

# TOP

## Tips on parenting



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## Helping Infants and Toddlers Reduce Stress

by Dr. Patricia Scully

As the parent of two small children, I have learned first hand that even the youngest members of a family can experience stress. The developmental changes that occur during the infant and toddler years can be especially challenging to young children as they seek more independence and yet still need the protection of their parents. When family life becomes hectic, infants and toddlers pick up on the tensions in the home. As parents rush off to jobs and try to balance work and family responsibilities, some small children find it stressful to be awakened before they are ready, fed on the run, and transported to another place for care. Other infants and toddlers are temperamentally spirited and can be hard to soothe even in a calm home.

While you may not be able to do much to change the circumstances of your busy life or alter your children's developmental stages or natural temperaments, you can help infants and toddlers become more peaceful. By creating a comfortable, predictable environment, arranging enough time for transitions, and providing sensory activities, vigorous indoor and outdoor play, and quiet times, you can promote relaxation in very young children.

**A comfortable environment** contributes to child and adult relaxation. The spaces where you spend time together should be soft and inviting. Pillows, mattresses, carpet squares, and cloth draped on tables add softness and absorb sound. Comfortable places for you to sit, like rocking chairs and overstuffed chairs encourage physical contact with your little one. Furniture can be arranged to create areas where your baby can be in a small, private space at times but where you can still see him. Mirrors and interesting pictures (covered with plastic for ease of cleaning) at the child's eye level create interest. Relaxation music, nature sounds, and quiet music played softly also help create a peaceful mood.

**Transition times** can be especially stressful for children. Parents should allow enough time so they don't have to hurry. Speaking quietly and moving slowly even when you are rushed helps your children feel more secure and promotes a less hectic transition. Your own peacefulness is one of the best ways you can help young children stay relaxed. It is also helpful if parents gently inform the child about what is going to happen next when making transitions. A child who is swooped up

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## Helping Infants and Toddlers Reduce Stress

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unexpectedly may react with alarm while one who knows what is coming is more likely to remain at ease.

**Sensory activities** can provide a focus for children's attention and also help them feel more serene. For instance, a small tub on the floor with a plastic tablecloth underneath to catch spills can be filled with water for your child to play with in different ways. Adding food coloring, soap suds, and doll clothes and providing a variety of containers such as funnels and sieves encourage fun ways to enjoy water. Filling the tub with rice and allowing your child to fill and dump small containers is another soothing activity. Scribbling with a large crayon or marker on very large paper taped to the floor, finger painting, and manipulating play dough (extra salt discourages tasting) are sensory activities that are relaxing for toddlers.

Vigorous **outdoor play** in areas that provide a variety of experiences is another stress releaser for toddlers. Different surfaces such as wood, grass, sand, and plastic offer unique opportunities for play. Gentle hills for climbing and rolling as well as play structures designed for the youngest children add challenge and interest. Toddlers need time and safe places to walk, run, climb, jump, and shout. Babies also enjoy the outdoors and will benefit from fresh air and a change of scenery as well as new textures to crawl or walk upon. Even on cold days, brief periods of outdoor play should be provided. There is really no substitute for the stress release offered by the outside environment.

**Active play** should also be provided indoors. Pounding golf tees into large pieces of styrofoam, moving to recorded music, and climbing and crawling through an obstacle course of cushions and chairs encourage vigorous play. Giving a horsey ride on your foot, playing peek-a-boo with a blanket or sheet, and joining hands to play "Ring Around the Rosie" are other active games that toddlers enjoy. Physical challenges and safe opportunities for movement afford children a wonderful release of energy and stress.

Very young children also need **quiet play**. One of the best quiet activities a parent can do with a young child is to share a book. Starting at about four months of age, babies enjoy sitting on a parent's lap looking at books with large, realistic pictures of familiar things. These early reading experiences help children learn to associate books with comforting physical contact from a parent. Cloth, cardboard, and other sturdy books provide both quiet time and language experiences as parent and baby sit together pointing and talking about the pictures.

Preparing for sleep should follow a period of quiet play. Yawning, stretching, and mentioning how tired you are sets a mood. Sleepiness is catching! A leisurely, predictable routine before sleep that includes a quiet story and lullaby can help most toddlers relax easier. Reading a soothing book like *Goodnight Moon* encourages sleep. Children who have a hard time falling asleep might enjoy some quiet talk and back patting. Stroking your child's temples or laying your hands gently on their lower back and neck can be very soothing. Music, if quiet and played low, can also enhance relaxation and lead to sleep. Special blankets and stuffed toys help the child feel secure enough to rest.

