

# TOP

## Tips on parenting



### IN THIS ISSUE:

1

Five R's of Parent Involvement

3

I Want What I Want When I Want It!

4

Making Field Trip Experiences Learning Experiences

7

Separation Anxiety



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## 5 R'S OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT

by Dr. Betty L. Powers

Parents are an important factor in their children's educational success. Experts in parent involvement report that children whose parents help them at home do better in school and are better behaved and more diligent in their efforts to learn. Additionally, others have noted, children maintain higher grades and test scores when parents are involved, and the children have better long term achievement. Children also have more positive attitudes about school and their behaviors are more appropriate when parents are involved in their children's education. Though some parents may be involved at school, many find they are unable to do so. However, there are five significant ways that all parents can be involved with their children at home. The areas of focus are Reading, Reinforcing, Respecting and Responding, and being Resourceful (see Table 1, p. 6 for summary). Reading is still one of the major predictors of school success. Children who come to school ready to read and find early success with reading tend to be more successful in the school setting. Reading is also an area with which parents may be most comfortable. Helping to nurture reading readiness can be as simple as reading aloud to a child every night from birth until high school graduation! Reading aloud to or with a child improves the child's fluency, vocabulary, and overall reading ability. Children never outgrow the need for positive reading models and books that enrich their lives. Reading aloud can be fun! Even if children don't understand all the words, they understand that it feels good to spend time with someone they care about sharing in the activity of reading. There is a cycle of reading success. When children read more, they get better at it. When they get better at reading, they enjoy it more. As the enjoyment increases, they read more.

There are ways to help a child who is struggling with reading.

Some children struggle with reading as they start school. There are ways to help a child who is struggling with reading. One way is to find books that catch the child's interest. Students will persist more in the act of reading if they are interested in the topic. Another way to help struggling readers is to take turns while reading. For example the parent can read a page and then the child reads a page. Some struggling readers don't like to read aloud. If that is the case, reading aloud to them is still beneficial. Children will improve in their own reading abilities when others consistently read to them. Other struggling readers may choose to not read outside of school. Reading together can encourage reading outside of school and promote reading as a fun daily family ritual. Even ten minutes a day can make a difference. Finding books that interest the child and reading together daily will positively affect the child's reading ability.

Reinforcing the importance of doing well at school is another area in which a parent is vital. Parents reinforce the importance of doing well at school when they show an interest

continued on page 2 ...



## 5 R's of Parent Involvement

... continued from page 1

in their children's education and maintain high expectations for them. Researchers have shown that a parent's interest and high expectations promote attitudes that are critical to achievement. One aspect of reinforcing the importance of school is having supplies that might be needed to complete school work and a place to complete schoolwork. Children might have a desk in their rooms to work at, while others prefer the kitchen table for finishing up homework. Routines are another way of reinforcing the importance of school. Establishing specific family routines about times to do homework and having morning and bedtime routines provide the message that parents believe children should be prepared for school. Supervising and monitoring the time a child spends on TV viewing, computer games, and extra-curricular activities can also be important. Children need balance in their activity selection. If too much time is spent viewing TV or being involved in extra-curricular activities, children may not have enough time to focus on school work.

Parents can set high expectations for their children by encouraging them to reach their potential and be successful at school. Much of school success can be attributed to effort. Effort has been shown to be a better predictor of school success than ability. A parent who reinforces the importance of

When parents have a positive and supportive attitude about the school and the teacher, the child will reflect the same attitude.

doing well in school is part listener, part coach. Listening and conversing about what happens at school and coaching the child as he or she strives to put forth a best effort signals to a child a parent's respect for education.

A parent Respecting and Responding to a teacher's requests shows children that value is placed on the learning experience. When a teacher asks a parent to work with a child on something specific, the parent shows respect for the teacher by trying to complete the request. If there is confusion about an assignment, parents can contact the teacher for further clarification. When parents have a positive and supportive attitude about the school and the teacher, the child will reflect the same attitude. Occasionally a child may have a problem with an assignment or experience some other school difficulty. How a parent responds in these situations can be a model for how the child will respond in the classroom. Classroom concerns are best addressed to the teacher. A parent can set up a meeting with the teacher and then the two of them can work together to find appropriate solutions. Mutual respect between home and school makes for the best learning environment.

