the actions that your child took because he was angry and point out that when he hits, bites, pinches, or otherwise inflicts injury on the object of his anger that he is not behaving in an appropriate manner. It's an opportunity to teach negotiation and compromise skills.

Teething

Teething! Whoa! It's a tough time for babies and for their parents. Teething usually begins when a baby is around three months of age and continues until somewhere around the time he turns three YEARS old.



The first two teeth that the baby usually cuts are the two front bottom teeth. Those two bottom front teeth will finally break through the bottom gum at between four to seven months, but the baby has been "teething" long before the teeth actually come through the gums.

You'll notice your baby drooling more when he begins the teething process. He'll want to chew on anything and everything that comes near his mouth.

Teething is a bit painful, so it's expected that the baby will become cranky and cry more often and for longer periods of time. Sleep patterns are often disrupted and eating can become problematic as well.

If the baby is exceptionally cranky and seems to be having more than a little pain, it's a good idea to talk to your pediatrician. Pediatricians differ in their recommendations for treatment of teething symptoms. Some pediatricians say that teething does not cause an elevated temperature or diarrhea while others say that teething does cause these symptoms.

There are products on the market that can help to ease the pain for teething. Different pediatricians will recommend different products.

It's important to remember that the drool can be irritating to the baby's skin, so wipe the drool away often. There are several products on the market that are designed to help ease the pain of teething and actually help the teeth to break through the gums.

Give your baby things to chew on. The chewing helps the teeth to break through and it also helps to relieve the baby's pain.

Dealing With Bad Behavior In Toddlers

Toddlers are becoming. They are just discovering that they have an opinion and that their opinion (about anything and everything) is the most important opinion, in their opinion. It's a tough time for parents.

Problem: Your toddler takes his clothes off. It's kind of cute at first, but "cute" doesn't last long. He's discovered that wearing clothes is optional, and that removing his clothes gets lots of attention.



Solutions:

1. Buy clothing that zips or buttons in the back.
2. Let him run naked at home, but tell him he can't go "see Grandma" until he puts his clothes on.
3. Let him start to choose his own clothing.
4. Take a deep breath — he'll outgrow it.

Problem:

The biting toddler. Your toddler has teeth, and he's decided that teeth make excellent weapons when things aren't going his way.

Solutions:

1. Remove the child who bites from the situation. If he's using his teeth to gain possession of a toy from another child, give the toy in question to the other child and remove the biter from the situation. Don't let biting "win."
2. Lavish attention on the child that was bitten while totally ignoring the biter.
3. Try to resist the temptation to bite the biter back just to show him that biting hurts. He already knows biting hurts. He's seeking getting his own way or looking for attention. Don't give him either.



Problem:

The toddler temper tantrum. Toddlers most often throw tantrums when they are overly tired or have been out of their comfort zone for an extended period of time. Tantrums are often reflecting frustration.

Solutions:

1. Schedule trips and vigorous activities during the child's normally peak hours, not during nap time or near bedtime.
2. Praise good behavior as often as possible. Toddlers seek praise.
3. If you threaten leaving a store without making a purchase if the child throws a tantrum, back up the threat.
4. Again, they really do outgrow it.

To Spank Or Not To Spank

Many parents struggle with the spank-or-not-to-spank issue. It's probably best here to define "spanking." Spanking is NOT beating. Spanking is NOT inflicting bodily harm, hitting hard enough to leave a bruise, or using any "weapon" other than an open hand.

Until about 50 years ago, spanking a child as a child discipline measure wasn't even in question. Most parents spanked. The general opinion about spanking was based on the Biblical admonishment of "spare the rod and spoil the child."

Today parents struggle with the question of whether to spank their children or not. It's not an easy decision, and you can find "expert" opinions that champion both points of view.

Those who advocate spanking say that young children are totally self-absorbed and intent on doing as they please. They say that the **ONLY** way in which a parent can have enough control over a young child to protect them is by spanking. Those who advocate spanking also say that spanking should only be used after other disciplinary methods have been exhausted.

Then there is the school of thought that says "no" to spanking — ever — under any circumstances. Those who are opposed to spanking say that a child learns what he lives, and if he is spanked, he will resort to violence when he gets older.

