

THE PARENTING EDUCATION PROGRAM

TODDLERS AND EARLY SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN

The highly active childhood years, from ages two to four, are known as the toddler stage. During this time, toddlers make improvements in their physical skills and begin to recognize their dependence on others while striving to assert themselves as separate individuals. The mental abilities of the toddler expand and they become capable of more complex language, pretending, and remembering and imitating behaviors. The capacity for a variety of emotions and ways to express those emotions emerges. The toddler also begins to become capable of regulating or controlling their own behavior.

As the toddler becomes aware of their separateness they struggle to explore their independence from others. This becomes a time when the toddler wants to do it by themselves. In attempting to develop and state their independence toddlers often say and insist, "I can do it myself". This stage is referred to as development of autonomy. Toddlers also become demanding of having their own way and often say "no" even to things they want. Both of these behaviors are normal ways in which toddlers try to express that they have their own desires and wishes. It is extremely difficult to reason with the two year old toddler due to several factors. The two year old has very little mental ability to reason things out or to understand reasoning because those functions of their thinking have not yet developed. This combined with the strength of their recently discovered will and their inability to control their will can make it very frustrating for both the child and their parents. Understanding the reasons for toddler behavior and the importance of developing autonomy can help parents to discover and understand how to help their toddler learn to manage their own will and their own behavior.

Children in general and toddlers especially, develop a stronger sense of their own worth, higher self esteem, and more realistic

expectations of their abilities when they have opportunities to successfully accomplish new tasks on their own. Parents can assist their toddlers by allowing them to do what they can but giving assistance when needed. Toddlers become frustrated when they are not allowed to attempt tasks they believe they can do. This is a time for parents to exercise their good judgement, encouragement, patience, and kindness with their children. If they are left to try things they are not capable of and fail they may also become frustrated and discouraged. Parents need to assess the dangers or problems that may arise if the toddler is allowed to attempt a particular task and is not successful. A balance between control and freedom helps to protect the child and allow them to experience the trials and errors necessary for learning. If toddlers are allowed to challenge themselves and their abilities without being shamed or ridiculed for their mistakes, they learn to evaluate their abilities more realistically without feeling humiliated by failure. The major hurdle in the psychological development of the toddler is their sense of autonomy versus their sense of shame and doubt about themselves and their abilities.

One very important learning task for toddlers is that of toilet training. This presents an opportunity for the toddler and parents to experience a sense of pride and accomplishment or to become frustrated and locked into a battle of wills. Before the toddler can master the task of toilet training, several other skills must have been developed. The toddler must be able to signal or use a word to communicate with their parents that they need to go to the bathroom. The child must have adequate physical muscle development to be able to control those body functions. The child must be able to recognize their body messages that indicate they need to go to the bathroom. To be successful, children must also be able to find the bathroom or get help in getting there. They also must have enough control to wait until they have removed their clothing. If toddlers have not developed the other necessary skills, they will have little chance of success and both toddler and parent will become frustrated. If

training is begun after signs of readiness in all areas show up, toddlers will be more willing to comply with their parents and actually enjoy accomplishing this important task.

One important and fascinating aspect of development that occurs during the toddler stage is the ability to imagine and fantasize. It is normal and healthy for young children to be able to pretend. They may use their ability to pretend to create an event or relationship that enables them to process their thoughts or feelings with themselves. Toddlers often lack the language skills to communicate their feelings, desires or thoughts accurately with someone else. Fantasy allows them the opportunity to express these things and process them with themselves. Children are often engrossed in fantasy play and they may use it as a means of gaining self-control, learning about themselves, and discovering what is possible or impossible.

