



Growing Together

Newsletter for
parents of preschool children

Developmental

Praise for the accomplishments of children

A child needs to feel that the significant people in her life notice what she does and are proud of her accomplishments. This message can be given by a hug as well as with words.

A baby's first step, the creation of a pretty picture, or blocks stacked into a tall tower are obvious times for praise.

Less obvious times are good too—for example, when a messy child shows the slightest sign of neatness. Or when she has completed a task without being asked to do it.

It doesn't matter how the accomplishment stacks up in relation to other children. The important thing is that the child accomplished something.

A good rule of thumb is to praise children as often as—or more often than—you correct them. □

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Parenting

Playing favorites

No parent wants to admit that he or she has a favorite child. It sounds so unfair, like Cinderella's wicked stepmother who catered to the selfish sisters and overlooked the kind-hearted heroine.

As a result, most parents hide any secret fancies. This is especially true if they grew up in a family in which one of their siblings was an obvious favorite.

Yet it is normal to feel a special chemistry with one child. She may be just like Dad — she laughs at the same things or she knits her eyebrows the same way.

Or maybe Mom favors one child because he resembles Dad, whose personality complements her own.

While these feelings are understandable, acting upon them is not. Favoring one child over another hurts everyone.

Naturally the less-favored one loses. He doesn't get the attention he desires and feels as if he is competing with an unbeatable foe.

The favorite loses, too. She may exaggerate whatever trait has earned her honor — "Aren't I being quiet, Mommy?" She may use her endearing qualities to advance her favored position.



Favorites also lose out in their sibling relationships. It is easy for them to become bullies while their brothers and sisters develop feelings of inferiority or hostility toward them.

And parents lose. They feel guilty for favoring one child and eventually must face the consequences of raising a self-important child. They also forfeit the joy of a close relationship with the unfavored child.

One sure way to complicate the situation is to try to treat each child the same. It works better to concentrate on distributing love and respect equally, instead of distributing punishments and possessions equally.

Children need to be accorded the same fairness and to be recognized for their uniqueness. □

A recommendation for grownups

Usually I give you book recommendations (and accompanying thoughts) for your children.

Today I want to share a book that I recommend for all adults who live with and care about preschoolers.

The Importance of Being Little: What Preschoolers Really Need from Grownups, by Erika Christakis (Viking, 2016) is a book that doesn't pull any punches.

The author is a parent with lots of experience in preschool education, and has a strong faith in the power of children.

She writes the book from the perspective of improving the lives of young children, and alleviating the anxieties of those caring for them with wonderful insights about what we know goes on in kids' heads, and the corresponding environments that best nurture them.

She begins with a bold statement: "We are smothering young children with attention and resources and yet, somehow, we're not giving them what they really need."

It's a thought-provoking book, and I'm not willing to even try to summarize it for you here.

Christakis writes with a sharp and witty pen, and I want to give you enough of her insights to entice you to get the book and read it for yourself.

First she tackles the physical environment, asking us to step into a four-year-old's shoes walking into a typical preschool classroom: "...a print-rich environment, every wall and surface festooned with a vertiginous array of labels, vocabulary lists, calendars, graphs, classroom

rules, alphabet lists, number charts, and inspirational platitudes.

"Add to this mix the reams of licensing regulations required to be posted in plain sight—hand-washing instructions, allergy procedures, and emergency exit diagrams—plus all the store-bought aesthetic hokum, the primary-colored plastic chairs and jaunty autumn-leaf borders that scream 'craft-store clearance aisle.'

"If an adult office space bore any resemblance to this visual cacophony, OSHA might get involved. There's growing evidence that the material clutter in early childhood classrooms can negatively affect learning."

I'm going to skip to just giving you snippets:

"It's technically possible to play a soccer game at age four, but the real issue is, as always, those vexing opportunity costs: how much investment are we willing to make to get a preschooler to complete a soccer game, and what do we have to give up in order to do it?"

"Children's natural use of time is compromised by adult whims ... Sometime in recent history, we began to see slow, unhurried experiences as subpar.

"For some parents, a child not signed up for karate class and music lessons is somehow seen to be neglected, even pitied."

"I am genuinely worried that our current priorities in early education are designed to stifle the kinds of creativity and quick footedness that future generations will need in order to solve their problems....our cultural harvest has long depended on the careful cultivation of whimsy along

with readiness in American childhood. Tom Sawyer could only be an American child; he has no counterpart in any other place but this one."

That's all the room I have, so I hope this is enough to give you the sense of what this book has to offer, as you consider what preschoolers really need from grownups. ▢

Art

Kids love 'slime'

What is slime for? Any kid can tell you it's to play with. Of course, most parents think slime is gross, and that's probably the truth.

Kids love to mess around with it anyway, and sometimes play like they're "sculpting." Here's how to make your own slime:

Start with some water in a bowl or plastic container. Slowly add cornstarch, mixing it with your hand.

Add enough cornstarch so that the slime looks wet when you're pouring it but feels dry when it is touched. Children can do the mixing with some supervision.

Color can be added. The best way is to add powdered tempera to the cornstarch before mixing. Or you can add food coloring to the water before mixing.

