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ABSTRACT

Focusing on parents' most persistent concerns about their children's growth and development, the 54 brief articles collected in this volume first appeared as monthly columns in "Parents Magazine." Section 1, "The Challenges of Parenthood," includes essays on alternative approaches to discipline, the limits of openness, teaching children to cope with problems, setting limits, solving parental disagreements about childrearing practices, and other topics. Section 2, "As They Grow," discusses, among other topics, vital signs of preschool development, shyness, imaginary companions, and sex-role development. Section 3, "Reaching Out to Others," provides comments about early friendships, encouraging preschoolers' interests, television watching, children and pets, and other subjects. Section 4, "Beyond the Home," explores issues such as selecting a preschool, early academics, and traveling with children. Each of the articles offers suggestions for dealing with issues commonly faced by parents of young children. Throughout the articles, it is suggested that parents ought not to readily accept "expert" opinion but should instead consider the suggestions in light of their own values and goals. (RH)

Talks with Parents
On Living with Preschoolers

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FOREWORD

The Educational Resources Information Center/Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education (ERIC/EECE) is one part of a network of sixteen specialized clearinghouses funded by the National Institute of Education to provide information about current research and developments in the field of education. Each clearinghouse focuses on a specific area of education (for a complete list of ERIC clearinghouses, please see the appendix). ERIC/EECE is responsible for acquiring, abstracting, and indexing recent information on the social, psychological, physical, educational, and cultural development of children from the prenatal period through early adolescence. Theoretical and practical issues related to staff development, administration, curriculum, and parent/community factors affecting programs for children of this age group are also within the scope of the clearinghouse.

Each month, documents including research studies, conference proceedings, curriculum guides, program descriptions and evaluations, and other publications not readily available from other sources are abstracted and indexed in the pages of *Resources in Education* (*RIE*). Through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service, the ERIC system then makes available microfiche and paper copies of these documents. Articles from over 700 journals and magazines are indexed in ERIC's *Current Index to Journals in Education* (*CIJE*); many of the articles cited are annotated as well.

Each clearinghouse provides syntheses and analyses of that information, in order to keep teachers, program administrators, researchers, and decision makers in all areas of education abreast of the most recent and important findings in their respective fields. In addition to publishing bibliographies and topical papers of interest to those involved with the care, development, and education of young children, ERIC/EECE produces resource lists and newsletters on a regular basis. Clearinghouse staff members also respond to individual information requests.

PREFACE

Written over a period of more than four years, the articles presented in this collection first appeared in *Parents Magazine* in the monthly column "As They Grow/3 and 4." They were intended to assist and support the parents of preschoolers as they think through their own goals and preferences for themselves, their preschoolers, and their families—and as they grapple with the normal problems of childrearing.

The topics were typically suggested by the *Parents Magazine* editorial staff, based on their long and rich experience in communicating with America's parents. I am deeply indebted not only for their suggestions for topics, but also for their constant encouragement and very skillful editing. I wish to acknowledge also their generosity in permitting these articles to be collected in this volume.

Readers may notice that a number of themes reoccur in several of the articles. In part, this is because the readers of the column changed over the years as their children grew, and their concerns also grew. In addition, themes reoccur that seem to me to be fundamental ones, which apply to many of the situations and problems parents face. Among the most important of these is the theme expressing the idea that different families have different values, priorities, and preferences —and that it is up to the individual family to consider what is known about the way children grow and to come to their own decisions about what they want to do and what kind of family life they prefer.

Using the ERIC document collection and other resources available at the ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, I have tried to bring to bear on the topics discussed the best available knowledge about parenting and young children's development. All in all, that knowledge suggests to me that young children thrive best when their parents believe in themselves, value their own values, and treat their children not only warmly and firmly but seriously and respectfully as well.

If at times parenting seems to be more difficult than we think it used to be, it is in part because we have fewer children in whom we

invest much more intense feeling and for whom we have much greater expectations than did parents in former times. Parenting is also more difficult than it might once have been because we expect ourselves to nurture very complex persons who will grow up able to cope with competing value systems, lifestyles unknown even to us, and social and technical demands we are only dimly aware of as yet. All of this must be dealt with in the face of many more options and alternative ways of behaving and feeling than our parents before us could have ever dreamed.

Being able to enjoy young children in the midst of so many conflicting and competing pressures is a major challenge—perhaps the most important one facing us as a nation and, indeed, as a world. I hope these themes and suggestions strengthen your own confidence and courage as you lay the foundations for your child to grow and participate in the adventures of creating a better future for us all.

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I. The Challenges of Parenthood

Authorities and Priorities

The amount of information on childrearing available to parents of young children seems to increase week by week. Some of it is useful, some is confusing, and some of it is contradictory. As a parent, you are most likely to benefit from the advice in many of the pamphlets, magazines, and books on parenting if you make it a point to accept and believe only what makes sense to you. Examine the suggestions and recommendations of experts and authorities in terms of your own goals for yourself, for your whole family, and for each family member. After all, your children have to learn to live comfortably with you, not with distant authors and experts.

Along the same lines, it is useful for parents to take a quiet moment or two, when they can, to think through just what they really believe is worth making an issue of. Different families have different values, priorities, and preferences for many aspects of daily life, and for life in general. It is up to each family to decide what really matters—what behavior, habits, ideas, character traits, and so forth are worth fussing about, arguing over, and insisting upon. Table manners are more important in some households than in others; practicing the piano or attending Sunday school are more serious commitments in some families than in others. As Americans, we prize these kinds of diversities among families.

Parents of preschoolers face plenty of potential issues: how important is it to you for your preschooler to remember to say "please" and "thank you," to put away playthings, to eat all the food he has asked for? Pick your issues carefully. Be sure you feel strongly and deeply enough about them to withstand fairly persistent challenges. It is a good idea to keep the number of issues down—a half dozen, perhaps. If you have too many issues, you will spend too much time and energy in contention. Remember, you can always revise your decision. Indeed, as children grow, new issues emerge to replace the old ones.

Once you have settled on what really matters to you, take your stand with calm courage and conviction. This approach is recommended not only for the sake of your well-being, but also for your child's welfare. Your child's psychosocial development is greatly facilitated when you provide clear signals about what you really think is appropriate, worthwhile, and desirable. If you are fairly sure about the kinds of behavior and habits you really feel comfortable with and want to live with, then you are more likely to effectively communicate to your child what is really expected. Often parents become so preoccupied with children's behavior that they really don't like—things about their children that make them uncomfortable – that they overlook their children's need to perceive clearly what their parents *do* want, what they *do* admire, and what they *do* think is worthwhile. Children do not have to like the demands and restrictions we place on them, they have a right to have their feelings about those demands and restrictions respected, even while they yield to our demands.

Preschool children seem to spend their full time learning about the world around them. They gain a certain sense of safety when the important adults in their lives not only have values, but take stands on them, too. Furthermore, an optimal environment for young children is one in which both the adults *and* the children are comfortable most of the time. There may be off-days when the comfort of the children comes at the expense of the adults, or vice versa. But growth and development occur over the long run and are affected by the day-to-day quality of the experiences of all the people who live together in a family.

Parental Guilt: How Much Is Too Much?

Feelings of guilt come to all of us occasionally, but for working mothers of young children, these feelings seem to be especially common. From time to time it is useful to step back and take a look at where these feelings come from and what might be done about them.

One major cause of guilt is the mythical vision of motherhood most of us have grown up with. Consciously or not, most men and women seem to carry around in their mind's eyes the image of mothers as people who are always there, patient, loving, and solicitous on all occasions. This vision of the ideal mother rarely, if ever, corresponds to a real person, but to the extent that a young mother sees herself as departing from this ideal, she may also think she's letting her own children down, and thus may suffer feelings of guilt.

For some young mothers, the ideal of motherhood stems from their own childhood, during moments of frustration or anger as children, they resolved to provide for their own children all the wonderful mothering they felt they should have had. Failing to measure up to that kind of resolution can certainly give rise to feelings of guilt. Another potential source of guilt is the fairly widespread belief among the general public and some specialists that the separation of very young children from their mothers may have enduring harmful effects. Such a belief is not convincingly supported by available research, however.

What can be done to assuage these difficult feelings? First of all, experience clearly indicates that mothers don't have to be all-patient and loving as depicted in popular myths. Children learn by examining contrasting experiences, and if parents were unvaryingly patient (or impatient) children would lack sufficient information with which to construct appropriate ways of understanding their environment.

Second, the resolution to do for your own children the opposite of what was done to you—sometimes referred to as the "negative-goals" approach—fails to provide indicators of success. It is difficult to know how well you are *not* doing something (i.e., not like your own mother). It is more useful to think through what you *do* want to do with

your child. And it is probably more important for you to feel and to believe that you *are* "right," that you are doing well, than it is to *be* right. Young children derive a sense of safety when they perceive their parents as reasonably confident in their own actions.

Third, if you're feeling guilty because you have doubts about the quality of your child's caretakers, it is wise to stop agonizing over it and investigate the situation thoroughly. Take an hour to visit the child care facility, speak to the staff about your concerns, talk to the other parents, call your local social service or public health agency. If the results of your investigations confirm your worst suspicions, then modifications of the arrangements must follow. Keep in mind that we *should* feel guilty when we knowingly or intentionally endanger another's welfare.

Finally, some young parents respond to their guilt feelings by indulging their children. If you offer children special goodies to make up for something you think you have done, you teach the child to agree with you and indeed to feel cheated. Furthermore, if you try to bribe a child (e.g., bring him gifts to make up for having left him with a sitter), it is like stopping at the next green light because you drove through the preceding red ones. The two acts should not be linked. If you take a day off from your children, you don't have to "make it up" to them. You are entitled to it (if not, don't take it!). Bring your child a gift because you want to bring him pleasure, or to express your affection, or to let him know you have been thinking about the things he likes. Don't hesitate to tell your preschooler that you have been thinking about him during a period of separation. Indeed, tell him specifically what thoughts you had, you remembered something he said, wondered what he might like for supper or whether he needs new shoes. Even grown-ups respond well when you let them know that you have been thinking about them.

The capacity to feel guilty is an essential attribute of a healthy person. It should serve as a spur to corrective action and not as a source of insecurity in responding to children.

How Much Love is Enough?

For anyone involved in the day-to-day care and education of young children, it is useful to remember that just because something is good for children, more of it isn't necessarily better for them. Children can be damaged by excessive as well as insufficient amounts of such essentials as affection, attention, stimulation, praise, and so forth. This so-called "Law of Optimal Effects" applies to a very wide variety of potential environmental influences. A few examples may clarify its usefulness.

Everyone readily acknowledges that young children need love and affection. Children who receive too little are said to feel rejected. But children who receive too much suffer from what is commonly called "smother love." Children need attention, and too little can result in feelings of rejection. But too much attention can cause demanding and whining behavior. Children need recognition, indications of their importance to the people around them. Too little may lead to feelings of inadequacy, but too much may cause excessive self-centeredness. Similarly, research on intellectual development indicates that the growing infant's mind requires ample stimulation from the very beginning of life. But too much can be as harmful as too little. Yet another example can be seen in the uses and abuses of praise. Lack of praise, or other expressions of appreciation, leads to discouragement and feelings of futility. In excess, though, praise loses its meaning and its informative value, as well as its power to encourage further effort.

As you think about what might be the optimal amount of something for your children, remember that what is optimal for one child may be excessive or insufficient for another. One of the ideas that may help you as you try to arrive at what is optimal for your child is the concept of *threshold*. The threshold refers to that point at which a child responds to a particular event in his environment such as praise or attention or affection. For example, some children feel they are getting lots of attention or affection when they get a hug once a day. Others

seem to require several hugs a day. In some families and some cultures hugging is reserved only for very special occasions. These differences are differences in thresholds.

Children who seem to have very high thresholds seem to give us the greatest difficulty. These are children who seem to need lots of hugs or attention or praise before they feel any of it. While there are apparently inborn differences in such things as temperament and energy level, it is reasonable to assume that thresholds for many needs are learned from experience. In other words, some children learn to need a lot of attention or affection (high threshold), but others acquire a low threshold, making it possible for them to get along quite well with very little. In either case, observation of your child's reactions to the events around him will give you clues about what the optimal amount of something is for him.

Inasmuch as the threshold is learned, you can modify it in several ways. For example, you can very gradually reduce the amount of attention or praise the child is given so that he can adapt to lower rates without distress. It also helps sometimes to explain to a child that even though you cannot give him affection or attention at a given moment, or "on demand," you are thinking of him and will get back to him after a specified event has occurred (e.g., after a meal has been prepared). It is important to follow through on such delays of attention so that the child can build trust and confidence in you. In addition, it is a good idea to teach children to tell you how they are feeling about receiving praise or attention or recognition. They should be encouraged to tell you their feelings and thoughts respectfully. Just because a child asks for something, that doesn't mean he should always get it. The difference between freedom and oppression, in this case at least, is that freedom means that his right to say what he thinks and feels is protected, not that all his demands are indulged.

A New Approach to Discipline

For a long time discussions about discipline centered on the relative merits of two approaches: authoritarianism versus permissiveness. Parents who are described as authoritarian approach discipline with insistence on absolute standards of behavior, setting firm limits on their children's behavior and often withholding warmth, support, and encouragement as a means of enforcing these standards. Permissiveness, on the other hand, is an approach that is marked by ample warmth, support, and encouragement, but which tends to be short on expectations, limits, and controls. Whatever the approach, the hope is that it will result in the child's wanting to do what she has to in order to get along in her social group.

Parents of young children worry about which of these approaches will "work" best, especially in the long run. They are often concerned that a child who is disciplined will come to feel unloved, or that discipline will undermine the child's love for the parent who metes it out. At the same time, however, they may fear that they will jeopardize their power and lose their child's respect by being too "soft." The results of recent research may help to alleviate these and other worries about this important subject.

As it turns out, neither permissiveness nor authoritarianism leads to optimal socialization in the long term. Authoritarianism is associated with negativism and intransigence in children; permissiveness with whining and demandingness—and both of these approaches are about equally likely to lead to dependence and aggressiveness. Fortunately, we are not limited to these two extremes. What seems to be required for optimal development is an approach called authoritativeness. The interesting feature of authoritative parenting is that it involves a combination of parental behaviors. Authoritarianism goes far enough in terms of expectations and controls but undervalues the warm, nurturing aspects of parental behavior; permissiveness errs in the opposite direction. Neither approach, as we have seen, leads to well-behaved and cooperative youngsters.

The authoritative approach, however, has not only been found to be highly effective as a form of discipline, it has also been found to be associated with the development of friendliness and spontaneity in the children of parents who practice it. Authoritative parenting is not an either/or approach; it involves setting firm standards of behavior and, at the same time, giving the child encouragement and support while she struggles to live up to parental expectations.

Authoritativeness also includes giving children reasonable explanations for the demands, controls, and limits—but don't speak hesitantly or apologetically. Keep in mind that young children need to feel loved by someone they can look up to. They cannot look up to a parent who makes empty threats or whom they can push around. For this reason, young children should not be allowed to strike or insult their parents. Most children will attempt to do so and must be firmly and gently stopped. It is important to make it clear to them that such behavior is not permitted. That is one way a parent lets her child know that she has self-respect, and children need to feel loved by self-respecting adults. A stern statement such as "Don't ever speak to me that way!" or "Don't ever strike me again!" will generally work with preschoolers and certainly will not harm them. If you are not firm with them on such occasions, they will continue to test you until you come through.

A child's sense of safety comes from being able to look up to a parent. When disciplined, the child may be angry momentarily—or even feel real flashes of hatred—but the anger passes, and in the long run, her admiration, love, and respect will be enhanced by firmness offered hand in hand with warmth.

The Limits of Openness

There's been a lot of loose talk in the recent years about the importance of openness in human relationships. Before we rush to open our communications, it might be useful to consider some of the risks it entails alongside its obvious values—especially in our relations with children. By definition, positive thoughts and feelings are supportive, enhancing, and nurturant—unless they are so extreme in intensity as to be oppressive, as for example in cases of "smother love." Thus, when considering the potential *risks* of free expression, we are thinking primarily of expression of negative rather than positive thoughts and feelings:

Many adults believe that open expression helps to meet the need to get things off one's chest. This classical view of the value of catharsis is not clearly supported by experimental evidence. On the contrary, when we let off steam we may cause reactions that in turn increase the intensity of frustration or anger and compound the problems the "openness" was supposed to solve. Some adults also believe that they might as well "let it all hang out" because the children can see through them anyway. There is no evidence that I am aware of that children are so unfailingly perceptive. It may help to recollect the occasions when you yourself as a child thought you could see through an adult and later learned that you had been wrong. Some children are better "readers" of adults' feelings than others, and some are better at it at different times.

One of the potential risks taken when parents indulge in open and free expression of their hostile, unfriendly, angry, or rejecting feelings—feelings bound to occur once in a while in most of us—is that many young children can easily feel overwhelmed or overpowered by the sheer magnitude of an adult's feelings—especially negative ones. It is easy for adults to forget how frighteningly large they can seem to a three- or four-year-old. Furthermore, if such outbursts occur frequently, then the child, in order to protect himself, has little choice but to tune them out and thereby lose the sensitivity necessary to detect when an adult's feelings are serious and when they are just part of a

steady stream of noise. Another risk is that the adult's behavior is likely to be imitated by the children, leading to a family life of ever-escalating emotionality in which the outbursts may become the household norm.

One of our responsibilities as parents is to help children learn to monitor their strong feelings and ultimately to temper them with reason, a habit that ideally is learned through the long course of development from childhood to maturity. Reflection is a type of self-debriefing that helps us to put the fluctuations of feelings into proper perspective and give them appropriate expression. For example, we sometimes feel the impulse to explode in rejection or anger toward a child because we are in fact preoccupied by some worry or disappointment unrelated to the child. In such cases a child can be victimized unjustly and inappropriately—a possibility that can be minimized by the habit of self-restraint from outbursts.

In general, it is most likely that the interests of everyone in the family are best served when the adults monitor their own feelings, minimize the frequency of strong outbursts, and teach children directly as well as through modeling that our intellect can be used to help us manage those inevitable occasional outbursts.

Setting Limits

The world of the preschooler is so full of temptations and hazards that it's no wonder we feel we are always being forced to set limits or lay down the law—something we once swore we would never do when we had our own children! Most of us dislike the parent's law enforcement role. But it won't go away—it comes with the territory. Setting limits on children's behavior is important not only to protect them from hazards they are too young to foresee, but also to establish the foundations of the capacity for give and take; to consider others' needs, rights, and feelings; to learn what behavior is appropriate in what situation; and to develop self-control. However, the child's ability to resist temptation or to stop herself from doing something even when she knows better takes a long time to learn.

Much mischief is inspired by the child's quest to find out who is really in charge, and if the boss really means what she says. No doubt about it: most of the time we probably do have to tell preschoolers "a hundred times" before the idea sticks! But keep in mind that deep down inside, children generally want to be the kind of person their parents want them to be.

When setting limits it's a good idea not to have too many of them. It's hard for small children to observe more than half a dozen really important, serious rules. It also helps to keep the rules simple, as in the directive "At seven o'clock, the TV goes off." Preschoolers will invariably contest such decisions and exercise their reasoning powers as they negotiate for concessions. Although too much yielding on your part can lead to chronic haggling children should win once in a while if they have presented a reasonable case. Parents often exaggerate the importance of being consistent. Occasional inconsistencies can give children valuable information about the normal fluctuations in behavior and about subtle differences in what is permissible in various situations.

In a pinch, parents often resort to bribery. This approach often seems to work—temporarily. But the use of bribery implies that the

rule you have set has no merits of its own. Of course, offering a bribe is a parent's response to the fact that young children cannot always perceive the merit of decisions. In such cases, however, it is better to insist on the simple observation of the rule without expecting the child to grasp the reasoning behind it. A brief explanation, as well as your indication that you understand why it doesn't seem fair, should help to give your child a sense that she is being treated with consideration.