When your infant or toddler does become stressed, a calm reaction can help restore a sense of calm. With very young children, you must learn to recognize cues so you can offer support or a change in the environment or activity before your child has lost control. Sometimes, holding your distressed baby against your chest while you breathe deeply and rock her can help relieve the difficulty. Speaking softly and rubbing a child's shoulders or arms can also be reassuring for a child in distress.

In order to help your child relax, you also need to be relaxed yourself. Remember: **Only a relaxed adult can help children relax.** Parents of small children often put their own needs last but taking a few minutes for yourself every day is crucial for your own well-being. By making the time to renew yourself, you will have more energy and enthusiasm to offer your children. As you relax yourself and help children relax, you provide a more harmonious environment and model sound ways of coping with stress. You also make a lasting contribution to the health and happiness of your young children. What could be more important?



~Dr. Pat Scully is an assistant professor of early childhood education at the University of Maryland Baltimore County. She is the mother of two preschoolers.



## question corner



We are having a very difficult time getting our 2-year-old to go to sleep at night. Sometimes she is up as late as 2 am!! Do you have any suggestions?

~Dora in Utah

If you were to take a survey of the number of parents who were awake late last night, you might be surprised. They weren't up late for personal or professional pursuits! Rather they were busy trying to get a toddler to bed.

What causes these bedtime dramas and traumas? In most cases bed problems are symptoms of "separation anxiety," which is a normal developmental process for young children. Bedtime is a time of separation and some children will do anything they can to delay separation at bedtime, including asking for yet another glass of water, worries about the monster in the toy box, requests for another hug, pleas to find the teddy bear, etc.

How can parents ease these bedtime problems? To help minimize bedtime dramas, a parent should develop consistent bedtime routines with children. Many parents create a visual bedtime checklist that could include the following steps:

- toy pick-up time,
- bath,
- pajamas,
- healthy snack,
- teeth brushing,
- bedtime story,
- tuck-in- and hug time.

Parents should talk to their child about the chart, and let the child check the chart to see what is next. Notice that this set of routines includes plenty of quality time so children have time to transition from busy play to quieting down to sleep.

What happens if your child still gets out of bed? If she gets out of bed, kindly and firmly take her by the hand and put her back in bed. Remaining kind and firm while doing this can be very difficult for most parents. It means that you keep a friendly attitude (no lectures or scolding) while firmly putting her back to bed, for instance "It is bedtime now. I look forward to seeing you in the morning." When parents are consistent, kind, and firm it usually takes children three to five days to understand that this is your routine.

Many times reading storybooks about bedtime dramas can be part of the solution. The following books are excellent examples of children who are having difficulties going to bed. These stories invite conversations about typical

bedtime concerns and allow parents and children to problem solve their own situation together. Our favorite is *How do Dinosaurs Say Good-Night?*

### BEDTIME RITUALS AND ROUTINES

*The Going to Bed Book* by Sandra Boynton, Little Simon, New York, 1982.

A fun little board book with rhythm and rhyme as all the animals prepare for bed.

*Kiss Good Night* by Amy Hest, Scholastic, New York, 2002.

A little bear and his mom prepare for bedtime. They end their routine with the best part, a kiss good night not once but twice.

*How Do Dinosaurs Say Good Night?* by Jane Yolen and Mark Teague, Scholastic, New York, 2002.

Do your children grump and growl at bedtime? The parents in this book have to get their little "dinosaurs" to bed.

*Time for Bed Elmo!* by Sarah Albee, Random House, New York, 2000.

Come along with Elmo as he goes through all of his bedtime routines.

### AFRAID OF THE DARK

*Afraid of the Dark* by Treasha Runnells, Piggy Toes Press, California, 2002.

What are those scary shadows in the dark? Is it a monster, a spider, or a troll? Find out when you read this big board book with big google eyes on each page.

*Sam's Scary Night* by Steve Cox and Don Klotz, Readers Digest Children's Books, New York, 2001.

A clever pop-up board book that helps Sam discover what really makes the shadows that are keeping him awake. Enjoy guessing together what makes these scary shadows.

