



# Growing Together

Newsletter for  
parents of preschool children

Games & Activities

## Hard or soft?

Here's a game that is easy to put together. First, collect a variety of objects around the house that are either hard or soft.

Here are some examples: Hard—rock, block, book, toy truck, comb, and bar of soap. Soft—tissue, cotton ball, eraser, scarf, sock, pillow, towel.

First have the players divide the objects into two piles by identifying each one as hard or soft.

Next, to make the task more difficult, put the objects into a bag or box and identify them by feeling only, without looking, and saying whether they're hard or soft.

Finally, the players can locate and identify a new set of objects to play another round.

The game can be made easier or harder, depending on the objects you choose and the ages of the players. □

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Parenting

## It's okay to cry

Few things are more distressing than seeing a child hurt and crying. The natural response for parents and other adults is to hug the child and say, "Hush. Don't cry. Everything will be all right."

Yet this can be exactly the wrong response because these words don't allow children to possess their own emotions. The message they hear is, "Stop now. There's nothing to cry about."

This makes the little one cry even more since his or her inner self needs to prove that there IS something to cry about.

One mom suggested a better reaction in such a situation. Say to the child, "It's okay to cry. I know it hurts (or that you feel badly). Cry until it stops hurting."

She said she found this reply worked better. When her children were given "permission" to cry, it was often all that was needed to stop the flow of tears. And even if it didn't, the children felt they had a right to their own emotions, had the freedom to release them and were consoled.

In helping a child deal with a hurt, the importance of having a right to his or her own feelings cannot be overstressed.

Even the youngest children

pick up unspoken ideas from parents and other adults. When they sense that what they are feeling needs to be suppressed or kept inside, the message is also given that these emotions and feelings are unacceptable and unimportant.

Phrases from the past, such as "crying is for babies" and "be a big girl" are, unfortunately, still used, and not only do they show little empathy for the child's problem, they also do nothing to encourage his or her self-esteem.

If children are to grow up seeing themselves as worthwhile people, they need to know at an early age that feelings are neither good nor bad, they just are, as a result of something that's happened. What's necessary is to express them and deal with them.

So, when your little one is crying, whether it's because she fell as she was learning to walk or because he wasn't chosen to play in a game, stop for a moment before you begin to offer comfort.

Then remember that the best way we can help these children handle their emotions is to surround them with love and acceptance, and to say: "It's okay to cry until it stops hurting." □

## Moving on

Most babies usually make an exciting discovery during the second half of their first year: If they move, they can go someplace and get something!

This is an important milestone in Baby's life. She has taken the first step toward controlling the world around her.

This discovery seems to come almost by accident, but it cannot happen unless Baby is developmentally ready for it.

Usually what happened is that Baby sees a desirable object, which she finds to be just out of reach. She rolls and stretches, but it remains beyond her.

In her excitement, Baby rocks on her stomach, moving her arms and kicking her legs. In the process, she pulls and/or pushes against the surface she is lying on, and suddenly she can reach the object she desires.

What an exciting discovery: "If I move, I can go somewhere and get something!" Now Baby has found a way to get what she wants all by herself.

This new discovery is so exciting that Baby begins to pull herself around just for the sake of moving from one place to another.

She learns better ways of moving herself around by pulling with her arms and pushing with her legs.

She pivots around and around on her middle. She pushes herself backwards. She pulls herself forward.

Her "reachable" world en-

larges and she can explore objects and places previously out of reach. But dragging herself along on her stomach is not a very efficient way of getting from place to place, and Baby continues to search for a better way—which is creeping.

By the last part of the eighth month, many babies have found this better way or have at least shown evidence of progress toward it.



They have been helped by an important developmental reflex which has been getting stronger over the past couple of months. It happens as a result of the position of Baby's head and neck.

Here's what happens: When Baby tilts her head up and back,

a reflex tends to strengthen the muscles which straighten her elbows, as well as those which bend her hips and knees.

So, when she lifts her head and chest, her arms stiffen to support her weight and her hips and knees bend to pull her knees up under her.

Now, the same reflex which helped Baby get into this crouching position tends to keep her crouched. When she tries to push forward, her arms give, her head goes down, and she collapses on the floor again.

To continue her progress toward the upright position, Baby must learn how to inhibit this reflex and hasten its normal weakening.

She does this by rocking forward and back, forward and back, until one day her arms continue to support her and she does not collapse.

Instead, she moves forward and begins her first attempt at creeping. By the end of their eighth month, a third to one half of all infants have progressed to creeping.

Still later, this reflex helps her pull to a standing position, holding on to the sides of her playpen, or on to a convenient piece of furniture.

It may be some time before Baby walks alone, however, since she has much learning still to do. But in this exciting period, she has moved a long way toward the day she takes her first independent step. □

## A more independent youngster

Around a child's second birthday, one can observe a shift from a dependent toddler to a more independent preschool youngster.

