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1-1-2003

23 Months

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Recommended Citation
Cudaback, Dorothea and Schneck, Betsy R., "23 Months" (2003). *All Archived Publications.* Paper 481.
http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/extension_histall/481

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GREAT BEGINNINGS

A Series for Parents of Young Children

23 MONTHS

Build Your Child's Self-Esteem

A child's self-esteem is his overall judgment of himself. It determines whether or not he likes, accepts, and respects himself. One of the most important challenges you face is to help your child feel good about himself.

Start early. Children begin very early to form either a positive or negative picture of themselves. You can help your child feel good about himself by telling him that you like who he is and you like the way he does things.

Use smiles and words. Let him know when you think he does a good job putting blocks in a bucket—or dumping them out of the bucket. Thank him for putting napkins on the table, or hanging his towel up. Show him with smiles as well as words.

Focus on the positive. Tell your child what to do rather than what not to do. Instead of saying, "Don't carry the cat that way" say, "Carry your cat like this." He'll feel like a success rather than a failure.

Listen with care! Listen to what he says and respond to his questions. Take time to understand his feelings, his joys, and his fears. You are showing him that his ideas and feelings are important. All this will help him to feel important and capable. You are helping him develop the self-confidence to become responsible and successful.

What's It Like to Be 23 Months Old?

How I Grow

- I can pedal a small tricycle.
- I can throw a ball into a wastebasket.
- I can walk down stairs alone, both feet on one step at a time holding on to the railing.
- I usually like to run more than I like to walk.

How I Talk

- I can ask questions just to keep the conversation going.
- I can answer some questions such as, "What is your name?" "What does the dog say?" "What does the cat say?"

What I Have Learned

- I can sit and *read* picture books, turning the pages for myself.
- I can put together a puzzle of three to six pieces.

How I Get Along with Others

- I still don't understand sharing, but I like to be with other children for short periods of time.
- I like to please others.
- I am interested in babies and their mothers.
- I am afraid of disapproval and rejection.

What I Can Do for Myself

- I can take off all my clothes and I can put most of my clothes back on.
- I like to unwrap packages.
- I know what a toilet is for, but I probably don't want to use it yet.

Play I Enjoy

- I like to play simple chase games like tag.
- A teddy bear or soft doll is still my favorite toy.
- I like to take things apart and put them together. Watch out that I don't play with small pieces that could choke me.

> Children can be very different from each other. Don't worry if your child is "early" or "late" in growth. Look for your child's growth in each area. Encourage each new ability. If you are concerned about your child's development, talk with your doctor.

Research shows that the way parents and caregivers help their children develop language skills influences their children's intellectual development. Children who are most intelligent have parents or other caregivers who talk to them a lot, encourage their use of language and do things with them that helps them learn and practice language. Keep talking and listening!

Homemade Toys that Teach: A Shape Board

This toy can help children learn about shapes and about similarities and differences.

Materials:

- Cardboard sheet about 8 1/2 by 11 inches
- A bright colored crayon
- White paper

Making the Toy: Draw and color in simple shapes on the cardboard with colored crayon, a circle, a square, a triangle, and a star. Then draw, color, and cut out matching shapes from white paper.

Playing: Show your child how to match the cut-out shapes to the shapes drawn on the board. Talk about the pieces, naming their shapes. Ask her to put the star on the star, the circle on the circle, the square on the square, and so on.

Remember, play this and any game only as long as it is fun for both of you. Encourage and praise your child's efforts; do not criticize her failures.

Be Good to Yourself: Good Parent-Bad Parent

Parents often think they aren't doing a **good** job if their children don't act the way they **should**. No matter how good you are as a parent, your child will misbehave.

Think positive. If you feel responsible for all your child's misbehavior, you will feel stress. That stress is hard on you and can cause you to be hard on your child. This will make things worse for both of you. Instead of criticizing yourself, try to give yourself some positive messages.

For example, sometimes parents think, "If I were a good mother or father, my child wouldn't be having so many tantrums." How about telling yourself and your child, "We got through that trip to the store without any fussing at all!"

Remember: No one is perfect. Young children need parents who try their best, but that doesn't mean we can succeed 100 percent of the time. We all make mistakes. When you're not feeling okay, do try your best but don't worry that you are not a super parent.

Give yourself and your child credit for the good times, and understand that nobody is perfect.

Toddler Talk: Give Me Lots of Different Experiences

- Make up a song or a story. Use my name and change the words to match my actions or

feelings. This may help me calm down when I am cranky.

- Sing songs like "Rain, Rain, Go Away" and "Mary Had a Little Lamb." These simple songs will be easy for me to copy. I won't really be able to sing until I'm closer to 3 years old.
- Let me smell some sweet smelling spices like cloves, curry powder, cinnamon. Watch me closely so I don't eat them.
- Look at the sky at night with me. Point out the clouds, the moon, the stars.
- Keep me interested in my toys by dividing them into two boxes and switching boxes every week.

Health: A New Immunization for Toddlers

Each year in the United States, thousands of children suffer from Hib meningitis, which is an inflammation of the covering of the brain caused by Hib bacteria. The disease is commonly called spinal meningitis. It can cause brain damage and is believed to be one of the most common causes of mental retardation in young children who were normal at birth.