Striking a bargain, which involves give and take, is probably a better approach than offering a bribe. For example, in making a bargain, you might say, "I'll take you out in the park later. You play in the family room now while I finish my morning work." A bribe, on the other hand, would be a promise to take the child to the park if she keeps out of the way in the morning, accompanied by a threat to withdraw the reward, rather than asking for mutual consideration.

Occasionally transgressions do deserve punishment. Genuine inconsiderateness of someone else's feelings or property, deliberate destructiveness, or excessive rudeness may require clear signals of disapproval from you. Try to make the punishment fit the crime. If the offense is serious, withdraw a privilege or cancel a planned excursion. Resist the temptation to use corporal punishment. Hitting a child only sets up a destructive pattern of escalation: in order to be effective, the blows have to get harder and harder on each successive occasion that such punishment is given. Eventually, the relationship between parent and child deteriorates, becoming a hostile and aggressive one. On balance, your best bet is to encourage the most mature and responsible behavior your child seems ready for. Try not to rush too far ahead of her. And don't forget to let her know, clearly and calmly, how much you appreciate and admire her mature responses when they do occur.

Spank or Speak?

The question of how to discipline children is one of deep concern to all parents. One special consideration for the parents of a preschooler, however, is what the effects—both in the short and in the long run—of spanking a young child might be. Some parents are quick to point out that they were spanked when young and were not damaged in the least, while others may recall their own childhood spankings as moments of deep humiliation and complete powerlessness. The increase in public awareness of child abuse and its origins has served to renew interest in and discussion of corporal and alternative methods of discipline. What are some factors to be considered in formulating answers to the question of whether or not to spank?

Certainly a consideration of major importance is that of effectiveness: Does spanking actually "work?" As you may imagine, reliable answers to this question are hard to find. Complex ethical questions obviously make it impossible to perform experiments that would give us definitive answers to this central question; clearly we cannot subject young children—nor people of any age, for that matter—to different forms of punishment merely for the experimental purpose of discovering in what ways they will be affected by the punishment. The clinical evidence that is currently available, however (based largely on childhood memories), suggests that the effectiveness of spanking is limited; it seems to be effective only as a way to clear the air for the moment.

It is a useful general principle to remember, when thinking about most issues related to discipline, that punishment is only good for the punisher, not for the punished. Clearing the air with a quick spank sometimes *seems* to halt the progress of a deteriorating situation, thus allowing the parties involved in it to change their direction. Nevertheless, the short-term utility must be weighed against the real possibility, gleaned from clinical evidence, that corporal punishment is not associated, in the long run, with self-discipline; rather, it is associated with the abuse of the child of the next generation. Overall, spanking can be thought of as something we use against our better judgment. It

is something we do in "hot" (as opposed to "cold") blood. To spank in the heat of the moment is not recommended, but, once in a while, it is inevitable and forgivable. But to spank in cold blood, as a matter of deliberate, premeditated policy, is sadistic; furthermore, it models for the child an unfeeling attitude toward another's pain, which is not something any of us wishes to teach a child. This applies, too, to the requirement that spanking be done at an appointed time, in an appointed place, with a specially designated witness.

When we consider the discipline of young children, we must keep in mind that many alternatives with better and more long-lasting effects are available. The following are some of the principles involved in successful discipline of young children, without resorting to corporal punishment of any sort: once you have established the rules and limits that make sense to you, you must, to the best of your ability, make your expectations *clear* to your child—and do so firmly, warmly, and consistently. If, for example, you don't want your four-year-old to play with your stereo equipment, insist upon her not touching it. But do expect to have to stay with the situation for quite a while—until your daughter learns that you mean what you say.

Make every effort to minimize the number of different situations that give rise to child/adult conflict. Conflict situations are inevitable, but if you find yourself settling conflicts every twenty minutes or more, then the fault may lie in your child's environment. Perhaps the solution is to place that stereo equipment out of her reach.

Resist the temptation to make empty threats, since, at best, they can easily undermine your credibility with your child; at worst, they may even lead the child to feelings of uneasiness or, occasionally, to chronic anxiety.

Grabbing, Kicking, Clawing

There was a time when the expression "Boys will be boys" was used to cover up a multitude of "sins"—especially those having to do with various types of aggression. With the gradual shift away from such sex stereotypes, it may be time to take a fresh look at the meaning and management of aggression in young children.

It is useful to think of aggression as being of two basic types. The first might be said to have the nature of an *attack*, characterized by hostility and the intention to harm another person or his property. Examples of this type of aggression in preschoolers might be the deliberate breaking of another's toy, knocking down someone else's block building or sand castle, throwing sand at others, or snatching away another's prized possession. The other basic type is primarily a sort of *defense*, taking the form of self-assertion or self-protection accompanied by anger at an attacker or by frustration with an obstacle. Some examples of this type of behavior in young children include pushing away an attacker, using force to protect one's property, or using violent means to retrieve one's belongings.

There is evidence that if the child's parents or other adults just stand by and do nothing when a child acts aggressively, the behavior becomes more frequent. Apparently young children take adult non-interference to mean that their behavior is acceptable. Therefore, the development of socially acceptable behavior requires parental action and guidance. Of course, any behavior that has a real likelihood of harming another person must be stopped immediately.

How should you respond to displays of aggression by your child? There is no evidence that children benefit by "letting off steam" through aggressive behavior. Further, there is no evidence that curbing aggression in young children leads to neurosis. It is a good idea, however, to acknowledge and accept the *facts* of a child's feelings of hostility, even though acting upon them is not allowed. While physically hurting others is not acceptable, verbal expression of one's feelings toward them is all right—though such feelings should only be

expressed if it will be constructive and is not done merely out of a desire to hurt.

Some aggressive behavior is caused by a child's need to "test the waters"—to find out who's in charge and what that person's limits are. In such cases, the behavior is relatively free from hostility; it will more likely be mischievous. But the behavior will persist until an adult clarifies the situation. Still other children engage in destructive aggression because they have found it to be a successful attention-getting device and have had difficulty getting attention in any other way. Two things are required here: first, the destructive behavior must be stopped with minimal fuss, and, second, attention should be given when the child is engaged in some activity that is positive or neutral, which will make the destructive behavior unnecessary as an attention-getter.

It is a pretty good rule of thumb in dealing with preschoolers to assume that their aggressive behavior is the consequence of ignorance of alternative strategies for coping with a situation. This calls for adults to teach socially effective and acceptable techniques for dealing with situations that might otherwise give rise to anger or frustration. For example, a four-year-old may knock down the block structure of a group of children with whom he really wants to play. He may simply be unaware of the social techniques that would get him congenially admitted to the group. In such cases, after the destructive behavior has been stopped, suggestions can be offered concerning the ways in which one goes about getting into a group—including specific suggestions of what to say, what to do, and so forth.

Disagreement over Childrearing Practices

It is inevitable that parents will disagree on occasion about what is best for their children. Old-fashioned deference to the father as the one who always has the last word must now give way to newer approaches to handling conflicts over childrearing. The expanding range of alternatives and choices in everything around us and the variety of expectations parents bring to their roles from their own early experiences, training, and culture all serve to increase the sources of disagreement over what is right for the young child.

How can you and your spouse develop the approach to dealing with disagreements that is most comfortable for your family? One first step is to take a look at the content of the disagreements. Often the content of the disagreement is closely related to early unpleasant or traumatic experiences of one of the parents. Is one of you fearful that painful aspects of your own childhood are being recreated and that your child is about to suffer in exactly the same way you once did? In situations that resemble those of our own childhood we are often convinced we know how our child is feeling. But we are often wrong. Observe your child's reactions to the situation closely; instead of looking for evidence that she is feeling the same way you once did, look for evidence that she feels differently. That should help persuade you that your own childhood experiences sometimes lead you to exaggerate or misinterpret your child's reactions, helping you to dissolve, or at least temper, the disagreements involved.

Another step in developing an effective approach to managing disagreements is to ask yourself the following question: Is my spouse's approach to the child *really* harmful, especially in the long run? Careful reflection on this question is very important. Your answer constitutes what we might call a "go/no-go" decision, which works somewhat as follows: If the answer to the harm question is fairly easily no—which it will be in most cases—then back away from arguing over the matter, and make a "go" decision (i.e., to go along with your spouse), and help your child gracefully accept the demands or expectations your spouse

prefers. If your answer to the harm question is clearly yes, then you will have to make a "no-go" decision—that is, you will have no choice but to intervene on what is now clearly to you in your child's best interests. Remember to maintain your respect for your spouse, even though you disagree seriously with her or him and have decided not to go along.

If resolution of your disagreement cannot be achieved by the two of you alone, solicit the advice of someone you trust—for example, your pediatrician or minister, a social worker, or someone who can refer you to an agency for help. The advantage of making a definitive "go" or "no-go" decision is that a clear decision minimizes the likelihood of the disagreement's becoming chronic, of intensifying recrimination and blame, or of the child's getting caught up in what may seem to her to be relentless feuding.

Of course, while flagrant or acrimonious arguments between parents can be quite alarming to a small child, it is not necessary to pretend to agree with each other on all matters. A child should not always be faced with a united front; occasional divided ranks will encourage and stimulate her growing capacity to bargain, negotiate, and test her reasoning against that of others.

Furthermore, it is probably a good idea for children to observe how adults renegotiate their relationship following disagreements and moments of distance or hostility. These observations will serve to reassure the child that when distance and anger come between her and loved ones, the relationship is not over but can be resumed to be enjoyed again.

Lies and Half-truths We Tell Our Children

"Honesty is the best policy" is a value most of us strive to impress upon our children. Yet we often lie to them ourselves, probably without realizing it. Perhaps the word *lie* seems a bit strong for the statements we make to young children, but any false assertion made as though it were true is essentially a lie. A look at some examples of the different kinds of lies parents tell their children might help in considering some of the potential hazards of this common practice.

One category is the teasing lie. For example, generations of children have been told that if they swallowed melon seeds leaves would soon sprout through their mouths. We may find such tales amusing, but for some children they are a source of intense anxiety. These children may be afraid to ask for reassurance, partly because they fear their worst suspicions will be confirmed and partly because they fear being ridiculed. Adults often forget the solitary anguish that can be caused by what they think of as casual teasing. Then there's the threatening lie, as in "If you don't come now I'll leave without you." Many children, even by four years of age, know that the parent will not act upon the threat, which renders it ineffective. But for a few children there is an unacknowledged fear of abandonment. For these children the threat may be effective, but the psychological cost is great.

Statements like "If you sit still in church I'll buy you an ice cream sundae" often turn out to be lies, falling into the category of bribery or manipulation. This manipulative-type lie seems to occur most frequently during the holiday season, as children are told lies and distortions about what kinds of behavior Santa Claus will or will not reward. Bribery lies do not seem to work very well, on the whole. Their potential risk is to undermine the credibility of the parent as well as of Santa Claus. It's better to make demands on children's behavior simply in terms of the behavior desired. Parents often overlook the fact that firm, clear, and serious statements have the power to obtain desired behavior in preschoolers as well as in older children, as long as they are used judiciously and implemented consistently. To say, "I

expect you to sit still in church, even though I know it is very hard to do that," firmly and warmly and not too often, can bring about the desired effect in most children.

Another category of lie that presents difficult problems for adults is that of the so-called white lie. White lies have at least two possible functions: first, to protect the feelings, self-esteem, or self-respect of the child; and second, to minimize the likelihood of his experiencing debilitating anxiety, panic, and terror.

The white lie told to protect a child's self-esteem may be necessary at times. But adults often underestimate children's capacity for realistic evaluation of their own efforts. Often adults lose their credibility when they flatter young children with these lies, even though they may have the best of intentions when doing so. Furthermore, if adults behave as though children should always get praise, then children will eventually experience its absence as hurtful and will acquire a powerful need for praise and flattery. Neither individual development nor society as a whole is well served by such exaggerated praise seeking and the white lies involved.

Probably the only type of lie that should be told to children—and, even then, it should only be told under special circumstances—is the lie that is intended to reduce anxiety If, for instance, a parent has even the slightest reason to believe that a child's life may be in danger (e.g., from an accident) and that the child's knowledge of that fact might intensify the danger because of the dynamic effects of panic, then a lie that reassures the child that he is safe seems both humane and justified.

In all other situations, however, honesty really is the best policy. By not dealing falsely with children, parents not only avoid the possible harm they do in lying to their children, they also, by their example, teach children the value of honesty.

Teach Your Child to Cope with Problems

Even preschoolers have their problems: getting used to going to nursery school, losing a treasured pet, being called bad names by another child, and so forth. At such moments in a child's life adults try to offer reassurances that things will get better soon. However, in many of these situations we can and should do more than just offer comfort. When we cannot change the situation or the people who are causing the young child distress we should try to help the child endure them with less trauma. We can make practical suggestions on what to do, how to approach a situation, and what kinds of things to say. We can't hope that our suggestions will be panaceas, but the tactics and strategies we teach will help when we or other protectors are not there, and they will teach the child to cope with the world as he is likely to find it.

For example, suppose your child is afraid of a neighbor's dog. It may not be possible to persuade the neighbor to tether his dog at all times. Nor would it be desirable, even though tempting, to characterize the neighbor as a villain in front of the child. What is appropriate here is to think of tactics that even a young child can use with this dog or others. You can explain to the child clearly and firmly that whenever he sees a dog approaching he should stand absolutely still and be quiet and calm until the dog has finished sniffing and acquainting itself with him. You can demonstrate once or twice, if necessary. Unless the dog is really and truly a vicious one, this tactic will usually be effective. (If it's a vicious one, other drastic action must be taken, of course.) It is also important, as you prepare the child to cope with this problem, that you let him know that you understand his apprehension and that you are confident it will pass; you are offering the child a strategy to use when he needs it, but he will surely not need it forever.

Perhaps the problem is adjusting to a new sitter. Help your child plan for the evening. If she likes stories, encourage her to select the books she would like to read aloud. Help her plan a favorite snack they can eat together, and plan how she will discuss her bedtime ritual—special toy or blanket, glass of water—with the sitter.

If a neighborhood child persists in calling your child upsetting names or teases your child cruelly, you cannot get a court injunction against the child or the family. We don't have control over the behavior of other families. The best move is to concentrate on those aspects of the situation we *do* have control over by providing the child with a strategy for dealing firmly with the offender. I know of a five-year-old who was taunted by other neighborhood children who persisted in calling him "a stupid ass." In helping him to cope with the problem his mother asked him gently and seriously, "Are you a stupid ass?" The child, of course, replied, "No!" The mother then suggested quite seriously that he say to the offenders something like, "I don't like to be talked to that way." His mother reinforced his own firsthand knowledge that he did not have the evil qualities attributed to him. This helped him to address his adversaries with confidence. Even aggressive name-callers find a confident five-year-old intimidating enough to make them stop the behavior.

This example illustrates another principle useful in helping children cope with the ordinary stresses of their daily lives: teach them to use the raw data of their own previous experiences as a source of reassurance. For example, if your child is highly anxious about another visit to the dentist, don't promise him that it won't hurt or that it will be fun. Say something like, "Do you remember the last time you went? You were uncomfortable for a few minutes, but by the time you got your coat on to leave, you were all smiles again." His own memory of having survived the experience helps him to cope with the same situation another time. If, on the other hand, you falsify the nature of what's ahead, you may unwittingly increase the intensity of his discomfort.

When Mother Goes to Work

A mother's decision to go to work outside the home is naturally accompanied by considerable worry as to how the change will affect her preschooler. But planning ahead and knowing what to expect can alleviate much of this concern and make the transition easier for both mother and child. If you are contemplating entering the work force, you should keep in mind that there is no evidence to date to indicate that young children are harmed simply by the fact that their mothers are employed outside the home. However, the way in which a child reacts to her mother's working does depend on the arrangements that are made for her care while her mother is absent. The evidence now available suggests that when children are placed in day care centers or some other kind of group care, the critical factor in their experience is the *quality* of the program and particularly the quality of the staff. Therefore, before you return to work, visit and observe the available child care facilities or get to know your sitter in order to satisfy yourself that your child's welfare will be protected and her development will be supported.

The more confidence you have in the arrangements that you have made for your child's care, the more you will be able to reassure her that she is in good hands and safe. This reassurance, in firm but sympathetic tones, will help her a great deal in gradually making a happy and secure adjustment. But even with excellent child care arrangements and comforting reassurance from their parents, children do need time to become accustomed to changes in their daily life patterns. Studies of young children indicate that the degree of upset a child experiences when major changes in daily routines occur is related to the kind of bond she has with her primary caretakers. Children who feel close to their families tend to find it more difficult at first to be without them. Take your child's resistance to being away from you as a sign that there is a significant bond between you. If you are prepared for her anxiety at being separated from you, you will be better able to help her, as well as yourself, to cope.

Kids don't have a monopoly on separation anxiety during this time of transition. Many mothers of young children feel guilty about leaving them in the care of others—be it in a family day care program or with a mother-in-law. They seem to feel even more acutely guilty if they are not forced to work by economic circumstances. It's common for mothers to try to cope with this guilt by overindulging the child, constantly giving in to her demands, or overcatering to her needs. Such coping strategies are not helpful for either the child or parents. In fact, this may initiate an unfortunate pattern in the parent/child relationship, one in which greater indulgence from the parent leads to more demands from the child, leading in turn to even more indulgence . . . and a very rapidly deteriorating relationship. A mother must deal with her guilt as her own issue, not by trying to assuage her supposedly injured child.

Remember that children do not know your reasons for returning to work and would not understand even if you told them. Whether you are working because you want to, or because you have to, is merely an academic distinction to a young child. A child has to be helped to deal with the changes in her arrangements, relationships, and daily routines, but the reasons for these changes are beyond most preschoolers. Simple, straightforward explanations of what is going to happen and what to expect will be of most help to your child. Before you plunge into the world of work, you can ease the stress on yourself and your child by taking whatever steps you can to simplify your life. Minimize your extracurricular activities until you get settled into your new work routine. Try not to spend time unnecessarily on the phone. Organize your shopping and other necessary chores so that they are done less often and more efficiently. Going to work is not just adding a new element to your life—it is more like a complete change of lifestyle.

II. As They Grow

Vital Signs of Preschool Development

If you are like most parents you have days when you wonder whether you are doing an adequate job with your child, whether he is going to grow up and take his place among his fellow citizens with sufficient competence and confidence. What are the vital signs of development during the preschool years? Assessing the development of a preschool child should be based on a look at his functioning over a period of about a month. Like adults', children's feelings and behavior fluctuate; there are better and worse days. Over three or four weeks, consider the following aspects of the child's behavior.

On the average, over a period of about a month, the child falls asleep easily and wakes rested and ready to go. This does not mean that there aren't some nights when the child lingers, frets, and fusses before going to sleep, and some mornings when he wakes up cranky. Only if these behaviors and feelings are typical is it necessary to take a closer look at the child's situation.

On the average, over a period of about two weeks, the child eats with appetite. That doesn't mean that he won't skip an occasional meal, or even several meals in a row. If, over a period of a week or two, you see few signs of real appetite, then take a closer look at the child's life, but don't worry about an occasional refusal of food.

Overall, the child has or is progressing in bowel and bladder control, especially during the day. That does not mean that there aren't occasional mishaps and accidents, especially at night and especially for the good, deep sleeper.

Over a period of a month or so, the child spontaneously expresses affection for one or more of the people he is living with. It is fairly easy to get a child to give good-night kisses, and in some families such embraces are standard practice. But the kind of hugging or cuddling in which the child spontaneously lets you know that he loves you is a pretty reliable sign that he feels included and cared for and feels his life is worthwhile.

