

MAY/JUNE 2011

Bright Start

The Magazine for the Kidicorp Community
For happy, confident learners

Growing **good** manners

It's okay to be
ANGRY



THE IMPORTANCE OF
CUDDLING

Stuck on You Carrie's Corner

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Stuck on You

FROM THE **BRIGHT START** TEAM

I've recently become a Nana for the third time. Holding my grandson does push all my buttons about wanting to make sure all my grandchildren have every chance to fulfil their dreams and have the best possible life.

The same week this baby arrived the Children's Commissioner reported on childcare for under two's. It's a subject dear to my heart as Kidicorp's Chief Operations Officer, but I am also personally affected since my daughter has two children under three. She wants to go back to work eventually.

So many mothers want to work when their children are under five or need to work to make ends meet.

So it was very reassuring that the Commission's report accepted that staying home isn't a choice for everyone, and reported that childcare for infants and toddlers isn't bad, provided it is good quality. He then went on to identify the quality criteria.

These are: high adult to child ratios, small groups with trained staff with qualifications, responsive care giving, well defined spaces for under two, involvement of parents, a focus on health and safety, and a socially, culturally and developmentally appropriate curriculum.

When my grandson eventually goes into childcare, his mother may well be working nearby so can pop in whenever she gets a break. She knows the teachers already but continuity of face will be important to baby. The teachers have had years of working with babies, they are all university graduates and know how to be responsive caregivers.

I'm confident that all our centres are able to offer you a safe, warm and loving environment, especially for under two's. Have a look at our Facebook page and read the comments from both our teachers and parents about the children they love and care for. It encourages me that we are doing a wonderful job of nurturing children and supporting parents.



Fiona Hughes
Chief Operations Officer

Fiona.

Bright Start

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Kidicorp is New Zealand's largest private early childhood provider. Over 8,000 children are enrolled annually in Kidicorp centres around New Zealand.

Bright Start aims to increase our sense of family amongst our teachers and to better connect us with our parents and their families.

Shorts

TOP PARENTING TIP

Why do children swear?

Almost every child experiments using 'dirty' words. Don't be embarrassed. Try and understand what your child is trying to do, ie, trying to shock you, express frustration ("oh ****") or to make a joke to amuse a friend ("Oh you poo-poo mummy").

The most common reason young children swear is they have heard older children or even their parents swear in response to something annoying.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Watch who swears and ask them to limit it around children. Make it clear 'those words' upset some people. We prefer not to talk like that.

Don't let children abuse you, even with words. And of course, you shouldn't be verbally abusing your children either. Guide your children towards speaking in a way that expresses how they feel rather than being aggressive or insulting. Even for adults that takes practice!

5 tips to spark curiosity in under 2's

Curiosity is the first step to learning.

1. Resist the urge to intervene if a child is using a toy or object in a unique way.
2. Explain what you are doing as you fold the laundry, write a shopping list, set the table.
3. Put a few items in a plastic box, like a tennis ball, ball of wool, small plastic container, and talk about the different textures with your baby.
4. Wind up a musical toy and hide it under a cloth or behind a cushion, ask your child to help find it.
5. Put some household items, like wooden spoon, teaspoons, and other kitchen utensils in an ice cream container so your child can pretend to cook like you do or even make music.

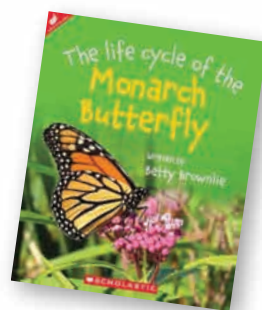
BOOKS

THE LIFE CYCLE OF A MONARCH BUTTERFLY

By Betty Brownlie

Scholastic \$19.50

Who hasn't been captivated by watching a caterpillar become a monarch butterfly? This beautifully illustrated book explains the process simply, with lots of 'did you know' type facts. Children who enjoy 'how to' books will love having this read to them. A great book to explain nature.



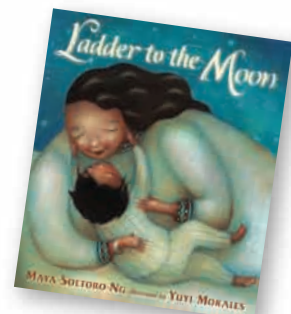
LADDER TO THE MOON

By Maya Soetoro-Ng

Illustrated by Yuyu Morales

Walker \$31.95

Barack Obama's sister wrote this beautiful story as a tribute to their mother. It's a beautifully illustrated story of the adventure Suhaila has when she takes the hand of the Grandma she has never met, and climbs all the way to the moon with her.



