



Good -ginnings

Early Child Development · Parenting Education · Learning and School Readiness Tips

the Buzz...

Managing family life with very young children is a challenging job. It can be very easy to focus on problems and the things that are wrong. For example, which child are you more likely to notice and say something to—the whining child or the child playing quietly?

Paying attention to the positive things children do takes special effort. Young children dearly desire the attention of their loved ones. They tend to repeat the behaviors that get them the attention they want. They are much less likely to repeat behaviors that don't get any attention.

Wise parents will spend more time noticing children's good behaviors and ignoring the annoying ones.

As your child's first teacher, you play a very important role in helping your child develop behavior patterns he will use when he enters school. Several of the articles in this issue of *Good Beginnings* offer suggestions for encouraging behaviors in children now that will support their success in the classroom later.

If you have further questions about the information presented here, contact your county Extension office. We welcome your comments and suggestions.



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Encouraging Independence

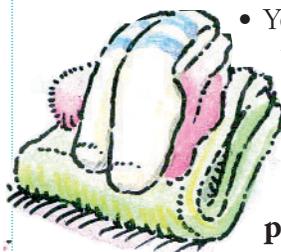


As two-year-olds gain more control over their bodies, they want to do more grown-up things. And they want to do them “by myself.” Encouraging this new sense of independence is good for young children. Two areas where you can **encourage** your young child to develop more independence are simple self-care and home-care tasks.



- Give your child the chance to dress herself. Find clothing for her that is **easy to manage**. For example, a pair of shorts or pants with an elastic waist and a t-shirt are items that a child can put on herself. As skills improve, she can move up to more challenging clothing with fasteners or large buttons in the front. These are harder for small hands to handle and require better finger coordination and a little more patience.

- Give your child his own washcloth, towel, brush, comb, and toothbrush. Keep these items within easy reach. Help your child get into a routine—washing his face and hands, combing his hair, and brushing his teeth. Show him how. Follow a similar routine every day yourself. Don't worry if his first attempts are clumsy or sloppy. As he gets older, he will be more successful. The important thing is to **develop good habits early**.



- Young children love to imitate their parents. Let them help in simple tasks such as sweeping, carrying things, folding laundry, and setting the table. Use short clear sentences when giving directions. Take it one step at a time because many instructions are hard for children to remember. Make sure to offer **positive comments** about their skills and helpfulness.

Remember, although young children want to do things independently, at times they may become afraid or frustrated. Be ready to offer a little help and encouragement. As a parent, remember that all these activities require a little planning and a lot of patience on your part. But, as we all know, practice makes perfect! Your **enthusiastic attention** to your children's successes will encourage them to do more things on their own.

TOYS, TOYS, TOYS

The verdict is in—kids love toys. But, as we all know, toys can be expensive. Sometimes the most expensive toys are not always the best. For example, a battery-operated robot will soon become boring to your child because it can do just one thing. Toys that can be

used in many ways will be more interesting. A small collection of building blocks of different sizes and shapes, for example, offers a child many choices in how to use them. Block play allows young children to try different patterns, shapes, and sizes. *(continued)*

Teaching Problem Solving

Problem solving is a skill that we continue to learn throughout life. Problem solving means thinking up solutions to everyday problems. You may be surprised to know that even young children can learn **problem-solving skills**. Encouraging ways to handle simple problems builds confidence and makes them less likely to give up easily.

As a parent, you are in the best position to help your child become a good problem solver. Here is a typical problem for a young child: Your child comes to you complaining that a playmate tried to take away her crayons. She tells you that next time the playmate grabs the crayons, she's going to hit him.

Rather than saying, "You'd better not!" instead ask her some simple questions. For example, ask, "What do you think will happen if you hit him?" or "Do you think hitting will make him want to give you the crayons?" Give her time to answer. **Listen carefully.**

Encourage your child to find a different solution with a question like "What else could you try?"



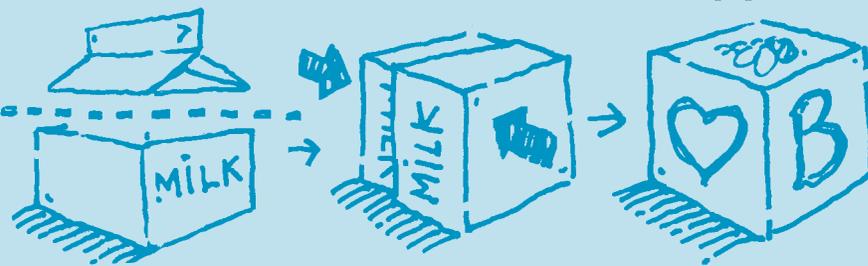
Help your child think of a couple of different solutions and choose one to try.

Solving problems will not be easy for your child. For this reason it is good for young children to try these skills **early** when the consequences of making mistakes are not serious. Your child will learn to use the lessons from mistakes to make better choices next time.

Finally, many children approach problems the way they see others around them do so. When you are frustrated or unable to reach your goals, what do you do? Do you yell or get angry? Do you act helpless and depressed? Brush up **your own** problem-solving skills and be a good model for your child.

(continued)

Sometimes the best toys are those made from things you have around the house. Instead of buying blocks, consider making them from small boxes and milk cartons. For example, take any two cartons of the same size and cut them to the same height. Slip one inside the other so that it makes a block closed at both ends. Tape the edges with heavy tape, like duct tape, that children will not be able to peel off. For added interest, paste pictures, letters, or numbers on the sides of the blocks or cover them with colorful adhesive paper.



WAYS TO PRAISE

To be effective, praise must be specific. Saying "Very Good!" is positive, but it really doesn't give children the boost that will enable and encourage them to repeat the behavior you want to emphasize. Here are some examples of more specific ways to notice and encourage children—or anyone!

- That's a kind thing you did when you....
- You did a lot of work today!
- That's the best you've ever done.
- You're a great help!
- Good remembering!
- You can do it!
- I think you've got it now.
- Now that's what I call a fine job!
- You're really improving at being able to....
- You have been practicing.
- You did it yourself!
- Look at you go!
- You are really learning a lot!



He or She? We take turns referring to children as he or she. When we use he or she, we mean to include all children.

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References: *I'm Positive: Growing up with Self-Esteem*, Kansas State University Extension. *Parenting the Second and Third Years*, University of Wisconsin-Extension. *The Parents' & Teachers' Guide to Helping Young Children Learn*, edited by Betty Faber. Cutchogue, NY: Preschool Publications, Inc., 1997

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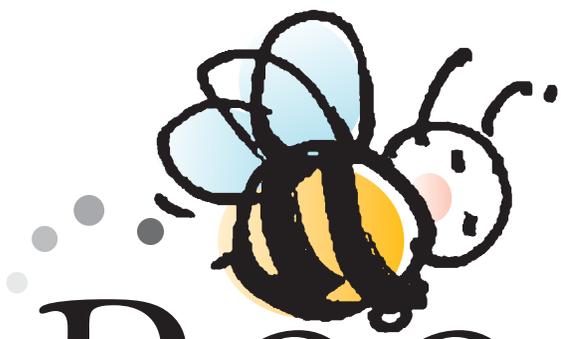


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