
FAMILY • SERVICES

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GIFTS THAT LAST A LIFETIME

What Your Child *Really* Needs From You This Holiday Season

ACCEPT YOUR CHILD'S TEMPERAMENT

Each child is born with a unique temperament that influences his reaction to life experiences, fears and family events. You will be able to see your child displaying qualities which show his preference for one way of reacting. This preference is part of one's *inherited* temperament which can be altered, but *never really change*. The more you understand, accept, and encourage your child to be himself and to "march to his own drummer," the calmer and happier he will be.

Research indicates that even babies show evidence of inborn temperament:

The EASY Child: This child takes the world as it comes, has regular body rhythms, and is flexible. He will be the least fearful in new situations and will tend to use a variety of coping strategies when faced with a fearful event.

The DIFFICULT Child: This child is irritated and thrown off track by change, has irregular body rhythms, and tends to approach the world in an anxious and sometimes negative manner.

The SLOW TO WARM UP Child: This child will stand back to size up a situation before deciding whether or not to become involved. He is often a shy, reserved child who approaches the world cautiously. This child will abstain quietly from fear-inducing encounters, and may be hesitant about making specific fears known to adults.

As children get a bit older, you will notice these two types emerging:

The Young INTROVERT: Introverts refresh themselves by being alone or with one or two special people. Introverts share their worries in bits and pieces. You have to listen well or you will miss them. Introverts are their own best friends. Participating in a group forces them to act outside of themselves which is difficult for them. Energy is drained as they socialize. An unrecognized *need for time alone* is one of the major reasons these children have tantrums, fight with siblings, or get nasty. Time alone "recharges their batteries." Introverts need their physical space and sharing can be difficult for them. Introverts need time for reflection. They like to think about problems and then talk about them. Sometimes, it can be frustrating for a parent not knowing what is going on in an introverted child's mind. They need thinking space and feel unsettled when pushed for answers. We need to respect their quiet process.

The Young EXTROVERT: Extroverts *draw their energy from others*, not from within. They jabber constantly and follow you around demanding your ear. Allowing extroverts to talk and share their experiences gives them energy. They like to discuss the action and ideas as they occur. They *need time with people*, because they energize themselves by interacting with others. They are happier when they are with others. Forcing them to play alone in order to become "independent" is not helpful to them. Extroverts also need feedback and lots of it!! Sometimes, it seems like they can't get enough of it! But extroverts "think by talking." To solve a problem or reduce their stress, they need someone to listen so that they can work it out for themselves. Their thoughts will spill out in words and you will always know what's on an extroverted child's mind.

Accepting your
child's
temperament
will allow him
to become the
person he's
meant to be!

TRUST YOUR CHILD TO GROW AT HIS OWN PACE

Stop pushing! Trust your child's inborn motivation to grow and develop *as he is ready!* If you keep in mind that your children pretty much learned to walk and talk by themselves, it may help you to relax about the more complicated things they'll need to learn later on.

**Let Go!
Stop
Pushing!**

Give your child
time to "play"
and do the
important work of
childhood!

Pushing doesn't work because it is impossible to push a child into more advanced performance before he is ready. Why? Because children learn in a logical, developmental sequence. One step must happen before the next. Babies do not grasp until their fingers have physically matured enough to do the grasping. Children do not write until their fingers have developed the fine muscles to control the pencil.

Children learn by doing, experiencing, playing and interacting with others and with a variety of materials. When they are allowed to be children and "play," they are putting down the foundation or building blocks for learning the next steps.

There is a big danger that parents are rushing their children to be "little adults" in our fast-paced culture. Children need a childhood!! Our experience has shown that excessive demands made of children tend to produce resistance and invite failure. The longer these unrealistic demands continue, the greater the damage to a child's self-esteem.

GIVE YOUR CHILD "ROOTS AND WINGS"

Children need these two basics in order to grow into emotionally healthy adults. Parents give children roots when they create a secure base for children. "Roots" grow from consistent and predictable nurturing, positive relationships, clear and firm limits, and protection from harm. Parents help children grow "wings" when they encourage them to try and take risks, believe that their children can succeed, support them when they fail, let them struggle to solve their own problems, refrain from overprotecting them, and give them freedom when they need to "fly" on their own.

GIVE YOUR CHILD SECURITY WITH RULES AND ROUTINES

Family rules and routines organize life -- both for us and our children. They create a feeling of safety for a child in knowing exactly what to expect. He doesn't have to worry about what will happen next. She doesn't have to push each night to see what time her parents will *really* make her go to bed. Many children act up in order to try to figure out just what the boundaries are. Rules and routines can create more peace in a home than almost anything else. All of this gives children the comfort and trust that their world is safe, that they know what to expect, and that the people they love the most are predictable.