Being Resourceful means parents are trying to promote a variety of activities and experiences for their children that will

help them explore their world while trying out new skills in a comfortable and familiar environment. Providing a variety of activities and experiences for their children might include having art supplies available such as crayons, colored pencils, paints, or clay. It has been suggested that activities could also mean family outings to local area attractions such as parks, specialty stores, museums, or zoos. A trip to the library to select new books is another fun outing. Parents can be talkative on these outings. They can point out things that they see and discuss them with their children. These new opportunities to talk can help children learn about the world and how to use words to describe their experiences. Resourceful parents, where possible, allow children some choice in these activities while maintaining acceptable family boundaries.

Being resourceful doesn't need to cost money. For example, it can be something as simple as talking with the child about everyday happenings. Families can even create opportunities to talk by playing games together, taking a walk in the neighborhood, making a meal together, and discussing TV programs or the child's day at school. Even an ordinary family event can be enjoyable when done together and seasoned with pleasant conversation.

Parents are a vital part of their children's success in the classroom. Much

... continued on page 6

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## I WANT WHAT I WANT WHEN I WANT IT!

by Rene' Crow and Dr. Mark J. Cooper

Parenting young children sometimes feels like a roller coaster ride with emotional highs and lows. As a youngster becomes increasingly more independent, parents often find that with newfound independence comes a highly demanding child whose actions scream, "I Want What I Want When I Want It!" This can be especially challenging when there is more than one child in a family. The following tips for parents are designed to increase the likelihood that the drive for independence and competence that is so necessary in young children is balanced with learning to cooperate with the desires and needs of people around them.

First, parents should realize that it is typical for preschool children to have difficulty seeing the world through the eyes of other people. Developmentally, young children naturally are *self-centered*, which should not be confused with selfish. Young children are self-centered in that they view the world through their own perspective and lack the experience and cognitive skills to consider the viewpoints of others. Parents can help young children to gain this experience by patiently pointing out the effects of their actions as they relate to others. For example, when a child takes a toy from his younger sibling, he can benefit from his parent pointing out to him, "Look at your brother's face. He is sad because he was holding the toy and now you have it. How can we solve this problem?" The more experiences like this that are handled in a positive, instructional way, the more likely young children are to begin to understand the needs of others.

Second, helping children to label and recognize a variety of feelings is a step toward developing empathy for others and compassion for their plights. Parents can help their children recognize sadness, anger, happiness, frustration, pride, and many other feelings as they occur naturally in the lives of their children. Before children can learn to understand the feelings of others, they must first recognize and understand their own feelings. When children work through the various feelings they encounter in their everyday experiences, parents can point out the feelings they see on their children's faces. "You seem to be frustrated with that puzzle you're putting together. Your eyebrows are scrunched up and

your foot was stomping when that piece would not fit. Let me see if I can help you with the next piece," or "You seem really proud of that picture you painted! Your face is smiling and you are holding it up for me to see. Let's put it on the refrigerator to remember how happy this picture makes us feel." When children have learned to label their own feelings, they will be better able to recognize the same feelings in others.

Third, visual reminders of cooperative behaviors are extremely helpful to young children. When siblings have difficulty sharing a toy, for instance, a timer can be a concrete way for children to understand turn taking. Parents can explain to each child that when the timer goes off after a designated number of minutes, it will be time for the other child to play with the toy. Another example of a visual reminder could be a photograph posted on the refrigerator or in the child's bedroom depicting the child engaged in cooperative or helping behavior. Parents can refer to the picture often, reminding the child of the cooperative behavior that is appreciated and expected by describing specifically what the child was doing in the picture that was very helpful to the family. It is important to remember to

... continued on page 5

## activity corner

### Crayon Resist

#### Materials:

- Crayons
- Tempera paint
- Construction paper in light colors
- Paint brushes
- Newspaper
- A smock or old shirt

This art project allows the child to combine different colors and explore artistic mediums. Put newspaper over the table and ask your child to put on a smock or old shirt. Give the child a piece of light colored construction paper. Ask the child to draw a picture using bright colored crayons. Tell the child to leave some blank spaces on the paper. After the child is done drawing, tell the child to paint over the entire piece of paper including the picture the child just drew. Then use a paper towel to wipe up the excess paint off the paper. The child will be amazed when he or she realizes that the drawing has not been erased. Surprise! The wet paint does not penetrate the wax in the crayon.





