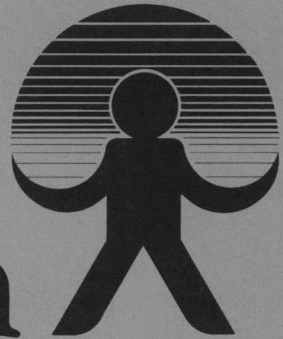


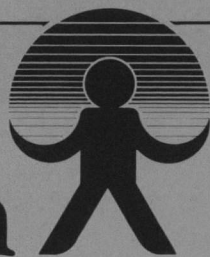
EM 8256 • Reprinted March 1991

# Oregon's Children



*Letters for parents of preschoolers: Letter 3*

# Oregon's Children



## Parents Are Teachers Letter 3

Oregon State University Extension Service

### Parents Are Teachers

**M**any parents think children learn only when they go to school. However, learning success is more likely when children have parents and caregivers who inform, guide, and encourage them.

Even after children start school, the home is still a classroom. You are a guide, teacher, and partner in exploring daily events, but not as lessons or scheduled occurrences. Don't try to be a school teacher; instead, use your natural spontaneous responses with your children to provide a rich, continuous flow of experiences and information.

Your teaching helps children understand what causes what; why people say, do, and feel the way they do; and how families work. This daily teaching develops your children's sense of belonging, responsibility to themselves and others, and ability to make decisions.

Educators do not recommend attempting to raise your child's IQ with reading and math drills. Children with learning difficulties usually have more problems with feelings of worthlessness and incompetence than with low intelligence scores. Learning flourishes among children who have achieved independence, self-worth, and self-direction.

### What About Reading?

Parents teach reading from the day a child is born. When Jim arrives at school announcing he can read, he is saying more about his home life than his intellectual superiority. He's revealing a background where mother and dad read him stories and poems, and acted out songs and rhymes. He's been on errands to the store, library, or post office. He's handled books, magazines, puzzles, and games. He's probably printed his name in many places.

The tools for learning to read are many listening, speaking, reading, and writing experiences. Children saturated with language experiences learn to read easily because words are familiar to them. Five-year-olds use a vocabulary of about 2,000 words to talk about what's happening to them daily. If your children watch "Sesame Street" they'll be singing the alphabet song long before it means anything to them. But the sounds of letters are being written in their minds. With your help, three-year-olds will find the letter on cereal boxes that begins their name. Reading is natural when words and letters are familiar; it's miserable when they aren't.

Children must be familiar with words and meanings before they can recognize them in print. To teach reading at home:

**Talk with children** about numbers, colors, shapes, sizes, and events so they understand words.

**Take children places** so they have new experiences and things to talk about. Help them expand their stories by saying things like, "What were the other children playing with?"

**Listen** to what children want to tell. They practice language by talking about things that interest them like Alex's new cat or the preschool picnic.

**Print** letters of the alphabet. Four- and five-year-olds first print straight line letters and add curved ones later.

**Read** to children. Learning language takes people and time. Children must also hear words from you rather than the TV or radio. Older preschoolers can go to bed with a book so they can "read" themselves to sleep at night.

Most children who become good readers live in an environment where reading is valued and rewarded.



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## Guide Emotional Control

By age 3 the preschooler's heightened awareness and imagination prompts a range of emotional responses—uninvited feelings that cause children to laugh, cry, or hit someone within the same hour.

A child's emotional reaction may be interpreted as "bad" behavior but it is a response to feelings that the child doesn't understand. Children's emotional outbursts stem from their fear of losing your love, having their plans blocked, or fear for their safety.

It's not easy to accept a child's way of expressing feelings. Affectionately recognize your children's emotions as normal behavior and teach them ways to handle their feelings.

**Fear.** Preschoolers see the world differently than adults do. Many things are mysterious and scary when you're only two feet tall and a beginner in everything.