*Children want
the security of
a firm fence
around them.*

*It's a parent's job
to guard the gate—
and make sure it
always stays
latched!*

GIVE YOUR CHILD PROTECTION BY "STAYING IN CHARGE"

By staying in charge as a parent, you add to your child's foundation of security. Even though it may seem like a paradox, children get scared and anxious inside when they think they have all the power. They begin to feel unsafe when the adults in their world repeatedly give in to them or don't set clear and dependable limits. Children feel overwhelmed by TOO much freedom and they feel TOO powerful. When children feel more powerful than their parents, they feel unsure of their parent's ability to protect them. They need us to be bigger and stronger than they are so that they can feel safe. Children need the loving enclosure of limits to push up against so that they know how far to go and when they have gone too far. They need to feel that someone greater than them is able to STOP them when they are not able to stop themselves. They test the gate, but they need us to keep it latched.

ENRICH YOUR CHILD'S LIFE WITH RITUALS AND TRADITIONS

Both children and adults find comfort in meaningful rituals in their families. Family therapists work with families to revitalize their family rituals to give meaning and stability in these times of rapid change. Families move, relationships change, crises and losses occur, life-cycles repeat, new beginnings unfold. Rituals help connect us with our past, define our present life, and show us a path to the future. .

Children who grow up in a family with strong rituals are more likely to be emotionally resilient as adults. We now know that when families preserve their rituals, such as having dinner together nightly, the children fare better emotionally, even in the face of disruptive problems like alcoholism. Sadly, some of the old "bedrock rituals" (such as family dinners together) are giving way to the stresses of modern life. For children in particular, rituals are crucial to their sense of stability and connection within the family. Rituals offer dependable anchors to children that assure them of the continuity of life and relationships

Think about your children and your traditions that have already been established that are important anchors for your children. The nightly bedtime story, repetitive sayings such as "Sleep tight, don't let the bed bugs bite," the good night kiss, songs, and other bedtime rituals comfort children. Mealtime is also full of opportunities. A time of "giving thanks," special foods with favorite family recipes, chosen dishes that are served every birthday or holiday, lighting a candle to

mark special occasions, or even using special dishes or good silverware begin to take on a positive ritual quality for children. Holidays are often the time some of our richest memories. What traditions do you want to establish as rituals for your children?

Most families begin to establish their rituals when their children are preschoolers, so this is a good time to reflect upon what you want your child to remember. By the time a child is five, these rituals become a critical stabilizing force in a child's sense of identity. They are the key ingredients in giving him a sense of security in himself and how his family works together.

TELL YOUR CHILD THAT YOU BELIEVE IN HER

Our children need us to form an alliance with their emerging sense of self. They need us to BELIEVE in them. This means that we need to "lend our strength" to our children in our words and actions. I like to think of children as "borrowing our confidence" until they get enough of their own! When we encourage them to do things for themselves—and we don't rush in to rescue them by doing it for them—they develop a sense of mastery and belief in their own ability and worth. Let your child struggle...but give her encouragement. Let her know you believe she can do it, even if it's difficult!

Here are some **POSITIVE WORDS** you can say:

I know you can do it.

You've got it made.

That's right!

You're on the right track now!

That's coming along nicely

GOOD WORK!

That's very much better.

I'm happy to see you working like that.

You're really working hard today.

You've just about got it.

That's the best you've ever done.

You are learning fast.

Good for you!

One more time and you'll have it.

WONDERFUL!

I love working with you!

Nice going!

You've just about mastered that.

FANTASTIC!

You're doing beautifully.

Good remembering!

What a good job.

Keep it up.

Good thinking.

I'm very proud of you.

You figured that out fast.

Well, look at you go!

You're getting better every day.

Now you have the hang of it.

CLEVER!

Keep up the good work!

That makes me feel good.

GIVE YOUR CHILD TIME ALONE WITH YOU

Remember that spending time with each child is an irrefutable message of love. Nothing you are doing - including your job - is more important than being with your children. A horrifying statistic says that as little as 4 1/2 minutes a day is the average time a child talks to his or her parents--and that 2 1/2 minutes of that time is spent in correcting the child. That leaves about two minutes a day for morals, values, and "Oh, by the way. I love you and care about you." Pitted against the messages of television and the world through which your child walks each day, *that is not enough time!!!*

Take one child to breakfast, lunch or dinner (or even out for ice cream) once a week. Go for a walk together. Go somewhere away from the family and do something where talking is invited. You don't know what to say? Small children LOVE to imagine. Ask things like: "If you had a magic wand, what would you do with it?" When grown-ups take time to be with children and create a safe space where the truth may be spoken, it is a bridge of unimaginable strength and calm to each of you. (S. Mac Daniel, *Recipes for Parenting*)

"If you want your children to be brilliant, read them fairy tales. If you want your children to be more brilliant, read them more fairy tales."