There are, of course, volumes written espousing both points of view. Parents must make their own decisions about spanking and a means of discipline and as a method to control their children and prevent them from injuring themselves.

There's no "easy" answer to the question of "to spank or not to spank." There certainly isn't a "one-size-fits-all" solution. But parents who do choose to spank need to remember that they are only to use their open hand and that open hand should be applied only to the child's bare bottom. They should also realize that there are other methods of child control and they should try all of the methods at their disposal before they resort to spanking.

Autism



"Autism" is one of the most dreaded diagnoses that a parent can hear. There are degrees of autism. Autistic children are classified as having low-, medium-, and high-functioning autism (LFA, MFA, and HFA). The severity is based on IQ scores. Autism is a brain developmental disorder.

Autism is characterized by a pattern of symptoms rather than by a single symptom. The autistic child has problems in social interaction, problems in communication, limited interests, and repetitive behavior.

Autism is not curable at this point, but there is a great deal of research being conducted and there has been progress made in helping those with autism to function at a higher level. Some of those who have autism can function almost normally in the world, while others who have more severe versions of autism may never be able to function without help.

It's a common belief that autistic children prefer to be alone, but that belief isn't substantiated by fact. Autistic children do not prefer to be alone, but they have a great deal of difficulty with interaction. Communication is a problem.

Repetitive behavior is one of the most noticeable symptoms of autism. Repetitive movements without purpose, like hand flapping, rocking, or head rolling, is almost always present. Compulsive behavior like insisting on objects being arranged in the same manner is also common.

Those who are autistic do not like change of any kind. They want to KNOW what is going to happen at a specific time and, as they get older, on a specific day. They do not menus to be varied. They do not want furniture to be rearranged.

About 30% of autistic children engage in self-injury behavior like biting themselves. A few of those with autism develop unusual levels of achievement in one particular area. They are called autistic savants.

The Holiday Meltdown

The holidays are a stressful time for even the best-adjusted adult. The holiday season for young children is almost a certain situation to cause the toddler meltdown. Think about the way your child sees the holiday season. First of all, the stores where he is used to going with Mommy look entirely different. Everybody keeps asking what he wants Santa to bring him. Mommy and Daddy are running around cooking, shopping, wrapping gifts, making plans, etc. The little one is excited — overly excited — and the excitement continues day after day after day. How do you NOT expect a meltdown?



There are certain things, however, that parents can do to help their young children cope with the holiday season and all that it brings.

1. Maintain the child's normal schedule as nearly as possible. Disrupted schedules are an invitation for stress. Try to maintain normal get-up and go-to-bed times. Try to maintain normal meal times, etc.
2. Limit sugar consumption. There is sugar everywhere during the holiday season. Sugar is a stimulant. Limit your child's consumption of sugar to help him maintain control.
3. Limit television and video viewing. It seems that the airwaves are over loaded with excitement during the holiday season, and the child "picks up on" that added excitement.
4. Allow ample "time outs" from the excitement. Sometimes the season is overwhelming for adults and it's doubly overwhelming for small children. Just take a break — and take a break as often as necessary.
5. Don't forget cuddle time. Yes, you are busy, but don't get so busy that you forget to take your little one on your lap and read a sweet story to him. Include humor in story time. A good laugh can prevent an almost certain meltdown!

Good luck, and remember that the holidays really don't last forever.

The Development Of Motor Skills



When a baby is born, he has no motor skills at all. Motor skills develop as the child ages. Motor skills are divided into two groups: gross motor skills and fine motor skills.

Gross motor skills begin to develop first. Gross motor skills involve the large muscles in the body. For example, a baby can usually control his eye movements and hold his head up by the time he's one month old. As the baby grows and gets older, he will learn to roll over, sit alone, pull himself to a standing position, crawl, stand alone, walk, run, climb, etc. Each new ability

indicates that the baby is developing gross motor skills.