by Leigh Monhardt

As the weather slowly changes from winter to spring, parents and educators increasingly look for opportunities to take their students and children on field trips and excursions beyond the home and school. There are many benefits to children who have these experiences such as stimulating their curiosity and interests, providing them with the opportunity to interact meaningfully with people, materials, equipment and environments, and allowing for questions to be asked and answered in authentic situations. The goal of any field trip or excursion is to be a well-managed and motivational experience that also provides the opportunity for your child to learn in a real-world setting. The National Science Education standards express the importance of field-based experiences in their statement, “good science programs require access to the world beyond the classroom” (NSES, 1996, pg. 220). One step in the process and often what we focus on the most is getting our children to and from the field-trip location. But to really facilitate the meaningful learning experience the field trip can provide, the parent or teacher can do a few things before, during, and after the experience to enhance the child’s learning. Following are some suggestions to make your next field trip with your child not only a fun experience but also a meaningful learning experience.

**Step One: Check out the Potential Field Trip Sites**

Whether you are planning a trip to the zoo, park, environmental center, or museum, having as much information about the site before you visit can greatly enhance your visit. Start with logistical information (fees, handicap access, restrooms, parking, maps, food, etc). How far will your child have to walk? What experiences are available for your child to take part in? Are there set tours that your child or children can take part in? Does the site have educational materials or educational programs that your child could participate in? If possible, personally visiting the potential site beforehand can also eliminate any surprises that may make the experience less than enjoyable.

**Step Two: Develop Interest in the Field Trip Site**

With potential field trip sites identified, the next step is developing some anticipation and excitement about your upcoming field experience. Start by letting your child have some input into what trips he or she might like to take. This will provide greater ownership in the field experience and a better possibility that your child will be excited and engaged in the field trip. Once a site has been picked, have your child brainstorm questions regarding what he or she would like to learn about the site. Often field trip sites have educational materials that include pre-trip information that help children not only get excited about the site but provide meaningful information that will enhance their experience.

**Step Three: Going to the Site**

So you have made all the preparations for your field trip; you have transportation set, food ready to go, restrooms mapped out, and your child significantly excited. How can you make the experience not

only fun but also a learning experience? Children need to be actively engaged with the new information they are experiencing to understand and learn it well. Start with the questions that your child asked about the site. Have them written down and look for opportunities to answer the questions. Remember this experience is not only supposed to be fun, but you hope your child will learn something meaningful. Nothing kills learning and excitement more at an exciting place like an aquarium than having to look for the answer to questions that you came up with. Focus on your child’s interests.

Providing your child with a disposable or digital camera to collect images that he or she finds interesting is a wonderful during-trip activity. This activity keeps your child engaged while searching for those meaningful photo opportunities as well as something to talk about when you get back and look at the pictures. If the site has exhibit signs, stop and read them. Find out what your child thinks about what the signs are saying. Often exhibit signs have you look for examples or asks the reader questions to ponder. Focus on those exhibits or signs that your child shows interest in.

Provide opportunities for your child to rest and reflect on what he or she is seeing and experiencing. I have been to many museums where I see a parent dragging a child from one room to another and the child is ‘done.’ A field trip should not be a forced march but an opportunity to experience new and interesting information. If your child is showing signs of fatigue, then stop and rest, reflect and discuss what your child’s favorite things have been so far. If your child is ‘done’ then go home!

**Step Four: The Post Field Trip**

After you get your child home from a successful field experience, the learning can continue. If the site provided educational material, there may be activities that you can engage your child in. Usually the material requires the children to use information gained when they were at the site. This is a good opportunity for you to understand what your child learned or gained from this experience. Next, pull out those pictures and find out from your child why he or she chose these images to photograph. Paper and crayons are also a great tool for your child to express in pictures what was learned from the field experience. What part of the day did your child like the best? What part of the day did your child like the least? What questions does your child still have about the site? Where would you like to go NEXT!?

Science is something that children understand best if they have the opportunity to explore it in authentic settings. Taking your child or children on a field trip can be a rewarding, fun learning experience if you take the time to plan for it.

~Leigh Monhardt is an assistant professor in the Department of Elementary Education at Utah State University.



## I Want What I Want ...

... continued from page 3

uses specific terminology rather than vague, general terms. For instance, rather than saying “You were such a good helper,” it is more helpful to say, “I took your picture while you were putting the plates and forks on the dinner table. You helped our family get ready for dinner while I put food in the bowls from the stove. That helped me so much!”

