

# Family Development

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**Child Development: The Process of Becoming**



# The Relationship Dance

by LaWanda Albright

**W**hat are your dreams for your children? Do you want them to be healthy? Have good friends? Be successful in school? To be curious? To be well behaved? Have the resiliency to successfully cope with the obstacles they may face throughout life? Whatever you may wish for them, there is one thing you can do to start your children down that path. Research has shown that healthy parent-child relationships are key to developing all aspects of a child and to maximize his potential.

During the first few months of life, your child is learning how to respond to and interact with the world and he needs you to help him. All humans seem to be wired to send and receive signals from each other that express internal emotions and others' states of mind. This is especially important for the newborn as these signals are the primary communications between parent and child, and it is this communication that helps your baby know how to respond to all the sensations he is experiencing. Your facial expressions, vocalizations, movements, timing of responses, and eye gaze communicate your understanding and feelings. The mind and patterns of communication of the parents directly shape the organization of the developing child's brain and have significant influences later in life.

As you care for your baby's basic needs, take the opportunity to interact with him and help him tune in to the world. When he is uncomfortable or unhappy, show him that you understand his distress and comfort him. This will help him learn to calm himself. When he is alert and ready for play, engage your baby and help him attend to sounds and sights through your interactions. Be sensitive to your infant's needs, mental states, and energy. Helping your newborn alter his internal states and attend to the world are the foundations for all future learning.

Gradually, your baby will learn your patterns of interaction and come to expect certain responses. He will begin to respond to your overtures more intentionally and will begin to purposefully initiate interactions. He will let you know what he wants with his own vocalizations, facial expressions, and movements. Your responses to these acts of engagement provide the foundations of logical thinking and communication skills in your baby. Get to know your baby's preferences and patterns of behavior. Is he alert when he first wakes up or does he need time before he is ready for play? Is he reluctant to try new foods or is he excited by a new toy? Your baby will delight in familiar games and will frequently want to continue much longer than you. Introduce variations on the games you play and watch to see how he responds. Slight changes in familiar games and activities help your baby become more flexible in his thinking and create new ways of responding. Follow your baby's lead and encourage him to share his feelings and interests with you. This dance between you and your baby is the foundation for his own sense of self and the understanding of basic cause and effect.



With mobility comes a sense of independence. Your toddler will still want you close by for security, but he will also want to explore the world on his own. You will need to introduce limits with firm, consistent messages. Let him know through your voice and gestures that certain behaviors are scary or dangerous. Your toddler will begin to understand that what he wants and what you want may not be the same. Help him find more appropriate ways to satisfy his sense of wonder and engage him in resolving conflicts and problems.

As your young child continues to grow and develop his skills, stay in touch. Be involved in your child's world. Take time to play, talk, and share common experiences. Challenge him to use his ideas to solve problems and create new ideas. Encourage him to express himself and explore new interests. Continue to build a healthy relationship by being emotionally available, perceptive, and responsive to your child's needs and mental states. Being responsive means not only connecting, but knowing when to back off and reconnect at a later time. Honor your child's way of being in the world and provide the emotional security necessary to integrate all of his experiences. You will be providing a solid base for your child to achieve his dreams and maximize his potential. ♥

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# Give Them Time - It's a Process not a Race

by Andrea Cameron

**T**ime. It is both a luxury and a resource. It is not an object that we can hold in our hands, yet we are constantly trying to save it, spend it, or figure out where it went. Time in relation to child development is essential. To understand why time is so crucial to a child's development and learning, we must first look at *how* a child develops and learns.

## *Quantitative and Qualitative Development*

Children develop in two ways, both quantitatively and qualitatively (Trawick-Smith, 2003). An easy way to think about quantitative development is in terms of quantity, or numbers. For example, a child grows taller and gains weight. Over time a child increases the amount of facts and information taken in about the world such as numbers and letters, the names of friends in his classroom, and how many times mom says "no!" before she really means it. Typically developing children are quick to increase the number of skills learned, and these skills are fairly easy to observe across all areas, or *domains*, of development: the physical, emotional, social, cognitive and affective domains.

Qualitative development is a little more difficult to observe, but if we take the time to do so, it can tell us a great deal about a child. In terms of qualitative development, children don't just learn new things, they learn *about* things in new ways. For example, a very young child may perceive singing the ABC's as a simple melodic song. But as the child learns that letters are symbols and that these symbols have meaning, she will come to understand the ABC's in a very different way. The meaning behind what the child already knows will change and she will change because of it; this is qualitative development (Trawick-Smith, 2003).

## *Development is a Process*

In today's day and age, very young children are expected to learn facts regarding letters, numbers, and colors at an alarming rate and often without any context to support their learning. Many preschool teachers and parents take great pride when their little ones recite flawless ABC's for the first time or count to a hundred without much help at all. Children are often expected to wield a pair of scissors with precision and accuracy, tie their shoes in double knots, and know both their phone number and address by the time they are four-years-old. However, not too long ago, these were things teachers expected children to know by first grade. And yes, some children have no problem rising to the occasion to please mom or dad and get the much deserved accolades from their adored teacher. Yet, something is being lost in this production and performance based mentality. If we slow down the pace and begin to see development as less of a race and more of a process, we will be giving our children a precious gift: the gift of time.