Is this stuff really art? Who knows, but the kids enjoy it enormously! ▢

Finger-food safety

Toddlers delight in feeding themselves. However, caution is advised to help prevent food from lodging in small airways.

For children less than three years of age:

- Check baked goods for nuts which are the number one food-related choking hazard for young children.
- Avoid giving hard or difficult-to-chew foods like raw carrots or other crunchy vegetables as well as hard candy, jellybeans, nuts and lollipops.
- Modify the shape and texture of firm and round foods. Cook carrots, potatoes and other hard vegetables until soft, and then cut into small pieces.
- Cut grapes into quarters and hot dogs into lengthwise sticks. Dice meats. Chop apples and firm fruit into very small pieces.
- Keep an eye on small children when they are eating. They might eat in a hurry, stuff too much food in their mouths, or chew their food inadequately.
- Feed small children in a relaxed atmosphere and only while seated. Do not allow children to run and play with food in their mouths or while chewing food.
- Train toddlers to chew food thoroughly before swallowing or trying to speak.
- It is also important for child caregivers and parents, when possible, to receive appropriate emergency training, including how to perform the Heimlich maneuver on children as well as cardiopulmonary resuscitation techniques (CPR). □

“Tell me more”

Language is more than the words we use to communicate with one another—it is a shared experience where one person speaks and the other person listens.

Through active listening you can give your child the message that she is important and that what she has to say is important.

First you must listen to what she tells you—about her day; what she had to eat; what didn’t work out; what was funny; something new that she learned.

Then you can ask her questions that encourage her to tell you more.

Finally, you must be patient by waiting for her response to your questions—she may have difficulty finding the words she needs.

We’ve all had the experience of talking to a poor listener. Just because they’re smaller doesn’t mean children can be fooled—they know when they are not being heard.

When times are busy, schedules must be met, and there’s no time to listen, say so.

“I’m sorry, Sally, but we’re in a rush right now. Let’s remember to talk about this again before bedtime.”

And remember to do it. Shared conversations keep the lines of communication open and active. □

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Articles in Growing Together refer to both boys and girls. For simplicity, the pronouns “he” and “she” are used interchangeably unless otherwise noted.

How to be successful

In order for a child to develop feelings of confidence in his ability to be successful, he needs practice at being successful.

Observe his present skills and interests. Then introduce him to activities that will spark his interest and stretch his skills, challenging him and assuring success.

Encourage him to stick with activities until he’s done what he set out to do.









Try not to interrupt him from an involving activity. Perseverance is an important part of success. If he meets with difficulty, encourage him to “just try.”

If you can suggest a way of simplifying the task, do so. But resist the temptation to take over and show him how by doing it for him.

That’s a subtle way of telling him he can’t do it and will undermine his confidence in his own ability. □



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Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<div>4</div> <div>Save the daily newspaper each year on your child's birthday to give to her when she's grown up.</div> <div></div>	<div>5</div> <div>Hard-boiled eggs, toast and jam for a snack.</div> <div></div>	<div>6</div> <div>Count your teeth (or your brother's).</div> <div></div>	<div>7</div> <div>What can you build with your blocks?</div> <div></div>	<div>8</div> <div>What color is your coat?</div> <div></div>	<div>9</div> <div>How many times in a row can you touch your toes?</div> <div></div>	<div>10</div> <div>Play with a ball outside.</div> <div></div>
<div>11</div> <div>Play hide and seek with a toy. (Hide a toy for someone to find.)</div> <div></div>	<div>12</div> <div>Abraham Lincoln's birthday.</div> <div></div>	<div>13</div> <div>Make some heart-shaped cookies.</div> <div></div>	<div>14</div> <div>Today is:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Valentine's Day• Ash Wednesday</div> <div></div>	<div>15</div> <div>Home-made soup for dinner.</div> <div></div>	<div>16</div> <div>Take a look at a picture book.</div> <div></div>	<div>17</div> <div>Orange and banana slices for a snack.</div> <div></div>
<div>18</div> <div>Go out for breakfast.</div> <div></div>	<div>19</div> <div>Presidents' Day</div> <div></div>	<div>20</div> <div>Count lunch bites. One bite of cheese, two bites of crackers, one bite of apple ...</div> <div></div>	<div>21</div> <div>Create a masterpiece with fingerpaint.</div> <div></div>	<div>22</div> <div>George Washington's birthday.</div> <div></div>	<div>23</div> <div>Practice a home emergency drill.</div> <div></div>	<div>24</div> <div>Go for a walk. Take along a paper bag and pick up litter.</div> <div></div>
<div>25</div> <div>Sing in the bathtub.</div> <div></div>	<div>26</div> <div>Learn a new nursery rhyme.</div> <div></div>	<div>27</div> <div>Practice listening skills. Close your eyes: What sounds do you hear?</div> <div></div>	<div>28</div> <div>Purin begins at sundown.</div> <div></div>	<div>X</div> <div>FRIDAY FEBRUARY 29 IS AN EXTRA DAY THIS MONTH</div> <div>IT'S CALLED LEAP YEAR!</div> <div>LOOK IT UP!</div>		