~**Dr. Billie Enz**, associate director, Division of Curriculum and Instruction, College of Education Arizona State University

~**Dawn Foley**, faculty associate, Department of Education, Arizona State University - East Campus

**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 email to [eejcenter@coe.usu.edu](mailto:eejcenter@coe.usu.edu) or mail to EEJ Center for Early Childhood Education • Utah State University • 6515 Old Main Hill • Logan UT 84322-6515.

## Ten Ways to Help Your Young Child Develop Number Sense

by Dr. Julie Ivey and Dr. Kay Reinke

Number sense is the ability to understand and use the numbers and mathematical relationships in our world. If your child has good number sense, he or she will be able to learn mathematical concepts in the classroom. There are many things that parents can do to increase number sense in their children, but here are a few of the most important.

1. **Count.** Counting is an essential activity and is the basis for future mathematics. Use every opportunity to count objects and people. Encourage your child to count with you. If there is hesitation, do not force it. Children love to count so they will soon join you in this activity. You could count toys, money, objects that are taken from a grocery cart, signs on the highway, steps from one room to another, or cookies on a plate.
2. **Estimate.** Estimation skills are important for a good sense of numbers. This ability will allow a student to determine whether or not answers are correct when working problems. Along with your child, estimate the number of candies in a wrapper, bananas in a bag, the number of cars in a parking lot, or the number of books on a shelf.
3. **Examine patterns.** Patterns are present everywhere and the understanding of them provides a basis for learning algebra later in school. Arrange coins in patterns such as two dimes, three nickels, and one penny. Then encourage your child to repeat the pattern. Using small bags of candy such as M&Ms, divide the candy and create designs that alternate the colors. Your child can sort buttons according to color, size, or texture.
4. **Compare.** The concepts of more and less are related to counting. Compare the number of people eating dinner and the number of chairs or the number of forks and spoons. Let your child decide if there are enough swings for each child at school. Even though a child can count, the ability to recognize one plate for one person is a different skill.
5. **Question.** The wonder of why things are as they appear is the foundation for exploration in mathematics and science. Why does the moon look so small even though it is very large?

How do I know how much water to give plants? How do scientists know about the interior of the earth? If children see their parents find answers to questions, they will learn by example to question and seek answers.

6. **Provide appropriate toys.** Great toys that provide and reinforce learning are not necessarily the most expensive ones or even those bought in stores. The best toys are those that encourage children to explore, ask questions, and create. Examples of these kinds of toys are paints, blocks, popsicle sticks, dried beans, and pipe cleaners. Another example is the use of stickers, arranged in rows, to facilitate the counting process. A parent could ask the child, "Put five teddy bear stickers in a row" or "How many red blocks are there?"
7. **Read everyday.** Reading literacy affects learning in all subject areas. Children who are readers can make discoveries for themselves. In addition, children who see that their parents love to read become better readers. Read all types of books, both fiction and non-fiction. Help the young listener to know the difference between the two. Find books that deal with numbers or books that can lead to discussions of patterns or counting. Examples of these types of books are:

Burns, M. (1994). *The Greedy Triangle*. New York: Scholastic Inc. ISBN 0590489917

Falwell, C. (1993). *Feast for 10*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. ISBN 0395720818

Hutchins, P. (1986). *The Doorbell Rang*. New York: Greenwillow Books. ISBN 0688092349

Myller, R. (1999). *How Big is a Foot?* Minneapolis: Econo-Clad Books. ISBN 0440404959

Pallotta, J. (1993). *Cuenta Los Insectos*. Watertown: Charlesbridge Publishing, Inc. ISBN 088106419X

Pinczes, E. (1995). *A Remainder of One*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. ISBN 0618250778

Walton, R. (1998). *So Many Bunnies: A Bedtime ABC and Counting Book*. New York: Scholastic, Inc. ISBN 0064437515

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8. *Encourage sibling interaction.* Children learn from their older brothers and sisters on a daily basis. Try to find games that children of various ages can play together. Very young children could guess what number comes after the number 5 while children a little older might guess a number greater than 15 and less than 17. Older children could make up questions for the younger ones. This activity benefits both age groups.
9. *Use any available time.* It is very tempting to wait for a large block of time to help your child do the things that facilitate learning. However, some of the best learning can be accomplished in small chunks of time. While standing in line at the post office, waiting in the drive-through lane at a fast-food restaurant, or giving a bath, parents can squeeze in activities that will add up to a considerable amount of time week after week.
10. *Show your love for learning and numbers!* A positive attitude toward mathematics goes a long way toward instilling that attitude in a child. Parents can visit the library to find books that give ideas about learning activities. Examples of activity books are:
  - Allison, L. (1993). *Eenie Meenie Miney Math!: Math Play for You and Your Preschooler*. New York: Little, Brown and Company. ISBN 0316034649
  - Diffily, D. (2002). *Fun-Filled 5- to 10-Minute Math Activities for Young Learners: 200 Instant Kid-Pleasing Activities that Build Essential Early Math Skills for*