Fine motor skills take longer to even begin to develop. The first indication that a child is beginning to develop fine motor skills is when he gains the ability to pick up an object using his thumb and first finger. As fine motor skills develop, the child will be able to transfer and object from one hand to the other. He will improve at manipulating small objects. Eventually he will learn to button buttons, zip zippers, thread objects onto a string, stack blocks, color, cut paper with scissors, print, write, etc. The development of fine motor skills is the development of smaller muscle groups in the body.

The time table for the development is not written in stone. Babies don't all develop at the same rate or learn in the same order. The newborn baby begins to develop physically, of course, and to develop motor skills; but he is also developing intellectually, socially, and emotionally at the same time. Some children will rush ahead in physical development, while others might rush ahead in intellectual development.

Traveling With Children



Traveling with small children is not an activity for the faint of heart, the disorganized, or those who are short on patience. It takes courage, planning, and patience to travel with children safely and even pleasantly.

First, it is wise to recognize the fact that your young child likes his comfort zone. He knows what to expect. There aren't many unexpected and/or unpleasant surprises while he's in his own home. When he is taken out of his comfort zone, he doesn't know what to expect. He's excited, but he is also anxious and even fearful of the unknown. So here are some good ideas about traveling with small children:

1. Prepare the child for the trip. Kids really do hate surprises no matter what they say. A surprise, they quickly learn, can be a good thing, but it isn't necessarily a good thing. Kids like sameness. So begin to prepare your child for going on a trip. Read him stories about riding in a car or a train or an airplane. Prepare him as best you can for what he will experience.
2. Plan ahead for the child's physical needs. If he usually has juice and a little snack at a certain time, prepare to give him that snack at the usual time. Maintain the child's eating and sleeping schedule as much as you can, and preparation will help you to do that.

3. Plan ahead for the child's intellectual needs. Kids aren't going to sit quietly with their little hands folded in their laps. A child's work is his play. That's the way he is leaning about the world, and he needs his tools (toys) for learning.

4. Keep the child belted into a restraint system at all times. It doesn't matter whether you are traveling by car, train, or plane, accidents happen. Provide your child with as much protection as you possibly can, no matter whether he complains or not.

Calming A Fussy Baby

Why is it that those adorable babies in the baby products commercials are ALWAYS smiling and happy? Out in the real world, babies are NOT always smiling and happy. Babies fuss. They become fretful and above all, babies CRY — and loudly!



A baby's cry is actually a miracle of nature. A baby cries automatically, and crying isn't a conscious decision. When the baby senses a need, the normal and automatic reaction is to sharply and suddenly inhale air and then to forcefully exhale that air. The air vibrates the vocal cords, and the sound produced is what we call a cry.

A baby's cry is very effective, too. The sound gets the attention of every hearing ear in the vicinity, and particularly the attention of the baby's mommy (or other caregiver).

Adults have been soothing crying and fussy infants since the dawn of time. The four long-used and successful techniques for soothing a fussy baby are:

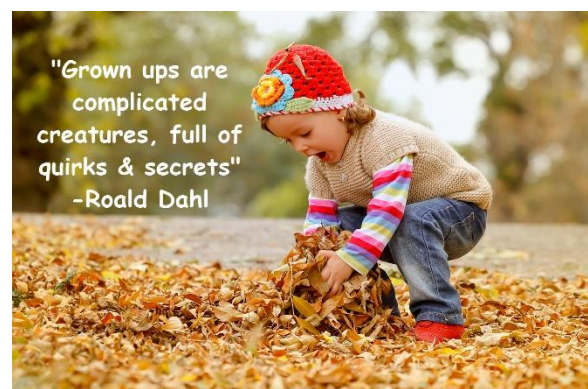
- * Rhythmic (rocking) motion
- * Soothing and calming sound (talking or singing softly)
- * Visual distractions (refocus the attention on something interesting)
- * Holding the fussy infant

Just like a baby's cry is automatic, it seems that these means of comfort giving are also rather automatic among human adults.

The sucking action is also calming to a fussy infant. Nourishment as a result of the sucking action isn't always necessary. (Think pacifier.) Swaddling is another method of soothing a fussy baby, particularly a newborn. The womb was a perfect fit, and the baby liked it. Just simply wrapping a baby tightly will provide him with comfort and stop the fussing at least temporarily. The point is that if one thing (rocking) doesn't soothe the baby, try another technique. Try the techniques in combination until you find the "right way" (according to the baby) to comfort your fussy infant.

