



TOP
Tips on Parenting
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From the Editor

Dear Parents,

The Emma Eccles Jones Center for Early Childhood Education is a new entity in the College of Education at Utah State University. The mission of the Center is to meet the interests and needs of parents and teachers of young children (birth to age eight). We hope our first publication of *TOP: Tips on Parenting* is of use to you. It is written specifically for parents and includes important and interesting information from experts in education and child development. The topics that will be addressed in coming issues include: discipline, helping your children deal with conflict, health issues, social/emotional development, language development, reading with your child, and more. I hope you enjoy the first edition of *TOP: Tips on Parenting*, and that you will use the form on the back of this edition to receive it regularly.

Early Childhood Education – The Journey of A Lifetime

By Jay A. Monson

How well I remember being enrolled in a course at the University of Utah a number of years ago and having Professor Marie Hughes open up my vision to the great importance of education during the early years of a child's life. Her research showed that the first four years of life are the most critical for human development—more than one-half of all a person “knows” is in place *before* a child ever comes to school. “Wow?” was my reaction. During my own 35+ years in the field of education since that time, I am firmly convinced of the truth of this statement. I have especially seen its truth rearing nine children of our own with my wife, and now meddling in raising twelve grandchildren. *The early years of a child's life are unquestionably the most important years for learning!*

Dr. Glenn Doman, an author and scientist, summed up his research in the book *How to Teach Your Baby to Read*. He wrote, “The newborn child is almost an exact duplicate of an empty computer, although superior to such a computer in almost every way. ... What is placed in the child's brain during the first eight years of life is probably there to stay. If you put misinformation into the brain during this period, it is extremely difficult to erase it.”

This isn't meant to convey that children are empty vessels waiting to be filled. Rather, it is meant to convey the importance of the first years of life. Children's experiences during their first years of life will leave lasting impressions. Such research arouses renewed emphasis for every parent, care giver, and adult who spends time with young children. Children learn a tremendous amount from their experiences with significant people in their lives—parents, grandparents, siblings, and teachers.

Years of Promise: A Comprehensive Learning Strategy for America's Children, a Carnegie Report on the welfare and education of children, identifies the early years as a time when children are undergoing rapid emotional, social, and intellectual development. Their attitudes about themselves and toward school are taking shape during these years; and for most children, there's still time to make up for any earlier problems they may have had, the report says. The report warns that all children—regardless of family background or income level—can slip into a pattern of underachievement. It notes that two-thirds of all dropouts are not poor at the time they leave school.

What can parents do to help their child during this most important learning time?

1. Assure that your child has a safe and nurturing environment in which to grow and explore. A safe environment includes freedom from on-going fears of others in close proximity, a warm and inviting home where a child likes to be. A

nurturing environment includes the basics of food, clothing, shelter, and much more. Books, child-oriented games, pictures, plants (growing things), animals, and space identified for the child's personal belongings are all important.

2. Create nutritious meals designed around the food pyramid and with special consideration for children's developing physical needs during these early years. This includes limiting sweets and fats (pop, candy, cookies, Twinkies, and chips) and substituting fresh fruit, yogurt, whole grain bread, juice, and even vegetables! A Public Health Department or County Extension Agent can assist with guidelines for doing this.
3. Read with and to your child. An excellent time is each night as part of a bedtime routine. Have books and other quality reading materials readily available in your home. A book bag of several favorites in the car is great for entertainment purposes and makes the trip go much faster. It is fun on short trips too. Also, be sure your child sees you reading. Your own love of good books will do much to assist your child in developing a life-long love of learning from the printed page.
4. If your child is in school, talk with the teacher, be involved in school, volunteer in some way to assist with what is going on in the classroom. Don't wait to be asked. Contact the teacher and see if there is some way you can assist with your child's learning. If it can't be in the classroom due to other responsibilities at home or work, there are many other ways to assist.
5. Talk with your child, daily if possible, about what is happening in school. This includes the regular school curriculum for early childhood students—play, friends, music, movement; as well as reading, writing, numbers, etc.
6. Look for educational toys and learning games instead of rushing to purchase the latest children's toy. Good choices may include blocks, Duplos™, Tinkertoys™, plenty of art supplies, and a box of dress-up clothes. These are some of the materials which can be used creatively to support a range of play themes.
7. Most importantly, remember that you are your child's most significant teacher. You will always be number one in influencing your son or daughter during the all-important early years. No one can or should take your place. Thus, first and foremost is the need for "quality time," with your son or daughter. Parents mean-to-do-better, but often don't interact with their children because they are so

