

YOUR  
CHILD  
from 3 to 5  
is...

# LEARNING TO GET ALONG WITH OTHERS

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Many of the things we do every day are aimed at getting along with friends or family. Through practice, everyone has come up with good ways to work with others. The early years are an important time for learning how to get along with other people.

Children and adults soon learn to behave in ways that are okay for the group they are in. What is okay to one group may not be okay to another. For example, at school, it may be okay for a child to play in mud or help with cooking. At home, parents may not allow either one. Children must learn *what they can do with different people or at different times.* This may be confusing to a young child.

A child learns to like people from parents, brothers and sisters, teachers and others. The way you as a parent act around your child is important. This can help a child learn the "okay" ways to get along with others and have friends.

Because children want to please adults, they will often copy what adults do. For this reason, adults must be careful to set good examples for children. For example, if you want your children to share, *you* will need to share. If you do not want you children to hurt others, they should not see you hurt others. *Actions speak louder than words!*

Learning to get along with others does not happen overnight. Children do not wake up one morning knowing how to get along with people. Just as children must walk before they can run, they must learn more

about themselves before they can get along with others. As children begin to understand themselves, they can begin to think about the needs of others. Children who understand how to act around other people will be happier. They will also enjoy making and being with friends.

## Children's Understanding of Themselves

The way children feel about themselves is called a "self-concept." If children feel loved, needed and important to their parents, they are usually happy. If criticized, blamed or harshly punished, they will probably be sad. Criticism can make children feel they have failed or cannot do anything right.



*Children who feel good about themselves usually enjoy being with others.*

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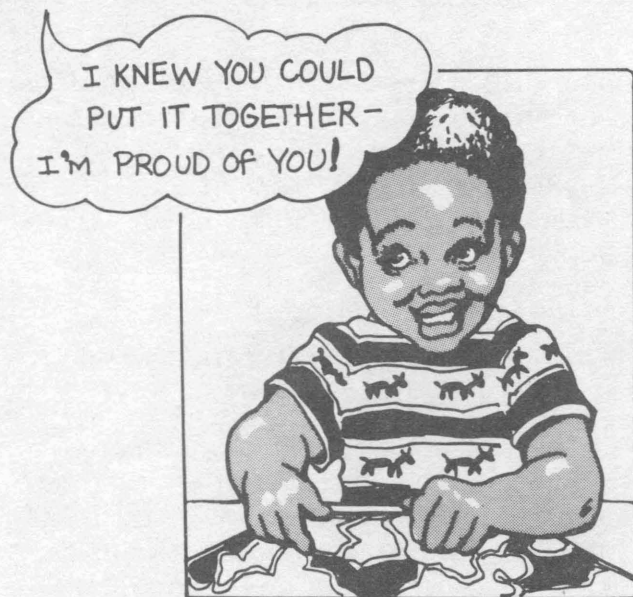
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Children, as well as adults, need to have good feelings about themselves. To love and get along with others, children must first love and understand themselves. This is not as selfish as it may sound. A good self-concept is an important part of growing up happily.

Children develop feelings of self-worth in many ways. Here is one way children can feel good about themselves:



Children try to live up to what parents expect of them.

## Learning to Share

After children have some understanding of themselves, they can begin to understand how others feel. As children get older, they realize that someone else's needs may be different from their own. Children also need to understand that their actions can affect other people. Thinking about the needs of others is the beginning of learning to share.

Three-year-olds find it hard to share. *This is natural!* They are still working on meeting their own needs. By age 4, children are more willing to share some of their things with others. About age 7, children begin to understand how to work with other children. The more chances children have to be around other children, the sooner they will learn to work and share their things with others.

Sharing is also learned by the amount of encouragement children get from parents.



Children need to see their parents share. This teaches a child that sharing is good for everyone.

Very often, sharing is *forced* on a child. For example, a parent says to a 3-year-old, "David, share your truck with Roberta." This may cause a child to resent sharing. David may do as he was told this time. However, when his parents are not around, he may not choose to share. Sharing seems to be more lasting when:

- Parents wait until the child "understands" sharing.
- Sharing is rewarded. For example, "I am proud of you for letting Sarah use your book."
- People children love also share.
- Others share with children.

## When A Child Hurts Others

When children get frustrated or angry, they may react physically by:

- hitting
- pushing
- kicking
- calling names
- making threats
- destroying someone else's property

Each of these are acts of "aggression." For many children, fighting or hitting is the only way they know to solve a problem. Some children also hit to get their way or to get back at someone else. Most adults know that hurting others can cause even more problems. For whatever reason fighting and

hitting are used, they are not good ways to handle conflicts and problems.

Children also learn violence from the people they are around. For example, many parents use spankings or whippings when a child has done wrong or if they are mad at the child. The next time the child gets angry or frustrated, the following could happen.