Childhood Abuse And Neglect

Child abuse and neglect are topics that all of us would simply rather not think about, much less talk about. Yet the topics are vital. They demand full attention. Children of all races, all economic levels, all ages and both sexes are abused and neglected in every country in the world and in every state in the Union.



The potential for child abuse and child neglect is not limited to a specific place, time, or segment of society.

The law defines child abuse and neglect as:

* Any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation; or

* An act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm.

The law is pretty clear on the subject and on the nightly news we are shown the stomach turning cases of severe child abuse. All child abuse, however, is not abundantly clear. That's why we all must be aware of what exactly does constitute child abuse.

First, a child can be abused before he is even born if the expectant mother takes drugs that will harm the infant, drinks alcohol, or uses tobacco products. All of these behaviors of the mother put the child at risk and ARE child abuse. SUSPECTED child abuse should be reported to the authorities. If you see a child in a situation that is dangerous to the child's safety or see evidence of physical abuse, it is your duty as a member of the human race to report that abuse or neglect. The number for "Child Protective Services" can be found in your telephone directory.

A mother spanking a child on his bottom with an open hand does NOT constitute child abuse. However, a mother or father hitting a child with a weapon (belt, board, etc.) or with a closed fist IS child abuse and it should be reported.

Reading To Your Child

I'm often asked what age a child should be when his parents begin to read to him. The answer is, "It's never too soon to start!" The baby can "hear" in the womb. Oh, he doesn't understand words, but he does understand emotions, and he does respond to the emotion behind a sound.

Sudden loud sounds cause a fetus to flinch. Calming sounds calm, and there is nothing more calming to an unborn baby than the sound of his mother's voice. So, yes, read to your child before he is born....what you read doesn't matter...the daily newspaper is fine as long as you read it aloud and in a soft, comforting voice.



The first books that parents should read to their child after he is born are those that feature touching and textures. Children begin to learn language and associate different senses with different words at a very early age.

As the infant becomes a toddler, the books that are read to the child can be used to help reinforce positive behaviors. There are thousands of excellent books for toddlers on the market. It is better to use books that are made of washable materials that are not easily torn until a child is old enough to learn how to treat books with care.

Reading time is a special time for children. They love the sound of their parents' voices, and they love the undivided attention that one-on-one reading provides. They

also love the physical closeness — the touching and cuddling — that are part of a parent reading to a child.

The wisdom of the ages is contained in books. The earlier a child is introduced to books and the pleasure that books bring into his life, the better he will do in life. Nobody who loves to read is ever lonely if they have a book to read!

Developing Coordination



Babies are born with no coordination or motor skills at all. Motor skills and coordination begin to develop about a month after birth. The baby will learn to control his eye movements and hold his head up. Those are the beginning of the development of motor skills. Motor skills must be accompanied with coordination in

order for the child to learn to crawl, walk, run, etc.

So how does coordination develop? When a baby is about three months old, his coordination has developed to the point that he can intentionally bring an object to his mouth with his hands. By the time an infant is six months old, he can transfer objects from one hand to the other. His coordination is developing.

At some point before a baby is nine months old, his fine motor skills begin to develop, and his coordination becomes more advanced. He can pick up a small object using his thumb and first finger.

By the time the baby is about one year old, he will have mastered many of the coordination movements that allow him to sit alone, crawl, walk (maybe), etc. His fine motor skills develop much more slowly, but he might be able to scribble with a crayon or a pencil.

By the time a child is two years old, his gross motor skills and coordination are becoming well developed. He can climb. He can jump lifting both feet simultaneously, etc. Fine motor skills and coordination are also becoming better developed, but still lag behind gross motor skills.

Motor skills and coordination continue to develop, and by the time a child is six years old he can hop, skip, jump, and throw and catch a ball. Most children can tie their own shoes and button buttons and zip zippers as well.

Child Safety First



As parents, our primary job is to keep our children from harm. Every other aspect of parenting falls below safety in importance. If our kids aren't protected and safe, no other parenting skill is of any use at all. So it is "Safety First" — always.