busy. However, many tasks done at home could be done *with* children if parents are willing to include them and take a little longer getting them done. Children can help cook, sort laundry, shovel snow, and grocery shop. The idea here is to work together so that parent/child interactions and conversations can occur.

Congratulations upon doing what you are doing right now. Continue to seek out further information from sources such as this newsletter and community agencies to further assist you in this wonderful opportunity of rearing a child!

Earnest L. Boyer said in 1993, as President of the Carnegie Foundation of the Advancement of Teaching, "Children are our most precious resource. In the end, they're all we have. And if we as a nation cannot help the coming generation, if we cannot prepare all children for learning and for life, then just what will bring America together."

Quality early childhood education can make a difference. It begins with each parent, then to the extended family, on to the neighborhood, the school, and beyond. Life moves in one direction. Each day we make decisions as we are faced with the day's agenda. It is of little value to worry about what might have been or what we might have done. *What is* is what matters; we are now. From this point we can ignore this great opportunity or decide to become a significant person in the life of a child. Hopefully you will jump aboard for one of life's great journeys. It is worth the ride! Most other things pale in comparison.

Jay A. Monson, EdD, father, grandfather, former public school teacher, principal, county commissioner, member of State Board of Education, is currently a Professor at Utah State University.

Activity Corner

Block Building

Building with blocks gives children a great opportunity to think, plan, and problem solve as they freely work with their hands to create a block structure. As they build with blocks, they are learning about the shape, weight, and size of different blocks. Sometimes they must count or sort the blocks in order to create a structure. Block building encourages creative thinking as children make their structure unique, and sometimes it requires problem solving if they have difficulty getting it to balance. So, take time to enjoy block building with your children!

How to Provide Positive Emotional Support for Your Child When Someone Special Dies

- **Set aside special times to be with your child.**
He or she may be feeling lonely and afraid. Give attention to both verbal and body language. If your child doesn't seem to care, it may be because he or she is having a hard time handling the strong feelings of grief.
- **Listen carefully.**
Let your child talk about what they want to talk about. Although you may not want to hear them, all of our child's feelings are valid and need to be expressed. You don't have to agree; just let the child know that you hear them.
- **Allow all feelings.**
It is natural for your child to be upset and behave differently after the death of someone special. There are no "wrong" feelings, but there is unacceptable behavior. Encourage talking, not acting out.
- **Relate to your child on their level.**
Use words and concepts that are right for the age and development of your child. The child's concept of death may be very different from yours.
- **Let your child be a part of the family grieving process.**
Don't try to "protect" the child by hiding the fact of physical death. Attendance at a funeral service can be an important experience of closure. Children need to say their goodbyes.
- **Talk Honestly.**
Children are curious about death and want the truth. It is OK for children to see adults showing emotion. This gives them permission to express their own feelings.
- **Explain that death is not like sleep.**
Children often worry that they will not wake up.

Emotional Intelligence Makes a Difference: Teaching your Child Emotional Skills

By Delphine Rossi

Early childhood is ideally a time of innocence, happiness, and joy. It is during these years that parents provide their children with important opportunities to grow in healthy ways. Meeting our children's

Activity Corner

Johnny Appleseed Sandwich

Let your child help you core an apple and slice it into thin slices. Spread one slice with peanut butter and place another slice of apple on top to make a sandwich.