Teachers and caregivers who allow children to take their time to fully explore materials, to learn new skills as well as refine skills already acquired, and to build ideas, problem solve and think creatively about their world, will be promoting a child's development on a very rich, deep level. Howard Gardner (1993), the pioneer of the Multiple Intelligences theory, argues that creativity is the avenue to all intelligence. In our society, logical/mathematical and linguistic intelligences are highly valued and most often the focus of school testing. However, without opportunities for creativity and problem solving, children may never reach their full potential. Janice Beaty, author of *Preschool: Appropriate Practices*, (1991) describes development within a framework of the 3-M stages of interaction: *manipulation, mastery, and meaning*. This framework is a helpful way to understand how we as caregivers can help promote child development. It is important to note that although Beaty limits the 3-M stages of interaction to how children relate to materials, an argument can be made that children also engage in the 3-M's in their relationships with others, their physical abilities, their ideas, and in their feelings, as experienced throughout their lives.

## *The 3-M's*

The first of the 3-M's is *manipulation*. Caregivers who observe children at this stage can provide them with many

*Continued on page 4*

# Give Them Time - It's a Process not a Race

Continued from page 3



opportunities for exploration of, and exposure to, a wide variety of materials, people, and cultural experiences. The key to the manipulation stage is to truly encourage children to manipulate and explore. For some, that may mean figuring out how to hold a chubby paint brush for the first time. In the next stage, *mastery*, children begin to problem solve. For example, they figure out how much or how little paint a paint brush can hold before the paint drips in unwanted ways all over their paintings or down to their elbows. Sometimes teachers and parents can step in to guide a child by way of open-ended questions (Kostelnik, Whiren, Soderman, Stein, & Gregory, 2002) such as: *What do you think would happen if you dabbed the brush gently on the side of the container before raising it to your picture?* Or, perhaps a teacher or parent could simply explain a technique needed in order to take the child to the next level: *I'm going to show you how to roll your paint brush across the edge of the paint container so the tip of your brush is pointy and slim.* Whichever way we proceed at this stage, the goal is to help children figure out how to master their skills.

Current brain research has encouraged proponents of developmental stage theories to think beyond simple stages of development and consider that brain development and growth occurs in terms of levels and tiers that are constantly being built to support new learning (Fischer & Rose, 1998). It is this web-like building, or "mapping," of new skills that signifies how children learn about their world. Therefore, this process requires time: time for exposure and exploration, time to build skills and learn techniques, and time to *create meaning*.

The last of the 3-M's is when a child has had the opportunity to explore, manipulate, master a particular skill, and is now ready to create meaning. In this stage it is not uncommon for a painting to symbolically represent a feeling, a memorable event, or perhaps a beloved family member. This meaning making process is a time where we as caregivers can encourage children to reflect on their work or perhaps just on their ideas. This is a time when we can document what young children say about their creations, or ask about their strategies and how they solved their problems.

## *Take the time to give them time*

If we give typically developing children some scissors and require that they cut out a circle and a square, then odds are they *will* learn shape identification and how to cut with scissors. However, if you give children access to scissors, perhaps a hole punch, some tape and lots of different paper ranging in various sizes, weights and textures, and explain that we are going to make shapes, any kind of shapes their little hearts desire, amazing things are bound to happen. They will not only learn to cut circles and squares, they may also learn to recognize that our world is made up of many different kinds of shapes and many of these shapes have meaning and can be used to communicate feelings and ideas. They might learn that making shapes is just the beginning to creating a structure and that when you put pieces of cut-up, ripped-up, and even crumbled up paper together to create a tall building or paper train, it is just like putting letters together to make words and words together to make sentences, and sentences together to express ideas and feelings.

This 3-M process of how children grow and develop takes time. Time to learn about what they already know in different ways allows children to transfer what they know in one situation or context to another. Time to explore, master and create meaning promotes flexibility in thinking and creativity as well as lays down a foundation for future development and learning (Gardner, 1993). And so, give children time! Give them time to explore, manipulate, master new skills, and create meaning of their world again, and again, and again. ♥

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# Art is a Way of Knowing

by Paula Steele

When was the last time you sat down to draw or paint something? Or had the opportunity to watch a young child drawing and painting? I wonder what kinds of feelings even thinking about drawing, painting, and other art work has for you. Lately, I've been reading about children and the stages or waves of growth they go through in their artistic development. I've been to two summer camps to observe and have seen fresh examples of children's art. That experience gave me a longing for a big piece of paper, brushes and paint. I'm pretty adept at the small, controlled, representational art that comes with being an adult who has been around for some time. I've had lots of practice in various artistic realms and making things look like what they are supposed to look like. But observing children's art gave me a hankering for the freedom of unconstrained movement that results in artistic expression that is absent of premeditated thought. Picasso said, "It takes a long time to become young," and "It took me four years to paint like Raphael, but a lifetime to paint like a child." When I look at children's artistic renderings, I feel the desire to return to those moments of fresh, unconstrained learning through creative expression.