With Mother's Day coming up, this is a special book for grannies or mums to read aloud and encourage the imagination of their children.

DON'T LET THE ALIENS GET MY MARVELLOUS MUM

By Gillian Shields and Liz Pichon

Walker \$11.95

Another Mother's Day book is this fun hardback. What if mum wasn't there to do all the wonderful things she does? This is a fun book, most mums won't mind reading over and over as their children realise they are pretty special!



OLD PIG

By Margaret Wild

Illustrated by Ron Brooks

Allen & Unwin \$32.99

Old Pig and Granddaughter have lived together for a long time. They share everything until the day when Old Pig doesn't get up as usual. Then she takes Granddaughter on a last, long walk looking, listening, smelling and noticing. This is a poignant story about the last days on earth of an elderly pig. It's a delicate introduction to death for children. Suitable for readers 4+.



Our People

This issue instead of focussing on one person, we wanted to share some of the stories from Christchurch.

Anyone who has been on our facebook page will have read the amazing stories that parents have shared about how grateful they were to teachers for making their children safe. One parent wrote, "my husband got my daughter home, and was checking outside, when an aftershock happened. He rushed inside to find her on the couch in the turtle position. It was fantastic to know that a 2 1/2 year old knows what to do, because of the amazing prep work at preschool. Keep it up you guys!"

Another posted, "We just wanted to thank you all at Northwood Nursery & Preschool for your wonderful efforts. We came soon after the earthquake to pick up Louis and I witnessed your amazing strength, calm, bravery and loving support for all the kids

as ...a major aftershock hit. The 'little turtles' were in great hands and I feel glad that our children can be a part of your school as we all go forward in rebuilding Christchurch and continuing to build our children bright futures. Thanks you all for the great job you do every day!"

Then there are the tragic stories of many of our teachers.

Many of our teachers have lost their homes or have had to put up with no water or sewerage. People like Emma Wilcock from Edukids Styx Mill are paying rent on a flat they can't live in. Lucy Pierce from Edukids Kilmarnock had to move out of her family house with Mia 7 and Dante because it is unsafe.

Claire Bartlett from Northwood Preschool lost most of her possessions after her home was 'red stickered.' Trina Mora from Northwood preschool had her car written off from flooding and then lost her house.

Maggie Campbell from Edukids Wainoni has lost all her possessions and her home is a wreck.

Chelsea Milne and Rebecca Chamberlain from Edukids Wainoni, lost most of their belongings and possessions.

For many teachers not being able to say good bye to the children who have moved out of Christchurch has been very upsetting. Teachers do form bonds with children. Despite this all our teachers are still getting on with teaching children. Their courage is inspiring.

FUNDRAISING

Many centres around the country have held amazing fundraising events to help our centres. Just under \$10,000 has been raised by Kidicorp centres.

So many centres held wonderful events, some of which local papers picked up on. Many had black and red play dough. More importantly it provided an opportunity for many centres to talk about earthquakes, safety, and understand what is going on in the world. Edukids Taradale had a Wheels Day and raised nearly \$1400. One little driver, Maia, managed to raise \$505, getting over \$100 per lap. Top Kids Totara St in Taupo raised a little over \$1200.

In addition, over 80 staff gifted some hours over a month, which has raised just under \$6000.



Maia and other Edukids Taradale children during the Wheels Day.



Topkids Pukuatua, Rotorua showing their support to Christchurch centres.

Why Cuddling is good for you both

By Valerie Davies

Have you ever asked the one you love for a cuddle, and been told to wait, or been ignored?

How would you feel if that happened? Probably heartbroken, even that they didn't love you very much. Because when we need or want a cuddle, it's because emotionally we are needing and wanting support, re-assurance, and love. And if we don't get that support we are left feeling empty, alone, unloved. If we're sufficiently strong, as adults, we may be able to jolly ourselves out of those feelings, but we'd probably go on feeling a bit empty or hurt inside.