The Hib bacteria is spread from person to person. Hib meningitis can strike any child, but children who attend child care centers and have contact with more children are at greater risk than children who stay home.

Hib meningitis is a mandatory immunization given at 18 months. Most departments of health require that all children 18 months and older receive the shot.

Games for Growing:

Color Learning

Purpose of the Game: To help your child learn to match colors and begin to learn their names.

How to Play:

- Sit in a comfortable position on the floor or sofa facing your child.
- Select five blocks or other objects of different colors.
- Place two blocks of different colors in front of your child.
- Point to a block and say, "This is red."
- Ask your child to give you the red block.
- Ask your child to say the color of the block she handed to you.
- Use only two colors at a time, but change the colors. For example, start with blue and red together, then switch to blue and green.
- Tell your child the name of the new color only. See if your child can remember the name of the other color.
- Learning colors takes a long time. Start with just 1-2 colors, and add another color when the old ones have been learned.

Other Color Games

Have your child tell you the names of colors in stoplights or on television, in magazines, or on signs. Put together different things that are of the same color and ask your child what is the same about them. Help your child use crayons or colored pictures to learn the names of the colors.

Get Ready for Toilet Training

Most girls are ready for toilet training at about age 2, most boys at about 2 1/2. You should not rush toilet training but there are some things you can do when you think your child is ready to be trained to use the toilet.

Start with the words. Teach your child the words he needs to ask to go to the toilet. A good time to do this is when you change his diaper. Tell him why you are changing him, "You peed (or urinated) and made your diapers wet" or "You had a BM (or pooped or bowel movement)." Show him and tell him the word for the toilet or potty chair you will want him to use.

Make it as easy as possible. Some children will let you know when they need to go to the toilet by saying the words, pulling your hand, or tugging at their diaper. When they are ready for training, it helps to dress them in loose-fitting training pants they can pull off easily.

Compliment good behavior. When your child shows he wants to go to the toilet, sit with him at least the first few times. Don't give him toys to play with and don't insist that he sit on the toilet when he wants to get off—even if he has not "done" anything. Always compliment him for his successes; don't criticize or punish his accidents.

Winning Ways to Talk with Young Children

Good communication helps children develop confidence, feelings of self-worth, and good relationships with others. It makes life with them more pleasant and helps them grow into adults who have good feelings about themselves and others.

Communication is what we say and how we say it. We communicate with looks (frowns or smiles), with actions (slaps or hugs), with silence (warm or cold) as well as with words (kind or unkind).

Use kind words to encourage and build up a child. Kind words bring happy results! They give children more self-confidence and encourage them to behave better, try harder, and achieve more. Kind words communicate love and respect, and create an atmosphere in which problems can be discussed openly and understanding reached.

Suppose a child has spilled milk on the floor. You can say, "Don't be so clumsy! Just look at the mess you made!"—which leads to unhappy feelings. Or you can say, "Here is a sponge. Please wipe up the milk."—with happy results.

Examples of kind words:

- Thank you for helping me clean off the table.
- You did a good job of putting on your socks.
- That really makes me feel good.
- I love you.
- I like the way you remembered to hang up your coat.

Use "I-Messages" to communicate your thoughts and feelings. I-messages are statements of fact. They tell children how their behavior makes an adult feel. Often children don't know how their behavior affects others. I-messages are much more effective than you-messages when a child misbehaves.

I-messages give children the responsibility for changing their own behavior. Which sounds better?

I-Message

- I need help picking things up now.
- I don't feel like reading a story when I'm tired.
- I get upset when I see mud on the floor.
- I can't hear you with all that screaming.
- I don't understand.

You-Message

- You surely made a mess.
- You're a pest.
- You ought to be ashamed.
- You'd better shut up!
- You're dumb.

Use *You-Messages* to reflect a child's ideas and feelings. You-messages describe children's feelings and encourage them to express troublesome feelings.

Examples:

- You are sad because your dog died.
- You are upset because I have to go shopping.
- You are mad because Jenny wouldn't let you play with her new doll.

Actions can be labeled good or bad, but not feelings. Feelings are neither good nor bad—they simply exist. When children are allowed to express their feelings freely, they learn how to handle feelings in healthy ways.

Hiding feelings is self-destructive. Feelings do not disappear. People who avoid dealing with their feelings often develop symptoms including self-hate, headaches, ulcers and violent actions. Healthy people learn to recognize and deal with their feelings.

Appreciation & Thanks to the Original Authors

This issue has been adapted from **Parent Express**, by Dr. Dorothea Cudaback, Cooperative Extension, University of California, and her colleagues throughout the national Cooperative Extension System. The "Winning Ways To Talk With Young Children" article was adapted from materials prepared by Dr. Betsy R. Schneck for the Virginia Cooperative Extension System.

Appreciation is expressed to Dr. Patricia Tanner Nelson, Cooperative Extension, University of Delaware for computerizing this series of "age paced newsletters" and for permission to reprint for parents in Utah.

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Robert L. Gilliland, Vice President and Director, Cooperative Extension Service, Utah State University. (2-95)