Fourth, parents can sometimes encourage games and activities that require two people to play in a reciprocal fashion. For preschool aged children, board games like *Candy Land* or *Hi Ho Cherry-O* are not only excellent tools for teaching cognitive skills, they are also great aides in helping children to understand and practice turn taking. The enjoyment of riding on a seesaw necessarily requires two people. Passing food bowls around a family style dinner table is another concrete experience to help children understand serving others and waiting for what they want.

Finally, the use of children’s picture books with a compassionate and empathetic theme can be helpful tools for young children in learning to think about the perspective of others. During the reading, parents can point out the faces and body language of the characters in the story and encourage children to make inferences about how the characters might be feeling based on the pictures and the story’s plot. After reading the book, it is helpful to reflect upon the story and the child’s reactions to it. Extending children’s thinking can be accomplished by asking, “Oh, what would you do if you were there?” Many quality titles from which to choose are available. The following list includes both classic favorites and newer titles to help promote social cooperation in young children.

- *The way I feel* by J. Cain
- *The very lonely firefly* by E. Carle
- *The bear under the stairs* by H. Cooper

- *I was so mad* by M. Mayer
- *Knuffle bunny* by M. Williams
- *I can share!* by D. Parker
- *Just big enough* by M. Mayer
- *Leo the late bloomer* by R. Kraus
- *If you’re angry and you know it!* by C. Kaiser
- *Lost in the woods* by C. Sams
- *Okomi climbs a tree* by H. Dorman & C. Dorman
- *It’s my turn, Smudge!* by M. Moss & L. Chapman

Perhaps the most important thing that parents can do in promoting empathic and cooperative behaviors in young children is to be patient and realize that children need many, many experiences in sharing and caring to fully understand the feelings and concerns of others. The practices of visually representing appropriate behaviors, descriptive commenting about caring behaviors, setting up cooperative play experiences, and reading stories designed to help children consider the perspectives of the book characters are all ways that can benefit children and parents alike in the journey toward a balance of independence and caring for others.

~Rene´ Crow teaches early childhood and special education courses at the University of Central Arkansas and directs the university’s nationally accredited preschool.

~Mark Cooper, Ph.D., is a counselor and tenured professor at the University of Central Arkansas. He has recently authored a book dealing with the struggling learner entitled “Bound and Determined.”



## question corner

“My child is learning to use words at preschool that I find inappropriate. For example, one day we were sitting at dinner and my child started talking to his sister about “poo-poo” and “pee-pee” and laughing. I am sure this came from one of the children at this new childcare center. What can I do to stop him from using this language?”

--Melanie in Minnesota



Preschool children often go through a phase where they use bathroom language as a form of humor. They make up words like pee-pee, caca, poo-poo, and potty. Try to ignore the child’s humor. If you do not pay undue attention to it, the child will naturally stop using it. However, if you feel that the bathroom language is getting out of hand, you may want to talk with the child about not using such words or limit when the words can be used. You could make an agreement with the child that the words can be used in the bathroom, but nowhere else. For more information, check out the book *A Practical Guide to Solving Preschool Behavior Problems* by Eva Essa.

~Heidi Malloy, Ph.D., is an assistant professor in the Department of Psychology at Metropolitan State University.

*question corner* features questions posed by parents to early childhood experts who provide brief responses in this newsletter. If you have any questions you would like answered, please send e-mail to [eejcenter@cc.usu.edu](mailto:eejcenter@cc.usu.edu) or mail to EEJ Center for Early Childhood Education, Utah State University, 6705 Old Main Hill, Logan, UT 84322-6705.



## 5 R's of Parent Involvement

... continued from page 2

of that success can be attributed to factors that happen in the home. Parents encourage their children's success at school when they encourage reading and reinforce the idea that school success is important. Modeling respect for the teacher and school provides children with a foundation of trust in the learning experience. Parents can encourage their children's success at school when they are resourceful and when they look for opportunities to introduce their children to both family traditions and new experiences. These types of parent involvement at home will reap substantial benefits to a child's success at school.