-Albert Einstein

READ, READ, READ TO YOUR CHILD

Do you want your child to be bright, literate, well-spoken, and do well in school? The best thing you can do to help him is to READ to him! Not just a little...read to him A LOT! The latest research shows that even babies who are read to learn from exposure to the printed word and the rhythms and sounds of speech. Children who grow up in what we call a "PRINT RICH" environment have better language and are more advanced in their cognitive skills. They also gain from the emotional experience of closeness and bonding that comes in sitting together while reading.

What else can you do? Recognize print all around your child, point out signs, go to the library together, sing nursery rhymes and songs, play rhyming and reciting games, put up magnetic letters for play on the refrigerator, after reading

stories, ask your child to “read” to you (let him pretend), encourage him to retell stories or tell you his own and write them down, encourage dramatic play that uses lots of language, or teach your child a poem and help him learn it by heart. Make this FUN and a special time to enjoy each other!

PROTECT YOUR CHILD’S BRAIN FROM MEDIA OVERSTIMULATION

Everyday we read in the paper about new discoveries in children’s brain development. There have been tremendous breakthroughs in neuroscience that help us understand how children learn. The first six years of a child’s life are crucial in the formation of “neural networks” in the brain that will guide their mental and emotional abilities for their entire lifetime. These networks are made from the real life *experiences* a child has. Every time your child has any experience, a connection between brain cells is stimulated. The more *repeated experiences* a child has, the stronger the connections become. Also, the *type of experiences* a child determines their brain “software.” Parents may want to ask themselves: do I want my child’s repeated experiences to come from television and videos—or from real relationships?

**Whose messages
and values are
shaping the
“software” of
your child’s
brain?**

Children today are being raised and educated in a very different way. The influence of family and school has lessened, while mass media has become a much more powerful shaper of children’s minds. The control of media to shape children’s thoughts, feelings, attitudes, values and behavior is increasingly obvious to parents, as well as social scientists researching it. Children as young as 14 months of age will imitate what they see on TV. Young children do not know what is “real” and what is “pretend.”

Researchers (which included preschoolers) found a positive link between exposure to media violence and subsequent aggressive behavior. Viewing violence does *not* have a “catharsis effect.” It does *not* allow children to vicariously “blow off steam.” Rather, children imitate what they see and hear. This can be part of a lasting pattern. Children who are heavy TV viewers see characters solve problems by behaving aggressively, and they are at high risk for encoding the aggressive solutions into their memory. Constant exposure has also been shown to lead to emotional desensitization and lack of empathy. Worse still, the more media a young child watches, the less he or she has an opportunity to use creativity in play and imagination, the critical factors in intellectual development. Rather than being actively engaged in their learning, they are passive receivers. Childhood obesity is another alarming consequence of increased television viewing. Limit the amount of television your child watches to 1-2 hours per day and be careful of the content. Preschoolers should watch mostly educational programming, says the Nat. Institute for Media & the Family.

LISTEN TO YOUR CHILD’S FEELINGS

We often feel most “loved” when we feel understood without judgment or lecturing! When a child experiences you listening to him, REALLY LISTENING to his feelings—to the message that lies beneath his words—then he experiences the remarkable gift of ACCEPTANCE. When you reflect back to your child what you have just heard, you are helping him label and identify the feelings he is expressing, while at the same time communicating that you are listening, which opens the door to discussion. Lecturing, on the other hand, only closes the door.

Here are some suggestions:

“You really wish Santa would come RIGHT NOW!”

“It sounds like you were sad when that happened...”

“You want a baby brother SO BADLY!!”

“You wish you could have all those toys.”

“Boy, you’re really angry!”

“You’re really scared of the monster...”

“You’re worried you’ll miss Mommy...”

“You HATE having to wait in line...”

TAKE CARE OF YOUR OWN EMOTIONAL BAGGAGE

We pass on our “ghosts in the closet” and our unresolved issues. As John Bradshaw has made so clear in his famous books and television programs on the family, our children are the unfortunate carriers of our hurt and shame. There can be unhealed wounds that seep through generations in the form of alcoholism, codependency, uncontrollable anger, poor parenting, abuse, and so forth. Many of us do not carry such serious traumas, but certainly most of us carry some unresolved issues from the past which often “trip us up” when we become parents. It is VERY important that we recognize these areas and become aware of them. *The truth is that we repeat what we experienced unless we change the pattern!* If we truly love our children and want the best for them, we will take care of ourselves and deal with our “baggage.”