There are laws that have been written to insure that we keep our children in "approved" restraints while they are riding in a moving vehicle. There are even laws on the books that deem child abuse and neglect as criminal activities, and there are fines and penalties attached for those who

do neglect and abuse their children — or even fail to keep their children from being abused.

But the fact is that the government cannot legislate good parenting. The government cannot pass laws that will guarantee that all parents everywhere keep their children safe from harm every minute of every day. It simply isn't possible, and it isn't even the job of government to ensure child safety. It's the job of parents.

Child safety measures begin at birth, when parents are instructed by medical personnel about how to prevent their babies from getting choked. Child safety is an every-minute-of-the-day task for parents of infants and toddlers.

As our toddlers grow and become "big" kids, we instruct them about how to keep themselves safe. We say, "Look both ways before you cross the street." We say, "Don't talk to strangers." We say many things and we repeat them over and over until we are sure that our kids are armed with enough information to keep them safe.

Child safety is a lifetime project for all of us. Fortunately, most of us love the task of keeping our children safe. We love our kids, and keeping them safe is the thing that is of the utmost importance to us.

Choosing Safe Toys

Every parent has read the reports of imported toys that are painted with lead-based paint. Those reports strike pure terror in the hearts of parents everywhere. Toys that are "recalled" by manufacturers and retailers for safety reasons make us quake with fear.

Finding that our little ones are busily playing with toys that we bought for them that could make them sick or kill them is an experience that makes the parent feel like he or she has failed to keep the child safe. Of course, it wasn't the parent's fault, but that fact does nothing to make the parent feel better OR keep the child safe.



So the question is, how do we, as parents, buy toys for our children that are safe? I'm not sure that there is any sure-fire way, but there are some guidelines that parents can use when choosing toys for their children that will help with the safety concerns.

Choose age-appropriate toys: On most packaging, there is a phrase that says "recommended for children 3 to 5" (or whatever age group the toy is intended for). But don't just blindly accept the recommendation. Examine the toy in question. If there are small pieces in the toy or small items that could come off of the toy when it's in use, don't buy the toy even if it is deemed age-appropriate for your toddler that puts everything into his mouth.

Choose toys that are manufactured in America when at all possible: This is a hard one. Labels can say, "Made in the USA" when they are, in fact, they are only assembled in the United States. Still, toys that are made following U.S. guidelines for child safety are certainly safer than those made where there are no guidelines for child safety.

Raising A Moral Child

What can parents do to help their children be moral when the child lives in an obviously immoral world? The answer is "a lot." Parents can do a great deal to help a child grow up to be a moral adult. Children are learning every waking minute. They are like thirsty little sponges who soak up information at an alarming rate.



"Morality" is subjective. The definition of moral behavior varies from culture to culture and even from person to person. According to the dictionary, morality is, "conformity to the rules of right conduct; moral or virtuous conduct." The "rules of right conduct" is where differences lie

when morality is discussed.

There's an adage that says, "children learn what they live." It's true. Children are learning what is considered moral behavior in the world that they experience. If that experience is gained by sitting in front of a television set watching people kill one another and having sex whenever and with whomever they please or playing violent video games, that's what the child will deem "moral behavior."

Morals are "learned" behavior. Babies aren't born with morals. Babies are born, however, with the capacity to learn and learn they do. Children develop physically, intellectually, socially, emotionally, and morally.

There is a school of thought that says that a child has established his own set of morals by the time he is 10 years old. He "knows" what is right and what is wrong according to his own moral compass. It's up to the parents to point that moral compass in the right direction. Morals are learned at home, and they are learned every minute of every hour of every day. The best teacher is a living example of moral behavior.

Bottom line: Your child will adopt your moral values, but they will learn those values by your actions and not by your words.

Raising A Responsible Child



**"The price of greatness is responsibility."
-Winston Churchill**

Babies come into this world with a functioning (but still developing) physical body. They have all their parts, and those parts work — sort of. Babies grow and develop physically without a lot of "help" from the adults in their world other than the adults providing food and shelter. But babies also grow intellectually, socially, emotionally,

and morally, and growth in these areas requires a great deal more from the parents of the child. Food and shelter aren't enough.