Babies and children don't have these adult resources. They just feel intolerable pain when they cry out for what they are needing, and no-one comes to comfort and to cuddle. The old advice about leaving a baby to cry has been eroded by what we now know about how the brain works, and we now know it's the worst thing possible to do.

Benjamin Spock was one of the last of a long line of men who dictated

how children should be brought up, and the gist of most of their advice was to break the baby's will, which was actually the baby asking for what she needed, and leave her to cry. Not having a maternal bone in their bodies, these men didn't understand the instinct of mothers to pick up their babies when they cried. And so many women, having been brought up to believe that men/daddy is right, suppressed their maternal instinct to comfort and to cuddle their child.

Luckily today, those old mistaken ideas have been turned on their heads. We now know, thanks to modern research, that when babies and toddlers don't get the emotional support they need, stress hormones called cortisol start to flood the brain. Fortunately, if a baby is lovingly comforted, the stress dies down, and she learns to cope, knowing that she will be supported when she needs it. But if a child is frightened, and is not comforted by a trusted adult, these cortisol levels remain high. After a time high cortisol levels become what is known as neurotoxic, in other words, destructive to brain cells, and if this happens

repeatedly, children can become more prone to anxiety, anger and depression.

So leaving a baby to cry is actually the worst thing we can do. All those emotions we endure as adults are what babies and toddlers also endure, and it's bad for them! In fact, more and more, people who work with problems like ADD, depression, eating disorders, substance abuse, and the whole range of dysfunctional behaviours in children and young adults now slate it back to babyhood, when the baby didn't get the loving cuddling, handling, and attention that he needed. (There are of course other situations like death and divorce which also affect children's emotional well-being unless the child is supported lovingly through it)

"Controlled crying" was the recipe offered by many experts to babies not sleeping at night. But in other societies where babies are constantly cuddled, carried all the time, and sleeping right next to their parents, mothers don't suffer from the sleep deprivation that western mothers do. "Controlled crying" – which actually means leaving a baby to cry (feeling alone, unloved, miserable and powerless, causing cortisol levels



to spike and damage the emotional centres of the brain eventually) - is now considered so damaging that the Australian Association of Infant Mental Health has issued a paper on it. It said that “controlled crying” is not consistent with what infants need for their emotional and psychological health, and may have unintended consequences”. Meaning –leaving baby to cry is not good for him!

Of course, getting baby to sleep at night is a challenge for many parents, and we touched on it briefly in the last issue. Unchanging routine, quiet time, bath and then to bed firmly and happily is the way to go, which we'll explore in greater depths, next issue.

Leaving a baby to cry himself to sleep is actually not a good recipe for teaching him to go to bed happily every night. Can you remember how you felt when you cried yourself to sleep after a broken love affair, the death of someone you loved, or some other grief? We don't wake feeling good when we've cried ourselves to sleep. We wake feeling heavy and miserable. Which is how babies also feel.

Robin Grille, author of 'Heart to Heart Parenting', made the analogy of a group of adults having coffee together and a ten year old daughter of one, sitting crying. He asked would everyone go on talking and ignore her, or would they want to see why she was crying and comfort her?

Of course we all would. So why, he asked, do we think it's okay to ignore a crying baby, and fail to comfort her? Do we think that babies' feelings don't matter?

In a recent study, two groups of mothers and babies were compared. One group looked their baby in the eye, smiled, and in fact responded the way loving mothers automatically do, inter-acting with their baby. The other group did not respond to their baby, didn't engage in eye contact, and

ignored the baby's body language. It was found that in these babies' brains, cortisol levels spiked enormously. But what was also very revealing was that when the experiment was repeated the next day, as soon as the babies with no motherly interaction were put into position, their cortisol levels spiked before the exercise even began. They remembered the misery of the previous day, and were expecting it to happen again.

In fact babies, who in other societies are carried on their mother's backs all day, or in a sling, hardly cry at all.



If we think about this, it tells us that babies are sensitive to our every feeling, to our body language and to stressful situations, which also remain in their memory.

So we've talked about what happens when babies don't get the cuddling they need.

So what happens when they do get it? Well, contrary to parents' fears, they don't become demanding and dependent. On the contrary, because they feel loved and safe and supported, they become confident, outgoing, and independent. Babies

who are picked up whenever they cry, cry less than other babies by the time they are a year old, research tells us, and those of us who broke the old rules, and did always cuddle our babies, know that without needing research to tell us.

