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The Wholesome Child

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Parent Education



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REFERENCES FOR FURTHER READING

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THE WHOLESOME CHILD

E. FAITH STRAYER

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“Let no one believe that these are questions below the dignity of statesmen or governments. If we could have but one generation of properly born, trained, educated and healthy children a thousand other problems of government would vanish.—From the President’s address at the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection, 1930.

What is a wholesome child? Perhaps we may say that a child who is developing into his best, who is growing into the very finest person he is capable of becoming is a wholesome child.

Until a recent time, helping a young child to develop into his best, referred only to his physical development. Now it means a great deal more because we have learned that while a child is growing very fast physically, he is also growing very fast mentally, emotionally and socially. He is learning to use his mind, to control his emotions and to get along with other folks even while he is still a baby. If attention is paid only to his physical well being, he may become a good physical specimen and yet be very much stunted mentally and emotionally.

Studies made for the 1930 White House Conference on Child Health and Protection show that many of our children are not wholesome children. **“Out of 45,000,000 in this country, only 35,000,000 are reasonably normal, 6,000,000 are improperly nourished, 1,000,000 have defective speech, . . . 675,000 present behavior problems, . . . 200,000 are delinquent and so on to a total of at least 10,000,000 deficient.”*

While this situation is most unfortunate in such a progressive country as ours, it is true that if wrong conditions are set right, literally wonders may be accomplished in the way of improvement. The best method of improving such conditions is to prevent their occurrence and this is largely the task of parents who have the opportunity to care for and train the child during the years while he is most impressionable and when he is growing most rapidly. Dr. John E. Anderson of the University of Minnesota says: *“Although many individuals may overcome the handicaps of a poor beginning, the fact remains that for most of us a good beginning is half the battle whether we consider physical health or mental adjustment.”*

*White House Conference—1931—The Century Company.

It is difficult for parents to know whether their children are showing wholesome growth during these early years unless they give careful thought to the matter. This is true because they see their children so frequently, because their affection sometimes blinds their judgment and because reports of scientifically made studies of the growth and development of children are not easily available to them.

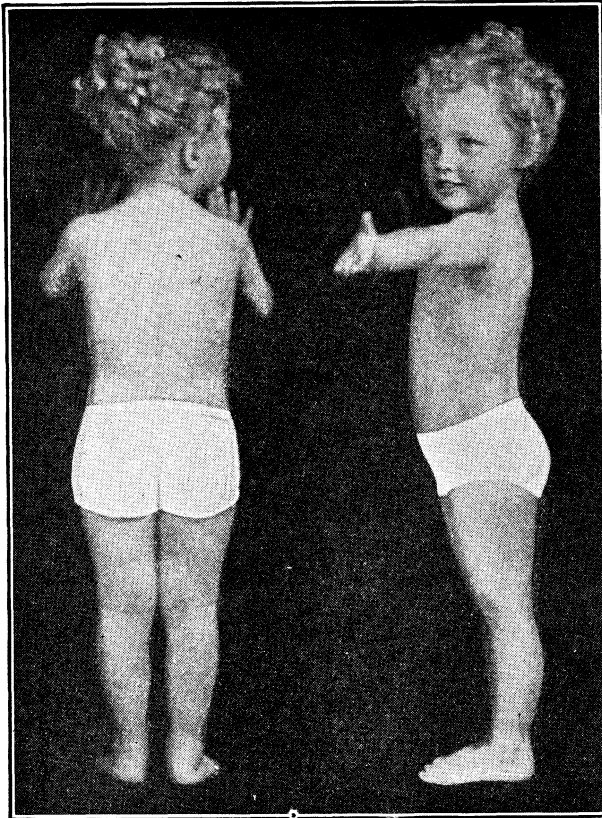
Parents then, need some means of determining whether or not their children are developing well physically, mentally, socially and emotionally.