Generally, the child is able to sample the "good things of life" appropriate for his age. If a child is so shy or so fearful that, for example, he will not go to a neighbor child's birthday party, or visit the zoo, or play outdoors at the nursery school, then his "problems" may be getting in the way of his development.

Over a period of a month, the child expresses a range of emotions. Healthy development is indicated by the capacity to feel a range of emotions such as delight, anger, or fear. Being able to express them from time to time reassures us that the child's development is going well. If over a period of weeks the feelings are not expressed or the range of emotions is narrow then we might take a look at the child's situation.

No one of the six aspects of a young child's life outlined above provides conclusive evidence of disturbances in development. Rather, a picture of the overall functioning in all areas helps put the child's growth into proper perspective. If the pattern suggests a closer look, then what do we do? First, remember that whatever may be disturbing the child is only temporary; his fate is not sealed by a poor turn of events in the third or fourth year of life. Children are wonderfully resilient, and almost all of them will respond well to spending time alone with you or another loved adult.

At the age of three or four, ten minutes a day for two weeks usually succeeds in turning the child's outlook and sense of well-being around. From these precious minutes alone, doing what the child and the adult *both* enjoy (e.g., taking a walk around the block, reading a story, etc.) the child's knowledge that he is included and cared about is strengthened and underscored. All of us, from time to time, want that kind of reassurance from those whose love matters to us. Disturbances of sleep, appetite, and so forth simply provide useful hints and cues that we may have taken these feelings for granted a little. They are easily restored in the preschool years.

How Is Your Preschooler Doing?

It is fairly easy for parents to gauge the milestones of a baby's progress from infancy to childhood: lifting and turning the head, sitting up, standing, babbling, and so on. But by three or four years of age, the markers on the road to maturity are not so obvious. One reason for this is that as children get older, the age range in which normal developmental progress is made becomes wider, often making it harder to know for sure whether or not a youngster's growth is on course. Maturational milestones also become harder to discern because the achievements in this preschool period are now less in the realm of physical development and much more in the area of social and intellectual skills.

Most preschoolers can sustain interaction with other children close to their own age; typically, they welcome opportunities to interact with other kids. The preschool child is gradually becoming skillful in give-and-take interactions: she can appeal to other children in order to secure their friendship and can engage in a variety of types of play with them.

A normal preschooler also generally accepts adult authority but challenges it from time to time as well. Behavior that indicates striving for independence should reassure you that things are going well. Four-year-olds can also usually be away from their parents and primary caretakers without experiencing excessive stress. Some signs of stress on separation are important indications that the child feels a healthy attachment to those who care for her. Total indifference at separation is a far more serious indication of a problem. Distress at temporary separation is normal as long as the preschooler is fairly easily consoled and after a few minutes of grief can adjust to the situation and return to involvement in activities.

By far the most spectacular achievements of the preschool years are the child's advances in coping with the complexities of language. Most four-year-olds have mastered the basic syntax of their mother tongue, so that the typical childhood errors in grammar result from

overusing the rules and from not knowing the exceptions (such as "goed" for "went," "runned" for "ran"). The number of words a preschool child can comprehend is too large to count, and the number she can actually use is well into the thousands. By four years of age, most children can use language fairly well to express their needs and feelings, to report on what they observe, to recount past events, to reason, to make predictions, and, of course, to ask 1,001 questions.

Although developmental milestones are more subtle than they were earlier, your four-year-old is still very much a growing and maturing being. In order to reassure yourself that her development is proceeding normally, take a look at her typical behavior patterns over a period of about a month. Ask yourself: Does she usually fall asleep fairly easily and wake up raring to go on most, but not necessarily all, days? Does she eat with appetite (not compulsively)? Does she usually have bladder and bowel control, especially during the day? Does she manifest a range of emotions—not all in one day, but over a period of a month—showing anger, grief, and sorrow, as well as real joy and laughter? Does she express curiosity and venture to explore her environment—sometimes to the point of nosiness? Does her play change, or get stuck in a repetitive pattern over a month? And finally, does she sometimes spontaneously express affection for you?

If the answers to these questions are positive, then you can be fairly sure that her development is progressing well. If the answers are "Maybe" or "No," take a closer look at your youngster and see where you might have inadvertently or temporarily overlooked her need for your affection and company. Having a special time together each day for a week or two should get her back on course fairly quickly. If the situation does not seem to improve, you might want to talk it over with someone whose advice you trust, such as a pediatrician, clergyman, or social worker.

Food: A Source of Strife?

Since our eating habits are formed early in life and can often become more difficult to change later on, it is worth getting youngsters off to a good start. But as every parent of a preschooler knows, this may be easier said than done. Parents are naturally concerned with the amount and type of nourishment their child is getting. In fact, mothers often feel responsible for every bite of food their children take. And since the emotional stakes are so high, it's no wonder that tension and dissension around eating sometimes develop.

Worry that a child isn't eating enough, or the right things, can easily lead to parent/child confrontations over food. A preschooler's often bizarre food preferences or reluctance to try new foods can be a source of irritation to even the most accommodating chef. And from time to time, a young child's tendency to eat too much may cause concern. However, mothers should remember that a healthy appetite seems to come built into normal infants, and it takes a good deal of effort to disrupt it. As long as your pediatrician is satisfied with your child's weight and other developmental indices, an occasional refusal of food or an aversion to a particular food is no real threat to health. Nothing will be lost by skipping meals once in a while. A healthy, thriving child will return to food with zest in due time.

Some people believe that if left alone, children will select from the available foods those items their bodies most need. And, indeed, if all the food you make available is nutritious, then the child's opportunity to choose for herself will pose no dangers to her health. However, exposed to junk food as they are, children often do select food that is nonnutritious or even potentially harmful to them. In order to protect a child from falling into the habit of consuming large quantities of junk foods, it is best not to have them available at all. Sticking to such a plan can often take great determination: on trips to the supermarket, children can exert almost irresistable pressure on parents to buy foods that may not be good for them. But resist! It may be difficult to do so the first

or second time, but after you pass the tests, chances are they will not occur again.

When your child simply refuses to eat, or just picks at her food, increasing the pressure or using bribes will only exacerbate the situation. There is something about being nagged to eat that "turns the stomach" and backfires, transforming minor reluctance to eat into a major feeding problem. Her occasional loss of appetite does not signify your failure as a parent. Once in a while a child's appetite does wane because of an underlying worry or impending illness. In either case, increasing the pressure to eat will not help and may lead to even further deterioration of her appetite.

If you treat your child's refusal of food as a personal insult, responding emotionally or losing patience too quickly or often, then your child will know how to elicit a response from you by making an issue over food. Don't ask her to eat to please you, and be careful not to use food as a reward or punishment for other behavior. Keep in mind that the purpose of food is to maintain optimal physical well-being and growth, not to teach a child rules of good behavior. Avoid fussing over manners during the preschool years. Try to keep the meal as relaxed and pleasant as you can—a special time when you do something enjoyable together. Resist the temptation to nag about her taking helpings that are too large, and avoid using expressions that ruin appetite, such as "having eyes that are bigger than the stomach," or talking about soft bones and flabby muscles, growing crooked, and other forebodings of disaster.

If you have real concerns that your child's preferences and finicky eating habits result in an unbalanced diet, check with your pediatrician for suggestions, supplements, or other ways to ensure adequate intake of the minimum daily nutritional requirements.

In Training

Only in retrospect is it easy for parents to be casual about toilet-training. Yet observation and experience support the view that being casual is probably the best and most effective strategy for helping the preschooler through this period of uneven control to ultimate self-regulation. When your child is three or four, it feels as though you've been at this forever. Just when success seems to be around the corner, a new period of forgetfulness and accidents sets in. Somehow, watchful relatives always seem to know a child the same age as yours who was trained "long ago!" It doesn't take much for hints like that to inspire a feeling that your child's lack of progress is an index of your own maternal incompetence.

During this time of false starts and backward steps, keep in mind that the processes of developing self-regulation only *begin* in the second year of life. The development of full self-regulation of toilet functions, for both day and night, is completed on the average by about four years of age. As in all other aspects of development, there are large individual differences in the rate at which this control is achieved as well as in the consistency of progress. Some children make steady progress, but many fluctuate between progress and regression for several years. The rate of progress in toilet-training is no indication of the child's other developmental achievements—being early or late in bowel or bladder control will not predict precocity or backwardness in school or the rate at which other developmental milestones are reached.

Don't be misled by early success at getting your child to the toilet "on time" to perform. Some parents start rushing the infant to the toilet at likely times even before the second year, but they are just building unrealistic expectations of early mastery and are destined to be disappointed. Such early success at getting the products of elimination into the proper vessel indicates only that parents know the body rhythms fairly well for a given—all too brief—period of time in their child's life. Such a combination of regularity and luck cannot last.

While it may save a little laundry and seem to do no harm, it does build false confidence, and the disappointment that follows can add tension to a parent/child relationship.

Remember that a child who nags and whines to have his soiled clothes removed is a good candidate for successful training. When this happens, don't scold the child or preach that the discomfort could have been avoided. These are precisely the moments to enlist yourself as an ally and to remind the child how to holler for help when he thinks he might have to go to the bathroom.

Many accidents occur when children who are partially trained are too preoccupied with interesting toys and activities to ask for help in time; they simply wait too long for their own retentive capacities. Children who seem to be on the way to mastery will also have accidents or periods of regression when they experience an unusual amount of stress or a big change in their daily routine. When accidents occur, it's important to reassure the child and not to overreact. Casual responses indicate to your child that you have confidence in his capacity for more mature behavior, that you accept the unevenness of the achievement, and that you are there to give help when needed.

Try not to involve yourself and your child in a competition with others or to offer bribes or rewards for success. When your child has an accident, avoid teasing or embarrassing him in front of others. Such strategies are likely to increase tension, which will interfere with progress. When your child does use the toilet, don't react with too much praise. Just be matter-of-fact yet warmly appreciative, as though you expect gradual success. If the appreciation of success is out of proportion to his other accomplishments, then his fear of failure may become excessive and interfere with successful self-regulation.

The Shy Child

By the time children are three or four years old they can normally be expected to approach new situations and people with reasonable ease. Of course, some mild wariness of strangers is desirable; it merely signifies that the child has acquired an appropriate understanding of social relationships in our culture. But if shyness is severe enough to be an obstacle to participation in family festivities, neighborhood friendships, or playground or preschool activities, then some help may be in order.

First, just what do we mean by the term *shyness?* Generally, it is used to refer to the kinds of anxieties associated with discomfort in the presence of others, resulting in the desire to avoid contact with them. Sometimes the term refers to extreme self-consciousness around others, characterized by great concern over the impression one is making on them.

What causes shyness? It is difficult to know exactly where these feelings come from. It is now well-established that normal social development includes the appearance of the so-called fear-of-stranger reaction close to the middle of the first year of life. This benchmark of normal development is taken to mean that the infant has formed close bonds with selected caretakers and can now discriminate between those who are close and trustworthy and those who are strange and of unknown trustworthiness. But if this fear persists past the second year of life, it may be a problem.

Such problem shyness may be due to anticipation of being rejected or ridiculed, or it may result from fear of being unable to cope adequately with what could happen or of losing control over the flow of events. It is difficult for many of us to remember that a small three-year-old may see an adult as a hovering dark figure, no matter how loving the adult's actual intentions may be. Sometimes the shyness, manifested by clutching the caretaker, apparently "for dear life," may stem from unknown background anxiety generated by vague family discord or lurking feelings of impending doom of unknown

origin. Some of what appears to be shyness, however, is best understood in terms of individual differences in approaches to new situations. For example, some children are impulsive or impetuous, likely to rush into things, while others may prefer to check the lay of the land first.

What are some useful ways to respond to the shy child? In any situation in which a child seems to be in distress, it is useful to acknowledge her feelings and reassure her that the discomfort will most likely pass very soon. Instead of saying, "Cat got your tongue?" —which is likely to make the child even more uncomfortable—it might help to say something like, "If you don't feel like talking just yet, you can wait till you're ready." This reassures the child that the relationship can be entered at a later time and that the initiative is hers. Once a reassuring statement is made, the child's anxiety is likely to subside enough so that she can focus on more constructive aspects of the environment, rather than on the management of her own distress. It is also useful to explain your child's reactions to the persons with whom she is shy and to take your child's side in the situation. Again, such support can have the effect of reducing her anxiety somewhat.

Also, you can take appropriate opportunities to remind your child of other occasions in the past when her early apprehension and timidity ultimately passed and she enjoyed the experience. This helps to instill the habit of drawing upon one's own previous experience as a source of reassurance. A child has her experiences available to her even when she is away from her parents, and she can ultimately learn to make use of them on many occasions. Finally, your own anxiety over your child's shyness can be tempered by remembering that most children recover spontaneously from the tendency to be shy —especially if it is treated with understanding respectfulness in the early years.

The Show-off

Most of us react with discomfort around adults who show off, brag, or boast about their experiences and accomplishments. So it is not at all surprising that when we spot these tendencies in our young children, we hasten to nip them in the bud.

A show-off is someone who deliberately hogs the center stage or who manipulates events so as to attract attention—sometimes disrupting the flow of others' activities. A braggart insists on spreading the word about his achievements to all who will listen, and even to those who won't. Boasting is more a matter of exaggerating one's assets and virtues. These traits seem to arouse some deep distaste in us, perhaps in part because they rekindle our own earlier unfulfilled wishes for recognition and acclaim, which at the same time conflict with our deep-rooted cultural valuing of humility and modesty.

In the preschool years such childish exhibitionism is unlikely to be serious. It may simply be part of the long and rocky process of learning the complex rules of how to behave in various social settings. Gentle reminders of where and when that behavior is appropriate will suffice in most cases. It is so easy for grown-ups to overlook (or forget) how many interpersonal niceties have to be learned. For a few children, persistence in this type of self-assertion may indicate genuine unmet needs for recognition. Somehow, in the daily hustle and bustle of family life, a child's basic need to be appreciated and acknowledged may have been temporarily neglected. This is easily corrected by giving her short periods of undivided attention and explicit acknowledgement of her developing competence.

In some cases these behaviors are a signal that the child has acquired a high threshold at which she becomes aware of the attention she is receiving. It takes a stronger dose of attention than it should for this child to sense or perceive your appreciation of her. Again, spending some time alone with her and giving occasional reassurances will gradually help to bring the threshold down to a more acceptable and manageable level. If, for example, your child calls for instantaneous

approval every time she produces a new drawing, you might say, in a low-key way, "I have three more things to do, and then I will look." Later, increase it to "four more things" and so on, until you gradually widen the distance between her demands and your attention.

Sometimes show-off behavior is an outcome of our own tendency to urge our children to "show-and-tell" when relatives and friends are a captive audience. In this way we *teach* our children to show off. Indeed, on such occasions we ourselves are showing off—through them! If we do this often enough—and successfully—our children may become "hooked" on audience approval. Remember also that most of our children are watching a great deal of television, which provides them with a heavy diet of professional show-offs, exhibitionists, and attention seekers. It is likely that they observe far more cases of self-display than of modesty and humility. The effects of such exposure on children's personality development have not been studied as yet.

As you try to help your child who is tending in this direction, remember to avoid a put-down in front of others. Not only will public shaming not help but it is very likely to engender deep feelings of shame and humiliation, which could create different but equally undesirable consequences. A simple explanation—in private at a later time—that others are not always interested in one's exploits will serve best in the long run. The suggestion to the child that it is a good idea to wait for an invitation to show what one can do will also give her a useful guideline for future occasions. And, as in almost all important social-development processes, our own behavior provides the best, most powerful, and most instructive model of how we want our children to behave in various situations.

Building Your Child's Self-esteem

Parents and teachers of young children seem to agree that children should have good feelings about themselves. These feelings are often referred to as self-concept or self-image. The foundation of an adequate self-image for all people, young and old, is *self-esteem*. Below are some points that may be helpful as you encourage your children to feel acceptable, worthwhile, and lovable.

First, remember that we do not acquire self-esteem on a particular day, or at a particular point in time, and then have it forever. For children and adults the sense of self-esteem fluctuates, sometimes daily, and from one situation to another.

Second, the feelings we have about ourselves vary from positive to negative. When a child's feelings are positive, we say he has adequate self-esteem; when they are negative, we speak of low self-esteem. Positive feelings may come from the satisfaction or pride that issues from achieving something the child thinks is important or difficult, or from being included in a warm and friendly group of children and adults, or from hearing a parent or teacher speak to others with pride and affection about him.

Third, our sense of self-esteem varies greatly with the interpersonal situations we are in. For example, a child may feel strongly positive about himself at home with his family, but perhaps neutral at school or negative among neighborhood children. Or an adult woman might feel strongly positive when working in her own kitchen and yet suddenly "all thumbs" and inadequate when her mother-in-law walks into her kitchen. Or a mother may feel quite adequate about her childrearing until her sister-in-law comes to visit, at which time she may revise her self-concept downwards, if her sister-in-law seems to be supermom—or upwards, if the sister-in-law seems to be failing as a mother. In these examples the adult is exactly the same person before and after the "intruder" enters the situation. But she redefines and reevaluates herself in the altered situation.

It's important to remember that while adults can often put themselves in situations that reinforce their own sense of self-esteem, young children have no such maneuverability. Nor are young children capable of the perspective on their relations with others that adults can hope to attain. Young children are, in a real sense, bound in the interpersonal situations adults provide for them. They cannot understand, for instance, that a crabby teacher may be "burned out" in her job or exhausted by stressful events at home. Without the context of wider experience, they may take her sharp words very personally and interpret them as a sign that they themselves are without merit. As a parent, you should learn to observe the effects of various interpersonal situations on children and help them to cope with the fluctuations in their sense of self-worth these create.

Finally, our sense of self-esteem is not achieved or maintained in a vacuum. We evaluate ourselves on the basis of certain criteria acquired early within the family, and these criteria vary by culture, ethnic group, and neighborhood. In some families one is judged acceptable (i.e., estimable) on the basis of being beautiful, or athletic, or intellectually precocious, or musical, or tough, or dainty, and so forth. Parents can aid their children with self-esteem by helping them to do and be those things they want them to do and be. In fulfilling this task you will find it helpful to become as clear as possible in your own mind about your values. Children seem to know very early on what basis the adults around them judge them as acceptable and worthy, and generally that is what children strive to be. Those are the criteria they try to satisfy as best they can.

Self-esteem is not helped much by unspecific praise. Rather, our sense of competence and self-worth comes from tackling tasks that seem complex, tough, and significant. We can strengthen our children's self-esteem by asking them to participate in tasks that are real and genuinely matter to them as well as to others.

Coping with Childhood Fears

Fears of monsters, spiders, and dark corners are not unusual in preschoolers, but neither are they inevitable. Some of the points below may help in developing ways to respond to children as they go through this particular phase.

The world is full of things that any right-minded youngster *would* be afraid of. Some dogs *are* vicious and should be avoided; a child who loses all fear of doctors and their needles could be on her way to enjoying illness and pain; deep wariness of strangers has potential lifesaving value in an age of kidnapping and terrorism. These fears are rational in the sense that their objects are of genuine potential danger, the fear of which should not be extinguished. Rather, the fear should be mobilized and managed, either with appropriate rules of action or with protective intervention by adults.

The list of potential irrational fears is virtually endless: monsters, ghosts, bogeymen, and so on. For example, a mother of a four-year-old reported that her son called out during the night in great fear that there were snakes in the corner of his bedroom. She responded by fetching the broom and pretending to sweep them out of the room. This response is *not* recommended because the adult put herself in the position of agreeing with the child that the feared objects were indeed there. The adult's role in cases of irrational fears is to acknowledge and accept them without ridicule, but not to agree that the child is in danger. The main point to make is that even if danger were present, you would know what to do and would be able to protect your child. Often the underlying motive of fantastic fears is the child's wish to be reassured that the adult is strong and brave enough to protect him, no matter what dangers come along.

