

As They Grow

*An Early Learning Newsletter for
Families of Preschool Children*

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Learning for life

Dear Families,

Raising a child is hard work and brings its special pleasures too. Preschoolers have an endless supply of energy and a boundless sense of curiosity. It takes strength and energy to parent a preschooler! Since children don't stay young forever, enjoy your child to the fullest and treasure these times together.

Happy 2006!

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MANAGEABLE FAMILY MEALS

Preschoolers learn by watching other people. At mealtime, they see what you eat and are influenced by that. Remember that you are the role model for your child. If you tell your child about the importance of eating fruits and vegetables, yet eat none yourself, this sends a mixed message to your child.

Provide your child with three meals a day and have planned snacks between meals. Children need snacks because their stomachs are small and they need a lot of energy. Structured meals and snacks help children regulate their own eating. With regular meal times, children learn when to expect to eat. This makes it easier on the parent and the child will learn the consequences of his behavior. If the child doesn't eat dinner, he will find out that he will get hungry before the next eating time.

Children love to cook and, with a little planning, even very young children can be involved in meal preparation. Cooking can increase precious time together. Sharing a common activity is a good way to open and maintain communication. For the very young child, this provides an important sense of contributing to the life of the family.

Here is a list of tasks children can learn to do well at early ages:

- | | | |
|-------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| ☺ shape meatballs | ☺ slice bananas | ☺ mix muffin batter |
| ☺ wash vegetables | ☺ grease baking pans | ☺ shape dough |
| ☺ beat eggs | ☺ tear lettuce | ☺ open packages |
| ☺ toss salads | ☺ wipe the table | ☺ shape burgers |

CHILDREN'S FEARS



Children have fears about many different things in their lives -- both real and imagined. They need supportive adults to help them gain control over their fears and to feel safe and secure. Because children think and understand the world differently from adults, we need to remember that a fear that sounds imaginary may turn out to have a basis in fact. For example, a child afraid to go to bed at night for fear of the monster growling in the closet may actually be hearing noises from outside the house.

It is important not to get angry or be impatient with a frightened child. Punishing a child who is feeling insecure is likely to increase the child's feeling of fear, not reduce them. Children need to feel confident to seek help and comfort from caring adults. Providing an opportunity for children to talk about their fears may help them to understand them. Young children may need help putting their fears into words. They may be able to express their fear through drawing pictures or modeling clay.

TOY SWITCH-A-ROO

Why is it that after the holidays some children have more toys than they can ever use or more than they have room for?

When children play with a toy for only a short period of time, or are bored with it, it may be time to put some of the toys away for a while. With a more limited selection, children will learn to be more inventive and resourceful in looking for new ways to play.

Time to time, switch toys from storage to playroom for an ever-changing variety. Your child may help you decide which toys to put away and which to bring out. With a more limited selection, children will learn to be more inventive and resourceful in looking for new ways to play.

When your child has outgrown toys, consider donating them to charity or passing them on to younger relatives or friends. Day care centers or churches may also accept gently used toys.



THE JOYS OF READING

Most parents enjoy reading aloud to their children as much as children love being read to. Reading together involves sharing warm feelings and can be one of the most peaceful and magical moments of the day. Children whose parents read to them daily learn to pay attention, to remember more details, and to formulate questions. Reading also stimulates an early interest in learning literature.



Young children like being directly involved in the reading experience. They may enjoy turning the pages in the book. They may choose the same book to read over and over again. This familiarity with the story increases the child's enjoyment. You may make a game out of reading favorite books by omitting words and letting the child supply them.

Preschoolers are quickly developing language skills. To satisfy their natural curiosity they will ask endless questions. But be patient, you will get to the end of the story! By answering preschoolers' questions, you will be enhancing their intellect. Allow your child to "read" to you as favorite books are memorized. This gives the child a strong sense of accomplishment.

WAYS TO SAY "VERY GOOD"

That's right!
Super!
Good work!
That's really nice.
I like that.
Keep it up!
Great!
You are great at that!

TEMPER TANTRUMS

Dealing with tantrums is part of parenting. Every child has temper tantrums and most outgrow this behavior by five years of age. Tantrums are usually the result of a build-up of anger or frustration. They occur when children are over-tired, over-stimulated, hungry, or don't get their own way. The child may kick, scream, cry, throw himself on the floor, bite, hold his breath, or throw things. A calm, caring approach in dealing with tantrums will make these difficult times easier. The child does not enjoy it any more than you do!

Ways to handle a tantrum:

- Count to 10 (or 20) before dealing with your child's rage. Approach your child only when you are calm.
- Some children who are having a tantrum are helped by being held gently, or stroked, and spoken to in a gentle voice.
- Some children having a tantrum need to be left alone. At home, you can go to another room until the tantrum stops.
- Remember, tantrums are tough for the child too. Children don't choose to have tantrums and find them scary and exhausting, just like you do.
- After a tantrum, regain the closeness and reassure your child. Spend some quiet time together. Don't talk a lot about the tantrum.