SOME EVIDENCES OF GOOD PHYSICAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT IN CHILDREN OF PRE-SCHOOL AGE

1. **Facial expression—alert and happy.**
2. **Hair—soft, smooth, glossy.**
3. **Eyes—wide awake, clear, bright, straight, no inflammation, no dark circles.**
4. **Nose—breathing easily through either nostril, awake or asleep.**
5. **Teeth—normal number, sound, clean, good occlusion, firm gums.**
6. **Skin—pink tone, smooth, clear, and elastic.**
7. **Mucous membranes—pink color in membranes of eyes and mouth.**
8. **Musculature—muscles smooth, elastic and firm, abdomen not protruding, arches and posture good.**
9. **Plumpness—moderate padding of fat over bones and muscles.**
10. **Bony structure—straight, strong arms and legs, flat shoulder blades, smooth forehead, toes straight in line. No enlarged joints or pigeon breast.**
11. **Body functions—good appetite, regular elimination without cathartic, no digestive upsets.**
12. **Nervous system—free from twitching, nail biting, bed wetting, irritability.**

In measuring growth and development in young children we may compare their height and weight with the average height and weight of children of the same age, but this is only one indication of physical growth and development. Children differ in type of body build and it is quite possible for a child to be almost average height and weight for his age and yet show poor development of bones and muscles.

*“If a child is growing, feels well and acts happy, is physically and mentally alert, has a good color, clear skin and flesh that is springy rather than flabby to the touch, we may assume that his height and weight are right for his own particular structural development.” It is well to remember also that we are interested in something better than average development; we are interested in the best possible development.



Courtesy U. S. Bureau of Home Economics.

Some Evidences of Good Physical Growth and Development

Regular Health Examinations Are Important

The qualities which were listed above might be called outward or external signs of good growth and development; however, they do not always indicate good physical condition because internal changes may take place much more rapidly than do external changes. Dr. Lydia Roberts of the University of Chicago says: "One organ may manage to supplement the failure of another for a time, though it may not be able to continue doing so indefinitely. . . . The intestines can, if necessary, do the digestive work of the stomach; and a heart with defective valves may pump faster or with greater force and thus furnish the required amount of blood to the tissues despite its handicap. . . . The body, in short, may 'keep up appearances' for some time, and it may be months or years before

the effects of a faulty nutritive process may be outwardly visible."

This is one of the reasons why it is important that every child be given a thorough health examination at least once a year. Hearts, kidneys, and lungs need to be tested. Figures representing the condition of men drafted to serve in the World War showed that 80 percent of them were physically below normal and one-third of them could not pass the requirements, yet other reports show that 80 percent of the babies born in this country are born perfect. This tremendous change in physical condition calls our attention to the old adage—"A stitch in time saves nine." Perhaps there is no field in which it is more applicable.

Children who are provided every chance for fine physical development are at the same time provided better chances for fine mental development, for it is true that a child who is well and happy is also alert, anxious and ready to explore his little world and to profit by his investigations.

Good Mental Development Is Essential to Wholesome Development

There was a time when we thought of children as small adults, but we have come to realize that there is not only much growing in size, but much mental and emotional growing for them to do.

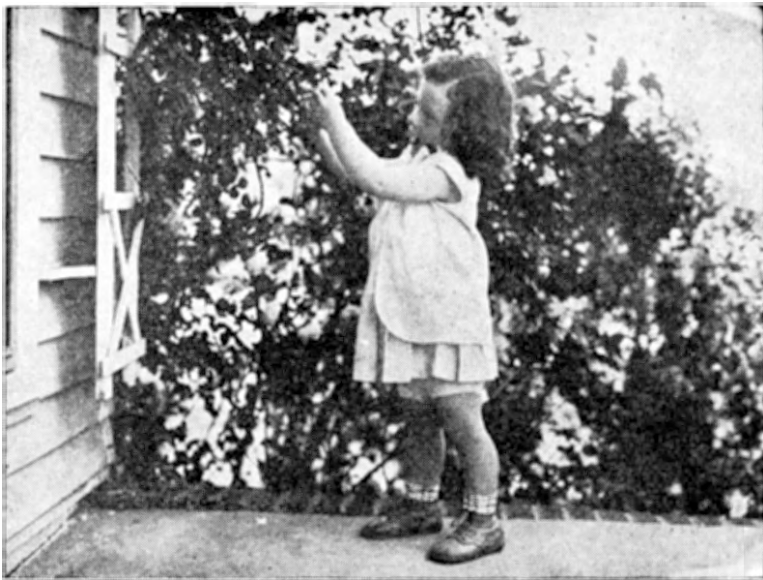
It is important that parents recognize some of the evidences of mental growth in their children so that they may know what to expect of them and so that they may provide them opportunities for development.