- **Explain that physical death is final.**
This may be difficult for your child to understand.
- **Explain that death is not a punishment.**
Neither the child nor the deceased is being punished for anything they have done.
- **Provide security.**
Children often worry that another special person will also die. The child should know that there will always be someone to care for him or her.
- **Assure your child that she or he is not the cause.**
Your child may feel that he or she was the reason the person died.
- **Do not permit your own grief to damage your relationship with your child.**
Small family problems may become magnified when you are upset.
- **Allow time for healing.**
It takes time to process grief and each child will do that in his/her own way and time. Seek help for yourself. Adults often need as much or more support than children do.
- **Professional services.**
It is OK for you not to have all the answers. Discuss your concerns with a helping professional. He or she can provide valuable guidance. Attend parent training programs whenever possible.

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physical and emotional needs is essential if we are to help them reach their developing potential. As Daniel Goleman, author of the best-selling book, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It May Matter More Than IQ*, explains, attending to our children's emotional needs does much more than provide them with a sense of well-being. Indeed, children who learn certain emotional skills early in life may experience greater success in school, in their future jobs, and in life in general. In other words, Goleman's philosophy is that

Activity Corner

Soap Flake Finger-paint

Try this recipe for making finger-paint with your children. They will learn about measuring as they help you mix the ingredients and will enjoy creating the colors for their paint.

1 ½ cups dry laundry starch 1 ½ cups soap flakes
1 quart boiling water food coloring or tempera paint

Mix the starch with enough cold water to make a paste. Add the boiling water and stir it until the mixture is clear. Let it cool. Stir in the soap flakes and food coloring. Store the finger-paint in a cool place.

a child's emotional skills may predict their life success more than their intelligence quota.

The emotional skills Goleman identifies as important to the successful emotional development of children are: self-awareness, control of impulsive behavior, motivation, empathy (the ability to feel for others), and social skills (managing relationships). These skills are ideally learned in the infant and toddler years as children interact with their family and significant others. Dr. T. Berry Brazelton, distinguished pediatrician, believes the emotional skills children learn before entering elementary school have a surprising effect on scholastic success.

Let's take a look at a few examples of emotional skill development. Empathy, the ability to know how another feels or to feel with another, is a skill that develops during infancy when the infant's emotions are accepted and reciprocated by the mother. In other words, the infant and mother have connected on an emotional level. This enables the infant to feel love and acceptance, establishing a healthy foundation for the child's emotional development. Conversely, infants and toddlers who have been emotionally abused and maltreated tend to behave like their abusive parents. Growing up with a lack of empathy, they hit, fight, throw tantrums, and yell. These battered toddlers are at high risk for many health- and education-related problems during their elementary school years and beyond. Potential problems include aggressive behavior, fighting, unpopularity in school, learning difficulties, truancy, poor grades, depression, and substance abuse.

Another important social skill that children need to learn is how to manage relationships. Children first develop relationships within their families. Within these family relationships, children need to have their

feelings accepted by their parents. When parents show indifference to their emotional needs, children begin to feel vulnerable. They may begin to avoid expressing and sharing feelings, which may result in a lack of the skills necessary for healthy relationships. The lack of such social skills can be identified by the rising rates of depression among American children during the past decade. This indicates that children's emotional needs are not being met. Such children are at risk of being alone often, not making friends easily, feeling unloved, daydreaming, moodiness, and a range of possible disruptive behaviors.