*To draw you must close your eyes and sing.* ~Picasso

Let me take you on the journey that a child takes as he begins to expand his abilities with crayon in hand. The quote leading into this paragraph is apt as that is how children frequently begin their artistic self expression. Initially, it is an exercise in movement and sound. You may have witnessed young children drawing with great intensity, humming, singing, or talking to themselves, caught up in the world of their making.

The very earliest foundation of artistic exploration begins with the grasping of the tool. Children as young as one year old are capable of holding onto a crayon with their whole hand. The big, thick ones are best for the first few years. Take the paper off so they can use both ends as well as the side of the crayon. Provide just a few bright colors right now. At this stage, you'll notice big movements of the arm.

Children don't have the small muscle control yet to manage fine movements of elbow, wrist, or finger. Because they lack small motor control, you'll also notice that the marks they make on paper are random. Very young children may not even recognize that they are the active element behind the appearance of those lines. Their arm movements and therefore their markings, are all over the place. For this reason, it's best to supply them with large sheets of paper.

There is no conscious thought given to drawing at this stage. A child may be scribbling and meowing at the same time. She has a cat in mind, but isn't necessarily making an attempt to draw one. Children at this earliest stage are not thinking about creating anything that represents anything else. It's akin to the early speech stage of babbling. That's early practice for



word formation. Scribbling is early practice for picture formation (and for writing later). As they engage in these random markings, they are developing the muscle control and hand eye coordination that they will need to be in command of directing future drawing.

By the age of two and a half to three years a child begins to gain control over her scribbles. She will be able to control her arm movements and will now have power over the placement of lines. She is using her wrist and elbow to create smaller marks. Children are now capable of making basic forms such as lines, circular forms, arcs, and loops. They have the ability to place these forms where they want them and intentionally make repeated lines. They have discovered that the marks appearing on paper are from their own hand. You will see thought applied to the placement of dots, lines, and arcs. Later you will see rectangles and squares. These are an extension of the ability to control placement and length of line.

The child is now ready for more tools. Children can use thick lead pencils and markers in a greater variety of colors. Vary the size and color of the paper as they now have greater dominion over their fine motor skills. If painting, provide a variety of brush sizes. As children gain a sense of self as creator and as their hand-eye coordination develops, their desire to create using a variety of tools expands.

Now that the budding artists are capable of reproducing forms, they enter the realm of pictures. This reflects a change in thinking. They'll notice shapes in their drawing that they see in the world. Just as the child's capacity to choose placement of line and shape on paper reflects an increased knowledge, so too the choice of shape that will represent something.

*Continued on page 6*

# Art is a Way of Knowing

Continued from page 5



Shapes become symbols for something else. A circle with lines around it is a sun; the circle with two lines extending downward represent a man. Around the age of four, as the child continues to develop her ability to relate language and symbol, the man will be named: daddy.

It's important to allow the child to name his own drawings and paintings. Earlier I mentioned that a child may be meowing as he puts marks on paper. You might then naturally assume that's what he's drawing. You then proclaim, "What a wonderful cat you have there!" You have the best intentions. You want to be supportive and maybe provide some language modeling. But, beware! His reproachful look will let you know that it is certainly NOT a cat. An older child's drawing that appears to be a field of sunflowers may in fact be a family on an outing.

It's best to stick with objective remarks. Talk about what you see on the paper. For the younger artist it may be something like, "You've put lots of marks on your paper. You have some dots and some lines. Look how this line curves." With an older, more experienced child you might say, "You've used some brilliant colors – lime green and sunny yellow. I see a zigzag line that goes all across the paper, from one corner to another. Oh! And here are some thin lines and some thick, bold ones."

Another good strategy is to ask them to tell you about the drawing or painting. It's a surprise and a delight to hear a youngster's interpretation of her own work. Also, expect that the interpretation may change. What in the moment is a fire truck (perhaps inspired by having heard one while drawing) may later on be renamed due to the events of the moment. Young children are like that.

Now you have a quick overview of what to expect from children as they develop their artistic abilities. The charts that accompany this article will give you some more information. The thing to remember is that while there are general guide-

lines for development, they are soft and vary depending on the child and on the experiences that have been made available to the child. You, as parent or as teacher, have an important role to play. You are an active agent providing children with meaningful experiences and the various materials that will be used to create. You will help the children grow and develop through your questions and comments and by prompting them to think about their work.

Yet, don't think that your efforts will result in quicker development or moving faster through the levels. Each wave of ability rests on the preceding one and each is important. A child must have the muscular and intellectual development to proceed to more refined marks and complex images. The best tactic is to allow children as much time to indulge in their creative endeavors as they want. It is not necessary to teach them how to draw a circle. They will make this discovery through the process of active engagement.