While there are standards by which experts may measure the mental growth of children month by month, we are interested here in more general qualities which children may show before they reach school age and which may serve as goals toward which to build during the important years of the pre-school period.

SOME GOALS FOR MENTAL DEVELOPMENT DURING THE PRE-SCHOOL YEARS

1. Attention control—not easily distracted. Ability to control his own attention for short periods of time.
2. Some ability in judging distance, size and shape, to distinguish between near and far, large and small, morning and afternoon.
3. Muscular control—ability to hop, skip, climb, swing, turn somersaults.
4. Distinction between the imaginary and the real—ability to distinguish between the real situation and those of stories and his imagination.
5. Good speech habits—proper use of words—no lisping or stuttering.
6. Creative ability—interest in originating new ideas in play.

The habit of controlling ones attention, of concentrating, of sticking to one thing is a very important quality in adults which has its beginning in the early years. Children, like adults, are most likely to give their attention to those things which are both interesting and understandable to them, but for much shorter periods of time. Among other things that are interesting and understandable to children is their play. If we do not want a child to be too easily distractible, we should provide him with plenty of play materials which are interesting to him and then we should be very careful not to interrupt him unless it is really necessary to do so. When this is necessary, we should make certain that we have his attention.



Learning to Enjoy Her Surroundings

It is interesting to watch children develop the second quality, ability to judge distance, size, shape, and time. When he is six months old, a baby may reach for a rattle, but have great difficulty in grasping it not only because it is hard for him to manage his hands, but also because he isn't yet able to judge distance. When he is eight months old, he hasn't learned enough about judging shape and size to know that his toes are a part of his own body so that he * "still has to learn that when

*Rand, Sweeney, and Vincent—Growth and Development of the Young Child.

he bites those toes he gives himself a sensation because the feet belong to him." By the time he is three years old, he usually has learned enough about judging distance, size and shape to know whether or not he can pull his wagon between two objects, although he may yet make many mistakes.

The ability to judge time grows slowly in a young child because he has so little help. He doesn't read the clock, and adults often confuse rather than help him. Time passes quickly when we are interested and slowly when we are bored, but what is interesting to adults is often very tiresome to children, so that what may seem to a child's mother to be a short time may seem to him to be a very long time. The important thing for adults to remember is that all of these abilities grow with experience and we must provide plenty of experiences which will help them to develop. We may provide a safe place to play, objects of many shapes and sizes, such as cereal cartons, spools, kitchen pans, cardboard boxes and then give children free range to explore and experiment.

Another indication of mental development is found in a child's growing ability to manage his body in running, jumping, climbing, swinging, turning somersaults and cartwheels. His brain must direct all these bodily activities from the time when he is first ready to sit up alone at about six to eight months to the time when he laces his own shoes at between four and five years. Children differ a great deal in the rate at which they develop, not only because each child is a little different from every other child, but also because they do not have equal opportunities for learning. By the time a child is four years old he usually has developed enough muscular control and interest to dress himself, but he will not be growing in this way unless his mother has let him help with the process in little ways for several years and has also provided the kind of clothing which he may manage for himself. It is also possible to hurry children into activities before they are physically and mentally ready for them. This is likely to happen with walking alone which, studies show, most children accomplish at about fifteen months. In the months while a child is learning to crawl, stretch, pull and stand, a play pen is an excellent place in which to practice these activities.

By eighteen months most children are ready to begin to learn to run and climb and they need plenty of space outdoors as well as boxes and steps on which to try themselves out. While the larger muscles are beginning to be controlled in active play, children are gradually learning to control the smaller muscles. Before they are three years old, they begin to use

hands rather skillfully if they have had blunt scissors, old magazines, sand and large crayons with which to work. These materials also provide a means of balancing play time between active and quiet play.