For young children, the world seems like a magical place. They do not have the ability to understand how and why many things happen. They just seem to magically occur. They do not have the experience to judge situations and determine the outcome before it happens. They are often surprised and delighted by events that adults see as predictable and ordinary. Toddlers and young children often have difficulty separating some fantasy from reality. Many of their curious questions are their attempts to separate fantasy from reality and develop a way to understand the difference. Many of the stories they hear and television shows they watch have a magical quality about them. The young child's experience of something pretend or magical may have as dramatic an impact or impression as a real event. For that reason, a child's fears are real, no matter if the source of their fear is real or imagined. Children's fears need to be respected and honored as real experiences for them. Feeling safe and secure is very important for the healthy development of children. When children are afraid they need to be comforted and reassured first. Even if a child is capable of reasoning and separating fantasy from reality, they will not be able to do so while they are experiencing a great amount of fear. Frightful dreams and monsters in closets and under

beds are real experiences for children. Telling them there is nothing to be afraid of makes them feel inadequate and teaches them to deny their feelings. When parents comfort and assure their children and then slowly explore the source of their children's fears, they teach their children a valuable skill.

They teach them how to acknowledge their own fearful feelings, comfort themselves and to have the courage to do something about it.

Something as simple as helping a child check under the bed, or close the closet door sets the foundation for an adult who can decide to take a computer class rather than be afraid to apply for a job they would like to have because they've never used a computer.

AGES FOUR TO SIX

There are several areas of development which are common among early school age children. During this time, they develop sex role identification, early moral development, and more social skills. The child's concept of themselves changes as they enter school. Their social environment changes and expectations their parents have of them also change.

With sex role identification, children begin to understand about gender. They learn that there are two genders, male and female. They identify that they belong to one gender, either they are male or female. They are able to categorize other people according to their gender. They also learn that society has different rules and expectations for boys and girls.

Early moral development is an expansion of the child's ability to control their behavior which begins during the toddler stage. The limits regarding behavior are constantly brought to the attention of the toddler. The early school age child begins to internalize the limits and standards that have been set by their parents. As these limits and standards are internalized, children become more successful in controlling their behavior. Their own emotional tension and thoughts about the behavior are enough to lead them to make a decision about their behavior and follow through with it. Most parents would agree that they wish to have children who will behave appropriately

when no one is watching. This is an ideal for both the parent and the child. It frees the parent from the need to constantly intervene to correct the child's behavior. It allows the child to experience more freedom, autonomy, and pride in their own ability to manage their own behavior. This also prepares the child for different social settings where their parents may not be available to intervene regarding their behavior.

Moral development and the internalization of some behavior management makes it possible for the child to successfully engage in group play and enter the school scenario.

Early school age children use of their imaginations and fantasies in their play. They also incorporate their increasing social skills and mental skills into their play. They begin to play group games that have more structure and are more reality based. Peer cooperation is another key element and is possible with the child's increasing development of social skills. Their ability to cooperate, follow rules and switch roles in their interaction with other children broadens the type of activities involved in their play and the richness of their experiences while playing. It is important for parents to know and recognize that children learn many valuable skills while playing. A child's work is their play.

As children enter school, their concept of themselves begins to change. For many children this is symbolic of growing up. They are now old enough and independent enough to be away from their parents care on a regular basis and expected to follow through with acceptable behaviors while in school. This is also a time when children have the opportunity to evaluate themselves and compare themselves with other children their age. Children are also exposed to other people whose beliefs and behaviors may differ from their own or from what they have learned to expect. The early school age child and middle school age child is more sensitive to the expectations of others on themselves, cultural norms and standards of behavior and achievement. Their ability to experience guilt and failure and judgements of themselves makes issues of self-esteem especially important during these years.

Self-esteem is based on a comparison between expectations and achievements and on the messages of love, approval, and support from others. High levels of self-esteem are important for children. The better they realistically feel about themselves, the more successful, adjusted and happy they may be.

The beginning school years set the foundation for later school years and even career choice and development. One of the crucial jobs for parents of school age children is to provide an environment that helps their child get the most out of their school experiences. This includes not only aspects about formal education, but also physical health and development, and especially social experiences and development. It is important to recognize that school offers more than learning the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic.

Due to increasing demands for new skills in the rapidly changing job market, new and different skills are now taught even in our elementary schools. It is becoming more and more evident that the ability to use computers is becoming a necessary skill today. Our children will need to be exposed to many different skills than we were if they are going to keep up and be successful. As important as these formal educational skills are for our children, their school experience offers opportunities to develop other skills they will need their entire lives, no matter what their careers hold for them.