*It is not the adult's answer, but the child's striving toward his own answer that is crucial.*

~Viktor Lowenfeld & Lambert Brittain

That's what it's all about – the process and the making of art for the sake of it. There is joy in each step of the developmental process – from the simple engaging act of moving the arm, to creating marks on paper, to designing a drawing that comes straight from the child's head and heart. It takes time to become. In a child's becoming, there is growth and delight in finding out who one is and what one is capable of doing. A child's sense of self is created and recreated in each magical moment of bringing something new into their world of drawing and painting.

*Remember that art is process. The process is supposed to be fun...At the heart of this play is the mystery of joy.*

~Julia Cameron

There are many wonderful books that are inspiring and fun to read about children and art and creativity. If you want to know more, the books that I read are listed below. You may find yourself wanting to discover what lies within you even as you become enthused in your work with the children. Bring on the paper, markers, and paint! ♥

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### ART ACTIVITY DEVELOPMENTAL NORMS

Activity	6-12 months	12-18 months	18-24 months	24-30 months	30-36 months	36-42 months
Drawing	Holds, looks at, mouths crayon	Does tentative scribbles	Draws vertical, horizontal, and diagonal lines Experiments with scribbles Is interested in textures	Does freer, circular scribbles Experiments with many scribble shapes	Connects lines to enclose shapes Names shapes after drawing them	Tells stories about pictures Begins mandala experiments May draw human shapes
Clay or play dough work	Tastes and eats clay	Pinches, squeezes, and pounds on clay	Rolls snakelike coils	Makes clay balls Gives names to objects made and plays with them (cats, trains, snakes, and pancakes are favorites)	Incises decoration on clay and sticks things into it	Produces flat designs with clay Adds on, builds
Painting	Smears paint with hands and tastes it	Does body decorations Makes dabbing movements	Paints lines with a brush similar to scribbles	Continues scribbling development through paint	Paints whole areas	Entire paper covered with areas of paint

from *Young at Art*, Susan Striker, 2001.

### *Developmental Stages of Child Art, based on Kellog (1967) and Lowenfeld and Brittain (1987)*

AGE	STAGE	CHARACTERISTICS
1-4 YEARS	SCRIBBLING	
A. 1-2½	Random Scribbling	Random lines are made using the whole arm Tool held with whole hand Lines may extend beyond paper
B. 2½-3	Controlled Scribbling	Begins to use wrist motions Stays on paper; makes smaller marks Controls where lines are placed
C. 3-4½	Names Scribbles	Holds tool with fingers Can make many different lines and shapes Names scribbles, but often changes name
4-7 years	PRESCHEMATIC	Develops a set of symbols to represent concepts May not resemble or be in proportion to real objects Learns pictures communicate to others Begins to value his product

from *Growing Artists*, Joan Bouza Koster, 1997.

# Friends Give Meaning to Life

by Dorothy Kerwin and Lois Vermilya

**T**ake a few moments and think about when you were a young child...

## *What is your earliest memory of being with a friend?*

*I was 4-years old when we moved to the big house. Up until then, I had spent most of my days playing with my older brothers and younger sister. After exploring the nooks and crannies of our new home, it was time to check out the neighborhood. Skipping down the front steps, I looked up to see two girls standing in my yard. The older one was pretty and about the age of my older brother. The younger one had funny eyes and a contagious smile, and she looked about my age. She froze and I froze. Finally the older girl pushed her sister forward and asked me if I wanted to play. I said “yes” and stood there. We stood and stared and shyly smiled, unable to move. Then, without a word I ran to our kitchen and returned with three warm, chocolate-chip cookies. As we munched on the cookies, the two of us began to walk and talk as her older sister waved goodbye. I learned her name was Ellen and she soon became my first true friend. We spent many long hours sharing secrets (we both still wet our beds), playing house and giving each other the courage to enter the new world of kindergarten. We grew up together in our neighborhood where over the years our friendship ebbed and flowed. Yet to this day, I can still recall the joy of finding a first friend.*

Most of our early memories of having friends are recalled from our school age years, yet the seeds of friendship start right at the moment of birth when we respond to our parents’ voices. The information that infants gather in their earliest interactions will help them develop the skills that will later blossom into friendships. This continuum of social skills creates the foundation for friendships to flourish. As with all developing skills, adults can lend a helping hand by giving voice to a child’s successes and by giving guidance when she stumbles.

## *Why do friends matter?*

Each of us has our own answers to this. We care about friends because they make us feel good about ourselves, share adventures and activities, give us courage to try to new things, teach us different ways of seeing the world -- along with lots of other reasons. In the earliest years, the foundation for a lifetime of friendships begins through the important relationships in a young child’s life. Young children learn about people and the world around them through their experiences with others.

Recent brain research confirms that emotional, social and intellectual learning is happening simultaneously as the child grows. Self-regulation is an essential skill that helps young



children begin to control their own thoughts, feelings and emotions. This is a skill that serves us well throughout our lives as adults too. Friends give children an opportunity to practice self-regulation in safe ways. As children become better at self-regulating, the easier it is for them to make and keep friends.