Here are some ways to help prevent tantrums:

- Maintain a regular routine of meals, naps, and bedtimes.
- Be clear and simple in the messages you give your child.
- Model using words to express your own anger. "I feel angry when you hit your brother." Recognize, though, that it will be awhile yet before your preschooler can learn to use words to express anger.
- Be realistic in what to expect from your child. Make sure you don't ask for something the child isn't old enough to do yet.
- Listen to your child!
- Be sure your child is allowed to make some choices. "Do you want to wear the red shirt or the blue one today?"



UW-Extension Early Learning Series

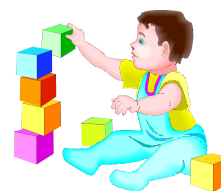
The Early Learning Series focuses on raising and caring for young children in Racine County. Parents and caregivers learn about challenging topics related to "*touchpoints*," the predictable times and events when a child's behavior seems to fall apart and disrupts family life. Often parents and caregivers wonder "why is this happening," "did we do something that caused this change," and "what can be done about it." For example, think about a child learning to walk. If she had been sleeping through the night, now she may wake up during the night, hoping to practice her walking. She might not be as interested in eating and might be more irritable, since she wants to put all of her energy into walking. Once she reaches the milestone of walking, she often goes back to sleeping through the night, regular eating, etc.

Some of the Early Learning Series Topics:

- ◇ Potty Training
- ◇ Bedtime and Sleep
- ◇ Feeding & Eating
- ◇ Crying
- ◇ Anger and Aggression

Attend the Early Learning Series at a variety of locations throughout Racine County. UW-Extension provides the workshops with the support of United Way of Racine County, Family Smart/Kid Friendly, and organizations hosting the workshops.
For more information, call 262-886-8460.

Pointers For Parents - Play to Learn



How do young children learn best? There is no need for special toys, videos, or flashcards. It happens when a child sits down and begins to play. Play is the work of young children. They are eager to learn about how the world works and do so through play, by using all the “tools” around them.

Through play, children learn about: *communication* and the back-and-forth of *conversation* and their own *self-worth* as they see how much fun playing with their mom and dad is. In addition, they learn about *imitation* and *cause and effect* as they make things happen and *problem-solving skills* and *self-confidence* as they take on new challenges and learn to master them.

It is important to remember that there are no rules when it comes to play. Fancy toys are not needed. In fact, parents are their child’s favorite toy! Every child is unique. Your child may have special skills or special needs. Follow your child’s lead. She’ll let you know what interests her. And when your child is engaged and having fun, she is learning.

There are many fun ways parents can engage babies, toddlers, and preschoolers during play:

Sing and Dance Together. Listen to different kinds of music and dance in different ways to see what your child likes best. Sing a favorite song that has been passed down through your family. Don’t worry about the sound of your voice!

Play Ball. For infants, offer a ball with different colors and textures. Let your baby explore it with all her senses. Encourage her to see what else she can do with it. This will eventually help her learn to roll it, drop it in a box, and take it out again. With toddlers and preschoolers, play games like catch or modify favorites like kickball, soccer, golf, and football.

Say It with Music. “Statue,” “Freeze” and “Hokey-Pokey” are fun musical games for older toddlers and preschoolers. They offer opportunities to listen and follow directions. They also teach about words and sounds and allow children to move and exercise their bodies. Toy drums, tambourines, and other instruments add to the fun.

Let’s Do It Again... and Again... and Again.... Through repetition, toddlers figure out how things fit together and work. They might fill and dump a pail over and over to learn about *full* and *empty* and *in* and *out*. They may want you to read the same book, and sing the same song, night after night. This kind of repetition helps children know what to expect. This gives them a sense of security and control over their world. It also helps them master new skills, which boosts their self-confidence.

Play Running, Climbing, and Action Games. Oldies but goodies like “Ring Around the Rosie” and “London Bridge” encourage children to move, sing, listen, take turns, and cooperate. The park, playground, and back yard offer chances to run, climb, and play with other children. On a rainy or snowy day, try creating an obstacle course indoors.



Keep Little Hands Busy. Young toddlers love to make things work. They use their hands and fingers for pushing buttons, opening boxes, and turning pages. This allows them to do everything from getting the music box to play their favorite song to exploring a treasured book. Many children also like to finger paint, color, play with play dough, or squeeze water out of a sponge. Providing a variety of hands on activities for your preschooler will also help them learn cause and effect.

Act It Out. Encourage fantasy play by providing dress-up clothes and other props. Use items like hats, scarves, backpacks, bowls, music makers, and whatever else you and your child can find. Join the fun. When you get involved, you can help her expand on her ideas and also learn about her thoughts and feelings as she acts them out through play.

It is important to remember to be spontaneous with your children and have fun. Playing should not feel like work. It should be a joyful, exciting time that you and your child share. So relax and enjoy yourself. Play is good for you, too. These suggestions come from ZERO TO THREE. You can learn more at: www.zerotothree.org/play.

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