Mental development comes with experience. This is as true of the fourth quality as of the others—the ability to distinguish between the imaginary and the real. Children under four years of age have had so few experiences that they are often unable to distinguish between the bear they only imagined they saw and the one they saw pictured in their books or heard about in stories. Parents may help them to overcome their confusion by kindly calling attention to the fact that this was only an imaginary bear, one that we really can't see.



Homemade Equipment is Helpful in Developing Muscular Control

Good speech habits should come with the mental growth of children. It is probably harder for children to understand “baby talk” than the kind of language they most often hear. Parents may help them by being good examples.

Creative ability in play is another evidence of mental development. It is shown in the house the three year old builds in the sand, in the “make believe” radio microphone the five year old makes from a broomstick and tin can, and the “dress up” play of the six year old. Parents may encourage the de-

velopment of creative ability in their children by providing the kind of play materials which give a child a chance to "act out" his ideas. Mechanical toys that perform provides a child with little else than a chance to sit back and watch, while scraps of cloth, water colors, bits of wall paper and a sand pile give him a chance to exercise his creative ability.

Good Emotional Development Is Essential to Wholesome Development

Of all the phases of wholesome development, the one we are most likely to overlook during the early years is emotional development; yet there is probably nothing that will have as much to do with the future well being and happiness of children. Too often we encourage in young children the very things for which we may punish them later. Babies may be fed because they cry and it is often much later when they have temper tantrums to get what they want that we realize that we may have been training them to do this very thing.

Parents may help their children toward wholesome development when they keep in mind some possible goals for their emotional development during the pre-school years.

SOME GOALS FOR EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT DURING THE PRE-SCHOOL YEARS

1. **Caution rather than fear—knows how to be safe—to cross streets, etc.,—not afraid of dark, strangers, shadows.**
2. **Anger control—ability to defend his own rights, but no temper tantrums.**
3. **Modesty without emotionalism—casual businesslike attitude toward toilet processes, undressing.**
4. **Wide range of affections—fond of many, no jealousy, no evidence of effects of "smother love."**
5. **Free from self-consciousness—normal desire for recognition as a personality, but no playing for attention through "performances."**

We know that children's fears may cause them serious suffering and may even handicap them in later life. At the same time we realize that children who are not at all afraid may recklessly rush into danger; but we often forget that a young child may be taught to be cautious rather than to be afraid. We may teach him to be cautious by showing him ways to be safe. For example, we may show him how to cross the street by first looking to one side, then the other and then if there are no cars, walking across. Letting him practice this will be much more helpful to him than merely warning him of dangers. Of course, a toddler is too young to understand ways of being safe and must be protected from danger.

All of us know the value of self-control in adults, but not all of us realize how much we can help little children to develop this quality. First, we need to know some of the causes of

anger in young children. Studies made by Dr. John B. Watson at Johns Hopkins University have shown that babies only ten days old will seem to be very angry when their heads are held; their arms held together and their legs together. This restraint of their bodily movements causes them to stiffen, hold breath and attempt to make slashing movements. As children grow older other means of restraint seem to produce anger. When they are between one and two years of age they seem to be angry more frequently than when they are older. This may be due to their new ability to get around and their natural curiosity and desire to investigate which is apt to meet many restraints. Other studies show that when children are tired or ill or hungry, they are more likely to be irritated than at other times.

Parents may help children to develop anger control in at least two ways; by finding and removing the cause of the tantrum and by being worthy examples themselves.

If a three year old has been angered by his failure at some project of his own, we may make a suggestion as to how he might succeed, or we may help him to find something else at which he can succeed. Instead of spanking an already overtired child, we may need to provide more regular meal hours or more nourishing food. We need to remember, also, that a child who finds that it pays to have a temper tantrum, that is, he finds that it gets him what he wants, will have good reason to use this method again and again. Always it must be remembered that example may help or hinder the development of children. Parents who see their children in tantrums and then themselves fly into a rage which they express in spanking or slapping do not help their children to learn self-control.

Very young children have no sense of modesty and indeed need none. As they grow older this quality, along with others, will gradually develop if given an opportunity. If the three year-old hasn't observed that one doesn't appear in public undressed, he may be told quietly that this is only good taste as are many of our customs. He need not be taught that this is wicked or that he needs to be ashamed of his body.