Imagination abounds in preschooler's minds. Unusual appearing people, masks, animals, strange noises, and dark rooms are fearsome. Five-year-olds show less fear but continue to fear the dark and parents abandoning them. They fear more for their own safety than younger children.

No matter how unreasonable a fear seems to you, it is very real to a child. Recognize their fear, hold them, and reassure them you are there to keep them safe. Failing to relieve your children's fears, forcing them into frightening situations, teasing or calling them "fraidy cat," leads to anxiety.

Handle fear of the dark by placing a night light in the bedroom or leave their door slightly open. If children have nightmares, comfort and stay with them until they return to sleep. Taking children into your bed is not recommended because it leads to a habit they might like to continue.

Some preschoolers fear your disapproval if they wet the bed or get dirty during play. You may find body control occurring sooner if you focus on successes of toilet training, not the accidents. Your casual acceptance of getting dirty during play lets your children enjoy playtime.

Children usually fear new experiences. While some wade fearlessly into swimming pools or lakes, others panic at the water's edge. Gradually face these situations. Let your children play on the shore or by the pool's edge until they want to get their feet wet.

Sometimes children are afraid of animals. Let them pet puppies or kittens and watch animals at the zoo to feel comfortable around animals. If you force or threaten your children to do something they're afraid of, they may lose trust in you.

**Jealousy** is a miserable emotion everyone has and hates to admit. Around 18 months, toddlers notice you giving attention to others and develop a fear of losing your love. Jealousy is a normal feeling that cannot be entirely prevented.

Children do not understand that it's possible for you to love more than one person. Preschoolers are jealous of babies because they steal your attention. They're also jealous of older siblings or other children who might have more privileges or toys—what they consider symbols of greater love.

Jealousy can be the reason behind hitting, pouting, imitating baby, or show-off behavior. Four- or five-year-olds often try to show how much better they are than the child of whom they are jealous. It's not possessions, other children, or privileges that cause jealousy, but the imagined loss of your love.

You cannot treat all children alike no matter how hard you try, nor can a child have all your attention. Scolding jealous preschoolers for aggressive actions against other children makes them more jealous. In their eyes, sticking up for someone else only proves you love the other one more. Telling them to love the baby or other children increases guilt about a feeling they can't control.

Relieve jealousy with attention and affection to reassure children of your love. Daily spend time with each child and praise their accomplishments without comparing them to others. Jealous feelings are lessened when children are satisfied with the amount of attention given them.

**Anger and aggression** often occur together. Anger is a temporary feeling caused by frustration. Aggression flares when problems are solved by hitting and fighting. Preschoolers want to be in charge but run into many situations in which they feel either not big enough, skillful enough, or out of control. Screaming, "I hate you. You're mean," translates as, "You're frustrating my wants." Anger can be triggered by the failure to get a trike Johnny is riding or having to leave play for dinner.

In dealing with angry children avoid punishing, shaming, or teasing them for having the feeling. This doesn't help them to learn what to do about the feeling. Teach children to express their feelings by saying, "You're mad because Johnny won't let you play with his trike." Encourage further talk about the troublesome situation and other things they could play with.

Occasionally children completely lose control of themselves. If so, you'll need to hold them or take them away from the scene. This is not punishment, but prevention from hurting themselves or others. Be sure you tell them why you're doing this, "I'm not willing to let you hurt Johnny. You



can play in the sandbox or show me how to make mud pies." Sometimes all they need is affection.

Children follow your example. If you or others in the family scream or hit in anger, a child learns that is a way to express angry feelings. You want children to stand up for their rights, but they need your help to learn how to do it. Usually praise for a child's generosity, patience, and skills removes many of a child's reasons for anger.

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## Eating Right

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Young children depend on parents to select food for them. They need protein, vitamins, minerals, and energy food for growth and good health. Supply these by offering a variety of foods at regular times during the day. This sounds simple, but with constant exposure to TV advertisements, the ready availability of high-sugar, high-fat foods, and the active schedules of many families it is not that easy.