In fact babies, who in other societies are carried on their mother's backs all day, or in a sling, hardly cry at all. They find the physical touch of their mother's body so comforting that they don't feel lonely or unsupported. Mother is always there....and another plus, they feel included in the life of their mother and their family, not shut away in another room. And car seats are no substitute for being carried!

So what it boils down to is that babies who are lovingly cuddled and feel that their needs are met, are happy and well-adjusted. Their brains have been bathed in healthy, feel-good endomorphins. They can separate from their mother easily because they already feel secure. They are likely to grow into children and adults with good mental health and self-esteem. They are likely to develop good brains, have fewer behavioural problems, and haven't suffered any long-term effects from any unavoidable, painful stress situations.

And what's in it for mothers? Well, cuddling is good for us too! It relaxes us, and stimulates feel-good chemicals in our own bodies. In fact mothers who carry their babies in a sling for much of the day, report feel-good feelings, relaxation, and a closer bond with their happy baby. A happy baby is an easy, relaxed baby. Above all, a happy baby means a happy mother. And what mother doesn't want her baby to be happy? So the simplest thing in the world turns out to be the best thing you can do for your baby, your toddler, your child and your partner.

Just keep on cuddling!

Pictures have meaning too

By Victoria Carter

My son didn't enjoy reading but he did love books like encyclopaedias. He didn't enjoy writing at school but he loved to explain things.

Listening to Steve Moline, an Australian author, many years ago, I realised how to make books and learning a bit more interesting for a child like my son!

At childcare children are encouraged to draw pictures and teachers then help children explain the picture with a sentence. Once children get to school however, the message can often be: write a story and if you have time, draw a picture.

Steve Moline suggests that the message we give children with this is that writing is important and pictures aren't.

He explains so many students who are judged to be "poor writers" (when asked to write exclusively in words) are sometimes discovered to be excellent communicators if they are allowed to write the same information in a visual form, for example, as a diagram, graph, or map.

For Moline, teaching in a visual way can turn children on to learning. He uses the example of a large picture of a fly with its anatomy written out. He shows how if we create a chart with numbers across the bottom and pictures of the legs, wings and so on children can easily draw the right number of wings, eyes, antenna. The science lesson becomes a maths lesson but the most important thing is that the lesson is interactive and a fun way to learn about insects.

When children have to write everything down it means they often

never get a chance to show their understanding of a topic. If children were invited to draw a picture of a seed growing in a pot and explain what they know about a plant, most children will explain a seed sits in soil and then grows up with leaves, buds and so on.

Children do know and can use technical language but the fact that it is too complicated for them to spell often stops them using these words! One technique Moline uses is to get children to draw flow diagrams to explain processes. He says this can be done for almost anything from the 'Rise and Fall of...' to 'What we did at the Zoo yesterday'. Moline uses the example of a five year old explaining how to round up sheep, explaining processes and it could still be marked by a teacher who asks, 'if I followed the steps would it work?'

My son didn't enjoy reading or writing much but he did love to talk and had a wonderful vocabulary. If Moline's style

of teaching was used more often in classrooms one wonders whether boys might enjoy learning more. My son, I discovered, loved non-fiction books, another technique Moline suggests to turn boys on to books.

Words are important, but many children are missing out on learning because they are visual. With Information Technology increasing perhaps it's time to re-think teaching. Giving children a chance to use visual literacy means we are giving them more skills and tools for their education tool box.

Just about everything that is taught could be translated into a visual learning way, says Moline and it may well stimulate our children and help give them a thirst for learning because it is interesting and they feel engaged. Food for thought.

For more information read 'I See What You Mean: Children at Work with Visual Information' by Steve Moline.



BEHAVE YOURSELF!

Growing **good** behaviour

By Annemarie Quill

Many of us long for a well-behaved child. Children are not born with certain behaviours, they learn them. Mostly from you.

So when we are telling them to 'Behave yourself', it's worth reflecting – are we behaving ourselves too?

There are few parents in the world who could claim to be perfect role models. Yet to get desirable behaviours out of children, parents must model and teach respect, as well as equipping children with tools to handle different emotions and circumstances.