**Table 1**  
**5 R's of Parent Involvement Summary**

<b>READING</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Read aloud to children daily.</i> This can happen in the morning, afternoon, or evening. It can take place on the sofa, around the table, or by the bedside. Any place where you can be together.</li> <li>• <i>Children may struggle with reading.</i> Although struggling with reading isn't unusual, it should not be ignored. There are specific things that can be done to encourage the struggling reader. Teachers are a good resource for helpful ideas.</li> </ul>
<b>REINFORCING</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Have routines.</i> Realizing that there will be interruptions on occasion, starting with a consistent daily time, places value on homework and bedtimes which helps children to plan for them.</li> <li>• <i>Supervising activities.</i> Many activities compete for a child's attention. Helping children balance their time so they can complete school work and still enjoy a variety of activities is an important step in school success.</li> <li>• <i>Maintain high expectations.</i> Encourage children to reach their potential by expecting them to be successful at school. Effort has been shown to be a better predictor of school success than ability.</li> </ul>
<b>RESPECTING &amp; RESPONDING</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Teacher requests.</i> Try to model positive responses to teacher's requests. Ask the teacher questions to clarify what is being asked in an assignment.</li> <li>• <i>Meet with the teacher to solve concerns together.</i></li> </ul>
<b>BEING RESOURCEFUL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Exploring the new with the comfortable.</i> Family outings to neighborhood locations provides valuable learning experiences.</li> <li>• <i>Conversations are priceless.</i> Being resourceful doesn't mean spending money. Having conversations with children about everyday occurrences can be fun learning experiences.</li> </ul>

~Betty L. Powers, Ed.D., is a graduate of Brigham Young University. Her interests include involving parents in educational conversations and teacher practices that facilitate literacy success for children.





## SEPARATION ANXIETY

by Elizabeth Pantley, Author of *Perfect Parenting and Kid Cooperation*

**Situation:** My child is afraid to leave my side to try new things or play with other children. How do I help him become more independent?

**Think about it:** It's a big world out there. Some kids jump right in, and some need to test the water with their toes before they're comfortable wading in. (And then they wade very slowly, of course!) Be patient. With some gentle guidance your child will leave your side. (I mean, honestly, have you ever seen a ten-year-old super-glued to his mother's side? Me neither.)

**Don't push:** Don't force your child to jump into situations he's nervous about. Allow him to watch from the sidelines for a while to absorb the goings-on and get a feel for how he'll fit into the picture. Let him know he can sit and watch for as long as he wants to before joining in. Many children relax when they know they have permission to take their time getting involved.

**Small steps:** Provide opportunities for your child to take small steps towards independence. For example, take your child to a familiar park and once he's involved in an activity move a short distance away, sit on a bench, and read a book. Every once in a while, touch base with him by waving or making a comment, "*Wow! You're sure going high.*"

**Don't make it worse:** Don't overprotect your child. Saying things like, "Don't worry, I'll be right here if you need me" imply that your child really does have something to worry about. Instead, make your comments positive in nature and get the message across that what he's about to do is no big deal. For example, when he's leaving your side to attend a birthday party, let him leave on a positive note, "*Have fun honey! See ya' in a little while.*"

**Help him understand himself:** Acknowledge his feelings, and help him understand them. Then reassure him and help him deal with the feelings and learn to get by them. "*I can see you're a bit nervous about joining the party. That's okay. Take your time and let's see who you know. There's David! Why don't you go over and show him your new watch?*"

**Take away the mystery:** Talk about the event in advance. Let your child know what to expect, how long he'll be there, what he'll do, and when you'll be back to pick him up. Information like this will help your child feel more comfortable about your separation.

**Give your child choices:** "*You've been invited to sleep over at Brandon's house Friday. He's really excited. He said you'd go roller-skating and then make homemade pizza. Do you think you'd enjoy that?*" Ask your child helpful questions to see why he doesn't want to go. Perhaps there's something specific that would help him be more comfortable, maybe knowing that he can call you to pick him up if he changes his mind. Your child may not be comfortable and choose not to go. That's okay. There will be many opportunities for your child to spend time with a friend. Some more tentative children will pass on an invitation and be comfortable with their decision. Typically, given enough time, the child will outgrow this separation anxiety.

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Emma Eccles Jones Center for Early Childhood Education  
 College of Education and Human Services  
 Utah State University  
 6705 Old Main Hill  
 Logan, UT 84322-6705

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Editor: DR. HEIDI MALLOY  
 (651) 793-1337 • heidi.malloy@metrostate.edu

Managing Editor: NISSA BOMAN  
 (435) 797-8629 • nissa.boman@usu.edu

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