



TOP

Tips on Parenting

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Pretend Play—Anytime, Anyplace by Farol Nelson

Many years ago as I was putting the baby down for a nap, doing laundry, and straightening up the house; I observed my two preschoolers busy at work. They began by hauling chairs to the family room and arranging them in rows. Next, they carefully distributed various stuffed animals on each chair and then disappeared. When the children returned, they were dressed in their best dress-ups with hats and purses. They arranged themselves on the front two chairs, stared straight ahead, and did not move a muscle. I observed this as I folded the laundry, then left to check on the baby. When I returned, they were sitting exactly as they had been—staring straight ahead. I was very curious.

“You two are so quiet,” I said, “What’s going on?”

“Shhhhhhhh,” replied my daughter.

“We’re watchin’ a movie!” said my son.

A movie! Of course—the chairs, the rows. They were an audience in a movie theater. Why not?

This type of play is called pretend, imaginative, symbolic,

dramatic, etc. But whatever you call it, it is important for children’s development. As they play in this way, children learn to get along, share, and even see what it’s like to be *Mom*, a *movie-goer*, or the *doctor*. They learn to lead and follow, develop their imaginations and their language skills, and even learn to make choices and live with the consequences. Parents should encourage their children to play.

I remember another day when my children and I were reading a story about going camping. We decided to find some stuff and go on our own camping trip—inside! We made a tent with blankets and a table, used more blankets for sleeping bags, and used stuffed animals as forest animals. Imagining all sorts of things, we carried our canteen full of water as we took a hike through the house and downstairs. We made a pretend fire pit with paper and small boxes, used pans from the kitchen to cook dinner, and even sang songs with an old guitar.

Another day, the book *Crocodile Beat* by Gail Jorgensen sparked us to go on an African safari. We cut pictures of jungle animals out of magazines and hung them on the back of the sofa. We made a jeep out of a box and some small chairs, draped pieces of rope over the furniture for vines, and grabbed our toilet-paper-tube binoculars.

Activity Corner

Oobleck

Make this recipe to experiment with solids and liquids. Oobleck feels like a solid when squeezed and a liquid when held loosely.

1 1/2 cups corn starch

1 cup water

Mix in mixing bowl with spoon or hands.

These are just a few examples of how I encouraged my children’s pretend play. You and your children can come up with more. Break out the boxes and blankets and have a great time!

Farol Nelson is an instructor of early childhood education and is a Master Teacher in the Adele and Dale Young Child Development Laboratory at Utah State University. At home, her musician husband, three diverse children, dogs, and horses keep her learning and laughing.

STICKS AND STONES MAY
Words Do Hurt
BREAK MY BONES, BUT WORDS
What Parents Can Teach Their Children
WILL NEVER HURT ME.
by Deborah Byrnes

“Fatty!” “Four-eyes!” “Stupid!” “Chink!” “We don’t want you to play!” Whether our child is the victim or the perpetrator, parents are usually distressed to hear children use such hurtful words. By understanding why children engage in name calling and by responding thoughtfully to such events, we can help both the name caller and the victim.

Isn’t Name Calling Just Part of Childhood?

Name calling doesn’t have to be part of childhood. Children need to learn that words do hurt—every bit as much as physical pain. In fact, the memory and pain of being called names is often carried far into adulthood. You can help children understand that words don’t cut or bruise the skin, but they do hurt people on the inside where it doesn’t show. If your child engages in name calling, talk to them about the circumstances under which the name calling occurred and encourage the child to find another way to express his or her anger or hurt. Explain that name calling hurts people and doesn’t help fix problems.

Why Are Children Likely to Use Name Calling or Hurtful Words?

Out of ignorance of the impact of his or her words

Children may be uncomfortable or curious when they see people who look or act differently from themselves. They may use derogatory words to describe the difference. “How come that kid looks weird?” may be blurted out when first seeing a child who has a physical difference. This is a perfect opportunity to talk about differences. Children need to realize that people are not all alike and that we can enjoy learning about how people are different. Explain to your children that we often think people are strange because what they do or how they look is unfamiliar to us. We don’t think what we do or how we look is strange because that is what we are used to. To avoid hurting others, we can tell children to ask us quietly or privately about differences that they observe in the people around them.

Because of anger

Children may use name calling because they want to punish or get a reaction from a person they are angry at. Because they have been good observers of the culture, they use a name that they know carries the power to hurt. Young children may use names that do not even match the characteristics of the person they are trying to hurt. The child knows that the word can be used to hurt others, so he or she uses it without understanding the meaning. In such instances it is important for the parent to focus on the use of name calling to hurt others rather than focusing on the inaccuracy of the term. Let the child know that name calling is unacceptable, and help him or her to think of other ways to deal with his or her feelings.

To feel powerful and important

A child may call someone else “stupid” to mask his or her own insecurities and show others that he or she is better than the victim. Sometimes a child will put another child down with a name to mask his or her own hurt at being left out or rejected. Acknowledge the child’s feelings, and help the child to come up with alternative ways to interact. A parent might say, “It sounds like you are [hurt, angry, upset], but name calling is not okay. What could you do differently next time you feel this way?”