Some of the most difficult fears to deal with are those that fall between rational and irrational. Common examples include fears of the dark, of injury or illness, and so forth. The causes and treatments of such fears vary. Fear of the dark may be picked up from stories, fables, tales, and horror movies. The loss of light that accompanies nightfall

results in the loss of familiar points of reference that give stability and order to our surroundings. Familiar features get lost, distorted, or exaggerated by shadows; noises unnoticed during the day seem louder and perhaps stranger in the dark. A small night-light and low-key, simple, and consistent reassurance that an adult is in charge and can protect the child from harm are the best responses.

Fears of injury, illness, and handicaps are a bit more difficult to respond to because we cannot guarantee our children that they will never become sick or disabled. Sometimes the fear stems from the child's belief that her own "evil" behavior will be punished by injury. If you suspect this is the case, open up a discussion on the matter. Discuss the true causes of disease and reassure your child that illnesses and accidents are not caused by misbehavior. Again, acknowledge the child's feelings and don't denigrate her fears, but don't agree with her that there is any real danger of which to be afraid.

Sometimes children fear their own fear. They become anxious and apprehensive in anticipation of being overcome by fear. In this case, your child can be reassured that the fear is "normal"—that it happens to lots of us when we're little—and that we do get over it. In any situation in which you think your child anticipates being fearful try suggesting something like, "If you feel yourself getting nervous or afraid, just think of me (or Dad or Grandma) and remember how I love you. That will make you feel better." An anticipatory strategy of that type helps reduce the fear of fear and increases the child's capacity to cope with the actual situation. That, in turn, increases her confidence and further reduces the fear.

We know that fear is a part of life. Successful coping with it takes time to learn, however, and children need our help along the way.

Big Babies

Many parents of preschoolers have moments of wondering whether their lively and sometimes confusing children will ever really grow up! For even though most preschoolers have already begun to show that they can meet the challenges of the outside world—coping with neighborhood children, babysitters, preschool teachers, carpool drivers—almost all occasionally revert to earlier forms of behavior, such as baby talk, crawling on all fours, pleas to be carried, demands for a bottle, or climbing all over a lap. When this sort of behavior is displayed by a child who already does many things for himself, frequently showing self-reliance and independence, we tend to fear that this slippage is a signal of an impending return to former days of constant and intensive care from which we have only barely recovered. However, as long as the appearance of the usual milestones falls within a normal timetable and there are no signs of a physical disability, then anxiety about a child's progress out of babyhood is probably unwarranted.

Sometimes the lingering babyishness shows up in demands for help with simple tasks that the child knows very well how to accomplish by himself. Often this is just a plea for attention, closeness, or perhaps for reassurance in moments of intense activity in the household. Perhaps this kind of behavior is stimulated by the appearance of a new family member or some other major change in the household. In either case, it is very likely to be a plea for reassurance that your concern and caring have not diminished in spite of the changes. Often the demanding behavior is exaggerated in the presence of other people, and sometimes only with particular people. If you find your preschooler is making special demands for your attention when certain people are around, take a look at their relationship with you, which the child may perceive as competitive with the relationship he has with you, and offer him the reassurance required.

Slowness to outgrow babyishness can also develop when a parent unknowingly gives a child mixed signals about self-reliance and independence. Many of us may reward immature behavior more than we

realize; a child's immaturity and obvious dependence on us, while often burdensome, is also a deep source of satisfaction, making us feel loved and needed. It may be helpful to take stock of your own feelings and impulses to see if your child's relationships with others and increasing reach beyond your willing arms present any difficulty to you. If so, don't scold yourself—just grow through it alongside your youngster. Parents have developmental phases just as their children do.

If none of these reasons seems to apply to your situation, take a good concentrated look at your child's lifestyle and try to identify sources of stress or pressures he may be trying to retreat from. He may be watching TV shows that are too frightening for him, or his life may be too busy, too cluttered with many demanding relationships and activities.

No matter what may prove to be the cause, it's often hard to know what line to take when babyishness surfaces. A preschooler who begins to crawl on all fours (sometimes hiding behind the claim that he is being an animal), signaling that he is being a baby, should be approached in terms of the immediate situation or circumstances. For example, fatigue or an impending cold or flu could be triggering his behavior. If there is no illness, and his babyish behavior occurs only occasionally—not more than about once every three or four weeks—it seems best to keep an eye on it without comment. Baby talk is also best allowed to go by without mention. Denouncing a child for "behaving like a baby" is unlikely to help since the behavior is not under conscious control. The lapses into earlier forms of behavior can best be handled matter-of-factly—for example, by letting him know that you are willing to carry him but will appreciate it when he once again is ready to carry on by himself.

Imaginary Companions

Some time during the later part of the second year of life, many children develop imaginary companions. The estimates vary as to how many children adopt these lively and vivid fantasy characters. Some observers estimate that the number is about a third of all children, others say about half. Certainly it is considered a normal and natural phenomenon unassociated with psychological or other developmental abnormalities. Some children begin their companionships with these invisible friends as early as two years of age, while others begin later. The friendship may last for only a month or two, or it may persist for years. Many children give their companions full-blown human qualities with elaborate languages, speech, thoughts, motives, good and bad behavior, and a variety of miraculous powers. Other children adopt animals for this imaginary relationship and give them a mixture of attributes, often elaborating upon them in great detail.

Imaginary companions serve a variety of functions. Obviously, and probably most frequently, they serve to alleviate loneliness by providing companionship. For some children they serve as a medium or vehicle for the expression of feelings that the child seems reluctant to admit to having himself. Children may also use companions to transfer guilt and blame for various wrongdoings or for commiseration about life's hardships. It appears also that many young children use the relationship to "rehearse" various dialogues and interactions, to strengthen their emerging mastery of repartee in much the same way that adults may rehearse forthcoming social encounters.

Recent research indicates that children who have such imaginary relationships tend more often than others to be firstborns, and some observers believe that they are more often only children—although the latter statistic is not conclusive. Contrary to popular belief, there is no relationship between the appearance of the imaginary companion and family upset, shyness, social withdrawal, or the degree of social skillfulness of the child. Indeed, generally speaking, the available

evidence indicates that the occurrence of the imaginary relationship is associated with positive developmental trends. For example, the research indicates that children with fantasy friends have been observed in the nursery school to engage in more imaginative play and to have greater capacities than other youngsters to engross themselves in play. Moreover, their play in nursery school is usually marked by more positive emotional tone than that of other children.

The picture is somewhat different for boys than for girls in that boys more often adopt imaginary animals for friends and girls prefer humans. In addition, girls are far more likely than boys to include the opposite sex among their imaginary playmates. Boys also tend to watch less TV if they have such friends, but that is not the case for girls. In general, the research indicates that the phenomenon for children of both sexes is associated with the healthy development of lively imaginations.

If your child has developed such a companion, try to maintain a respectful distance from it. Be careful not to make fun of it or insult it. On the other hand, it is not a good idea to agree with the child that the creature is in fact where he says it is, doing what he claims it is doing! In other words, you should let the child know that you both know that it is "just pretend."

Most children outgrow their companions quite spontaneously some time before their seventh or eighth year. If the relationship is generally a lighthearted and animated one with a positive emotional tone, you can relax and let it run its natural course. However, if it is largely associated with taking blame for misdeeds or with the expression of angry, morose, or hostile feelings, it may be a sign that your youngster needs a little extra time with you and reassurance that he is still very important to you—or it may be a clue to deeper stress.

The Truth about Lying

As the parent of a preschooler you may be shocked to hear your innocent child deliberately misrepresent facts or assert that something she knows to be false is true. You may worry that her lies are a sign of early irreversible moral deterioration and feel that you must immediately take steps to stem the tide. In fact, however, lying seems to be a naturally occurring part of intellectual development, which generally makes its appearance during the preschool years.

There are several different types of falsehoods that are used by adults as well as children, each of which carries its own significance and deserves a different response. An understanding of the causes of each type may help you in determining an appropriate response to your child's lies. Probably the most common type of lie among preschool-age children is that of denying misbehavior. Declaring oneself innocent or failing to admit guilt is not as bad as it might seem at first. To confess quickly to misdoing and to imply that one is simply awaiting punishment suggests the emergence of a masochistic disposition, which is far more worrisome than the self-protective lie. Indeed, denial of guilt indicates normal intellectual understanding of the relationship between one's own behavior and the consequences of transgression. Thus, the lie told out of fear of potential painful consequences should not be thought of as a prognostication of life-long immorality.

Nor is the type of lie a problem, also common among children, that is called the "tall story," generally told to attract attention and to surround oneself with a measure of glory. In such cases, young children embellish the truth, sometimes becoming quite carried away (e.g., claiming to have eaten hundreds of ice cream cones, to have parachuted from a jet plane, etc.), often forgetting the actual facts of an event. This exaggeration is sometimes due to the loss of cognitive control over facts. Sometimes young children's cognitive control over the sequence of complex events may fluctuate to the extent that the distinctions between causes and effects, intentions and accidents, may

become blurred and confused. As a result, they are often unaware that they are being untruthful.

Finally, there is the "white" lie, which children of preschool age may just be beginning to learn about. As this form of lying requires the ability to know how another person might feel, it is an important developmental milestone that is thought to lead to mature empathy and altruism, rather than something about which a parent should be concerned.

Thus, as we have seen, most lying at this age is not something about which you should be unduly worried. Of course, if the lying is very frequent and your child refuses to relent even when you can clearly demonstrate the falseness of her assertions, then you should take a look at the quality of the child's daily life and try to determine what the sources of her distress and anxiety might be.

In general, however, lying should be regarded as nothing more than a part of your child's intellectual and cognitive development. As you try to help your child through this important developmental stage, keep in mind the following points: (1) The capacity for truthfulness is acquired from adults who are warm, encouraging, understanding, forgiving, and clear models of the behavior they value. (2) Insistence on confession as a better alternative for expiating guilt is a very advanced concept for a preschooler, requiring her to see sequences of interconnected events probably beyond her capacity. (3) Long lectures about evil and wickedness are unlikely to help much at this point since children of this age are rarely caught lying for truly wicked purposes (e.g., getting another in trouble, causing harm to others, etc.).

Be patient. Remember that it takes time to grow and that moral development is a long, slow process, requiring many years and more experience than a child of this age can fairly be expected to have had.

The Budding Perfectionist

Nothing warms the hearts of parents quite as much as the early signs that they have given birth to an eager beaver who is ready to set the world on fire with a steady stream of accomplishments. But often such children are impatient with the trial-and-error style of learning that others accept as part of life, and they experience acute difficulty in coping with their frustration and overeagerness. Sometimes we call such children perfectionists, although the full-blown version of perfectionism is not apparent until middle childhood.

When difficulty in handling failure, frustration with his own ineptness, or fretting over anticipated challenges is so severe that the young child becomes miserable and unusually irritable and cannot be easily reassured, then the chances are that he is developing a pattern of very intensive striving to master new skills and very high standards of performance for himself.

The intense striving may be the result of family pressure that may be fairly subtle but is still quite real to the child. It may be further reinforced by the family's appreciation of each developmental milestone, a sort of family "song of praise." Taken together, the pressure and the appreciation of achievement can induce a strong pattern of nonstop reaching for bigger and better successes. At the same time, the child may become apprehensive or anxious lest he be unable to keep up his reputation for accomplishment. The "song of praise" he hears broadcast about himself may inadvertently suggest to him that unless he keeps up the good work, he will deeply disappoint those he loves.

In addition to constant striving, perfectionist children also seem to have excessively high standards for almost everything they do. Sometimes the standards are learned from parents and siblings, as well as being motivated by an inner desire to please loved ones. When so much anxiety becomes associated with these standards that the child becomes preoccupied with expected failure or gives up on new tasks without really trying, the pattern of behavior seems to need some attention. As one of my children once put it, "I don't want to learn how

to read, I want to know how to read." He had to learn that none of us can skip the learning step.

If you detect such perfectionist tendencies in your child, take a moment to observe the significant adults and children around him (including yourself, of course). Put yourself in your child's place and try to estimate how often you hear comments and get responses from others that carry a message about the importance of making the grade, growing up, being "big" and self-sufficient, getting better at something, or catching up with others. Our everyday conversations are often sprinkled with such messages—and they should be. But we should be concerned with those times when the messages are *too* frequent or intense for a child to cope with satisfactorily. You should also try to estimate how often your child hears disparaging remarks about those who do not measure up, get ahead of the pack, and so forth. Taking time to sensitize yourself to these pressures on your child should help to alert you to the need to modify them as much as possible so that they match your child's capacity to cope.

If your child protests plaintively and becomes very upset when he tries to do something and does not succeed, try not to respond at the same level of emotional intensity as his. Try to make your response resemble a sponge—accept the flow of feelings without throwing them back at the child. Certainly resist the temptation to say anything like, "I told you so." Instead, do your best to listen quietly without comment, without suggesting that you agree that the child's situation is a tragic one, until the magnitude of his anger subsides. Then you may want to offer a calm comment about trying again another day, perhaps many more times without success. Gently remind him that trying and failing over and over will happen to him as it does to everyone, and that it is all right.

Coping with Young Conformists

When four-year-old Nancy trooped into her house one day after nursery school and let fly some rather unbecoming curse words, her mother, Rose, was understandably appalled. Rose didn't realize, however, that to a certain extent Nancy's latest verbal acquisitions reflected a healthy developmental process that she herself had indirectly encouraged when she urged Nancy implicitly as well as explicitly to "do as others do." From day one, parents want to be reassured that their children are normal—but also special and unique! We hope that our children will reach all the developmental milestones at the age when other children do—but preferably even before them. And we hope that they will be socialized—that is, learn the culturally prescribed behaviors—so that they will fit into society, but without losing their individuality.

We promote the socialization process when we exhort our children to do certain things and have certain feelings by telling them that "other children do." When they encounter difficulties, we also reassure them that "it happens to others" or that they are "not the only ones" with such problems or feelings. Each time we make such references to others' actions, behaviors, etc., we teach what is typical, what it takes to belong, what is expected by us and most others—in other words, what we think is "normal." It is no wonder then that healthy development includes a strong tendency for children to conform to the pack, to copy others, and to pick up behaviors, such as likes and dislikes—sometimes passionate—for foods, games, TV shows, toys, etc.

Although we would like our children to learn only the positive behavior of their peers, we really cannot have it both ways. Urged to "do as others do," four-year-old Nancy will pick up undesirable as well as desirable behavior. But it is up to us to help children select what to adopt and what to reject from others, so that they can keep a balance between learning what is required to participate in the group and the unique elements of their family, life, and culture.

When children bring home behavior, such as brattiness or aggression, that you find unacceptable, it is important that you clarify your position and your reasoning for your child, speaking seriously but without anger. Reacting to your child's new behavior with agitation will rarely help reduce it. In fact, it may strengthen it. One reason curse words are so popular with children is that they usually get a big rise out of adults.

It is all right, however, to indicate to your child that behavior that is standard with her friends is not acceptable to you at home. Most four-year-olds can understand this kind of situational difference. If your child tells you that she feels compelled to conform to other children, perhaps because of pressure from bullies, suggest other ways in which she might react to peer pressure. Reassure her that although some of her peers may not like it if she does things her own way, she will not lose the love of her family. If peer pressure is too destructive and too strong for your child to deal with, even with your help and support, it may be best to withdraw her from the group and make other arrangements for her social life. Long-term experience of feeling overpowered by others is unlikely to contribute to a child's healthy development.

You can discourage imitation of unacceptable behavior by minimizing the extent to which you evaluate your child by comparing her to others; whenever you hold up other children as examples, you're exerting pressure for her to either be just like them or be just the opposite of them. The secret of development seems to be to strike just the right balance between being similar to others and being unique. In general, you can help your child through this learning process by maintaining your own values calmly but firmly. Children usually come back to the values of their own family, albeit after much exploration of others'.

Childhood Labels That Linger

The pace of daily activities in a lively household makes it easy for us to slip into habitual ways of thinking about the individuals we live with. This common tendency to define the roles and personalities of family members has its advantages. We come to know how and where we fit into the overall picture of family life. But this has a number of pitfalls, too. The tendency to label a child's personality fairly early in life, called "character definition," can be a hazard for some children. Not only parents, but often grandparents, siblings, relatives, and teachers get into the act, too. In this way a child may be defined as the "clumsy" one, the "shy" one, the "noisy" one, the "crybaby," the "class clown," the "little mother," the "intellectual," or whatever.

These character definitions are often both powerful and enduring. Indeed, many adults report that when they go home on special occasions they almost magically find themselves behaving in accordance with the way they were defined as children. As one adult put it, "Here I am, 42 years old, and when I go to family dinners I'm still treated as the baby; it is assumed that I couldn't possibly know how to decide which apartment to rent by myself." Another adult captured the same kind of problem when she raised the question, "How come when I am with my own friends and colleagues I feel perfectly competent and intelligent, but among my family every time I open my mouth I say something stupid and I feel stupid, just the way they expect me to?"

The precise mechanisms underlying the power of these character definitions are not clear. However, it is useful to remember that other members of the family seem to have a vested interest in keeping us behaving the way they have defined us. After all, their own roles have also been defined early. Someone who has been defined as an omniscient, benevolent, or omnipotent eldest sister or brother needs a foil for these attributes—someone to stay in the role of helpless, fumbling baby. Perhaps one reason we find the character definitions so enduring is that we want to please the other members of the family by giving

them what they appear to want—even at the expense of our self-respect. Perhaps also we stay in our early characters when we're with our relatives because we still want their acceptance and can only get it on their terms. Similarly, it is helpful to remember that whenever we are being defensive, it is partly because we believe the attack!

If you find yourself defining a child's character, you, too, may be locking that child into a set of behaviors and attitudes and a self-image he may not be able to escape. One alternative strategy is to try to imagine what the child might be like if he had a different character. Try to picture in your mind how this child would behave, how he would interact with you and with others, how he would move, and how he would respond to various situations if his character were different. For example, if a child has been defined as a crybaby or a whiner or as excessively dependent, try to imagine him as a responsible, competent, cooperative member of the family. Fill out this picture of the child in your mind as fully as you possibly can. Then, treat the child as though he did in fact fit that attractive mental image.

Several interesting things begin to happen when you try this approach. You gradually become aware of the fact that, at least some of the time, the child does have those behaviors—you just hadn't noticed them very often. You then begin to respond to this child's attempts at self-assertion more positively than you had before. Once you see these competencies, you can more easily make room for the child to express his potential for another character. Your own new confidence in these alternative capacities has a way of strengthening your child's confidence as well. In the same way, it helps to remind other members of the family to acknowledge and respect this child's attempts to express his competencies and to resist defining the child into a "character corner." Making opportunities for all members of the family to try out a variety of alternative roles and characters is one way to enhance the future adaptability of each of them.

Sex Roles

Women's lib and ERA have become household words in the last ten years. But while liberation means the opening up of options, it also means having to make more conscious and deliberate decisions about things that came automatically before these recent dramatic changes. Therefore, parents of young children have been asking lots of questions about handling their children's sex-role development. Perhaps you are one of many young parents who find the mixture of terminology a bit confusing. Maybe these brief definitions will help.

The term *sex role* is a little like a job description: it refers to the particular behaviors expected of each sex, independent of the unique qualities of the individual. Thus nurturance and expressiveness traditionally have been more central to the "job description" for females than for males, and assertiveness and stoicism have been expected of males. In our culture the duties and functions of the two sexes with respect to childrearing and employment as well as types of jobs have been part of the sex-role definitions for some time, and these are undergoing rapid changes.

Sex-role identification refers to the process of feeling associated with or belonging to one's sex, capable of feeling reflected glory (or shame) from the actions of someone of one's own sex. *Gender identification*, on the other hand, has to do with the process of coming to know that specific anatomical features are characteristic of each sex and knowing which of the two one is. It is hard to imagine that such information is learned in just the same way other knowledge is acquired. Few can remember a time of not knowing what the two genders were and to which of the two one belonged.