- Circle Time, Transition Time or Any Time*. New York: Scholastic Books. ISBN 0439318904
  - Hechtman, J., Ellermeyer, D., & Grove, S. F. (1999). *Teaching Math with Favorite Picture Books: Hands-on Activities and Reproducibles to Teach Math Using More Than 25 Picture Books*. New York: Scholastic Books. ISBN 0590762508
  - Stenmark, J.K. & Gothberg, B. (1999). *Family Math for Young Children: Comparing*. Berkeley: University of California Press. ISBN 0912511273
- Encouragement and a belief that a child can learn anything he or she wants to learn is the best insurance for a successful future school experience. A proficient sense of number is a firm foundation for competence in mathematics.

~ Julie Ivey, a lecturer at Baylor University in the Educational Psychology Department, is interested in learning disabilities and autism.

~ Kay Reinke, an associate professor in the Mathematics Department at Southwest Texas State University, is interested in how children think about mathematical problem-solving strategies.

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## activity corner

### A Goodnight Rhyme

from the book *125 Brain Games for Babies*  
(for ages 6-9 months)

Rock your baby as you say the following rhyme:  
 Good night sweet baby, good night sweet one.  
 The clock is ticking and says "we're done."  
 Good night sweet baby, goodnight my dear.  
 The stars are twinkling and sleep is near.

Gently put your baby in his bed and say "Good night, good night." Rub his back and give him a kiss.

#### What brain research says

Holding and cuddling comforts your baby and helps his brain grow.



~ Reprinted with permission from *125 BRAIN GAMES FOR BABIES Simple Games to Promote Early Brain Development* copyright 1999 by Jackie Silberg. Price 14.95/\$3.00 Shipping. Available from Gryphon House, Box 207, Beltsville, MD 20704-0207, 1-800-638-0928. <http://www.ghbooks.com>.

## science corner: ON THE TRAIL OF LEWIS & CLARK

by Leigh Monhardt, Ph.D.

Following is the instruction from President Thomas Jefferson to Meriwether Lewis on June 20, 1803:

*The object of your mission is to explore the Missouri river, & such principal stream of it, as, by it's course & communication with the water of the Pacific Ocean may offer the most direct & practicable water communication across this continent, for the purposes of commerce.*

Lewis and Clark braved the unknown waters of the Missouri to chart America's future. As we approach the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their expedition it is an appropriate and timely topic in which to engage young children. In 1803 President Thomas Jefferson offered a once-in-a-lifetime challenge to his personal assistant Meriwether Lewis. The mission was to find a water route to the Pacific Ocean that would prove useful as a future trade route. In addition, he and a group of men were to draw maps, keep track of the weather, write down vocabularies and beliefs of native people, collect plants and animals, and "discover" what was out there in the western land.

Many have compared this journey to the journey into space and the landing on the moon. In both journeys it was unknown what would be found. But in the end, both journeys would change the way we live forever.

There are several ways that you can get your child involved in learning more about the Lewis and Clark expedition while using many science skills. I would begin this "journey of discovery" by reading several stories about the expedition to your child. The following is not an exhaustive list but it would be a good place to start.

### RESOURCES

#### CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Fifer, B. (2000). *Going Along with Lewis and Clark*. Helena: Montana Magazine. ISBN: 1-56037-151-X

Herbert, J. (2000) *Lewis and Clark for Kids*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press. ISBN: 1-55652-374-2-23-0

Morley, J. (1998). *Across America: The Story of Lewis*

*and Clark*. New York: Franklin Watts. ISBN: 0-531-15342-8

Patent, D. (2002). *The Lewis and Clark Trail Then and Now*. New York: Dutton Children's Books. ISBN: 0-525-46912-5

Patzman, B. (2000). *Would you have gone with Lewis and Clark?* Bismarck, ND: United Printing and Mailing. ISBN:0-96740022-8

Schanzer, R.(1997). *How We Crossed the West: The Adventures of Lewis and Clark*. Washington, DC: National Geographic Society. ISBN:0-7922-6726-5