Manage your child's food by establishing a routine that both of you can depend on. Plan a schedule that best fits your family and stick to it.

Breakfast is important because the body has been without food for 12 or 14 hours. An appropriate breakfast food is any food not high in fat or sugar. Traditional breakfasts include fruit, cereal with milk or fruit juice, egg, toast, and milk. A nutritious breakfast can also include last night's leftover casserole, a tuna sandwich, or cheese and crackers with fruit and milk.

Preschoolers are able to prepare their breakfast if the ingredients are easily accessible. A special place in the refrigerator might hold a small pitcher of milk and fruit especially for breakfast.

Offer snacks between meals if the meals are more than 3 or 4 hours apart. A small stomach cannot hold enough food to keep an active body growing and going for very long. Any food is OK for snacks as long as it is not high in sugars and fats. Choose snack foods from the basic food groups: fruits, vegetables, breads and cereals, meat group foods, and milk. Apples, cheese, milk, toast, peanut butter, carrots, fruit juice, and pudding are excellent snack choices. Avoid soda pop, punch, cookies, candy, pastries, potato chips, corn puffs, and similar foods. They fill children with calories but provide few necessary vitamins and minerals.

Dinnertime can easily become a battleground because everyone is tired and hungry. Things overlooked at other times become big issues just before dinner. There are times when it is wise to feed the preschooler before the rest of the family. This is

especially true if you're planning a late meal or if you or the child are especially tired. At other times a quiet few minutes with a book before dinner may calm an active child enough to allow everyone to have a relaxed meal. Mealtime should be a pleasant time. Try to avoid disciplining at the table.

A major dinner table problem can be how much a child eats. While you are responsible for providing a variety of good food, allow children to determine how much of these foods they eat. Appetites of preschoolers vary from meal to meal and from day to day. Give each child a small serving and allow for second helpings, if requested. Allow children a reasonable time to eat but don't force the issue. At the end of the meal, remove uneaten food without comment.

If it appears that a preschooler is only drinking milk and not eating foods, be sure there is plenty of water available between meals. At mealtime serve the milk last so that the child cannot fill up on milk and be unable to eat other foods.

Food jags are normal at this age. Try to make as little fuss about them as possible. If you are concerned that a child is not eating enough food, keep a food record for several days. List everything eaten; include the time and the amount. As you look at the list, pay attention to how long it is between meals and snacks. Perhaps the child is not hungry enough at mealtime to eat much. Check to see if there are high-fat or high-sugar foods that can be replaced by fruit or juice.

Look at the amount and variety of food eaten during the whole day, not just one meal. Is there a variety of foods? Some from each food group? How much of each food does the child eat? A child-size serving of vegetable is 1 tablespoon for each year. Three-year-olds can eat 3 tablespoons of potatoes. Make sure there are several servings from each food group. If you are still concerned after you study the whole picture, discuss it with your doctor.

A child needs to be comfortable at the table. The child's chair should have a foot rest at the right height. Eating utensils should be child-sized. A cup with easily held handles or a small glass that fits the child's hand will help to avoid spills.

Meals with the family can be wonderful learning experiences. Children can learn colors, shapes, and textures from foods. They also learn social skills used throughout life. Manners are learned by watching and copying how adults eat and behave at the table. There is a chance to practice conversation, share news, and be recognized as an individual.

Prepared by Marcelle Straatman, Extension human development specialist, and Margaret Lewis, Extension nutrition specialist, School of Home Economics.

**Dear Parents:** There's no doubt you are the most important teacher in a preschooler's life because you spend more time with the child than anyone else. Healthy children have a powerful desire to learn. They don't just learn when you are ready to teach. They learn all the time—when you are trying to teach them and when you think they aren't learning.

Sincerely,

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Extension Service, Oregon State University, Corvallis, O.E. Smith, director. Produced and distributed in furtherance of the Acts of Congress of May 8 and June 30, 1914. Extension work is a cooperative program of Oregon State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Oregon counties.

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