Sex-role stereotyping is another frequently used term in discussion about women's lib and sexual equality and is the focus of the current important struggle for human rights. To stereotype means to attribute characteristics to a person on the basis of some particular feature that is, in fact, irrelevant to the attribution. Thus sex-role stereotyping is the tendency to attribute qualities and characteristics to someone just

because of his sex, rather than because as an individual he is accurately described as possessing the quality or characteristic.

In matters relating to children there are expressions that give away some of our sex-role stereotypes. For example, "Boys will be boys" assumes that maleness is accompanied by rough-and-tumble activity. There are many dangers from stereotyping, not the least of which is that a boy loses the freedom to be sensitive and delicate if boys are stereotyped as tough. Stereotyping, whether it is ethnic, sexual, national, or racial, always has the effect of restricting the options for those who are stereotyped.

Most specialists and observers of child development agree that the content of one's sex role is well-mastered by most children during their first five or six years. Indeed, the evidence of such early sex-role learning is pretty convincing. Similarly, learning one's gender also seems complete by the time children go to school. It is the *content* of the sex role, however, that is undergoing the most dramatic and rapid change. Parents appear to be more willing these days to open up the options for their children so that they learn the attitudes, dispositions, and skills of both sexes. The modern view of sex-role learning is that we encourage children to learn and practice the sex-role behaviors of both sexes (i.e., the behaviors that had been traditionally linked to one sex or the other are now encouraged in all children, regardless of their gender). Thus we want to encourage small boys as well as girls to practice the nurturance functions traditionally fostered in doll play, and we encourage small girls to engage in the same rough-and-tumble play once reserved for boys.

It is probably useful to remember that over a period of several thousand years, the roles of the two sexes have been getting more and more similar, and the trend promises to continue. It is up to you and your family, however, to determine just how much differentiation between the sexes you want to encourage in your children.

Great Expectations

We naturally expect a great deal of family joy to result from our careful planning for the holiday season. But excitement can easily turn into tension, and eager anticipation into stress, when we lose our perspective on the purpose of the festivities and what they mean to young children. Many of the emotions we invest in the holidays are shaped by our idealized pictures of the traditional family celebrations and the positive sentiments we associate with them. These unrealistic ideals lead to expectations of unalloyed goodwill and cheer, which can trigger serious disappointment and sometimes depression as well.

Our anticipation may be increased by a desire to give our children the kind of holiday we never had as children, or else to replicate the fondly remembered festivities we were lucky enough to experience. But both of these wishes can be very frustrating, since children's reactions to gifts and events are often hard to predict, and they might not find everything quite as wonderful as we had hoped. You can help your family keep the holidays in perspective by limiting the number of activities per day and per week to the levels everyone can accommodate without feeling harassed. For example, a viewing of the local production of *The Nutcracker*, a visit to Santa Claus, and dinner at Grandma's all in one day is a lot for preschoolers (and their parents!) to handle. Instead, try to spread the highlights out over longer periods in order to minimize exhaustion.

Keep the anticipation at manageable levels by resisting the temptation to give the kids too many details too far in advance. Announce an impending event no more than three days ahead, rather than building it up for weeks. Preschool children have only a limited grasp of the meaning of weeks or months. Their ability to develop realistic expectations of an upcoming activity is also limited. A young child is bound to be let down by an outing that has been talked about for weeks ahead of time.

One of the nicest traditions associated with the holiday season is the family reunion, which may include your family's entertaining or

being houseguests. The chances that such visits will be happy occasions are increased if you don't exaggerate how wonderful all of this togetherness is going to be. Remember that youngsters don't always love their grandparents at first or second sight, and many grandparents find the children tiring after a few hours.

As with the celebrations, try not to overdo your gift giving. Be careful not to always be pressured into getting the presents the children have begged you for. Children are sometimes (but not always) poor judges of what kinds of playthings they will really enjoy. Some toys they want will be too difficult, while others will require cooperative playmates, could prove to be unsafe for young explorers, or may not be durable. If you do decide, against your better judgment, to give a child what he has begged for, resist the temptation to say, "I told you so" when the toy does not live up to his expectations. Even we adults sometimes make poor guesses about how we will respond to selections we make for ourselves.

A common source of tensions at this time of year is the use of threats to withhold gifts and other treats if a child misbehaves. Such threats are difficult for us to implement, as it is hard to know how bad the behavior must be for us to act on the threat. Although we may know we are bluffing, a child cannot be sure and may be caught up in a state of anxious insecurity. This uncertainty will only serve to make him more irritable and difficult to live with during this busy time. When the children do get underfoot, it helps to preserve the peace if you keep the emphasis on simple activities that you can do together. The times spent together in preparation for the festivities—stringing cranberries, baking cookies, decorating the tree—help to minimize tension and maximize companionship.

Where Did I Come From?

Many of us face our children's inevitable questions about the facts of life with a mixture of dread and embarrassment. What most of us are really concerned with, however, are not the "facts" so much as the feelings and attitudes associated with them. We wonder not only how much a preschooler should be told but also how we can present the information so that our children will also pick up the values we wish them to have.

Parents are often alarmed by their own embarrassment when their children raise questions about sexual matters. Don't be. After all, you learned from the environment in which you grew up that such matters are intimate and personal, and if you value this approach your embarrassment is, in a sense, a good sign. Most of us want our children to approach sexuality as we do and to link it with love and intimacy as they grow. Nor should you worry that if your children pick up on your embarrassment this will serve to implant in them some of the very attitudes you wish to help them avoid. This will not happen if, without scolding, you let your child know how you feel about discussing intimate matters—of any kind—in public. Even at this age children can begin to understand that there are things that are only appropriately discussed in certain situations—such as among family members—but not in others.

As you begin discussions of sex and human reproduction with your preschooler, you needn't worry too much about moral issues. Problems of sexuality, sexual standards, and the complexities of eroticism are up ahead a few years yet. Generally at this age children are just trying to make sense of the mysteries of their origins and of such daily observations as pregnancy, the anatomical features of the opposite sex, and so forth. So as you attempt to clarify the basics of anatomy, conception, pregnancy, and birth for your child, you should include references to the emotional aspects of sexuality, but don't overdo it. You may end up making the whole subject seem too magical and mysterious, when the child may merely have wanted to put an

observation in an appropriate context. Two further things to keep in mind are to be truthful in answering your child's questions, even though the necessary simplifications will make the truth seem trite, and to ask your child if the answers you have offered are helpful and let her know that if she has more questions, you will be available to discuss the subject again at any time.

Also, try to avoid giving a long lecture. Instead, respond to your child's questions as they come up, with simple, straightforward explanations, information, and labels. The facts need not be learned on a single occasion; children are bound to return to the subject again and again, and as their ability to comprehend improves, more details can be supplied.

Another reason to avoid overloading a preschooler with facts is that, however clearly explained, such things as intercourse and conception are likely to seem very abstract to her. Pregnancy, on the other hand, is quite vivid for young children and can be most readily understood, although childbirth itself may still seem a bit confusing.

One useful aid to understanding the process, if available, is the opportunity to observe the birth of kittens, puppies, or other mammals. Also helpful might be a visit to the local public library to have a look at some of the excellent publications available from the many organizations interested in improving sex education. Among the variety you are sure to find something that addresses your own views and preferences. But, again, keep in mind that it isn't necessary for a child of this age to attain a complete understanding of the processes involved in birth, nor of the many aspects of sexuality in general. It will take many years to receive and synthesize all the information she needs before she can be expected to achieve such an understanding.

Preparing Your Child for the New Baby

Many observers of young children suggest that three- and four-year-olds are at just about the right age to welcome an addition to the family. For one thing, most children of this age have begun to develop activities and friendships of their own and can generally get into enough things to absorb their considerable energies. Even more important, most preschoolers—with the right kind of help—are at a stage of development where they can begin to understand some of what a new arrival requires and to make allowances for the disruptive aspects of a new baby in the household. But the key here is *help*. A preschool-age child may be ready to accept a new sibling, but an adjustment is required—and he'll need your help to make that adjustment. The pointers outlined below may help ease the process for all concerned.

The news of the impending event is often announced too early. Wait until your preschooler begins to ask questions about the preparations and the enlarging abdomen. When he does, straightforward explanations of the facts are timely. Some preschoolers enjoy feeling the kicking or trying to hear the baby's heartbeat—but some do not. Be guided by your own child's readiness to the extent that he is interested and is able to participate. Together, you and your child can also begin to plan for a role he might want to take in the care of the baby upon arrival. But be careful not to overprepare your preschooler by building up high expectations or exaggerating what fun it is going to be. Simple, plainly spoken descriptions of some of the inevitable nuisance aspects of newborns should be included in your talks.

In addition to this explanation, if your preschooler is really unfamiliar with tiny babies or with breast-feeding (if that is part of your plan), it will be helpful to try to arrange opportunities for him to observe closely a friend's baby. In this way he will be able to become familiar with the sights, sounds, and activities involved in the care of newborns. It's also important that you discuss with your child the arrangements you have made for his care while you are in the hospital and after your return. The more confident you are that you have made

the best possible arrangements, the easier it will be for you to convey your real concern for your child's welfare.

Once the baby has joined the household, try to give your preschooler ample opportunity to let you know how he is feeling about the new situation. Don't expect him to love and admire the baby right away, and try to assure him that you do not have such expectations. Remind him that what you are doing for the new one you once did for him when he needed it.

But while you should try to be sensitive to and accepting of your child's feelings, don't indulge them. If you try to appease your preschooler by arranging special activities or giving him presents, you may reinforce his belief that he is entitled to feel so , for himself. Moreover, this behavior may also reflect some feelings of guilt on your part about the amount of time and effort you must give to the little one, which your child may pick up on and which may also serve to reinforce his feeling that you're giving the baby too much attention. So, again, make sure you let your older child know that he got the same time and effort when he most needed it and that he doesn't need the same things from you now. Try to transmit to your child that what is occurring is natural and normal. It may sometimes be annoying, sometimes frustrating, but it's part of the inevitable life cycle we observe in most of nature around us.

Sibling Rivalry

Most parents are uncomfortable when their children fight and tease each other. The popular view seems to be that this kind of behavior, generally called sibling rivalry, is both natural and inevitable. Some rivalry among siblings may indeed be inevitable, although it is not apparent in all families in all cultures. The point is that we do not have to stand by and let our children go at it. Brotherhood (and sisterhood) can and should begin at home.

Growing up in a culture that scorns such negative feelings as rivalry, envy, and jealousy only makes matters worse—it is bad enough to feel this way about others in the family, but to learn that such feelings are also wicked just convinces us of our real unworthiness. To approve or encourage expression of such feelings in our children is not a useful approach to the problem of sibling rivalry, however. Most parents are frustrated and troubled by the squabbling and teasing of their children. If you are reasonably sure that the scrapping is due to sibling competition, some of the approaches outlined below might help you deal with it in your family.

If fighting between your children bothers you, stop it. Don't lecture, moralize, or nag about it. Whatever technique you use (e.g., telling or commanding the children to stop, separating them, etc.), stick with it until the episode is really over. The long-range benefits of effective, responsive authority to both you and the children are irreplaceable. Keep in mind, also, that often children are waiting for you to exert your authority, and by their behavior are saying, "Help me to be the kind of person you want me to be."

Once the unpleasant behavior is stopped, we can then look at possible causes and ways of dealing with them. Rivalry is a function of scarcity, so when scraps occur with troubling frequency and intensity, ask yourself what it is that one or all of the children might be perceiving as in short supply. It could be affection, praise, recognition, or other forms of attention. Whatever the child *believes*, it is helpful to acknowledge her feelings even if you do not agree with them. Defensive

responses usually signify that, deep down, you agree with the attack. One of the most effective ways to help a preschooler who feels left out in this way is to spend time alone with that child, doing what she really enjoys. a walk around the block, reading stories, cooking, or gardening. Ten minutes a day for a week can turn around a preschooler's feelings of being left out or unimportant.

Another point to remember is that treating children alike is sure to be unfair. After all, it is very unlikely that children within a family will all need the same things in the same amounts or at the same time. If one child seeks comfort and another demands "equal time," simply reassure the second one that when she needs comfort, you will be right there, ready to provide it. Explain that each individual person's needs are responded to—*not* that each gets the same responses.

An approach that can be helpful is to take advantage of frequent opportunities to let one of your children help you to understand what a sibling is struggling with, thinking about, or trying to express. If you ask a child to share her insights, take her contributions seriously. Listen to what she has suggested, and let her know that you have reflected on the insights shared. Another approach worth trying is to teach children to take pleasure in one another's good fortune. For example, if one child draws beautifully, encourage the others to admire her work, to bask in her reflected glory. Avoid, however, saying something like, "It's all right if you can't draw; after all, *you* are good at X." This suggests that everybody has to be good at something special "or else!" Being good at art doesn't make someone a better person, only a better artist, and we needn't be artists to be estimable.

Finally, if your children say genuinely nasty things to you about one another, use those occasions to indicate that you do not agree, and to explain that even though we get angry at each other, we still belong to each other. When we consistently remind children of their unalterable belonging to us and to each other, we strengthen their sense of safety, which is perhaps a prerequisite for the development of the capacity for brotherly and sisterly love.

Rivals for Attention

Siblings occupy a very special place in each other's lives; close as peers, they are at the same time often the closest of relatives. Recent studies of the elderly suggest that, especially in the case of sisters, closeness between siblings intensifies during the later years. But when sibling rivalry erupts, often when children are three or four years of age, we wonder whether they will ever learn to get along! Parents often feel helpless when their children bicker and scrap among themselves. They are resigned to their children's rivalry because they assume that it comes with the territory. However, there is no reason to believe that it is inevitable. Sibling rivalry does not appear in all cultures, and it is certainly not equally severe in all families in the cultures in which it does occur.

Perhaps the most common source of strife is one child's impression that another is getting more than his fair share. Parents should keep in mind that competition occurs when something desirable is believed to be in limited supply, whether or not this is truly the case. And when the supply of something in demand seems to be running low, the smart thing to do is fight for it. Typically, for a young child the most desirable commodity is parental attention, usually in the form of time spent together. Parents often feel that they are providing ample attention and can't believe that their children should feel the necessity to fight for it.

It may help to remember that we teach children to expect certain levels of attention and praise by the amount we give them. Sometimes the pressure they put on us for even more attention is owed to the fact that in our eagerness to meet their demands, we have simply taught them to expect more than we can keep up with on a regular basis. In such cases, it is necessary to gradually lower their expectations, giving them time to become accustomed to less attention. By the time a child is about four years old, he can begin to learn that his desire for attention does not always take priority. For example, when you are busy cooking dinner and your preschooler begins to nag you to play his favorite

game with him, you can take a moment to gently explain that you are preoccupied now but you will be able to play with him after dinner.

Inevitably, situations do arise when one sibling requires more attention than another for a time. When such situations occur and the child is old enough to benefit from simple explanations, it is helpful to remind him that there have been times when he, too, needed extra time and, for whatever reason, his sibling requires it right now. Don't apologize for it; state the situation matter-of-factly. Attempts to "make it up" to the complaining child may simply reinforce his belief that he is right to complain of feeling left out.

Parents may also inadvertently contribute to the development of jealousy between children by comparing them too frequently. The child's jealous or competitive reaction may not always be obvious. Jealousy may involve feelings of apprehension and anxiety about the possibility of losing out to competitors, as well as feelings of self-doubt. Such doubts are intensified when we tell our children how much nicer or better a sibling, or even someone else's child, is. Although we may believe we are motivating a young child when we make comments such as "When your sister was your age, she cleaned up her own room," we are also planting the seeds of sibling rivalry and hostility. Furthermore, such statements come back to haunt us when the same child later tries to win our approval with remarks such as "Jane's mother lets her have a snack before dinner!"—or whatever the issue may be.

The best approach to such situations is to think through what you want your child to be like and to do, and make your views clear. Ask for the behavior firmly, warmly, and directly *because you think it is worthwhile.* No comparisons are necessary. In the preschool period, your views do not need justification. However, as children grow, their views do require increasing consideration.

My Child, the Genius

The fear of giving birth to a three-headed monster is not uncommon—especially during the first pregnancy. Perhaps just as common is the fantasy of giving birth to a little genius. During the preschool years there are basically three broad types of giftedness that may be observed. The first, and most common, is the type we might call *precocious*. This is a child who uses advanced vocabulary or complex sentence structure, or who rides a bike without training wheels, long before most other children of her age, all of whom will ultimately do these same things, simply at a later point in their lives. This is a fairly simple case of acceleration of the rate at which normal skills and competence are acquired, and learning things early does not by any means guarantee that the child will ultimately learn more than do children who progress at a more normal pace.

A second type is one whose behavior is *original*, but not bizarre. Perhaps the child makes observations and connections between objects, events, ideas, words, or images that most of the rest of us would never think of—no matter how old we were. Occasionally this type of giftedness shows in something like an early output of poetry, drawing, or creative prose.

A third type, which overlaps quite a bit with the other two, is the *virtuoso* type. Virtuosity occurs primarily in music and mathematics, nowadays in computers, and sometimes in art. These children show unusually early an exceptional ability to master complex ideas, operations, and skills very fast, and they often approach their specialty obsessively. Virtuosos learn very early what most other people will never be able to master, no matter how long they struggle with the skills and ideas. In the case of music, the virtuosity may be related to an especially fine auditory perception called "perfect pitch." But it is the persistent preoccupation with it, the obsessive working at the skills and ideas, that accounts for the rapid early mastery.

Whatever a child's gifts, she still needs limits, responsibilities, challenges, and the guidance of adults who may not be as gifted but by

virtue of being older and more experienced are wiser than she. Being gifted never gives a child the right to be rude or insensitive or careless of the feelings and needs of others, nor to have her own needs take priority over those of others in the family. This is particularly true of siblings, who must be protected from potential exaggeration of the special needs of a gifted child.

It's also important that parents resist the temptation to use the child to realize their own early wishes and fantasies for great achievements or to make an impression on in-laws or neighbors. If adults yield to the temptation to show off through the gifted child, she is apt to learn to do so as well, and to abuse her giftedness as leverage to get her own way. Similarly, avoid recounting the child's accomplishments, exploits, and triumphs in her presence. One of the dangers to the child of such glorification is that she may come to feel that she is loved only for her special gifts and, as a result, may repress them in order to test her status within the family. Many potential gifts have been unrealized because of this kind of fear.

No matter how gifted, a child is still a child, and still has complex social learning to acquire from experience with others. Developing and maintaining friendships is one area with which parents often have to help their gifted children. Some gifted children may enjoy solitary activity, but others want the pleasures of companionship like other children. Their social growth may be out of synchrony with their intellectual or artistic development, and patient understanding and parental help is required. Perhaps the most important thing for the parents of a gifted child to keep in mind is that no matter what gifts an individual has, she is still a person who, while she may have some special attributes, also has common needs and traits shared by all human beings, and in that sense she is no more than their equal.

Four Years Old Going on Twelve

Having older brothers and sisters around has many advantages for younger children: the older siblings are often their mentors and protectors. On the other hand, it can also be a source of much strain and frustration, as the little ones strive to keep up with their older siblings.

Whether or not preschoolers feel this pressure to keep up with big brothers and sisters depends on several factors. Certainly the distance between them in terms of years makes a difference. When a child is four, the activities and apparent freedom of a seven- or eight-year-old may look enticing, whereas those of a fourteen-year-old sibling are unlikely to be quite so visible or understandable to the preschooler. If a four-year-old is the only small one in the family and there is perhaps a gang of siblings between the ages of, for example, seven and thirteen, then the feeling of being left out of the really exciting things of life is likely to arise. Having to go to bed when it looks as though the others are having so much fun may feel like being sent to Siberia.