Schultz, J. (1999) *Bird Woman Sacagawea's Own Story*. Boston: Mountain Meadow Press. ISBN:0-945519

Smith, R. (1999). *The Captain's Dog: My Journey with the Lewis and Clark Tribe*. New York: Gulliver Books Harcourt. ISBN: 0-15-202696-7

Steenwyk, E. (1997). *My Name is York*. Flagstaff, AZ: Rising Moon. ISBN 0-87358-758-8

Tinling, M. (2001). *Sacagawea's Son*. Missoula, MT: Mountain Press Pub. ISBN:0-87842-432-6

#### MUSIC CD

Horton, Bobby (2001.) *Lewis and Clark Songs of the Journey*. Yakima,WA: Edge-of-the-Woods Pub.

Various Artists (1998). *Lewis and Clark: Sounds of Discovery*. Chairmaker's Rush.

#### VIDEOS

*Lewis and Clark – The Journey of the Corps of Discovery* –Ken Burns.

National Geographic – *Lewis and Clark – Great Journey West*.

After your children have been introduced to Lewis and Clark and become excited about their adventures you can have them participate in some of the same types of



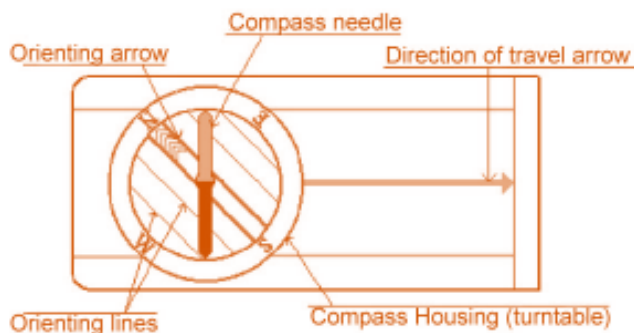
activities that Lewis and Clark experienced on their journey. One of the main objectives of the Lewis and Clark expedition was to carefully map the area in which they traveled. The following activity will introduce children to using a compass. The next issue of TOP will provide an opportunity to practice some of the same skills that Lewis and Clark used on their expedition.

## ORIENTEERING

Orienteering was developed at the turn of the century in Sweden to teach soldiers navigation skills. It has evolved into a popular national sport utilizing map reading and problem solving skills. It is a compulsory subject in Swedish schools and is an exciting way to develop mind and body coordination. Upper elementary students can learn the basic principles of orienteering very quickly after they have become familiar with using a compass.

A compass is graduated into degrees, and there are 360 degrees in a compass circle or compass rose. The cardinal directions, north, south, east, and west, are 90 degrees apart. A bearing is one of the 360 degree directions of the compass rose. A bearing is always measured clockwise from north to the place you want to go. Bearings can be very easily determined using an orienteering compass.

An orienteering compass has the following parts:



In orienteering, students measure the distance from one place to another by counting how many paces they take. Each step is one pace. It is important to emphasize to your child that a pace is not an exact measure of distance because it varies with leg length. Children should practice their steps and try to standardize the distance of one pace.

There are three main steps to follow in orienteering:

- A. **Set bearing.** Hold elbows close to the body with forearms stretched out in front. Compass should be held in the palms of the hands with the direction of travel arrow pointing in the direction you want to go.
- B. **Align the orienting arrow and the magnetic north arrow.** Turn the dial on the compass until the two are lined up.
- C. **Follow the direction of the travel arrow.** Walk in the direction of the object you wish to reach. The direction you are traveling is read from the number on the compass rose that is lined up with the travel arrow. Count the number of paces it takes to reach the destination.

## INTRODUCING THE COMPASS

### MATERIALS

orienteering compasses  
tape

### PROCEDURE

1. Give each child a compass and have them locate the parts using the picture in this activity as a guide.
2. Using steps A-C outlined above, instruct your children in how to use the compasses. Using tape to make an X on the floor, specify various starting points in a room. Have your children use the compasses to locate the bearings for the different objects you point to.

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



Emma Eccles Jones Center for Early Childhood Education  
 Utah State University  
 6515 Old Main Hill  
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Editor: DR. HEIDI MALLOY  
 (651) 793-1337 • heidi.malloy@metrostate.edu

Managing Editor: REBECCA COWLEY  
 (435) 797-8629 • rcowley@coe.usu.edu

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