## *What does the development of young children’s friendships look like?*

When papa coos and stares into his newborn baby’s eyes, an important lifelong relationship begins. At three months, mom and her daughter have a back and forth conversation. “Oh my precious girl, you’re sticking your tongue out. Blub-blub-blub-blub... mommy is too!” As the baby babbles back, she imitates mom – and the love affair of connection continues. What we think about as attachment and bonding in the first years of life can also be thought of as setting the stage for what will later be called friendship.

*I still can remember watching Owen’s eyes light up when he saw Danny and Daniel, two other 9-month old boys, who were cared for in the home of our wonderful provider Patty. Danny and Daniel would smile enthusiastically as Owen arrived – Owen was a part-timer and his buddies had been there all morning. These three boys were together from the age of 6 months to two years old. Patty would tell us stories about their comfortable interactions with each other and verbal sounds of acknowledgement even before words and walking and playing together fully came into the picture. I always thought that this must be what the earliest glimpse of friendship looks like!*

Common wisdom tells us that toddlers engage in parallel play. When those who work with children delve deeper, they see that there is often an engaged relationship taking place. When toddlers are playing together, they are teaching and



guiding each other, learning important communication skills through conflict, developing sensitive ways to care for each other, forming friendships, and simply enjoying the fun of being together -- what some researchers call “toddler glee” (Wittner, 2004).

Three and four year olds are experimenting with their independence, including the development of first real friendships. They start to call someone a “friend” because they often play together or engage in similar activities at the same time. They also still look to adults to help them navigate the social and emotional roadmaps of peer relationships. Sometimes they need our assistance to find ways to ease into new relationships and routines, especially with our sensitivity to their different temperaments.

Older preschoolers and kindergartners start to understand more about what it means to be a friend through cooperative behaviors that make them feel good about each other. A special playmate may be someone who gives them a turn or shares gum or offers them a ride on a new bicycle. School age children move through their play times together with a little more ease, allowing us to stay in the background as they figure out the dynamics of their relationships in games, make believe, rough and tumble, and other activities. They can use our support as they discover ways to express the emotional ups and downs of friendship, and find ways to resolve conflicts when they occur. They also need our help to assure that every child feels welcome and has ways to be included.

### *How can we support and encourage young children's friendships?*

**We can help children learn about friendship:** We need to take young children's friendships seriously. Notice when two children are getting along, whether they are your own children or those in your classroom. We can describe the specifics of how they are playing well together and tell them that that is what friends do. We can let them pair together during activities so they can build on their success. The more young children create a history together, the more it can deepen into lasting memories.

We also want to help children understand and express their feelings about the sorrows of friendship. These can be times of rejection, or when a friend moves away, or when friends get angry with each other. When we role model good conversation skills between an adult and child, we also help a child develop new skills for conversation with friends. Depending on a child's temperament, they may need our help in figuring out how to ease into a play scenario or how not to take over. Sometimes a simple suggestion such as “maybe you could be the mail carrier” is all that it takes to help a child feel included.

### *Some Stepping Stones*

**T**here is a continuum of experiences important to developing healthy relationships that begins in infancy and continues through life. Some of the stepping stones to watch for and nurture along the way include:

- ♥ When a child looks to a caregiver to find out what to feel. (If mom smiles, babies smiles. Mom looks scared, baby cries.)
- ♥ When a child uses imitation to demonstrate a shared experience before she may fully understand the situation or feeling. (A child pulls on her ear when she is upset. When she notices her dad upset, she pulls on his ear.)
- ♥ When a child begins to understand that two things can be thought of the same way or differently. (A child rolls the ball and then realizes that another child bounces the same ball.)
- ♥ When a child begins to take the perspective of others. (A child realizes that although he loves to play with trucks, his best friend loves to play with dinosaurs so he offers his friend a Tyrannosaurus Rex.)
- ♥ When a child has compassion and understanding about the feelings and thoughts of another person without necessarily having experienced the same feelings herself. (A third grader puts her arm around her friend whose dog has recently died.)

**We can create cultures of belonging where friendships will emerge:** It is only natural that we are drawn to others who are like ourselves. We need to help children understand how we are like each other in ways that are not always as obvious to see. We have to take our role as stewards of diversity very seriously by deliberately paying attention to concerns about inclusion, cultural respect and a sense of caring. While we want to guide children to learn about each other, it's also part of our responsibility to clarify our expectations that we won't tolerate discrimination toward others for any reason. It's important that we help children learn what it feels like if someone is rejected or left out.

We can talk to children during circle time about what it means to be a friend. Through skits, puppet shows, books and other activities we can explore with children the feelings of being included and excluded, and help them create strategies to make sure everyone feels that they belong. We need to understand that friendships come in all shapes and sizes and that they ebb and flow. We need to allow children to move

*Continued on page 10*

# Friends Give Meaning to Life

Continued from page 9



through the dynamics of friendship without prescribing who their friends are and the absolute qualities that a friend is supposed to have. We learn about friendship both through our mistakes as well as through our times of getting along.