It all sounds very daunting. You have only just mastered putting a nappy on in the dark, and now you are responsible for their whole behaviour?

A good start is to sit down as a family and think about what sort of behaviours matter a lot to you. And what you are not so bothered about. Writing a list makes you prioritise. It may be very important to you that your child brushes their hair, and less important that they put their elbows on the table.

Once you have selected the behaviours that matter to your family, make your child aware of what you expect. Explain why they are important. Let your child know that these are your family's expectations. Parenting expert Ian Grant talks about setting family standards with the mantra "In our family we...."

REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Before you start out on your quest, remember the golden rule about any behaviour shaping, is to have realistic explanations. It may take years for children to accept 'the rules'. Keep expectations in line with children's stage of development. Otherwise we set children up for failure. Acceptable social behaviours don't come naturally to preschoolers who are inherently egotistical. Until three, children believe that they are the centre of the universe. Then gradually they can start to empathise with others, and may slowly start to take on your rules. Or at least have fun watching you try.

WALK THE TALK

Children do not have the monopoly on bad behaviour. Once you have sorted out your family's priorities, you need to role model these behaviours. Children exhibit attitudes that you have. Every parent experiences an awful light bulb

moment when you realise that your child parrots back your behaviour. So don't be surprised when little Jack starts waving his fist at cars to 'Move it'. On the flipside, if we say please and thank you, our children will copy us.

RESPECT THEM

We cannot expect children to respect other people if we don't treat them respectfully. Child expert Magda Gerber believes we need to model respectful behaviours to children from birth. Gerber says that adults try to dominate children into behaving a certain way, but that if we respect them, they will co-operate willingly.

YOU'RE NOT THE BOSS OF ME

Respecting our children doesn't mean that we cower in the corner with our parenting book while they trash the house. We still need to show who is in charge, and that we expect them to behave in a certain way.

SET LIMITS

Research shows that children brought up with regard for clear and consistent boundaries develop positive self-esteem. This makes for an easier time at school and later in life. Rules should tell children what to do, rather than what not to do. For example, say, "We walk inside" instead of "Don't

run inside.” Also balance limits with opportunities for their own choices, so that as well as enforcing your rule, you are allowing your child to develop their own behaviours: e.g. “This is how we hold a knife to cut our food.”

GIVE THEM TOOLS

It is important to equip children with resources to develop positive character attributes. It's pointless telling children to share, or not to hit if they don't understand why. Often children behave 'badly' because they are often caught up in a swell of emotions that can interfere with their reasoning. If we want to encourage

positive behaviour then we need to help them sort out their emotions and reasoning.

So a child who refuses to share toys might feel more inclined to share if we let him choose some toys that he doesn't have to share, and then sort out a box of toys that he can share.

ATTENTION SEEKING

For some minor behaviour breaches we have to turn a blind eye, otherwise we find ourselves giving out constant tickets. For things like being cheeky, tell your child you don't like the behaviour, then ignore it. Focus on the behaviour not the child. When we can't ignore a

situation like throwing food, we can still take the food away, then give them the attention they need.

SEE THE POSITIVES

The challenge is to provide guidance, so the child who answers back puts their negotiating skills to use in ways that are more acceptable. When guiding, balance one negative statement with three positives. “I found it rude the way you answered back when I asked you to put your toys away. I think you were saying you didn't want to do it all yourself. Shall we ask your brother to help? You are really good at organising him.”

INCENTIVES

There is nothing wrong with a bit of bribery. Call it incentive setting if it makes you feel better. Bribes don't have to be chocolate fish. Negotiate. Try, “If you eat at the table we can have a game afterwards.” Then you are giving them time not a chocolate fish!

PRAISE

Being specific with praise helps your child understand which values and behaviours are important. Saying “Good boy for eating nicely” is patronising. Saying “I liked the way you chewed your food today; it made me happy how we enjoyed lunch together” is more likely to enforce the behaviour in a meaningful way. Praise their efforts more than the result. Children are motivated when their efforts are praised.

And finally, remember ...

Your children will copy you and those in your family so encourage everyone to be good mannered and courteous and it will rub off on everyone. The result- your children will thrive socially because they will have seen and practiced how to behave.

Annemarie Quill is a Tauranga based writer and mother of three.



HOW TO BE **ANGRY**

By Jane Brown Smith

When you were a child, did you stamp or slam the door to try to express your anger?

