

Children's Individuality

*Variety is the spice of life,
That gives it all its flavor.*

—William Cowper



We are each a unique experiment. In our physical, mental, and emotional makeup, we are each different from everyone else in the world. We have our own way of walking, talking, running, writing, and throwing a ball. We vary in our ability to use language, add and subtract, spell and memorize. No one else sees, hears, smells, tastes, and feels pain in exactly our way. We differ in our energy level, sleep pattern, body temperature, heartbeat, interests, and talents. In virtually every area of human growth, each of us is truly an individual.

In children as in adults, there is an infinite variety. You can see the differences between your children right from birth. Some babies are quiet. Others cry a lot. Some persist in going after what they want. Others lose interest more quickly. Some sleep all night and eat at regular times. Others wake up hungry at different times of day and night.

From the very beginning, children demand to be seen and treated as individuals.

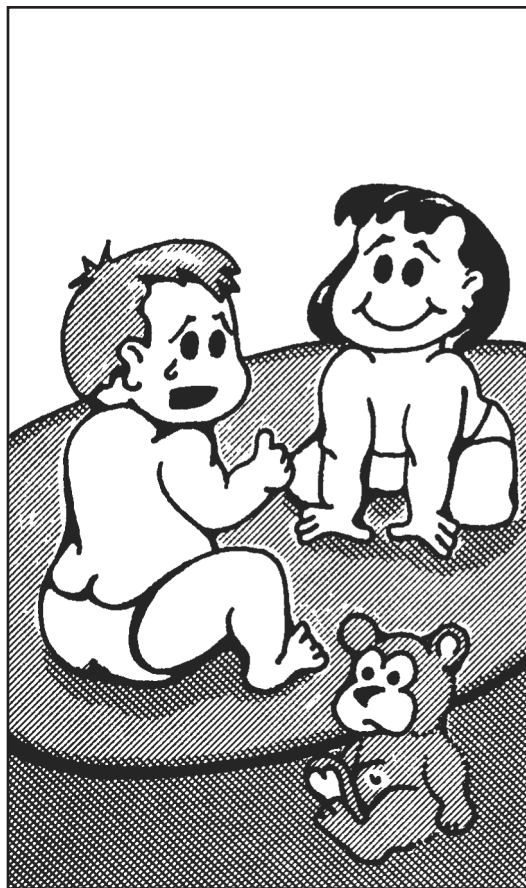
A unique way of growing



Our children will continue to express their individuality as they grow. Each child has his or her own special timetable for growth. Some children walk at 9 months, others at 15 months. Many children can speak several hundred words by the time they are 2 years old. Some know many more, and others are just beginning to talk.

A push in the wrong direction

Generally we respect the work of nature. As parents, we can accept physical differences such as height and hair color in children. But in other areas—such as ability and



temperament—we sometimes forget the facts of life. We may want our children to be “above average” or exactly like us. We may compare our children with others. We may even push our children to do things that are impossible for them.

Such efforts usually don’t work. Not only that, even when they are well intentioned they can harm children. They prevent children from using their energies to become what they were really meant to be. Instead, children become frustrated, withdraw, and even give up.

So remember:

Don’t push your children or compare them with others.

Do respond to children as individuals and rejoice in their differences

Variety among human beings is not only natural, but desirable. By accepting and prizing the differences between your children, you’ll be more comfortable both with your children and with yourself. You’ll be able to experience less of the anxiety and more of the joy of being a parent.

EC 1298-E

Reprinted February 2006

HELPING • CHILDREN • GROW

So who's normal?



here's no such thing as an "average" child. Each child grows in his or her own way and in his or her own time. Notice, for example, how differently the following two normal children develop.

Joey

Three days. From the minute he was born, Joey has been quiet and easy-going. After he was delivered, he lay quietly in his crib, even when he was washed for the first time. He fusses sometimes, but he doesn't cry much. When he isn't sleeping, Joey moves his arms slowly and looks around.

Six months. Joey has been sleeping through the night and eating at regular times since he was just a few weeks old. He still doesn't move around a lot. Even though his older brother was sitting by his age, Joey goes limp when his parents try to sit him up. He loves to play with simple objects like blocks and cups, and he welcomes new experiences. He accepted solid foods and his first bath with smiling and cooing.

Two years. Joey didn't start walking until just 6 months ago, but he did start talking at 10 months. He knows many words for his age, and spends hours looking at books and talking to himself. Since he doesn't always reach for new things, his parents offer him lots of stimulating toys and activities. Joey always accepts these happily. Because he is so regular in his habits, Joey's parents were able to start toilet training him at 20 months.

Five years. Joey has just started kindergarten. He loved school from the first day. His early interest in words has continued to grow, and he started to read last year. Joey's teacher encourages this interest, but makes sure he has lots of chances to exercise and play with other children.

Della

Three days. Even before birth, Della was very active. She kept her mother awake at night before she was born "bicycling in her stomach." When she was delivered, she came out crying and kicking. She still cries a great deal. When she isn't crying or sleeping she's in perpetual motion—kicking, squirming, and throwing her arms about.

Six months. Della has been sleeping through the night for just a few months. She's still a whirling dervish. She can sit up by herself, loves to be stood up, and spends hours doing push-ups. Della isn't agreeable about everything, though. She cried loudly at her first bath and always spits out food the first time it's given her. She'll usually try it if it's offered again though.

Two years. Della has been walking for over a year now. She keeps her parents busy trying to keep her out of trouble. Della still is determined to do things her own way and has temper tantrums if she can't. Her parents try to remain calm but firm. Della dislikes change and refuses to sit still long enough to use the toilet. Her parents know that sooner or later she will decide she is ready.

Five years. Della cried and put up a fuss on the first day of school, but by the end of the week she was starting to enjoy herself. It's a bit hard for her to sit still and concentrate on one thing. Everyone likes Della, though—the other children try to imitate her skill on the playground, but most of them can't keep up with her.

Reprinted from a University of Maryland Cooperative Extension Service publication and adapted for use in Oregon by Cindee M. Bailey, former Extension child development specialist, Oregon State University.

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Published January 1988; Reprinted February 2006