The sex of the older children may also play a role in the dynamics of the sibling relationships. It is not uncommon for little sisters to strive to become "one of the boys" in order to be admitted to the older ones' activities. Also, not uncommonly older brothers and sisters will impose certain conditions to be met by the younger ones before they will be allowed to come along. Some of these requirements can produce great strain on the younger children—another reason why a supervising adult should always know what groups of children are up to.

Parents, too, can contribute to the pressure many young children feel to keep up with their older siblings. We are often unaware of just how much we push our children to grow up, to be "big" and independent. Among the methods we use are nagging children about behaving like "babies," threatening that they will make fools of themselves in front of their friends with their babyishness, warning them that they will not be able to behave so childishly (dependently) once

they get to school, threatening older children with return to kindergarten if they don't "grow up"—to say nothing of the frequent compliments we give them about how big they're getting to be, how grown-up they are acting, and so forth. All of these socialization pressures are so pervasive in our culture that even at three or four years of age children know that being small, dependent, and helpless is a state to be lamented and cured as quickly as possible and that at the very least one should feel guilty if the process is a slow one.

All of this is to suggest that parents who worry about a preschooler's rush to grow up might take a moment to examine their own spontaneous behavior to see if they are unknowingly putting excessive pressure on this child to speed up the growth process. With our second and subsequent children we tend to have higher expectations for maturity than we did for our first. Becoming aware of this tendency should help to minimize it. In most cases parents should resist the temptation to attempt to compensate their preschooler for privileges enjoyed by the older children. However, if the older children are indeed going off to participate in some exciting activity, leaving one solitary little one behind, it may be a good idea once in a while (not every time) to plan a special event for the younger child to assuage his feelings of being left out in the cold.

Above all, parents should try to alleviate the young child's sense of urgency about growing up. It's helpful to reassure him occasionally that when the older child was his age she also went to bed early and also was unable to do some of those seemingly daring things she now does so easily. Let your child know that you understand how hard it is to wait, and assure him that he will get to be a "big boy" in time and that all those opportunities and activities will still be there for him when that time comes.

III. Reaching Out to Others

Early Friendship

Social contact between preschoolers amounts to more than just play. In fact, studies of young children's friendships indicate that their playing together involves the development and use of such vital social skills as initiating contacts with strangers, negotiating who will do what (play which role, have which doll) and for how long, being assertive about possessions and their retrieval, managing rejection, backing down from an obdurate posture, and so forth. But a child of this age is only taking the first few tentative steps toward mastery of these skills, and adult help will be needed during this early stage.

For example, if your youngster complains about not being able to make friends, or a particular friend, you can help by exploring the matter with her in a supportive way. Try to interpret for your child what other children want from their playmates and help her to recognize what she wants from hers as well. Be careful not to commiserate too deeply, however, or you may indicate to your child that she is experiencing a real problem rather than just the typical fluctuations associated with social growth. Try to make your suggestions about how to initiate contacts, bargain with others, and so on, in experimental form: "Try X, and if that doesn't help, come back and we'll think of another way." This strategy helps children to learn early that there may not be only one solution but rather a variety of possibilities, and that we can experiment with them all through life.

Although children should be left more or less on their own to select their playmates, it is appropriate for you to know your child's playmates and, whenever possible, to know about the playmates' homes, if your child is to go there to play. If your child is nervous around dogs and her playmate has one, this might interfere with a budding friendship. In this case, the playmate's coming to your house could be the solution. Don't, by the way, be concerned if your child seems to prefer older or younger children to playmates of her own age. Some preschoolers find it easier—and are happier—when their playmates are not of their own age group. An older playmate who is more

proficient at maintaining the give-and-take and flow of activity can model these skills for your youngster. A younger playmate, on the other hand, can give your child a breather while she consolidates emerging skills not yet robust enough to be tested among equals.

It is also appropriate for parents, without being obtrusive, to make a point of always knowing what the children are up to. While children learn a great deal that is good through play, some of the things they can learn you might prefer they didn't. For example, by being successful at bossing others around, a child can learn to be a bully. Keep in mind that most young children cannot make reliable judgments about when another child's suffering is excessive. It is hard enough for adults to judge when intervention is called for; preschoolers certainly should not be expected to carry that responsibility unaided.

On the other hand, resist the temptation to intervene in squabbles too soon. Let a dispute play itself out long enough for the children to try out solutions, but not so long that one of them is deeply hurt. When spats do occur between playmates, reassure your child that these painful feelings occur in us all from time to time, but that they will pass. Don't take the other child's side against your child. When the pain subsides, make suggestions about how to renegotitate and resume the relationship, and facilitate a get-together in due time.

The greatest form of help you can give your child as she strives to acquire these very complex skills is taking her friendships seriously. Remember, too, that even in adulthood we continue to test and refine these same social and cognitive skills our preschoolers are just beginning to struggle with.

Teaching Your Preschooler to Share

Generosity and sharing are highly valued in our culture, but so is success—which generally means getting ahead of others. We live and work in a social context that involves us in a constant squeeze between self-assertion and cooperation. It takes a long time to learn to balance the conflicting values and pressures they give rise to. With the onset of the preschool years, children come into increasing contact with others near their own age. In a preschool they enter into what has been referred to as a "miniature society" in which the rudiments of social rules can gradually be acquired, and learning to share is one of the most common expectations parents have of a preschool program. The fact that all of the children in a preschool group are almost equally unsophisticated in interpersonal relations often makes us overreact to their apparent self-centeredness and give in to the temptation to scold them in advance of their having developed the ability to temper their selfish impulses.

One important point to remember as you strive to help your child with her social development is that *children do not always have to share,* any more than adults do. How many otherwise quite generous adults want to share something brand-new? Perhaps at a later time they would be quite willing. Also keep in mind that when a young child behaves in ways we call selfish, she needs our help rather than our condemnation. Shaming a child into generosity may "work," but it does not enhance the development of altruism and cooperation in the long haul. At this age most children learn best through direct and concrete experiences. Abstract moralizing is not very effective, and excessive preaching may even induce guilt inappropriately.

Intervention is often a more effective approach to teaching social skills to preschoolers than lecturing is. Many preschoolers *will* respond favorably to having the feelings of others explained to them. This can be done without a preaching or shaming tone. For example, let us suppose your child refuses to share a new tricycle, in spite of pleas from a visiting cousin. A simple and direct statement from you to your

child, explaining the visitor's wishes and interpreting his feelings, followed by a simple and direct explanation to the visitor of *your* child's feelings, helps both children learn to tackle such situations with a problem-solving approach. When you have explained to your child what the visitor wants, then indicate to her that when she is ready to give up the tricycle, she should let the visitor know.

If these interpretations of each child to the other do not lead to the spontaneous yielding of the tricycle, you might decide that the time has come to teach your child that you expect thoughtfulness, kindness, and sharing. Begin with the interpretation of each child to the other, but be prepared to intervene if your child does not yield within a few minutes. Start with a simple warning: "If you are not ready to give your cousin a turn, then I shall give you five more minutes and give it to him," for example. You must follow through, not with recrimination —rather, with a firm, businesslike approach to the matter.

Again, keep in mind that it is not always appropriate or fair to demand generosity of a young child. There are often reasons why a child may not want to share. For example, sometimes a lack of generosity indicates that the child wants reassurance that she belongs and that the things that belong to her (both objects and relationships) are not up for grabs. And remember, too, that the behavior you model will help your child as much as—possibly even more than—explanations and intervention. Research indicates that children who are generous have experienced more nurturant behavior from the adults in their lives and have observed models of generosity in their environments

Social Graces for Beginners

Tact, kindness, gratitude, and considerateness usually emerge spontaneously when we are interacting with people we know and like, but, unfortunately, most of us do not have the luxury of choosing to associate only with such people. It is important, therefore, for us to teach our children good manners, which, it has been said, are what make it possible for us to get along with people we don't know and especially with those we don't particularly like.

Mature understanding and reliable use of the social graces represent the acquisition of complex mental and social skills. These skills include the ability to distinguish—technically called "discriminate"—among situations, occasions, and places and the behaviors appropriate to each. It involves reading sometimes subtle cues about interpersonal situations and relationships, being alert to indicators of what behavior is acceptable in a given situation, at a given time and place, and not in others. Almost all parents of young children experience moments of embarrassment caused by the fact that it takes their children such a long time to master the social graces. One fairly obvious example in our culture involves the learning of conventions regarding where and when nakedness is acceptable. The first few years of life consist of a constant sampling of new and old situations through which this knowledge is attained, and occasional errors are almost inevitable.

Another classic example is when your child says to your brother-in-law, for instance, "My mom says you are a fat slob and a meathead." One way to avoid this, of course, is not to say anything within your child's earshot unless you are reasonably willing to accept the possibility of his spreading the information from the rooftops. But if you do slip up and your child passes along your defamatory remark, try to keep in mind that he probably didn't realize what was at stake. Apologize as best you can, but don't let your brother-in-law turn on your child, and don't scold the child in front of the injured party. It is at moments of acute social discomfort that young children most need to know that their parents are behind them no matter what and that

someone else's feelings are not more important than the parents' caring for them.

You can, of course, always go over the incident in privacy later with simple explanations. In fact, you should take advantage of all the opportunities you have to help your child learn to understand other people's feelings and to care about and respect them. This will not be well achieved through lecturing, moralizing, or preaching, rather, such learning is helped when we remind a child of occasions when he may have been in the other person's position and ask him to remember how he felt at that time. This helps to strengthen the child's capacity for empathy, which in turn underlies most social gracefulness.

Another point to keep in mind as you strive to help your preschooler with the long process of socialization into polite society is that it is generally best to introduce your child to simple manners one by one and allow plenty of time for him to build them into habitual behavior. If you introduce too many of these customs and conventions at a time, or do so too early in the child's development, your efforts may have little effect. Also, avoid the temptation to make important events contingent upon your child's remembering manners. For example, the extorted "please" or "thank you" required in order to get dessert is not a very effective teaching method in the long run, simple and gentle reminders are more effective and are less punitive as well. As with so many of the great learnings under way during the preschool years, it helps if parents provide a clear and reliable model of the behavior they want their child to learn. The power of a model beats all the pleading, coaxing, pushing, and explaining as an effective means of teaching the social graces.

Beginners' Ethics

Two-month-old Brian, out for a carriage ride in the park, began to bawl —as if on cue—when he heard a nearby baby begin to cry. This wasn't a deliberate attempt to sabotage his mother's peace, but was, in fact, evidence of the foundations essential to his future development of moral feelings and ethical conduct. Moral feelings, which we experience as guilt, remorse, compassion, etc., are an important component of ethical conduct. These feelings have their roots in a sense of altruism, which itself depends on an empathetic response to the experience of others. An empathetic response seems to be virtually "wired in" to all human beings. even very young babies like Brian may become upset by the sound or sight of another's distress, and young children are often observed trying to comfort someone who is hurt. This natural empathy eventually grows into compassion and altruism and is related to the capacity to feel guilty when one's own behavior causes another person injury.

By the time children reach preschool, their moral development has progressed far beyond empathetic crying, but it is still rudimentary in many respects. They are beginning to move toward mastery of moral reasoning, another component of ethical conduct, which refers to knowing and understanding the rules of behavior. However, preschoolers' intellectual capacity limits their moral reasoning to the comprehension of only very simple rules about matters in their personal experience, with the result that their judgments tend to be absolute and inflexible. Three- and four-year-old children are also learning to distinguish between behavior that causes harm by accident or by intention. Therefore, they will occasionally suffer acute anxiety lest their "bad thoughts," by their very existence, cause harm.

Moral behavior, a third facet of ethical conduct that children must learn, refers to the ability to resist a wide variety of temptations—and ultimately to do so when no authority figures are present, or when nobody will even know if the act was committed. To resist temptation as a matter of principle is known as the development of conscience.

Research in child development has shown that children best learn these various aspects of morality by inducement, rather than through moralizing, scolding, or punishment. It appears that parents who are openly affectionate and who use only moderate punishment with calm, appropriate explanations seem to create a strong desire in children to be . cceptable in their parents' eyes. Such parents give simple explanations for moral expectations, and point out the potential consequences of transgressions. In addition, they appeal to the child's pride and refer to his progress toward mastery over his impulses. They may remind him of others' feelings, as well as his own experiences as a victim of someone else's transgressions.

When your child does do something wrong, don't belabor the incident, but focus on techniques by which he can resist the same temptation next time. For example, you might say, "When you feel like taking someone else's toy home without asking permission, remember how proud I'll be that you stopped yourself." Encourage your child to feel regret over the incident; it is healthy for him to feel guilty if harm was intended. At the same time, you should indicate how the child can make up for whatever damage he might have caused.

Your code of manners may lead you to insist on an apology while an incident is still "hot," but such an apology won't help a child learn moral principles. Instead, a chat later concerning your views of the incident, your sense of what is just (as long as you keep it simple), without shaming him, can convey your standards and expectations of ethical conduct and can include your encouragement for more mature responses to similar situations in the future. Don't expect any of this to happen overnight. The acquisition of moral values is a long process and one that continues through life.

Encouraging Your Preschooler's Interests

"As long as the children are happy and having fun . . !" This phrase, so often used by parents and teachers of preschoolers to reassure themselves that they are doing the right things for the children, can be a dangerously misleading one. It can keep parents from recognizing the importance of a capacity that can be pleasurable, but is not identical with fun or happiness—namely the capacity to find activities and experiences interesting, absorbing, and involving.

Although these terms are difficult to define, we can probably agree that by *happiness* we mean lighthearted good feelings, relaxed and comfortable states that are the opposite of sadness and despair. *Interest* has been described as a disposition to seek out particular objects, experiences, activities, skills, understandings, or goals, which the person feels compelled to attend to or acquire and without which he feels deprived. Interests are those activities we stay with over time in spite of the frequent routine elements they include. For example, we might contrast the sheer pleasure of a young child on a beach letting sand run through her fingers, or running in and out of the waves, with the interest the same child takes in building a sand castle. The capacity for interest is evident very early in life and develops in the first five or six years, so that by the age of seven or eight it is recognizable as the pursuit of interests, which may vary from science fiction to dolls.

Newborns seem to arrive with the capacity for interest; they show what is called the *orienting response*—namely the capacity to slow down all activities, such as heart, pulse, and breathing rates (except information processing) in response to certain kinds of stimuli, such as human voices, music, and certain visual patterns. As the child grows older we call this capacity *attention*. This also refers to the ability to slow down activity and concentrate on processing a specific or limited range of stimuli for a given period of time.

A child who grows up in an environment that fails to support and strengthen this capacity for interest and attention will be as surely

handicapped as if he lost the use of a limb. Almost any human endeavor that is worthwhile—raising a family, most types of jobs available in industrial societies, and certainly the ability to use expanding leisure time—requires the ability to concentrate and become absorbed in tasks and sustain our involvement over a period of time.

Here are some pointers to help your child's capacity for interest to develop: Be careful in the use of rewards and praise. Recent research suggests that excessive use of either praise or rewards undermines children's interests and their capacities to find activities intrinsically satisfying. Apparently, when we promise children rewards we suggest to them that the activity itself couldn't possibly be interesting to a normal person and that if the child likes the activity he is not quite right, and he therefore loses interest in it. Similarly, the excessive or undiscriminating use of praise diverts the child from intrinsic satisfaction associated with the activity she is engaging in.

Make sure your child has opportunities to engage in activities such as sport or craft skills, which require involvement, attention, and effort over longer and longer periods of time. This includes activities that the child can return to following interruptions. Opportunities to resume activities after a hiatus, picking up where the child left off, and continuing to refine and develop the activity are important ways to support and strengthen your child's capacity for interest.

Finally, share your interests with the child. Interests such as gardening, sports, music, cooking, photography, and so forth, which can be fairly easily understood by a young child, are just fine. The important thing is that you be an honest model of someone who is interested in something in which knowledge, skill, and satisfaction develop and grow over a long period of time.

How to Talk with Your Child

One of the most impressive achievements of a child's first five or six years of life is the acquisition of the mother tongue. A powerful way to stimulate and encourage a child's language competence is to engage him in conversation. A conversation is a very special type of verbal interaction that should not be mistaken for just giving a child names for things or simply talking to him a lot. A conversation—at least between adults—is a two-way verbal exchange in which each participant, in turn, takes into account what the other has just said. With young children it is possible to have an extended conversation even if their side of it is limited to smiles, gestures, and nods.

Here are some ideas that sometimes help parents get into the habit of conversing with young children: Solicit children's ideas and opinions regularly. If you show children that you are really interested in what they think and feel, they will become comfortable about expressing ideas to you.

Ask children the kinds of questions that will be likely to *extend* the interaction rather than cut it off. For example, some adults try to stimulate vocabulary development by asking a child, "What color is your sweater?" and awaiting the correct answer. That kind of question is really an interrogation (which does have its uses). But if you ask the child, "Is the color of this sweater one of the colors you like?" or, "What are some other clothes you have of this color?" you are more likely to extend the interchange. Questions that require a *yes* or *no* or *right* answer often lead a conversation to a dead end.

Try to pick up a piece of a child's conversation and extend it. For instance, if a child says, "I like to watch TV," then, in your response, use some of the same wording the child has used (e.g., "What are some of the TV shows you like best?"). If the child says *Wonder Woman*, then your next response could be, "What does Wonder Woman do that you like seeing?" When you use the child's own terms, you strengthen his confidence in his own conversational skills and reassure him that his contribution to the exchange is listened to and valued.

Share with your child what you are thinking about. For instance, if you are puzzling over how to rearrange your furniture or what to prepare for dinner or for house guests, get your child involved with questions like "I'm not sure where to put this shelf. Where do you think would be a good place?" Or, "What would you guess Uncle John would like for dessert?" Be sure to take the child's comments seriously, thinking through the practical implications of the ideas he has suggested.

When you suspect that something is bothering or puzzling your child, make the best guess you can about what the problem is, then phrase your questions indirectly. "It's the noise of the vacuum cleaner that bothers you, isn't it?" If you've guessed right, you can talk about what to do or how to cope with the problem. If you've guessed wrong, you have given your child a chance to correct you (by saying, "isn't it?" at the end of your statement), and to tell you what is really bothering him. Sometimes just reflecting a child's feelings back to him encourages him to tell you what's on his mind. Saying, "You're really feeling sad today, aren't you?" is more likely to invite a child to share his feelings than is asking, "What's wrong?"

It is best to watch the child for cues that it is time to end a conversation. When a child begins to stare into space, or to give really silly or way-out responses, he may be signaling that it is time to release him from the interchange.

One of the special values of adult/child conversation is that it gives the child an opportunity to sort out and retrieve information he has already stored in his mind. In other words, he gets a chance to practice articulating thoughts, feelings, and impressions from experiences he has already had. At the same time, parents have a chance to find out about the child and how he understands those experiences. The more we know about how the child understands his experiences, the more we can help to make the best sense of them.

The Language Connection

"What did you do in nursery school today?" a mother asks her lively four-year-old. "I runned, I swinged, and I slided," she reports. These charming errors, known as overgeneralization of the rules, are, in fact, good signs that the youngster is well on her way to mastery of language. Her response shows that she is applying the rules of the language so faithfully that she ignores the maddening exceptions faced by newcomers to any language. The methods by which youngsters learn a language are so complicated that they still defy complete explanation. However, specialists in this area do agree on the things adults can do to support a child's drive for mastery.

Researchers often point out that language is "caught, not taught" —meaning that the rapid and complex learning involved occurs mostly unconsciously on the child's part. Moreover, parents intuitively support their child's learning in many ways. For example, parents, fine-tuned to their child's vocabulary and experience, tend to modify their speech when addressing young children—a practice known as "motherese." The use of "motherese" suggests that parents help children's language development best when they speak in the child's actual vocabulary and when they respond to the child's meaning rather than to her actual words.