Here we are talking about teaching "responsibility." How many times have you heard, "It wasn't MY fault," "SHE did it," and all of the variations for declaring oneself not responsible. It's a natural human response not to want to be held accountable when bad things happen.

Teaching that there are consequences for wrong behavior is part of teaching responsibility. Children must not live in a "consequence"-free world. When they do wrong, there need to be consequences.

For example, when a toddler throws a toy in anger, the parent might pick the toy up and hand it back to the child once. If the child throws the toy again in anger, the parent must remove the toy and deny the child the pleasure of playing with the toy. Responsibility! Bad actions do not produce good results.

Children must be actively taught to be responsible for their own actions (or inactions). He forgets his lunch today, and if you take his lunch to him, he is very apt to forget his lunch tomorrow. If he misses lunch, he'll likely remember his lunch forever more. Responsibility!

Teaching a child to step forward and accept responsibility for his or her actions isn't easy. There isn't a parent alive (or an expert, for that matter) who would claim that teaching responsibility is easy — but it IS necessary!

Encouraging Childhood Creativity

Children are born with some measure of creativity. I believe that. Like all human ability, of course, some children are more creative than others, but creativity at some level is innate.

Young children have mental images of their perception of the world long before they have the



Creative play is like a spring that bubbles up from deep within a child. ~Joan Almon

linguistic skill to voice those images. The adults in the child's world need to provide the child with the opportunity to communicate those mental images using a wide range of ways other than the spoken or written word; gestures, drawings, paintings, sculpture, construction, music, make-believe play, movement, and dance.

There are three basic ways in which parents can help their children to develop their innate creativity: experience, tools, and encouragement.

Experience: Children need to be exposed to a wide range of creative media, including art, dance, acting, sculpturing, etc. The more children see the results of the creativity of others, the more their own creativity is fostered.

Television is a good medium, and I'm certainly not objecting to all television programming for children; but parents need to be selective about their young children's television viewing. Television programming for children needs to help children see the results of creativity and encourage children to be creative themselves.



Tools: If you put some Silly Putty in the hands of a five-year-old, you'll be surprised at what he creates. If you give children the tools that they need to express themselves creatively, they **WILL** use those tools. They will dance to music. They will cut and paste with abandon. Kids need tools to be creative. Every home in which there are children should have a place where kids can create with abandon.

Encouragement: When children see their parents engaging in creative pursuits, they will imitate them. If the parents do nothing more creative than change channels on the TV, the kids aren't being encouraged to be creative themselves. Children are encouraged by example and not by words.

Quotes About Childhood Development



I really do appreciate quotes, and I quote experts often. I believe that the wisdom of those with more experience than I possess can teach me a great deal, and I actively seek quotes that have been made by experts in all fields. Childhood development is a field of study, and there are some experts that have devoted their lives to learning how

children develop and helping the rest of us help our children.

Here are some of my favorite quotes:

Dorothy Cohen wrote "The Development of Five Year Olds" in 1972. In it she said, "Adults understandably assume that the level of verbal proficiency a five-year-old displays represents his level of proficiency in all areas of functioning — if he talks like an adult, he must think and feel like one. However, five-year-olds ... belie the promise of adult-like behavior with their child-like, impulsive actions."

James L. Hymes, Jr. was a U.S. child development specialist and the author of "Teaching the Child Under Six." In his book, in Chapter 1, you will find these words, "Early education can only promise to help make the third and fourth and fifth years of life good ones. It cannot insure without fail that any tomorrow will be successful."



**Childhood is the most
beautiful of all life's seasons.
~Author Unknown**

Nothing 'fixes' a child for life, no matter what happens next. But exciting, pleasing early experiences are seldom sloughed off. They go with the child, on into first grade, on into the child's long life ahead."

Alice Sterling Honig is a child development specialist and author who wrote, "Helping Children Become More Caring and Cooperative." She wrote, "Family is the first school for young children, and parents are powerful models."

Honig is right — parenting is an awesome responsibility. It takes courage to bring a child into this world and willingly assume responsibility for that new and

unique human being! Here's to parents everywhere!