A bed of his own and a room of his own give a child few reasons to become concerned in such matters and gives him an opportunity to develop a sense of modesty.

A baby might begin to develop a wholesome attitude toward toilet processes when he is very young. By the time he is three months old he may have begun to have regular bowel movements on his own toilet at regular times. Care should be taken to hold him there comfortably, supporting his back, and for

very short periods of time, not more than two or three minutes. With this kind of beginning and later training to care for himself at toilet, he will be given a chance to develop a casual businesslike attitude toward these processes.

The fourth evidence of emotional development, a wide range of affections, is one of the most important for the child's present and future happiness. Learning to like many people and to adjust to them has its beginning in the impressionable early years. Sometimes a mother who means very well becomes so absorbed in her child that she develops what someone has called "smother love," rather than wise "mother love." When her child is still a baby, she may insist that she is the only person who may care for him properly. Of course, his father needs to share in the pleasure as well as the responsibility of caring for his child and both father and child would profit by such an arrangement. As the child grows older he may be kept too much with his mother and with his own family, when he needs to be learning to "give" as well as "take" with other children who have interests more nearly like his own.

At meetings of home demonstration clubs children should be provided for apart from adults. They need to be provided plenty of interesting things to do and to be supervised by an understanding adult. This will not only free the minds of the mothers, but will free the children to learn, among other things, to adjust and to be happy with others.

Although love and affection seem to be almost as necessary for a child's fullest development and happiness as are food and clothing for his physical well being, this love must be a wise love that remembers the child's needs and does not smother his individuality. *"Thou shalt love thy child with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy strength, but wisely with all thy mind."

Still another goal for early emotional development is freedom from self-consciousness. A child has a natural and normal desire to be recognized as a person, to be addressed as such, and to contribute his part to the group, but he need not be taught while he is young that he is the center of interest about which others revolve, which he will of course have to unlearn later. Rather than recognizing a child as having a personality of his own, we often assume an attitude of patronage toward him. We may ask him rather foolish questions and this before he has had any chance to become acquainted with us, or we may require him to speak pieces or to perform in other ways

*Ten Commandments for Parents by Paul M. Pittman—The Parents' Magazine.

that make him the center of interest. This may cause him to become timid and self-conscious or to develop an exaggerated idea of self-importance, either one of which is undesirable. His parents may provide for his natural desire to be recognized, by suggesting that he assume certain responsibilities, along with others in the family. If there are guests, he may open the door, help to serve the meal or contribute his part as one of the group in other ways in which he takes pride.

Another cause of self-consciousness in a young child is a strict training in "manners." Although he will need occasional suggestions, he can learn true courtesy best as he sees it in his own home. He observes thoughtfulness and kindness of his parents for each other and for other members of the family including himself. If he brings a gift to his mother or father, be it only a mud pie, it is a real gift in his mind and deserves a courteous "Thank you."

Good Social Development Is Essential to Wholesome Development

Social development is, of course, very closely related to emotional development, for good emotional development is largely a matter of being able to get along with one's self and good social development is largely a matter of being able to get along with others. Each is dependent on the other.

"Social life begins when an infant first distinguishes between persons and things. By the end of the second month he smiles when someone comes near him and by the eighth month moves toward adults who approach him and squeals or babbles at them."

**SOME GOALS FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT DURING
THE PRE-SCHOOL YEARS**

1. **Friendliness—enjoys playing with other children.**
2. **Self-help habits—going to bed alone, dressing himself, putting away own toys, amusing himself.**
3. **Cooperation—sharing home duties and pleasures, ability to join in cooperative play with other children.**
4. **Sense of reverence.**
5. **Respect for possessions of others.**

By the time the child is starting to school at about six years of age, he will have had many experiences in adjusting to others. These experiences need to include many more folks than the members of his own family, for a child needs friends his own age at least as much as do adults. If we wait until children are ready for school to provide them these experiences, we are likely to find them much handicapped. School itself is an important new experience which will require many adjustments. If a child also has to learn how to get along with other

children of his own age because he is "undersize" socially, his task will be overlarge.