School physical education and health programs provide children with an opportunity to exercise and train their bodies as well as their minds. Obviously, physical well being and health are very important factors in our lives. Today children can learn in school how to take care of their health. School athletics can also prepare students for careers in athletics as well as teach them the value of healthy competition, exercise and physical fun.

Children have the opportunity to develop and enhance many social skills in their school setting. Peer relationships offer experiences to develop meaningful friendships. These relationships teach children how to communicate on a personal level with others, how to express their feelings, how to get their needs met, and how to respect the

needs of others. In general they learn how to get along with other people without giving up too much of themselves in the process. In their relationships with teachers and other authorities, they learn how to determine what is expected from them, how to respond and how to get a task done. They may learn that they may not personally like a teacher and still need to manage their behavior so that they can cooperate and comply with what is expected from them. They learn how to negotiate with people. They learn that people are different in their expectations, beliefs, behaviors and customs and how to accept those differences. These social skills are skills that every child and every adult can continue to use throughout their lives.

Being able to get along with co-workers, customers, bosses, relatives, family, friends, and neighbors is important. Being able to communicate with others so that we are understood and get our needs met is crucial. Learning how to respect the needs and rights of others allows us to have more harmony in our lives.

Parents can assist their children by recognizing the importance of the variety of educational experiences and challenges children encounter at school. It is important that parents help set their children up for success in school. Children need a calm, stable, comfortable home environment to be most successful in school. Helping children to organize their time and their activities reinforces the organizational skills they learn at school. Parents can assist their children with difficult learning tasks by encouraging them and being empathetic when their children express their concerns over their struggles and challenges. Sometimes children need to hear new material in a different way in order to understand it. Children have distinct ways in which they learn best. Some need to hear it, others need to see it and still others need to be able to touch, handle or work with things to learn them. Parents can use these techniques to help their children when they have a hard time learning at school. Parents can compliment children on their efforts and what progress they are making, rather than focusing on what they haven't mastered yet. Children need to hear that they are capable of learning new

things, that it is OK to make mistakes and that they can try again and again if necessary. The messages children get from their teachers and parents helps to mold their expectations of themselves, their abilities and their futures.

Take time now to remember your own personal experiences of, or feelings as a young child. What memories do you have of your school years? Did you feel like you could be successful? How did you get along with other children? What did your parents do to encourage you or were they very critical of you? Try to come up with one experience or situation you would like to have had different in school or as a young child. Take time now to tell that little child what they needed to hear in order to know how to handle the situation differently or to feel differently about things.

You can do this by writing a letter to yourself. Write yourself a letter about your experience and how you felt as a young child. Next using your adult experience and knowledge write a letter to that little child telling the child what they needed to hear or know. Read the letters to yourself and allow yourself to feel your feelings. Then imagine re-living the situation, using the new knowledge, understanding and support you just gave to that little child to create a different outcome.

**STUDY QUESTIONS - STUDY GUIDE FOUR
TODDLERS AND EARLY SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN**

1. The toddler begins to become capable of _____
their own behavior.
 - a) monitoring
 - b) understanding and fixing
 - c) explaining
 - d) regulating or controlling

2. When toddlers attempt to develop and state their independence,
they are developing _____.
 - a) autonomy
 - b) flexibility
 - c) accountability
 - d) trust versus mistrust

3. Which of the following is not a reason why it is extremely
difficult to reason with a toddler.
 - a) they have very little mental ability to reason.
 - b) they have a very strong will.
 - c) they lack ability to control their will.
 - d) they enjoy arguing with their parents.

4. Toddlers develop stronger sense of self-worth and more realistic
expectations of their abilities when:
 - a) their mistakes are pointed out to them.
 - b) they have opportunities to successfully accomplish new tasks
on their own.
 - c) they are controlled and not allowed to attempt new things
without their parents helping them.
 - d) they are left to do very difficult things alone.

5. Parents can assist their toddlers by allowing them to do what
they can, _____:
 - a) but giving them assistance when needed.
 - b) coaching the child through every new activity.
 - c) providing an environment that has no challenges.
 - d) refusing to help toddlers with new tasks.