## We can help children deal with conflicts in constructive ways:

Friendships often involve conflicts. These are great opportunities for children to learn and grow. We need to begin by asking ourselves, “What is the child trying to communicate?” When a child hurts another child, it is often because he is feeling hurt, mad, or scared himself. It is important that we focus on the children rather than the toy or situation they are fighting over. When we make one child a “winner” and the other child a “loser” – no one really wins. Conflicts are resolved only when both children really feel like their feelings and ideas have been listened to and understood. Sometimes it can require a break before they’re ready to talk or figure it out. We can help children find a mutual solution that gives everyone a sense of peace.

Friends give meaning to life. During the early years, children develop the skills it takes to become a friend. Through their emerging friendships, they are able to try out and practice new skills that in turn help them deepen their relationships. As this circle of development continues, they learn and grow. Because most of us value the gifts that friends bring to us, we want to understand children’s friendships and help each child learn to become a friend. ♥

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## Me and My Giant

Shel Silverstein

I have a friend who is a giant,  
And he lives where the tall weeds grow.  
He’s high as a mountain and wide as barn,  
And I only come up to his toe, you know,  
I only come up to his toe.

When the daylight grows dim I talk with him  
Way down in the marshy sands,  
And his ear is too far away to hear,  
But still he understands, he ‘stands,  
I know he understands.

For we have a code called the “scratch-tap code,”  
And here is what we do –  
I scratch his toe...once means, “Hello”  
And twice means, “How are you?”  
Three means, “Does it look like rain?”  
Four times means, “Don’t cry.”  
Five times means, “I’ll scratch you a joke.”  
And six times means, “Goodbye,” “Goodbye,”  
Six times means, “Goodbye.”

And he answers me by tapping his toe –  
Once means, “Hello, friend.”  
Two taps means, “It’s very nice to feel your scratch again.”  
Three taps means, “It’s lonely here  
With my head in the top of the sky.”  
Four taps means, “Today an eagle smiled as she flew by.”  
Five taps means, “Oops, I just bumped  
my head against the moon.”  
Six means, “Sigh” and seven means, “Bye”  
And eight means, “Come back soon, soon, soon,”  
Eight means, “Come back soon.”

And then scratch a thousand times,  
And he taps with a bappity-bimm,  
And he laughs so hard he shakes the sky –  
That means I’m tickling him!

# We Can Solve It!

by Alida Dávila-Larrichio

One of the problems that we often encounter when children are under our care, is to react very quickly to solve the children's problems without giving them a chance to solve their own, let alone letting them participate in finding solutions on how to solve them. Writing this article brings back memories of 25 years of teaching in the classroom and also as a parent. One thing that I learned from experience with my students and my own children was to have them take part in finding solutions to their problems. In this way I was more of a mediator than authoritarian adult. The goal in this process is to have the children develop problem solving skills, which is a good way to foster independence.

As Britz (1993, p.4) summarized:

...becoming skillful at problem solving is based on the understanding and use of sequenced steps. These steps are:

- ♥ identifying the problem,
- ♥ brainstorming a variety of solutions,
- ♥ choosing one solution and trying it out,
- ♥ and evaluating what has happened.

For example, María and Kate (4 year olds) were having a disagreement about who gets the swing first. The words exchanged got louder and louder. As I approached the scene, I noticed they were both clinging tightly to the swing. "I was here first!" said the girls in unanimous high pitched voices. So what is a teacher to do? It is obvious that the two girls wanted the swing. "I can see that you two want the swing, right?" I asked to make sure that I understood the situation. "Yes, but I got it first," said Maria. "No, I got it first," said Kate. I looked at the two of them and said, "So we have a problem, one swing and two girls want to have it at the same time! What shall we do?" The two of them looked at each other. At that point I suggested they should talk it over and gave them time to think. I moved a few steps away and let them discuss it. Moments later Maria called and said they wanted to share the rides on the swing. "How are you doing that?" (making sure that this agreement is okay with Kate) I asked. "Well, one of us swings first while the other one pushes, and we take turns," said Maria. "That sounds like a good idea!" I affirmed. I moved a decent distance away from the girls, watching, just to make sure that the solution of the problem was coming from Kate as well. They swung a few times taking turns. Then they ran away from the swing holding hands.

In my classroom the students took part in identifying the problem and finding solutions. When we evaluated the agreed upon solution, we made sure that those involved were satisfied with the final agreement. Sometimes children are not as skillful as Kate and María and need assistance from adults. If the children are unfamiliar with brainstorming, the teacher can offer suggestions and ask open-ended questions such as: "What will happen if...?" and "What other ways can you think of?" Sometimes you need to walk the children through the problem solving process, guiding them to find their own solution. Ac-



ording to Britz (1993, p.4) "...problem solving becomes a cycle of learning when mistakes are made and different solutions have to be tried. Most problems have more than one solution; some problems cannot be solved. Experiences with these sorts of problems promote learning in young children."