To gain acceptance

If high-status friends use put-down words, a child might do the same to feel accepted and show support for friends. Parents can explain to their child that it is not okay to put others down, even if friends do it. Help your child to empathize with the victim. Ask your child these questions:

“How do you think the victim of the name calling felt?”
“Did you feel good about saying that?”
“What else could you have done?”

Encourage your child to act differently in the future. Role play situations with your child to give practice saying things like, “I don’t like name calling. It’s not playing fair,” or “Just leave him alone.”

Correcting a Child’s Thinking

Name calling can involve naïve or illogical thinking on the part of the child. If a young child puts down whole groups of people, it is important to carefully correct his or her thinking without making the child feel defensive. For example, a father has just been confronted by a very



Activity Corner

Woodworking

Tools are interesting to children because they see adults using them. Providing boys and girls with child size tools and wood scraps creates an opportunity for them to learn woodworking as well as develop motor skills and creativity. Their eyes, hands, and muscles work together as they create.

angry 6-year-old daughter who says, “I don’t like Wu; she’s Chinese.” (This statement has occurred after she has clearly had a rather upsetting play date with her friend Wu.) The father might respond with some of the following ideas: “I know you are angry at Wu, but when you say ‘I don’t like Wu; she’s Chinese,’ it sounds like you know all the people in the world from China and you don’t like any of them. You can only like or dislike people you know. There are people you don’t like to play with because they do things you don’t like, but being from China has nothing to do with it. It is okay to say that you are angry with your friend Wu, but we don’t judge people we don’t know.”

What Do I Say When My Child Is Called Names?

When a child has been put down by someone else’s language, it is important for the child not to internalize the negative message he or she received. The message is, “You are a bad or unacceptable person because you are [dark skinned, poor, Jewish].” Talk with the child and assure him or her that it was wrong for the other child to say such things. Help your child understand that some children have not yet learned that calling people names because of the way they look or behave is wrong. You may explain that children call people names because they are angry, confused, or unsure of themselves; and they have not learned better ways to deal with their feelings. You may also point out that it is silly and unfair to hurt people because of how they look, where they live, or what they wear. Help the child to see the problem as belonging to the name caller, not to him or her.

If name calling or exclusion is a frequent problem at school, talk with your child’s teacher and let him or her know what is occurring. Teachers can implement character-education lessons that will help all the children in the class be more sensitive to and accepting of each other. There are numerous children’s books that can be used by parents or teachers to open discussions on this topic. Here are a few titles that should be easy to find in most school or public libraries:

Amazing Grace by M. Hoffman

Crowboy by T. Yashima

Chrysanthemum by K. Henkes

The Sneetches by Dr. Seuss

You Look Ridiculous, Said the Rhinoceros to the

Hippopotamus by B. Waber

Practicing What We Preach

As we work with our children to be respectful of others, we must make sure that we model this behavior. If people use bigoted language around you or your child, don’t ignore it. Children need to know that such behavior is unacceptable even when it comes from a relative or respected adult. A calmly stated response such as, “Please don’t use such language around me or my child,” “I’m uncomfortable with that word because it is hurtful to others,” or “That kind of joke is not funny to me,” should get the point across. Later you may want to share why the word or words were not respectful of others. If your child asks why Grandma or Aunt Ceily would say such a thing, you might say, “A lot of wrong ideas about people have been causing problems for a long time. It’s sad when people make others feel bad because of [the color of their skin, their religion, their weight]. People grow up with these ideas, and it’s hard to get rid of them. But when a lot of children like you grow up, fewer and fewer people will believe such things. In the mean time, we can help others learn that it isn’t fair or kind to say such things.” This kind of message helps children know that they can help overcome racism, sexism, and other forms of bigotry.

Deborah Byrnes is an elementary education professor at Utah State University. She has published numerous books and articles on anti-bias education.

Misconceptions About Food, Eating, and Children

by Kristine Saunders

Eating often becomes an issue between parents and children at some time. Many times the first eating battles will be fought when a child is still a toddler. Parents are afraid that without some guidelines or restrictions, their child will starve or become malnourished. In striving to provide “perfect” food for our children, several misconceptions about food, eating, and children have developed among parents.

- | | |
|-------|--|
| False | Parents are totally responsible for what and how much a child eats. |
| True | It is the parent’s job to provide appropriate food and the child’s job to decide whether to eat and how much to eat. |

Instead of allowing a child to have some independence when it comes to how much food to eat, parents tend to impose restrictions. Ellen Satter, who wrote *How to Get Your Kid to Eat... But Not Too Much*, says that it is helpful to divide feeding into two jobs. It is the parent’s job to provide appropriate food and the child’s job to decide whether to eat and how much to eat. Experience tells us that it is almost impossible to force someone to eat something not wanted. However, parents often get caught up in trying to. For example, a parent might say, “You need to eat three spoonfuls before you can get down from the table.” When an adult offers food in a positive way, it becomes the child’s job to figure out how much to eat.