How can parents and families help their young children grow up to be emotionally healthy? The family relationship is the most important and influential emotional connection our children have as they enter the world. Both the joys and scars that develop in the early years carry over throughout their lifetimes. Here are a few simple ways to help your children to learn emotional skills and *reach their potential*:

- Make your children's emotional life a priority! Families today are much busier and more hurried than in the past. As parents, we need to make a conscious effort to put our children's emotional lives first.
- Begin by taking the time to give your child your complete attention. Read to your child, tell stories, play a game, draw and color, take a walk. Talk to your child about things that interest him or her.
- Learn to be a good listener. Recognize emotions your child is trying to express. If your child is upset, sit down and discuss what is happening. What emotions is your child feeling? Why is your child feeling these emotions? How can you help your child resolve these emotions?
- Communicate with your child. Ask your children to express their feelings and emotions. Express your feelings and emotions too.
- Accept your child's feelings and emotions. Begin with an "I" statement, and address the problem. Here are some examples: (1) Your son is angry because he cannot go out to play after dark. To show that you accept his feelings, you can say, "I understand that you are angry because I won't let you play outside now. You can play with your sister now, and tomorrow you can play with your friends." (2) Your daughter is upset because a playmate took the toy she was playing with. You can respond by saying, "I understand that you are

upset that Mark took your toy. Let's ask Mark if he will ask, 'Please may I use your toy?' before he takes it from you. Then the two of you can take turns playing with it." (3) Your son is upset because you won't let him have a cookie. You can show your understanding by saying, "I understand that you are angry because I won't let you have a cookie. I will let you have an apple now, and you may have a cookie after dinner."

- Commit yourself to enhancing your child's emotional life. Talk about feelings and emotions daily with your child. Ask, "How are you feeling?" If your child says, "I don't know," then give him or her some feeling words to help describe

the emotion. For example, "Do you feel lonely, sad, disappointed?" It is most often the difficult feelings that children and adults have trouble identifying. Happy feelings need little coaxing and are often shared easily.

Remember, be patient and positive with your children to help them learn the emotional skills they need to reach their potential!

Delphine Rossi, M.S., CHES, is a lecturer in Health Education and the coordinator of the School Health Education Program at Utah State University. She has extensive experience in the public schools teaching Health Education K-12.

Pretend Play Can Help Your Child Learn to Read

By Martha Dever

As parents, we want our children to learn to read. If your children are in school, teachers have undoubtedly advised you to read to them regularly because it helps them learn to read. This is excellent advice; you should also know that participating in pretend play will help your children learn to read.

You see, as we read, the words have meaning for us because they represent people, objects or events that are familiar. For example, when a reader comes to the word *cat*, an image of a small, furry, quiet, tame animal comes to mind. While personal experiences may bring slightly different images to mind, members of our English speaking society generally agree on the meaning of the word *cat* when they encounter it in a book.

In a similar way, as children play they assign meaning to objects, events, and people that are familiar to them to create a play story. For example, a child might decide to become a mom or doctor, use a paper towel roll as a magic wand, use a hanger placed on the arm as a purse, or declare that it is Christmas time in June. In other words, as they pretend they are creating a story by representing things that are familiar to them.

Thus as children participate in pretend play, they are thinking in a way that will help them eventually become readers. Since pretend play supports children's development as readers, it is important to provide them with that opportunity in your home. Following are some guidelines for creating pretend play settings for your children.

- Provide a few realistic play props to help children create a story. A small table, some dishes, and discarded food boxes will help them create a story in a restaurant setting. A customer will order food, a server will write the order, and a cook will create the meal. This is a good opportunity for children to engage in pretend reading and writing.
- Provide some abstract props such as discarded boxes, paper towel rolls, jar lids, plastic containers, etc. so that children can assign meaning to these objects. Discarded phone books, magazines, tablets, and writing implements will encourage children to pretend to read and write during play.
- Read often to your children about a variety of topics. Reading is an important activity, and it gives children ideas for their play.
- Give the children at least 30 minutes to play. It takes time to create, develop, and play out a story.
- Provide readily available space for play so that children will feel welcome to engage in play activity daily.
- Vary the availability of props to enhance children's interest in play.
- Children learn from each other, so invite friends to play. You can play with them yourself to show the purpose of reading and writing during play. For example, you might ring the doorbell and pretend you are the mail carrier with pretend mail, or write a prescription when you pretend you are the doctor.

Pretend play is an extremely valuable activity for children which supports their growth and development in many ways. Encourage your children to engage in pretend play daily.

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