A child's first training in learning to get along with other folks should come in his own home. There he learns to adjust to the members of his family and also observe the attitude of fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters toward him, toward each other and toward their friends. In his early years he learns among other things, to eat the food he is served, to express himself in words rather than grunts, because this is more pleasing to others, and to respect the rights and property of other members of his own family. Children who grow up as members of large families usually receive much valuable training in give and take; however, it is important to remember that all children need to experience a full childhood and the older ones must not be burdened by too much responsibility for the care of the younger children.

Another very important part of the child's training comes when he is developing a friendliness with children of his own age. Learning to adjust to those who have reached a similar state of development provides many opportunities to learn to share interests, toys and friends; to measure his own accomplishment against those of his equals, to respond to group opinion and to enjoy companionship. This learning process, like others, calls for much experimenting. Many small children think of other children merely as objects and one sometimes sees a two year old push over another much as he might tumble over a pile of blocks. Fitting one's self into the group also requires much experimenting, to learn that one sometimes leads when one has something to contribute and at other times one follows.

Studies show that up until about three years of age, children tend to play alone. They enjoy the presence of other children and seem to learn by merely observing each other. Often one may see two three-year old children doing exactly the same thing, but each one to himself. Each may be making a mud pie or drawing a "picture" with his crayons, all the while picking up ideas and imitating the other. As children grow older they develop an interest in group play; first in small groups of two or three, then in larger groups of five or six when each will have some part to contribute to the activity of the group and hence to grow a spirit of cooperation.

Through these days of learning it is often difficult for parents to remember that children must learn to stand on their own feet and to curb their desire to direct the children and to referee their quarrels. Of course the younger ones will need

some help, for instance, in learning that when a child is already putting some play material to good use, he is entitled to it. Merely saying, "John is swinging" and "Billy is playing in the sand" will often help a great deal.

The greater responsibility of parents is for providing enough interesting play materials, preventing the children from becoming overtired and for providing positive suggestions to the younger children when their play becomes undesirable.



Sharing Her Homemade Slide With Friends

Another essential part of the child's social development comes with his growth in self-reliance. Children receive a great deal of pleasure from doing little things which interest them and which will provide them a sense of accomplishment. Most children can dress themselves by the time they are four years old if they have been allowed to help in little ways from babyhood, and if they have been provided simply made clothes with front openings, few, but large buttons and easily managed buttonholes.

Children who have from babyhood gone off to sleep when put to bed will not have to be helped to do this. Putting away toys isn't difficult if there are convenient low shelves or a box on castors for them. A quiet reminder and a word of praise

help in learning to wash face and hands, to care for self at toilet and to hang up clothes.

Self-reliant children are also able to amuse themselves. This they begin to learn, when as babies, they are placed in a safe place with interesting play materials for a part of the day.

Learning to cooperate also begins at home where children enjoy a chance to express themselves and to contribute to the pleasure of others. Care must be taken to find tasks that "fit," for a job that is too easy soon becomes tiresome and provides no stimulation while one that is too hard is discouraging and may cause the child to lose confidence in himself. A two year old likes to pick up papers and to carry spoons to the table. A three year old may help to set the table by placing the silver and napkins, he may wipe up spilled things and he can wipe the spoons at dishwashing time. He is old enough to help in watering the chickens and feeding the dog.

Always we need to remember that we must not expect children to do as well as grown-ups, and that they have a right to learn. Although efforts to "help" may be bungling, they are sincere and deserve a word of appreciation. When a child chooses a job that is too hard for him, it is a simple matter to give a word of praise and suggest some other task more nearly his size in which he may be interested.

Providing a variety of interesting tasks that "fit" will help a child to grow a spirit of cooperation. Almost any work may be pleasant if we ourselves maintain a wholesome attitude toward it.

The fourth quality, like the fifth, can best be learned by example. Children who see their parents show a genuinely reverent attitude will gradually grow to understand its meaning and those who live in homes where their own little possessions are respected, whether they be toys or sand tunnels or collections of stones, will soon learn to respect the possessions of others.

All Phases of Development Are Essential to Wholesome Development

No one phase of wholesome development, whether it be physical, mental, social or emotional development is worth much without the other three. Each one is dependent on the other and all must grow together. Wholesome children grow into wholesome adults. Shall we, as parents, provide children an opportunity to grow into their own best selves?