- | | |
|-------|--|
| False | Children need to be rewarded for trying new foods. |
| True | Keep offering a variety of foods and wait for the child to decide when to try something new. |

It is common for adults to offer rewards to children if they will try new foods. If you experiment with this idea, you will most likely find that the child who was rewarded is less likely to go back to the new food than the child who was left alone. During the growing years, most children will go through a stage where they will only eat one food. If this happens, don’t drive yourself nuts trying to get your child to try new foods. Keep offering new foods, and wait for the child to decide when to try them. Offering a food over and over increases a child’s awareness of that food. Getting them to taste it improves the likelihood that they will try it again. It may be helpful to assure the child that he or she can spit the food out if it tastes really bad. In most homes the eating habits of parents are the most significant influence on the acceptance or rejection of foods in their children.

One caution: Don’t allow your child to fill up on snack foods and between meal treats. Trying to get a child that isn’t hungry to try a new food is a waste of time. However, if you continue to offer a hungry child the same foods over and over, the child will eventually try something new. The trick is to be patient, persistent, and not to use pressure.

- | | |
|-------|---|
| False | Desserts and/or sweets are good to use as rewards. |
| True | Do not make desserts and sweets special foods by using them as rewards. |

Generally, this practice creates the idea that there are good foods and bad foods. For example, if you promise a child dessert for eating broccoli, the lesson learned is that dessert is good and broccoli is bad. This practice also increases the value of the rewarded food and implies that some foods are special. Instead of promising dessert if dinner is eaten, try putting a moderate serving of dessert at each plate when you set the table. Let the child decide when to eat it. You may find that the dessert is eaten first, but the child then discovers that he or she is still hungry and eats the rest of the meal. It is parents who value dessert. If eating everything on your plate is the way to get dessert, the child may get full on dinner and then overeat to have that special food. I wonder what would happen if a child was rewarded with broccoli for eating ice cream.

- False It is okay for children to drink juice and milk in a bottle or sipper cup all day.
- True Plain water is the best beverage for quenching thirst.

Some parents think that juice is a nutritionally superior food, and because of its superiority children benefit from drinking it all day. What happens with children who drink too much juice? They fill up on juice and aren't hungry at mealtimes. Another problem is that the kind of juice often chosen is apple juice. Upon reading the Nutrition Facts label, it is found that apple juice is mostly carbohydrate (simple sugar) with little other nutrition unless vitamin C has been added. When children are thirsty give them water, and expect their appetite to perk up at mealtime.

Kristine S. Saunders has a Masters degree in Nutrition and Food Sciences. She is the Family Nutrition Program Coordinator for Utah State University Extension.

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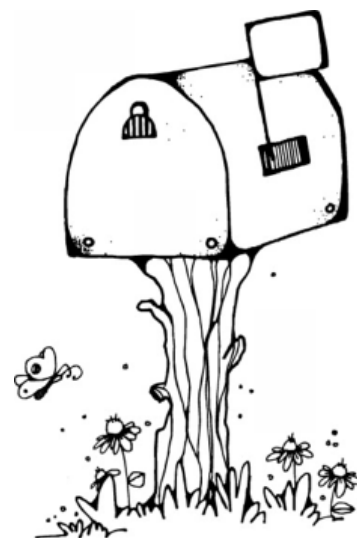
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Activity Corner

Ideas on the Internet for Teaching Your Children Science

<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/science/index.html> Teaches about important science concepts and experiments that can be tried at home.

<http://www.spe.sony.com/tv/kids/beakman/beakmain.html> Based on the television show *Beakman's World*.

<http://www.nyelabs.kcts.org> Based on *Bill Nye the Science Guy*, a popular science program for children.

<http://www.place.scholastic.com/magicschoolbus/index.htm> This site is based on *The Magic School Bus*, a science literature series for children.

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Activity Corner

Favorite Children's Books

Infants & Toddlers

Reading is beneficial to children even before birth. You will notice that infants are especially attracted to vivid pictures. Many books are now published on durable board to withstand the tendency of little ones to put things in their mouths.

The Cheerios Play Book by L. Wade

Good Night Moon by M. Brown

This Little Piggy illustrated by J. Manning

Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear and other Reader's

Digest Children's Books

TOOT! by T. Gomi



3 – 5 years

Amazon Alphabet by M. and T. Jordan

Ben's Trumpet by R. Isadora

Mystery of the Missing Red Mitten by S. Kellogg, et al

Pretend You're a Cat by J. Marzollo

The Red Balloon by A. Lamorisse

Tacky the Penguin by H. Lester

The Very Hungry Caterpillar and other E. Carle books

6 – 8 years

Ben's Trumpet by R. Isadora

Chameleons Are Cool by M. Jenkins

Frog and Toad Together and other A. Lobel books

The Lotus Seed by S. Garland

Mrs. Mack by P. Pollaco

Red Ranger Came Calling by B. Breathed

The Velveteen Rabbit by M. Williams

Weird Parents by A. Wood