Language development is stimulated most powerfully by engaging in conversations, generally about what the child is doing, seeing, and feeling. Parents can facilitate learning by encouraging their children to recount experiences they have had together, offering terms and names for things, clarifying the meanings of words and expressions, and helping children to grasp more accurately what others are saying. Keep in mind that by the time a child is a preschooler, there is no advantage to using various forms of baby talk.

Like all other learning, language mastery takes time—about four years—and lots of practice, appreciation, and response. Your patience is essential in this learning process. This is especially true in the case of the child who stammers and hesitates in attempting to express herself.

Adults tend to engage much more readily in conversations with a child who is already articulate, and because of this the already articulate child easily becomes more so. But a child who hesitates, mumbles, or repeats herself tends to be avoided by adults who assume that the child is best left alone, doesn't really want to talk, or simply takes too much time. Such a child then falls further behind in the acquisition of verbal skills, and the cycle of inarticulateness, adult avoidance, and consequent greater inarticulateness is impossible for the child to break by herself.

When a child is slow to express herself, adults often give in to the temptation to finish her sentence for her, or supply her too quickly with missing words, although it may be clear that she has the words in her vocabulary. This kind of overassistance should be minimized. It is also important to resist the desire to correct a child's errors. Preschool children cannot make use of grammatical corrections because their verbal behavior is still unselfconscious. In fact, it is risky to make a preschooler self-conscious about her speech, since this could lead to exaggerated hesitations and stammering. In addition, it is not a good idea to bribe a child into naming things by refusing to accede to her requests unless she uses the correct terms or full sentences. Such emphasis on correctness is inappropriate and potentially upsetting at this age.

Occasionally when children struggle to communicate something, we fail to catch on. At such times it is useful to ask gently, "Can you say it another way?" or patiently, "Tell me that again, slowly." It is all right to say something such as, "I'm not sure I know what you want to tell me. Let's try again later." In general, resist the temptation to interrogate a child in order to stimulate discussion. Instead, solicit the child's views about things that interest her, and let her know in the way you respond that you are really listening.

Watch Your Television-watching Child

The effect of television viewing on young children has been the object of intensive research for the last twenty years. The findings have been both mixed and controversial. Some children, it seems, are affected by the content of television shows, others by aspects of programming such as pacing, music, noise, the intensity of actions, the kinds of visual or special photographic effects, and so forth. As if we didn't know this already, some children are just more sensitive to some of these features than are others. The individual child has to be observed carefully in order to assess which of these various features he is most sensitive to. As you watch your own children's reactions, here are some points to keep in mind.

The evidence indicates that children do learn behavior from watching television. It is not clear, however, how much of what they learn this way was already available to them before they saw it on television, nor how much the tendency to use the behavior was simply reinforced by watching someone engage in the behavior on the screen. Children learn desirable as well as aggressive behavior from watching such behavior on television. In order to increase the learning of desirable behavior, the programs children are watching have to be monitored by an adult.

Take opportunities occasionally to probe your child's understanding of what he has been watching. In this way you can help to clarify mistaken ideas and interpretations of what has been seen. If your child seems to become very fearful or anxious when watching something, *turn the set off!* You will not harm a child by turning the program off. Similarly, if you think a program haunts your child for long periods afterwards or causes even mild insomnia, turn the program off. You might be wrong in your analysis of what is upsetting your child, but it's better to make the mistake of being too careful. Failure to see a given television program all the way through or each week cannot ever be a substantial loss to a child. There are, of course, distressing situations children have to confront that cannot simply be

"turned off," and we have to help our children get through them. But television programs can be omitted without great sacrifice.

Take as many opportunities as you can to watch television with your child. This will give you the best chance to observe how he reacts to the pace, the speed of the action, and various other content elements in the programs he watches regularly. If a program that you find objectionable in terms of your own values and preferences is being aired regularly in your community, you may want to keep your children from watching it. In that case, try to arrange with the parents of your children's friends to ban the same program. It is hard to do, but it is an important part of valuing your own values.

As preschoolers grow into the primary years, you can do much to help them acquire what we call "good taste." Parents often overlook the fact that the acquisition of taste in artistic as well as other matters is part of learning and development. Don't hesitate to let your child know that you consider a given feature of a TV program too noisy, fake, or superficial, or to be in doubtful or bad taste. Your child does not have to agree with you, of course, but he needs to see you as a thinking, discriminating person. Let your child know which kinds of portrayals, music, or visual images you find moving, satisfying, pleasurable, inspiring, or enlightening. This kind of sharing between parent and child lays the foundation for the development of discriminating aesthetic behavior.

As you watch programs with your children, find out how well they understand how a program is produced, how effects are created, how a story line is developed, etc. Encourage them to guess or predict how the plot will unfold. Practicing these kinds of responses to what is watched on television prepares youngsters for critical viewing habits they can use throughout their lives.

TV and Your Preschooler

Mrs. S. found herself in a quandary when her three-year-old, Debbie, developed a sudden passion for watching television. She had heard a great deal about the effects of television on children—both good and bad—and she was uncertain of what to believe. Mrs. S.'s confusion was understandable. The mass of information about children and TV accumulated by researchers in recent years is indeed confusing. However, although many findings are controversial, there are some common conclusions.

Most observers agree that children vary a great deal in how they experience television. They vary in their reactions, their ability to learn, and their tendencies to imitate what they see. Furthermore, the particular sensitivities of the individual child will help determine just what aspects of a TV show he responds to. Some children are more sensitive to the action depicted, others to the pace, content, color, or the sound of a show. A child's own real-life experiences also affect his response to TV; program material that is either very unlike or very much like a child's own experiences may have less impact than material that is in between. The in-between material could raise a child's hopes, doubts, and fears about whether his own life is going to follow the course depicted in a program. For example, a child might not be aroused emotionally by the totally unrealistic nature of most cartoons or by the comfortable familiarity of a show such as *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. However, if the child has a favorite pet, he might be disturbed intensely by a program about a heroic dog's encounters with danger.

The action-packed, rapid-paced nature of much of children's television also tends to reinforce mindless viewing, automatic responses, and acceptance of what is seen on a fairly superficial level. Although this makes TV a powerful babysitter for small children, it also puts the child in danger of developing superficial responses to all presentations and leads to what researchers refer to as "shallow information processing tendencies." Uninvolved watching is appropriate

on some occasions some of the time. But if the child watches for 20 to 25 hours a week, he could be building undesirable mental habits that might get in the way of learning and achievement in school later on. Because of this danger, it is vital that parents monitor their children's viewing habits.

Adults play a central role in helping children to acquire an analytical approach to watching TV. The more children practice the habit of analyzing and asking questions of what they see on TV, the more they learn and the less gullible they will tend to be toward TV in the future.

Recent studies suggest that some children are more active viewers than others and that the degree of involvement in the content of what is viewed depends on what kinds of help and guidance adults have given their young children in understanding and interpreting TV. In fact, research has shown that children who watch television in the company of adults who comment on the program's contents, format, and other attributes learn more from their viewing than those who watch alone or with other uninformed young children. So when a child is in the preschool period, it is helpful to encourage him to criticize what he sees, to be curious about how the shows are made and how effects are created, to predict what might happen next, and to take notice of the kinds of events or characters that are introduced into a plot.

Even though the off switch may evoke screams and cries at first, keep in mind that no harm is likely to be done by turning off a TV set! Young children have great difficulty turning off such an irresistible source of amusement for themselves. If you do let your children watch TV, be alert to the fact that some programs produce excessive anxiety—sometimes followed by sleeplessness, bad dreams, or increasing fears of the dangers depicted in the programs. If you think that a program is inappropriate for your child, don't nag or condemn—just turn it off, and help in the search for more rewarding activities.

Children and Pets

Around the world and across the generations, tales of the charms and chagrins of humans' relationships with animals testify to the universal appreciation of their importance in people's lives. Dogs and cats enjoy a special reputation, having been glorified and caricatured in classical books, films, and cartoons. Household pets, however, also include a wide variety of other species, including guppies, hamsters, guinea pigs, rabbits, turtles, and many others. Pets of all types provide opportunities to learn about varieties of species and their special attributes concerning food, temperature, patterns of sleep and motion, and so forth. Another important type of learning is the need for constancy of care, the necessity for routines that ensure adequate care, and the responsibility of maintaining these routines. In addition, experience with pets can help a child learn about which animals to trust and which to be wary of.

There are a number of factors that should be taken into account when you consider what type of pet to obtain for your child—or if you even should get your child a pet. For example, suitable space must be provided for a dog or cat, and its care may involve considerable expense: for food, vaccination, and in case of illness. Moreover, allergies to cats and dogs are not uncommon—and if the pet must be given away for this reason, it can be heartbreaking for a small child. It is also distressing for a small child when his pet dies. Therefore, while smaller creatures may be relatively easier to house, they may not be the best choice, as they tend not to live very long even under the best of circumstances and are very vulnerable to disease and such common mistakes as overfeeding.

There are other emotional considerations that should also be borne in mind when choosing a pet for a young child. When we discuss children's needs, we tend to emphasize the importance of their being loved—and no one disputes that need. But perhaps we should also remember that children can benefit from having an object for their love that responds visibly and unequivocally to it. Of course, although pets

of many types can and do become objects of intense love, attachment, and even passionate devotion among their owners, young and old, turtles, for example, do not provide much in the way of companionship or reciprocation of affection. Dogs and cats, on the other hand, respond in recognizable ways to the affection and care they are given. There's something very special about the warm and often enthusiastic reception these creatures give us no matter what unforgivable errors we have committed in our work or other activities—and these qualities are of considerable value to young children as well. Therefore, for this and the reasons given above, a puppy or kitten might be the best choice of pet for a preschooler.

Whatever type of pet you eventually decide upon, remember that the responsibility for its care will be primarily yours, even though your child is the intended beneficiary. Despite their promises, preschoolers cannot be held to their early pledges to take care of complex creatures. In a few weeks the novelty of the pet may very well wear off. Recrimination and nagging about how much trouble and expense you went to on the strength of a small child's wish will not make a positive contribution to his sense of responsibility. You will probably have better luck in engaging the child in the care of the pet if you keep his responsibilities very simple at first, and increase them gradually as he grows. Of course, as always, children learn most fully to be responsible, caring, and nurturing from the models we provide for them to emulate.

IV. Beyond the Home

Accidents among Preschoolers: Lessening the Risk

When you live with a preschooler you probably sometimes wonder that there aren't even more accidents than the grim statistics on accident rates for children indicate. Their activity, energized by unabated curiosity, takes them into a wide variety of potentially hazardous situations. How can parents cope with these very natural tendencies without going to the extreme of either being overcautious or taking too many risks? Some of the points outlined below may help.

Obviously, a major part of a sensible approach to the problem of accidents is prevention. This involves the often-recommended step of inspecting the environment your child is in or is about to enter. A child's environment includes not only her own home, backyard, and sidewalk play area but also Grandma's house and garage and the hotels, parks, shopping centers, airports, and other locations frequented by many modern preschoolers. In such places, look for things that could pinch, pull, swing, cut, and squeeze small fingers; look for exits onto parking lots and roads, electrical outlets and equipment, and so on. If the situation is a fairly new one to your child, indicate as simply and clearly as you can what behavior you expect and how far the child is allowed to wander—and it is sometimes a good idea to issue a clear caution about special dangers in the environment. But be careful not to overdo giving your child warnings. Any statement that is overused loses its meaning and is no longer heard. Use warnings, by all means, but do so sparingly.

Once in a while the preventive approach is helped by taking a look at the environment or situation from a child's-eye view. Looking at your own kitchen as your child would, for example, may be the best way to strengthen your appreciation of the dangerous temptations that a modern kitchen can be so full of. It is helpful, too, to get to know as much as you can about the other children playing around yours. How cautious and self-restrained are they? How likely are they to dare your child to do something dangerous? If you don't know them, don't leave your child with them unless you can keep an eye on them.

In addition, it is always helpful to know your own child and her idiosyncrasies. Not all children are attracted by the same potentially dangerous activities. What have you noticed about your child and about what attracts her most often? How does your child deal with fatigue? What about irritability? All of us suffer decrements in judgment when we are tired or irritable. We are much more likely to walk into an obstacle or misjudge the stabililty of something to stand on or the speed of an approaching vehicle when we are suffering from fatigue.

When a child does have an accident or a close call, try not to react punitatively, even though the temptation to do so is often very strong. If children are to be punished, it should be only for those transgressions that are deliberate and premeditated. Accidents by definition are neither. If your child has an accident in the course of breaking one of your rules (e.g., crossing the street), punishment is unlikely to prevent a future brush with the same danger. Reassuring your child of your great relief at the luck of avoiding injury, followed by a ground rule on how such dangers can be avoided, would be a more appropriate way of reacting to such a situation.

One ground rule to offer your child for use in a wide variety of situations is "When in doubt, ask an adult." Let her know that all through life, even when one is fully grown, one will sometimes be in doubt about whether or not something might be dangerous, and that you yourself observe the rule "When in doubt, don't do it." Above all, keep in mind that a preschooler has very little experience with the world, and that judgment comes only with experience. So, for safety's sake, try to keep your expectations of your child for caution, judgment, and self-restraint realistic.

Traveling with a Preschooler

Few preschoolers will get through a summer without some sort of travel. This season is typically a time when parents take a long-anticipated vacation to alleviate the tedium of everyday work routines, and chances are if you have a preschooler at home your plans include her. I am tempted to recommend, however—based on observations made during a recent extended overseas trip—that you travel without your preschooler. But if you have no such choice, here are some ideas that may be useful as you prepare for the potential travel ordeals ahead.

Whatever kind of travel you choose, keep in mind that safety must be the first priority. If you have any reason to suspect that your child's curiosity and desire to explore could lead her to danger, stop her! Observe all the safety rules recommended by auto clubs and airlines. Insist on your child's using a seat belt, and insist on keeping sharp or long objects—which tend to be put in the mouth—away from the child while she is in a moving vehicle. The temporary frustration these restrictions and prohibitions cause will not result in permanent psychological change.

Where the child's safety or health is concerned, if you are going to make any mistakes—and we all do—it is always best to make the mistake of being too careful. Therefore, be sure to follow up signs of illness—even if it means interrupting your planned journey to seek advice and institute preventive or remedial measures. Some mothers are too shy to seek medical advice unless the child is clearly dying! There's little doubt that any first-rate physician would rather see your child too soon than too late, and it is better to make what may turn out to be an unnecessary stop than to be caught at 35,000 feet without a simple remedy that could have helped.

Another error parents often make is that of expecting their preschooler to be as enthusiastic about traveling as an adult might be. I recently observed a father's disappointment when his three-year-old failed to respond to a stunning view of the Austrian Alps thousands of

feet below. The child insisted they were rocks and resumed his pleading for a Coke. Don't expect the youngster to be thrilled by things other than those very close at hand, such as fancy water faucets, light switches, and seat-recliner buttons.

These novelties may not be sufficient to keep your child entertained, however, and a certain amount of squirming and whining is inevitable. Bringing along a "bag of tricks" including games, toys, and storybooks is a useful strategy, but it can be overdone. Use the activities to vary the pace of the hours—not as a reward for good behavior. Good behavior has to be the norm simply because you expect it. If you fall into a pattern of rewarding it, too often you will be manipulated by the child. If despite the "traveling kit" your child becomes bored and begins to fidget, don't threaten her in ways you cannot possibly carry out. If you want her to sit still, demand it of her without threats. If necessary, give up what you are doing and hold the child, firmly and kindly. Remember that your child will not change her whole character for the sake of a particular journey and that everything you have already taught her will display itself on these occasions.

Some children travel best at night when they are likely to sleep; others prefer the excitement of new experiences daytime travel brings. This varies among children, so it is useful to observe your own child's habits before you decide whether day or night travel is best for your family. One final piece of advice: if possible, travel with at least one other adult and plan to relieve each other. The combination of children, delays, luggage, and confinement can become too much; sensitive traveling companions can help keep each other from reaching the breaking point.

Tips on Selecting a Preschool

If you have decided to enroll your child in a preschool or other child care program, you will probably have a difficult choice to make among the options that are available in your community. There are, however, some steps you can take to narrow the field and save the time that might otherwise be spent making unnecessary personal visits. For example, it is a good idea to start out by calling your local public agency responsible for child care licensing to get a list of the licensed facilities in your area. Often the licensing staff is willing to make recommendations related to your particular needs and concerns. A next step is to think through the range within which you are prepared to pay for child care and thereby eliminate those programs that seem to you to be too expensive or even too "cut-rate." A third step is to consider how much time you are prepared to spend traveling with your young child in the early-morning and late-evening traffic rushes, thus ruling out any programs that seem to you to be too distant. Finally, you might try to get some recommendations from other mothers whose views you have some confidence in.

Once you have narrowed down the potentially acceptable facilities somewhat, then make arrangements to visit them. At the time of the visit many questions can be put to those who are responsible for the day-to-day management of the program. Ask them to discuss their approach to child care and the normal problems of young children and have them explain their policies on standard issues such as the handling of illness, toilet accidents, eating problems, nap times, discipline, etc.

Try to visit the program at midmorning and stay for about a half hour. This should give you a sufficient sample of events to get a feeling for what the program is really like. As you observe, take note of the child/staff ratio. Most states' child care licensing authorities have regulations governing the ratios, depending on the ages of the children. Moreover, some young children feel that more than five or six other children is a crowd, while others are less sensitive to large numbers.

Observe, too, whether the children are segregated by age. Some children are more comfortable around children close to their own age, but others enjoy both older and younger children. The relevant concern in the areas of size of group and age distribution within the group—aside from whether or not the center meets the mandated standards—is *your* child's response.

Next, turn your eye to the available space. Is it ample or cramped? Can the children be easily seen by the adults in charge? And check out the materials and equipment: Is there a wide variety, well organized and easily accessible to the children? Is the play equipment appropriate and safe? Also take a long look at the activities the children are engaged in: Do they seem absorbing? Absorbed children give out a sort of quiet hum of activity. And find out what you can about the snacks and meals offered to the children. How often is food served, what is its nutritional value, and how is it presented? Most children benefit from dining casually in small groups with an adult participating in the meal and the conversation, as well as being ready to help when needed.

Which brings us to the question of how the adults interact with the children. Do they speak casually but specifically to the children? How do they handle misbehavior or conflicts between the children? Do they seem to be relaxed yet alert, as well as warm, pleasant, and friendly? After this initial visit, a good facility will generally suggest another visit, this time accompanied by your child, followed, ideally, by a "breaking-in" period. Watch your child closely for several weeks to see how he reacts. Try not to expect too much too soon. Remember, your child is venturing into the world outside his home for the first time, and it may take time for him to adjust.

The Preschool Blues

On a recent morning when four-year-old Laura R. suddenly kicked up a fuss at the prospect of going to preschool, Mrs. R. was uncertain how to react. She wasn't sure if she should take Laura's resistance seriously, probe into the causes and maybe even let her stay home, or ignore Laura's behavior and insist that she attend school that day. Laura's rebellion was not unusual—almost every child resists going to preschool once in a while. There are often legitimate reasons behind this resistance, including events at home, a desire for a break in the daily routine, or even an impending illness. But often a child's resistance, although it seems to erupt out of the blue, is due to a situation at the preschool that parents may not be aware of because children have a hard time explaining such things.

For example, a young child may be having trouble with another child who teases her unmercifully. Perhaps there is a particularly fearsome bully at school, and the child's fear of him may become overwhelming on a given day. Or she may be hurt or angry because some of the other kids don't like her and exclude her from the group. Occasionally, a child may resist attending preschool because of problems with her teacher: she may find it difficult to share a beloved teacher with so many others; on the other hand, she may be upset because she feels the teacher does not like her. When you talk to your child to find out what the problem may be, keep in mind that young children are not always accurate reporters. Respond to her reports with respect. However, if you accept every story without question, you may inadvertently teach her to tell tall tales, and then you'll never know what to believe!