Since this phase continues for several months, it is worth discussing in more detail.

Parents who have an understanding of the changes that occur in their child will be better prepared to handle the behavior that they may see.

This change to a more independent youngster is brought about by several changes, such as: (1) increased movement skills; (2) improved language ability and (3) newly emerging social skills.

Youngster's movement skills now let her explore new territories. Just being able to climb stairs one at a time allows her to experience the delight of discovering things on her own.

At the same time, her improved language ability provides her with new opportunities to express her own thoughts and to talk more with other people.

As Youngster begins to play with other children her age—at first alongside them in “parallel” play and later in face-to-face play—her newly emerging social skills also help her to make the transition from dependence to independence.

Often a child's striving for independence can be very trying for parents. She may insist on doing things for herself—like dressing—even though the adults in her life are quite sure

they can do the same things for her more efficiently and more neatly!

It is also hard on parents when Youngster constantly seems to want to “test the limits.” It is often at this stage that she may suddenly decide to give up her afternoon nap—just when parents most need a midday break!

It is obvious that some adjustments in family living need to be made to take into consideration these developmental changes in behavior.

Go along with her where you can. Encourage independence by giving her choices, when possible: “Do you want to wear the red shirt or the blue one?”

In some cases, you must insist on your decision as an adult and a parent. Explain why your decision must be followed, but be prepared to insist, even if the result is fireworks.

Children don't stay two years old forever, and this, too, will pass. In the meantime, your child learns that independence is fine, but it does have limits. □

### Something New!

“Grandma Says” is a twice-monthly special message that includes general parenting tips, words of encouragement, and children's book reviews. To receive your free issues, go to: [www.GrowingChild.com/FreeGrandmaSays](http://www.GrowingChild.com/FreeGrandmaSays) and enter your e-mail address.

## Learning from real life

It's easier to understand a new idea if the lesson includes real-life objects rather than using pictures or words.

For example, the word “orange” stands for the *fruit* (object) we eat as well as for the *color* of certain things.

That idea may be hard for children to understand if we just tell them about it or show them pictures.

If children touch, smell, peel, and eat an orange, and then look around for other objects that match the *color* of the orange peel, the idea will come alive.

Any time a youngster is having trouble understanding something from a picture or from words, try using the real object or action itself. □



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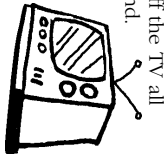


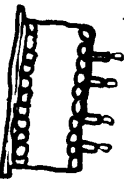








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Articles in **Growing Together** refer to both boys and girls. For simplicity, the pronouns “he” and “she” are used interchangeably unless otherwise noted.

[www.growingchild.com](http://www.growingchild.com)

# February, 2009

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<p>1</p> <p>In what month is your birthday? Mark the calendar.</p>	<p>2</p> <p>Groundhog Day. Will the groundhog see his shadow today?</p>	<p>3</p> <p>Name the colors of your shoes.</p> 	<p>4</p> <p>Draw a picture of where you live.</p>	<p>5</p> <p>Jump up in the air three times.</p>	<p>6</p> <p>See if there are any icicles outside.</p>	<p>7</p> <p>Turn off the TV all weekend.</p> 
<p>8</p> <p>Visit a retirement community.</p>	<p>9</p> <p>What time does the sun set?</p> 	<p>10</p> <p>Give your child his or her own box of tissues to encourage "nose wiping." Write the child's name on the box.</p>	<p>11</p> <p>Read "The Little Engine That Could."</p> 	<p>12</p> <p>Abraham Lincoln's birthday.</p> 	<p>13</p> <p>Have a bagel for breakfast.</p>	<p>14</p> <p>Valentine's Day. Make a valentine for someone special.</p> 
<p>15</p> <p>Have a tea party.</p> 	<p>16</p> <p>President's Day. What is our president's name?</p>	<p>17</p> <p>Read a nursery rhyme. Can you pick out the words that rhyme?</p> 	<p>18</p> <p>What did you eat for breakfast?</p>	<p>19</p> <p>Brush Baby's hair with a soft brush.</p> 	<p>20</p> <p>Before bed, talk about what you did today.</p> 	<p>21</p> <p>Practice pouring an object (or dry cereal) from one cup or container to another.</p>
<p>22</p> <p>George Washington's birthday. Sing Happy Birthday to him.</p>	<p>23</p> <p>Color this page yellow.</p> 	<p>24</p> <p>Read a comforting story before bedtime.</p>	<p>25</p> <p>Put a blanket on your back and pretend to be a turtle.</p>	<p>26</p> <p>Disguise yourself so no one knows who you are!</p> 	<p>27</p> <p>Plan a home fire drill.</p> 	<p>28</p> <p>Let Toddler hold and feel a dry sponge. Then put it in a pan of water and let her feel it again. What's different?</p>
<p>Write your name here.</p>	<p>Draw a picture of your pet.</p>	<p>Make a star.</p>	