And were you punished for showing that anger? Parenting has come a long way since then. We recognise now that feelings are important, that we shouldn't try to stuff them down, and that if we do stuff them down either as children or adults, the suppressed feelings come popping up in most inappropriate ways.

Many women, because they weren't allowed to show when they were angry as children, as adults, end up crying when they're angry. Tears come into their eyes as they are trying to assert themselves, and they end up feeling frustrated and powerless, because that was how they felt as children, denied the space to feel their anger.

So how do we teach our children to handle their anger, and how do we handle their anger?

One of the problems is that we too often equate anger with violence, particularly if the people around us when we were little became violent when they were angry (because they had never learned how to handle their anger). We become alarmed and anxious if our child starts demonstrating anger, and we try to stop his anger. We often re-act the way our parents re-acted to us, and punish him for being angry and having a tantrum. This merely perpetuates the problem of people walking around angry because it's all locked up inside them, and it pops out in road-rage or other in-appropriate ways.

So the first step in learning to handle our children's anger, is to become aware of how we felt as children when we were angry, and how we would have liked it to be different.

If you had been allowed to say what was bothering you or how you were feeling, would you have become angry? Did it really help when adults told you to calm down, to stop being emotional or being a tragedy queen? Or did it make you angrier? Did the adults get

angry with you for being angry, or did they treat you with mockery, or cold disdain? Remembering these things, do you want to treat your child differently so he doesn't end up feeling powerless, unheard, and misunderstand – all of which creates distance between you, rather than warmth and loving connection

If you were punished for showing your anger as a child, you will have grown up feeling that anger is dangerous, and that



and healthy

you will lose the love of those you care for, if you dare to show your feelings and be angry. So you will feel that it's not OK for your child to be angry either. Anger, you will have grown up feeling, is dangerous.

But we had it all wrong, anger is not dangerous, it's what we do with it that matters.

On the other hand, suppressing it IS dangerous, as it builds up and comes out at in-appropriate times and in

in-appropriate ways. Expressing it violently, because we don't know any other way, also convinces us that anger is dangerous. But anger expressed appropriately, in words like: "I feel angry when you do such and such" -not dumping or blaming on the other, but owning your own feelings -, does not cause offence or retaliation. People respond to an honest statement of your feelings, and it usually means you become closer and more real. When we suppress anger, it shuts off a part of our vitality and life energy, and creates a distance between us and the other person.

It's the same for our children. If we hide our anger from them, they can feel our in-authenticity. But saying gently to a small child: "that makes me feel angry, darling, because...", shows them that they can also say when they feel angry, with no bad consequences.

When a toddler becomes angry, often because he's feeling frustrated, thwarted, not understood or not being listened to, his emotions spill over. He hasn't got the emotional maturity to cope with these passionate feelings which are overwhelming him, so instead of punishing him for having them, we need to support him. Neuro-scientists are now saying that the more children are comforted and cuddled when they are upset, the stronger and more mature they become emotionally. They have, as it were, a bank balance of support in their memories, which are a long-term investment for their emotional good health.

Give your toddler and your older children the space to feel and express their feelings, and be with them, so

that they feel safe and supported, rather than estranged from their parents. Teach them how to punch a cushion or a pillow, even to shout and say all the things they want to say. Show them how to do this when they are not angry so they've already learned the words, and a technique to handle their anger. Some child experts suggest having gentle play- wrestling matches with your children, showing them that it's not OK to hurt at the same time. Then do this with the child when he's angry. Often what could have ended in tears, ends up in a laughing match as you wrestle, making parent and child feel closer, instead of having angry space between them.

And when parent and child feel close, there is trust, cooperation and a deep and satisfying feeling of fulfilment. All this pre-supposes that you treat your child with respect and courtesy, the same way that you treat your best friends. Speaking to your child as though he does not deserve politeness or respect, destroys trust and his self-respect and self-esteem.

Above all, listen when your child is angry. Say: "I hear what you're saying, I hear how you feel," even if you don't understand or agree with it. Not to hear him, and not to acknowledge the validity of his feelings is to invalidate them, making a child angrier, or worse, despairing.

Bringing up our children is not about winning or losing, battles of will, dominating them, and making them behave the way we want. It's about honouring their feelings, and their rights as small human beings with the same feelings that we have, only they're too small to have learned to handle them.