If the complaint is about a persistent teaser, an approach used by one mother may be of use: when her four-year-old son complained with anguish that one of his car-pool companions kept calling him bad names (the literal meaning of which neither child knew), the mother calmly asked him, "Are you any of these awful things?" The child reflected briefly and replied, "No!" The mother then suggested that

the next time he was called such a bad name, he should simply say, firmly and calmly, "I am not an X." A similar kind of response can be used by a child confronted by a bully. Rather than fight back and lose (which, incidentally, strengthens the bullying habit), a child can tell the bully, "I don't like to be pushed!" or, "Don't ever do that to me again!" This kind of self-assertion, even among four-year-olds, is surprisingly effective. While it disarms the aggressor, it arms the victim with a strategy she can use in many similar situations. However, if this strategy fails, the situation may require teacher intervention.

Rejection by other children is just as painful as being teased or bullied and even harder to deal with. If your child tells you that someone doesn't like her, you can help by listening with respect, reassuring her that you still love her, and reminding her of others who love and like her. It is important that parents do not deny the possibility that these things occur. If you deny too vehemently your child's assertion that someone doesn't like her, she may get the idea that it would really be terrible if it were true. In addition, excessive sympathy may teach your child to expect to be liked by everybody, and that would be seriously misleading. It is also unrealistic to expect a teacher to like every single child. However, teachers do have to treat every child with respect. Teachers' disrespect of the children in their care is a serious matter, and does call for parental intervention.

Whenever you are confronted with resistance to school, a phone call to the teacher to check out the basis of your child's antipathy and perhaps a visit to the school a little before pick-up time can help sort out the real facts. Whatever the problem turns out to be, reassure your child that you think of her often and that no matter what others do or feel about her, your love and acceptance are constant and always will be. Such reassurance goes a long way to tide preschoolers over the typical childhood crises.

Interracial Awareness and Acceptance

The improvement of interracial relations is a top item on the social agenda around the world for this generation, and most likely for many generations ahead as well. Most people concerned with interracial problems agree that our efforts to solve them should begin with children while they are still very young. Available research indicates that the acquisition of racial attitudes follows a pattern similar to that of any other aspect of intellectual and social development. It begins with an increasing awareness of differences in physical attributes such as skin color, facial features, hair types, and so forth. Children growing up in a multiracial society such as ours generally achieve full awareness of racial groups by the time they are four years old.

The second stage is marked by the acquisition of the language through which the child can describe and define the different groups. This stage is an important one, as feelings and attitudes—both positive and negative—are conveyed in the process of answering children's questions about what labels go with which features.

The third stage is a conceptual one, in which the child progresses from simple labeling to a fuller and deeper understanding of what attributes do and don't belong in the concept of race. This concept is developed, clarified, and sharpened through constant information gathering, question asking, hypothesis testing, and observation throughout the preschool years. The two main pitfalls of this developmental process are the formation of racial stereotypes and hostility.

Stereotyping refers to the tendency to attribute characteristics to an individual, which he may or may not have, simply on the basis of his race or other group membership. This kind of overcategorization is typical of, and indeed normal for, preschool children and is a function of their as yet limited intellectual capacities. The opposite of stereotyping, *differentiation*, comes ideally with increasing intellectual maturity and exposure to many individual members of different racial groups. *Racial hostility* most often develops as a result of attitudes picked up from parents, people in the neighborhood, the media, and

so forth. However, in young children it is also related to some extent to their need to feel that they belong. Children apparently develop a deeper sense of belonging to an in-group through identifying—and rejecting—an out-group.

While some of these attitudes and concepts may be normal for young children, adult help in developing beyond them is required. Keep in mind that lecturing is not a very effective approach to the development of racial harmony in young children. So to begin with, let your youngster's reactions, comments, and questions be your guide to introducing new information, experiences, and concepts. Don't hurry. Mature social attitudes are a long time in the making. And remember, too, that neither children nor adults have to like, love, or befriend everybody. If your child reacts with apprehension concerning impending contact with a new group or individual, offer the reassurance that you would in any other anxiety-provoking situation. When the appropriate occasion arises, it helps to remind the child that he doesn't like all of the members of his own group equally, either.

Although the chances are that during the preschool years favoring one's own group is the most natural response—and probably a healthy one as well—ultimately, we want our children to understand that all the human virtues and vices are evenly distributed across the races, nations, sexes, neighborhoods, and ethnic or other human groupings. Outgrowing the ethnocentricism of childhood is probably most likely to occur when children live and grow up among adults who practice brother/sisterhood naturally and consistently and participate in community efforts to solve one of the modern era's most stubborn social problems.

Early Academics

I have often been stopped by parents of preschoolers who want to know whether they should introduce their youngsters to the so-called "basics," like reading and math. How early to begin to teach youngsters these things and just what we mean by reading and math for young children are hard questions, and answers are even harder. On the whole the evidence is not very favorable for starting children on academic skills at an early age. There is ample evidence that it can be done. The issue, however, is not whether it can be done, but rather what are the effects, immediate as well as long-term and side effects, of early instruction. Experts don't all agree on some of these points. But here are some to consider.

If your youngster is pushing you with questions about the sounds of letters and what letters say, by all means help her. Help the child who wants to read the labels on milk cartons, or on the TV screen, or on roadside billboards. Similarly, if your child wants to count or add and subtract quantities in her environment, encourage her with help, guidance, and obvious pleasure. As long as she's pushing you, rather than the other way around, you'll be all right. Be careful not to indicate real disappointment when your child makes incorrect guesses. Most preschoolers of today will probably live into their 70s, so what's the hurry?

Another very important consideration is that we not only want to encourage our children to learn to read, but we want them to learn to read in such a way that they will become lifelong readers. We have the technology to teach almost all children to read, but to do so in such a way that they will be habitual readers is our real challenge. If we start children on learning to read in advance of their spontaneous curiosity about reading, we may sacrifice this important disposition to be readers. There is little evidence currently available that indicates that starting early—in the preschool years—increases the love of reading or the disposition to be a reader ten years later.

Children do vary considerably as to when they are ready to tackle reading and math. If any mistake at all is made in the time at which you

start your children on academic skills, it is probably best to make the mistake of starting what might be considered "too late" rather than too early. It is of some interest to note that most other countries don't start children on reading until they are seven years old. Part of the reason for that is the tradition of not starting school at all before that age. But they may have a very good point in terms of children's perceptual and cognitive readiness to handle such a complex matter as reading.

Keep in mind also that if you start a child early at something that is very difficult and perhaps not very rewarding, you are asking that child to spend more time at a distasteful activity. Spending more time at an activity at which one is unsuccessful or which one doesn't find satisfying creates diminishing returns. Children who have trouble learning to read are often "condemned" to spend more time being unsuccesful than children with less difficulty. One solution is to stop the pattern and let the matter go for a while and try again after a rest period. We tend to forget that many of us had great-grandparents who learned to read for the first time when they were adults. Learning to read does not have the same "critical period" urgency as language learning. A child must learn her first language in her first six years, or she will have a very hard time with all subsequent intellectual development. But one can learn to read for the first time at any age.

Set the stage for teaching your child to read by taking all opportunities to read to her. Pleasant experiences of being read to are far more likely to make children want to learn to read than are early drills of the alphabet and uninteresting three-letter words. Try to make the learning fun. Some parents find that such techniques as leaving messages for their children in the form of cartoons, pictures, or stick figures introduce children to the pleasure, fun, and significance of written thought, which is what words, writing, and reading are all about.

What's the Hurry?

Americans have been described as a nation of scorekeepers. As others see us, we seem to judge events according to whether they are the first, the biggest, or the largest of their kind. This national obsession with setting and breaking records also shows in the ways we put pressure on children to speed through the complex process of development. Young children are so frequently greeted by well-meaning relatives and friends with enthusiastic declarations about how "big" or "grown" they are that they soon get the message that it is not wise to linger over growing up. But since today's preschoolers will still be full of life 80 years from now, what's the hurry?

Many parents become excited when their children learn to walk or talk or say clever things earlier than some other children. However, remember that almost all these early advantages disappear within a few years. If you look at a whole class of twelve-year-old children, you cannot tell by their present behavior which one of them learned to tie his shoelaces before the others. Precocious achievement is not a great advantage to the total developmental process. In some cases, early achievement can even prove to be a disadvantage if it leads to impossibly high expectations of a young child whose failure to meet them could cause him emotional distress and feelings of self-doubt.

During the first few years of life, children are so completely dependent on us that our concern over every step on the road to self-sufficiency is understandable, and we are naturally eager to see them gain control over their own feeding, toileting, dressing, etc. However eager you may be, try to keep in mind that your child does have his own timetable and tempo for development. Most children seem to have an innate impulse to proceed with the business of growing up. You can be most helpful with gentle encouragement and appreciation for what he does achieve.

If your child stubbornly digs in his heels and refuses to budge when you ask for more mature or responsible behavior, you are probably pushing too hard. Back away for a while—a month or six weeks

should be enough. Say nothing about the matter during that time except to let him know that when he is ready to try again, you'll be ready to help. It is not a good idea to press a child in the direction of more mature behavior by comparing him unfavorably with a neighbor, cousin, or sibling. Such comparisons may unnecessarily deepen the child's sense of inadequacy more than they stimulate efforts at new achievements.

When children seem to be taking too long to master new skills, adults are often tempted to say, "Do I have to tell you a hundred times?" Children really ought to answer us, "At *least* a hundred times, because I am only a small child and I really haven't been around very long!" Patience on your part is invaluable to your child's development. We all know how hard it is to learn around impatient people. They make even adults feel hurried and incompetent, so imagine how a four-year-old trying to dress himself might respond to the heavy breathing of an impatient adult looking on. Your patience will allow your child to try things his way and to ask for help when he gets stuck.

Of course it's impossible to always know exactly when to step in and help. But of all the errors to make, it's probably best to err on the side of responding too slowly (as long as there are no dangers involved). Often the longer you wait to react to your child's behavior, the more hints it will provide about what he is really trying to accomplish and needs help with. (Sometimes the very best help will be to do nothing at all). If you occasionally wonder whether your child is growing as fast as he should be, just take a look at the progress he's made in the past six or ten months. If he seems to have zest and energy, explores events and relationships around him, the chances are that his rate of development—even if different from other children's—is just right for him.

All in Good Time

Few adults can remember back to when they did not understand commonplace concepts involving time, such as the days of the week, anniversaries, seasons, and other conventional time markers. But, in fact, these notions, which adults take for granted, take a long time to learn. The complexities of how children acquire an understanding of time-related concepts have only recently become the subject of close study. The findings available so far suggest that at three or four years of age, a child is usually just beginning to learn these concepts and will most likely be working at it steadily for another five years before achieving mastery.

When you stop to think about it, you become aware of just how much information a young child has to integrate. Telling time means a great deal more than the ability to read a clock; there are the conventions, customs, and cultural events by which we mark time (i.e., weekends, the holiday season, days of the week, etc.), as well as the more abstract time-related notions such as succession, duration, and simultaneity. In addition, there are quite a few terms that we commonly employ to denote different time frames, including early, late, day and night, past, present, future, morning, evening, hurry, not yet, now, slow and fast, tomorrow, week after next, etc.

It appears that the first time-related concepts a child comprehends are those having to do with the succession or the sequence of events. An understanding of sequence with respect to time is related to learning about cause/effect sequences (i.e., an action is followed in time by its consequence). Learning about sequence derives as well from learning about daily routines and seemingly simple chronology, such as what favorite television program comes after one show and before another or knowing that dessert comes after the main meal. You may see evidence of this learning process when your preschooler corrects you if you retell a favorite story and change the order of events from what she has come to expect.

Concepts of duration are more difficult for children to master than those of sequence, as any parent will attest who has traveled with a young child and been subjected to the unnerving, persistent question, "Are we there yet?" Sometimes the interrogation begins even before departure, although the youngster has already been told that it will be a long trip!

Learning to tell time and learning to relate clock time to the actual experience of the passage of time are also gradual processes. For example, when a preschooler is told that it is 10:30 in the morning, she may know that 10:30 is the time she always has her midmorning snack and that lunchtime will eventually follow. However, she will not yet grasp that two hours is the amount of time that must pass between snack and lunch. The same cognitive immaturity will also make it hard for her to understand that even though it was Monday when she had her snack, it will still be Monday when she has lunch as well as when she wakes from her afternoon nap.

Most children achieve solid time-reading skills by first grade, but don't expect too great a mastery of these skills while your child is a preschooler. Nor should you expect her fully to understand your references to "being on time," "hurrying up," or "still having a long time" to wait or travel. It is not harmful to ask preschool children to wait or to stay quiet and still for certain periods. But nagging a child about having patience is not very effective. Nor is it helpful to repeat to a child this age that you had warned her that something would take a while. The best strategy in situations like these is to model quiet, calm patience yourself. Most children will pick up your patient attitude unconsciously. Similarly, if you get very nervous about being late or delayed, the youngster is likely to pick up such feelings too and perhaps act up in such a way that you are even more delayed and irritated.

Nothing to Do, Nowhere to Go

School-age children typically suffer from summer doldrums—chorusing that there's nothing to do. Preschoolers, however, are subject to the nothing-to-do syndrome year-round, and while they may be a bit young to join in their older siblings' lamentations, their *behavior* is likely to tell the story. Bored children are often fussy, irritable, and quarrelsome, making life difficult for themselves and for those around them. It is only natural for parents to respond to these complaints by trying to cook up some exciting or distracting activities or by scolding the complainer into desisting. Both alternatives may provide temporary relief, but in the long run you may do your child a disservice by employing them.

In trying to deal with three- and four-year-olds' boredom, parents may find it useful to consider the ways in which people respond to their environments. Basically, there are two distinguishable types of response to environmental stimulation. The first is a reaction system we may refer to as the excitement/depression continuum; the second is called the interest/boredom system. Despite their differences, we often tend to confuse the two systems and thus respond to them inappropriately.

The excitement/depression continuum is characterized by a short burst of high-intensity reactivity, which subsides and is generally followed by a tendency to fall *below* the normal rate of reactivity. The low end of the continuum is commonly known as the "morning-after blues" and in its more extreme form is identified as depression. Children on this end of the continuum are not *bored*, and if we respond to a child in this condition by offering him another dose of excitement or thrills, hoping thereby to bring him out of the blues, we may inadvertently cause the child to become subject to cycles of thrill-seeking, followed by depression, followed again by thrill-seeking, and so forth. Television provides precisely this sort of excitement "fix"; therefore, our children are already in constant danger of becoming "hooked" on excitement due to the heavy television viewing they are reported to be doing.

True boredom is found not on this continuum, but on the low end of the other basic reaction system. Interest is a slowed-down reactivity marked by focused absorption over long periods of time, boredom is its opposite. Children don't appear to need practice with boredom—ordinary life provides lots of opportunities to learn to cope with it. Nor do children usually need help from parents in finding a way out of boredom. If parents too often provide excitement and distractions for bored children, the children may not learn to generate their own constructive responses to the situation—that is, they may never develop the capacity to come up with their own interesting activities. The capacity to cope with boring situations by entertaining himself will have value to the child throughout his life, and the available evidence suggests that unless this capacity to create interesting and absorbing diversions spontaneously is nurtured early in his life, it may well be lost to the child in the future.

So, when you are faced with symptoms of boredom in your child, the points outlined below may help you to develop strategies for coping that will enhance the development of your child in the long run. (1) Resist the temptation to provide distractions and excitement. (2) Resist responses that may teach your child to expect to be entertained all the time. (3) Respond calmly and patiently, pointing out that one doesn't have to be busy all the time; it's all right just to sit quietly for a while. (4) Be careful not to scold or to imply that the child is at fault or should feel guilty. Recriminations never help. (5) Above all, inspect your own behavior to see what kind of a model you may be presenting to your child.

Should You Be Your Child's Teacher?

The findings of recent research on the development of young children have led many early childhood specialists to urge parents to see themselves as their child's first, as well as best, teacher. Numerous books, magazines, and television programs have been designed to teach parents how to instruct their young children. Before you launch your career as the instructor of your preschooler, however, consider cautions and ideas suggested by a closer look at this growing body of research.

In general, the research indicates that intellectually competent young children have parents who give them information, explain events happening around them, encourage them to be curious and to explore, and provide them with the guidance, nurturance, and firmness necessary for development in the early years. But what is sometimes overlooked in enthusiastic discussions of parents' instructional roles is that the information and explanations these parents impart to their youngsters are given during the course of naturally occurring daily events. The information is *not* provided in the form of lessons, structured or formal activities, or even "learning games"; rather, it is embedded in *spontaneous* interaction between parents and their children.

This spontaneity is an essential attribute of parents' responses to their children for several reasons. For one thing, relationships that are enduring, full-time, and emotionally loaded would become exhausting and self-conscious if they involved too much formal instruction. Furthermore, if parents had to resist their own spontaneous impulses for any length of time, they might suffer from "analysis paralysis," the inability to respond to their children with sufficient confidence to be effective. In addition, it is the very spontaneity of life with parents, with all its fluctuations and complexity, that gives the young child a rich flow of information upon which to sharpen his cognitive teeth. What is required in the midst of all this potentially rich information is adult help in making sense of everyday events: what causes what, why

people do and say and feel what they do, how family events are planned, what a parent's reasoning is concerning numerous mundane activities, and so forth.

As you consider how to help your child understand and make sense of her own environment, some of the considerations outlined below may be helpful. (1) It is not necessary to cook up elaborate excursions, activities, or projects to stimulate your child's intellectual development. Daily living is rich in ideas, concepts, facts, and relevant knowledge. (2) Support your child's spontaneous curiosity and exploratory behavior. Let her know that you will be interested in her findings from explorations. (3) Encourage your child to "use" anyone as a potential source of information, facts, and explanations. Do let her know, however, that not all adults will want to be used in this way. Help your child to understand and acknowledge that there are always times when adults—even those who are generally willing to take the time to give explanations and answer questions—are not in the mood or are otherwise engaged, and therefore they will not be able to be helpful or informative on all occasions. (4) Be careful not to teach your child too far in advance of understanding or interest. Watch for clues—both in what she says and in what she does—that she has had enough or that you have lost her. (5) Teach the child a handle by which she can resume the discussion or activity when she wishes: "Just give me a sign whenever you want to talk more about X or do some more X." When you provide a method for resuming the activity, you minimize the likelihood of the child's feeling guilty for losing interest.

Finally, keep in mind that too much "help" from parents may discourage a child's natural curiosity and may foster feelings of incompetence. So, above all, have confidence in your child's intellect.

APPENDIX

The ERIC Clearinghouses

ADULT, CAREER, AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
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Columbus, OH 43210
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COUNSELING AND PERSONNEL SERVICES
The University of Michigan
School of Education Building
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Ann Arbor, MI 48109
(313) 764-9492

EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT
University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97403
(503) 686-5043

ELEMENTARY AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
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University of Illinois
805 W. Pennsylvania Ave.
Urbana, Il 61801
(217) 333-1386

HANDICAPPED AND GIFTED CHILDREN
The Council for Exceptional Children
1920 Association Drive
Reston, VA 22091
(703) 620-3660

HIGHER EDUCATION
George Washington University
1 Dupont Circle, N.W., Suite 630
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 296-2597

INFORMATION RESOURCES
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Syracuse University
130 Huntington Hall
Syracuse, NY 13210
(315) 423-3640

JUNIOR COLLEGES
University of California
118 Math Sciences Building
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Los Angeles, CA 90024
(213) 825-3931

LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS
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Washington, DC 20007
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Educational Testing Service
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New York, NY 10027
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