Opportunities for problem solving occur in the child's every day life, whether they are at home or in the classroom. We need to create an environment that has a variety of developmental materials to meet the needs of all levels. Whether they are toddlers, preschoolers or older children, we must provide interesting materials to establish and maintain an environment that encourages problem solving. It is important that we pay attention to the needs and interest of each child. Problem solving develops from the experiences within the classroom and those experiences that are important to them.

"Caregivers can stimulate children's development, promote advanced critical thinking, and help children take pride in their own abilities to find out more about how their world works" (National Association for the Education of Young Children, n. d.). Problem solving is a skill that, with daily practice, will eventually enable the children to function independently, not only in the classroom, but also out in the world.

Sooner or later children find themselves on their own, where they can use these problem solving skills to benefit their lives. When you observe behavior of not just the children under your care, but your own, and watch them solve their own problems successfully, then you can sit back, smile and be assured that all the patience and consistency was worth while. ♥

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# An Overview of *The Six Stages of Parenthood*

by Ellen Biderman

*“My baby was so colicky. I got used to him as fussy. Now that he is easy I find I still hover and can’t enjoy him.”*

*“Joe was such an industrious 6 year old, I don’t understand where his new found defiance comes from. What happened to my little boy?”*

*“Julie doesn’t need me anymore now that she is in school.”*

**T**hese typical statements made by parents reflect their image not only of their children, but also of themselves. While today’s abundance of how-to-parent books provide helpful and important information that may be of use to parents, most emphasize the parents’ influence on, and responsibility toward, the child. Few, if any, address the equally significant effects of the developing child on parents or describe how parents also go through their own stages of growth and development.

In 1981, Ellen Galinsky, President of the Families and Work Institute, interviewed 228 parents across the nation to try to understand how parents grow and change. Her book, *The Six Stages of Parenthood*, has become a classic that can help parents understand their own joys, challenges and frustrations. Galinsky found that, like children, parents go through predictable stages. But unlike their children, parents’ stages depend on the growth of someone else – their children. In addition, parents can experience several stages at once as they raise children of various ages. She suggests that at each stage parents have images of themselves and of their children that are often critically at odds with reality. In addition, parents often use these unconscious expectations to judge their



children’s behavior and measure their own success or failure. For example, as the child moves forward, the parent may stay “stuck” in the actions of an earlier stage, like the parents quoted above. And when the new reality doesn’t conform to the image of the child or of themselves as parents, that image needs to be refined. True growth occurs whenever a parent resolves the clash between what the parent expects and what is really occurring. That can involve modifying an image to be more consistent with reality or modifying their own behavior to live up to their expectations. Interestingly, growth comes from confronting the difficult issues, and does not simply unfold. Galinsky puts forward the notion that this process of growth is ongoing as parents move through six predictable stages.

**I. The Image-Making Stage:** This stage occurs during pregnancy or while awaiting the adoption of a child. During this time would-be parents rehearse for parenthood, engaging in hypothetical discussions of the kind of parents they intend to be, and visualizing hopes and dreams for the new child.

**II. The Nurturing Stage:** After the baby is born or adoption complete, the parent must reconcile the imagined child with the real baby. Is the baby fussy, easy, or sensitive? Is it a boy when they imagined a girl? The parent must adapt to the baby’s personality and temperament and form an attachment, while at the same time the baby is learning to trust his or her world. But if a parent’s image from stage one is totally at odds with reality, she might feel confused or anxious.

**III. Authority Stage:** As the child becomes more mobile and more independent, the parent again has to adjust. Now instead of just nurturing the child, the parent must determine how to become an authority. The first time a child defiantly says “no”



can be a shock, forcing parents to come to grips with the reality that the child is not just an extension of themselves. At this point, parents need to define what the rules of the family will be and how they will use discipline. Will they be like their parents or use a different approach? Are there social pressures to conform to? When the child tests them, parents can feel inadequate and overwhelmed. As the child is establishing her own autonomy, the parent is figuring out how to nurture this important developmental stage.

**IV. The Interpretive Stage:** It seems that just as the parent figures out the authority stage, the child enters school and a new reality comes into play. The child is now exposed to many more influences from the outside including peers, television and other media. The idea that the parent can have a lot of control over societal influences on the child shifts. Parents now interpret the world to their children. Parents stuck in the authority stage can thwart the child's new sense of industry and not provide opportunities for the child to start to explore the world.

This is a stage where children are very industrious and are learning about concepts of fairness and values.

**V. The Interdependent Stage:** The teen years always seem to be a surprise. One parent of many teens that Galinsky interviewed said, "I find that I am never ready. I am always overtaken" (Galinsky, 1987, p. 233). Parents of a teen find themselves having to say goodbye to the child they knew and get accustomed to a slightly new child as the child's body goes through major changes. Adolescents are wrestling with defining their own identity. Parents need to recognize that their child is now a sexual being. Conflicts can arise similar to

those encountered in the authority stage, however with higher concerns about health and safety. Parents have to respond to new behaviors and attitudes by figuring out how to set new and appropriate limits. It is a dance of distance and closeness; separateness and connectedness. At the end of this stage the child is beginning to identify who she or he is. And in the process the parent needs to continually negotiate and renegotiate, a new and different role than they might have ever imagined.