Often what could have ended in tears, ends up in a laughing match as you wrestle, making parent and child feel closer, instead of having angry space between them.

Grow the **Brain** through

By Maureen Hawke

First baby could taste, now the growing child can touch, and this is a wonderful way to bring fun into your relationship with each other.

If you've been massaging your baby he or she already knows about touching, so expand this experience into lots of new sensations.

Bath times are a fun way to continue these important touch experiences.

Rubbing and squeezing arms and legs while naming different body parts is fun. Using different materials and brushes is good too, because all these activities are developing body awareness. Singing while touching body parts is enjoyable too.

With greater body awareness and touch experiences, balance improves and therefore your baby moves more efficiently and with better coordination.

Moving the body sends messages to the brain about where we are in space.

Movement reinforces body awareness and helps the brain sense changes in body position, this affects balance.

So it follows that with more movement the brain gets the more messages – and the balance mechanisms are stimulated more.

With better balance and improved co-ordination it becomes easier to develop spatial awareness.

LEARNING ABOUT SPACE

Learning about space is very important and we learn this primarily through movement.

However, tactile input, body awareness, balance, vision, proprioception (the unconscious awareness of where we are in space) are all necessary for learning about space.

Good spatial development is essential for many aspects of

learning, especially reading, writing and mathematics.

With improved body awareness comes an awareness that there are two sides to the body. Later on this helps with the understanding of concepts such as: up, down, near, far, bigger than and smaller than as well as internalisation of left and right and where to start on the page when your child begins to write and which way the letters b and d go.

Rolling down hills is also good for body awareness. Not only does the brain receive countless pieces of sensory information from the body as it touches the grass, it also stimulates balance mechanism.

Sand and water play are wonderful tactile experiences. When playing in different textured environments the brain gets more and different information from the body.

Some children just love rapid swinging and spinning activities. This rapid self-stimulation makes them feel good.



Touch



DOES BABY LIKE BEING TOUCHED?

Some babies find massage, touching and cuddling unpleasant. When being fed as babies they may have pulled away from their parents and were resistant to touching, handling and massage. As they grow older they complained loudly about clothes prickling them or they cried excessively when they were hurt and sometimes they didn't even cry at all.

These signs tell us that these babies are not putting together (integrating) information from their touch systems.

Their brains are receiving mixed messages from their bodies. Not liking or being sensitive to touching and close contact doesn't mean that there is no need for this stimulus.

HOW TO UNSCRAMBLE TOUCH AND MOVEMENT SIGNALS

To help your child deal with sensations of touch and movement appropriately the following activities can help.

- Find the kinds of sensations your child likes.
- Try giving a favourite soft toy and show how you can use it to rub limbs, face and head.
- If your child does not like this sensation, try other materials such as soft brushes, silk, wool, fur or velvet.
- Many children who are defensive to light touch love much firmer sensations.

Things to do to support better movement

- rolling down hills,
- Rolling like a log on different surfaces and rolling in blankets,
- rubbing different body parts of different materials, for example, silk, satin, net,
- Creeping on hands and knees through tunnels or rolled up carpet,
- walking with bare feet on a variety of surfaces, for example, grass, sand,
- Swinging children in a blanket held by two adults,
- tactile bags – finding the contents by touch,
- bean bags covered with different materials,
- rolling a light large ball over the child as it lies tummy on the floor.

- This can be achieved by using firmer brushes, firmer pressure like using the palms of the hands or an electric massager.
Rough housing may continue to be a firm favourite with many children.
Distracting your oversensitive child while finding the touch sensations that are okay will usually increase tolerance.

Some children will respond well to:

- slow spinning, rolling and swinging and may progress to doing these activities more vigorously.

Some children just love rapid swinging and spinning activities. This rapid self-stimulation makes them feel good.

Remember, all touch and movement experiences must be pleasant. They must be enjoyed. They must never be unpleasant or cause the child to giggle excessively.

About the author

Maureen Hawke has been directly involved in child development work for the past 25 years.

A mother of three and grandmother of one, Maureen travels extensively, training teachers on ways to promote child development. Born in New Zealand, moving to Australia in 1967, Maureen now lives with her family in Brisbane, Queensland.

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