6. If toddlers are left to try things that they are not capable of
and they fail, they may _____:
 - a) try till they hurt themselves.
 - b) become frustrated and discouraged.
 - c) feel a sense of accomplishment.
 - d) become resentful.

7. A balance between _____ and _____ helps to protect the child and allow them to experience the trials and errors necessary for learning.
- a) challenges and rewards
 - b) control and restriction
 - c) freedom and power
 - d) control and freedom
8. It is important for toddlers to challenge themselves and their abilities without being _____ for their mistakes.
- a) shamed or ridiculed
 - b) realistic
 - c) evaluated
 - d) doubted or confused
9. Toilet training for toddlers should begin:
- a) at age 12 months
 - b) when the child decides they are interested
 - c) at age 2 years
 - d) after necessary skills and signs of readiness in all areas show up
10. It is _____ for young children to be able to pretend or fantasize.
- a) unusual and dangerous
 - b) normal and healthy
 - c) difficult
 - d) frustrating to adults
11. Toddlers and young children often have difficulty separating some _____.
- a) rules and behaviors
 - b) fantasy from reality
 - c) will from control
 - d) success and failure
12. Children's fears need to be _____ as real experiences for them.
- a) separated
 - b) considered as fantasies rather than
 - c) criticized
 - d) respected and honored
13. When children are afraid they need to be _____:
- a) comforted and reassured first.
 - b) reasoned with.
 - c) told there is nothing to be afraid of.
 - d) criticized.

14. Telling children there is nothing to be afraid of makes them feel _____:
a) comforted.
b) insecure.
c) more afraid.
d) inadequate.
15. Which of the following is not a common early stage of development for early school age children.
a) sex role identification
b) moral development
c) more social skills
d) autonomy
16. When children learn that society has different expectations for boys and girls they are learning:
a) sex role identification
b) early moral development
c) more social skills
d) autonomy
17. Early moral development is an expansion of the child's ability to control their _____:
a) emotions.
b) thoughts.
c) behavior.
d) temper.
18. As limits and standards are _____, children become more successful in controlling their behavior.
a) strict
b) internalized
c) confining
d) understood
19. It is important for parents to know that children learn _____ while playing.
a) nothing
b) many valuable skills
c) very little
d) everything
20. _____ is based on a comparison between expectations and achievements and on the messages of love, approval, and support from others.
a) rewards
b) praise
c) achievement
d) self-esteem

21. The beginning school years set the foundation for later school years and _____.
- a) career choice
 - b) friendships
 - c) social skills
 - d) self-esteem
22. If they are going to keep up and be successful our children will need _____.
- a) to have strict guidelines and standards
 - b) to be exposed to many different skills
 - c) to be good athletes
 - d) only formal educational skills
23. _____ provide children with an opportunity to exercise and train their bodies as well as their minds.
- a) recess
 - b) sports
 - c) athletics
 - d) physical education and health programs
24. _____ offer experiences to develop meaningful friendships and social skills.
- a) communication exercise
 - b) peer relationships
 - c) formal educational skills
 - d) school assignments
25. Which is not a social skill children learn from their peer relationships.
- a) to express their feelings
 - b) to get their needs met
 - c) to respect the needs of others
 - d) to convince others to do things their own way
26. In general, in school, children also learn how to get along with other people without _____.
- a) giving up too much of themselves in the process
 - b) thinking of themselves
 - c) taking care of their own needs
 - d) negotiating
27. The social skills that children learn in school are _____:
- a) not important in their development.
 - b) useful through out their life.
 - c) only important until they become adults.
 - d) taught mostly by teachers.

28. Learning how to respect the needs and rights of others allows us to have more _____ in our lives.
- a) communication
 - b) expectations
 - c) skill
 - d) harmony
29. Which of the following is an example of how parents can set their children up for success in school.
- a) pointing out their mistakes in their school work.
 - b) challenging children by doubting their abilities.
 - c) being encouraging and empathetic with children.
 - d) Being critical of their mistakes.
30. The messages children get from their teachers and parents:
- a) helps to mold their expectations of themselves.
 - b) is not very often remembered by children.
 - c) should always remind them of their mistakes.
 - d) should always make things easy for the child.