**VI. The Departure Stage:** Like all aspects of parenthood, departure is never really departure, since grown children come and go. However, as the grown child establishes her or his own life, parents take stock of the whole experience of parenthood. They establish an identity as parents of grown children and reconcile their original images of parenting with the reality of their children's lives and relationships.

The parents interviewed by Galinsky describe the rewarding experience of parenting as a process not just of raising children but of learning about themselves and the cycles of life. As parents deal with the totally dependant baby to the industrious 8-year old to a teen who swerves from dependence to independence to an adult, it can often feel like they are on a roller coaster, filled with highs, lows, challenges and changing emotions. At each stage of their child's growth and development parents are given the opportunity to grow and learn. Images can be at odds with reality, but in the end, the rewards of parenting come from adjusting the image to a new truth that is often richer than one's dreams. ♥

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# Laughter Makes the World Go Round

by LaWanda Albright

*The sound of laughter is like the vaulted dome of a temple of happiness.*

~ Milan Kundera

A baby's first smile, the first giggle, and then the first belly laugh. Hearing these sounds brings joy to parents and indicates that their baby is engaged with the world. But what is it that creates these responses?

The first laugh usually comes from anything that may be physically arousing in a familiar, non-threatening environment. A tickle of the feet or a raspberry on the belly will frequently make a baby laugh. While these behaviors will continue to make a child laugh, it is the development of humor that demonstrates knowledge of how the world works and mastery of skills. Humor has been defined as altering one's knowledge of the world in a playful manner (McGhee, 2002).

A baby's first expression of humor usually emerges between six months and a year and is likely to be in response to unusual behavior from a parent or sibling. When a baby laughs at mom pretending to drink from the bottle or dad singing a familiar song in a very different voice, he is demonstrating that he understands and expects certain patterns of behaviors from these caregivers and he recognizes the unusual behavior. For it to be funny, however, the unexpected behavior must take place in safe surroundings with familiar people.

Toddlers begin creating their own humor with the emergence of pretend play. They will purposefully use an object in the wrong way. Using a pan for a hat or pretending that a shoe is a telephone can elicit gales of laughter and reveals an understanding of the typical usage of the object. Moving in a silly way and making funny faces demonstrates mastery of physical skills. The toddler who repeatedly bumps his head on the wall, says ouch, and then laughs is also revealing his understanding of cause and effect relationships. He knows that hitting his head can hurt, but when he controls the bump he can



keep it from hurting and can illicit a response from mom or dad. To the child, it is funny because it doesn't really hurt and yet mom and dad show concern.

Acquisition of language skills leads to new forms of humor. The young child who has learned that the word butt refers to one's buttocks will often repeat the word over and over while laughing when he hears an older child say "but." Calling mommy "daddy" and daddy by the child's own name is a common form of humor at this stage of development. This intentional mislabeling can be generalized to intentionally giving wrong answers. Children at this stage of development can also appreciate the humor in the story, *The Cow that Went Oink*.

As the preschool child learns letter sounds, he will begin playing with words in a new way, substituting beginning sounds to make up rhyming words. At this age songs like Willoughby, Wallaby, Woo and The Name Game are great fun. He may enjoy creating his own nonsense names for people and/or objects. As his language abilities continue to grow, the preschooler may begin combining words together in nonsensical ways to elicit laughter from his peers or teachers.

Young children can use humor to demonstrate their knowledge of concepts and classification principles by distorting the known properties. For example, drawing cakes growing on trees, or putting ears where the eyes should be is hilarious to many preschool children. At this stage, children understand the humor of animals taking on human characteristics and the idea of raining cats and dogs. Young children can appreciate and create humor that depicts impossible behaviors, changes in the properties of objects, and additions or deletions of features. Most children enjoy creating something that they know is at odds with reality.

Verbal humor emerges with increased understanding of language. Initially the child may tell a joke or riddle and begin



laughing immediately without understanding the nuances of the vocabulary. A child's first attempt at a joke may sound something like this. "Knock, knock. Who's there? Baloney. Baloney who? Baloney you." The listener's look of puzzlement will send the five year old into fits of laughter. She doesn't know why you are puzzled by the response, she just knows that jokes are funny and the answers make no sense to her. Just the fact that there is not any real relationship between the question and the response is what is humorous to the child at this stage of development. As the child begins to understand that words can have multiple meanings, the riddles and jokes will reflect the language and cognitive growth.

Humor can be used to both stimulate and reflect social, emotional, and cognitive development. As children mature, their humor may also reveal their concerns about social issues and changes in their lives. At all ages, jokes that have emotionally

relevant content are more humorous. Encouraging humor in young children will result in wide ranging benefits throughout life.

*A sense of humor... is needed armor. Joy in one's heart and some laughter on one's lips is a sign that the person down deep has a pretty good grasp of life.*

~ Hugh Sidey ♥

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