When parents spank their children as punishment, this teaches children to solve a problem by hitting.

Young children may fight with others to get attention from adults. For example, if John hits José to get a truck, José will probably let John have the truck. This rewards John for hitting José to get his own way. A parent may choose to step in and fuss at John. This is also an attention-getter, even if it is not a very pleasant one.

Children can learn violent acts by watching television and movies, or by playing aggressive games. If children see people on television use violence and fighting to get their own way, they may soon believe that fighting will work for them, too.

The best way to *discourage aggression* is to *encourage cooperation*.

Some other ways to discourage aggression include:

- Not rewarding an aggressive child with attention
- Avoiding aggressive toys, such as guns, sticks, toy soldiers or plastic knives
- Being a good model for your child



Teach children to use words and not fists when they are frustrated or angry.

### Now it is your turn . . .

1. *Build good feelings.* Praise your child when he or she does well. Understand that he is not perfect. Children make mistakes, but this is part of learning and growing up. Your child needs to know that you love him, even when he has failed or disappointed you. Letting your child know that he is okay will give him self-confidence. Avoid criticizing and name calling, such as "dummy" or "I knew you would do it wrong." Encouraging successes will help him feel good about himself as a person.

2. *Practice sharing.* If you want your child to share, then it is important that you share also. Remember that 3- and 4-year-olds are not quite ready to share. As children get older, they become more willing to share. Try to be patient. Forcing a child to share will not help him learn the real value of it.

3. *Teach cooperation.* Your child may also need some help in learning to take turns or work together. For example, when two children both want to play with the same toy, suggest that they take turns. Try, "Willie, why don't you play with the toy for a little while, and then let Carmen use it." Or, you might say, "Why don't you both play with it together?" Both ways teach a child to cooperate and help him learn to get along with others.

## Growth Measuring Stick

### 3-Year-Olds

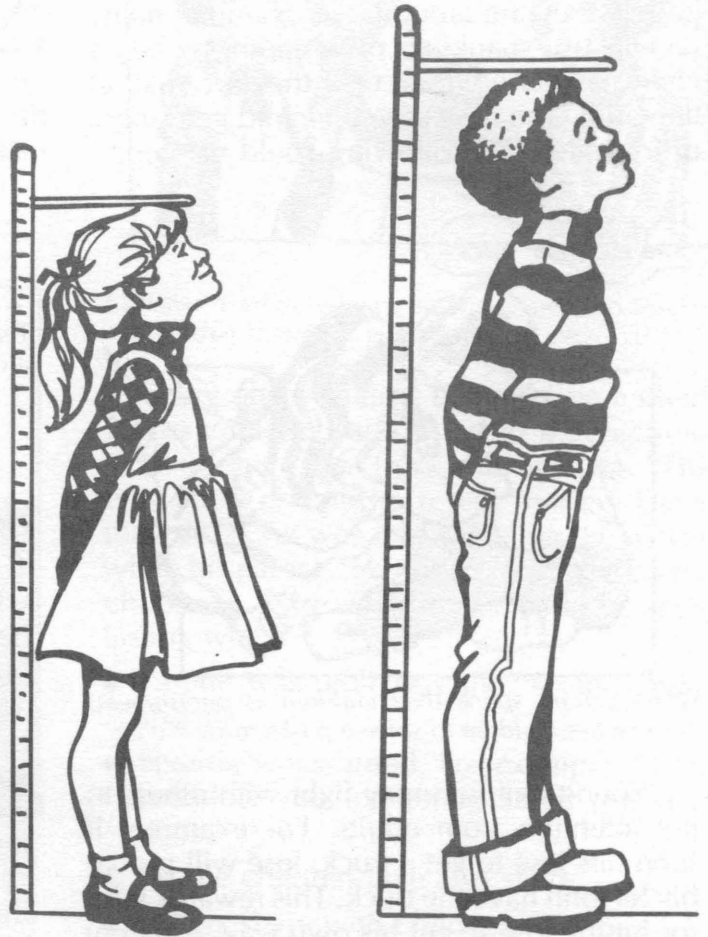
- Can take turns
- Are beginning to share (toys, but not play space)
- Play mostly alone but in the same room with others
- Will often choose a "special friend"
- Are bossy
- Are starting to handle their own conflicts

### 4-Year-Olds

- Are noisier and more active
- Are more likely to share things with a special friend than with others
- Know the difference between boys and girls
- Want to be around children most of the time
- Play cooperatively with friends
- Play in groups of "all boys" or "all girls"

### 5-Year-Olds

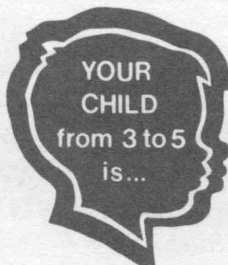
- Enjoy playing in groups of up to six for short periods of time
- Can play organized games if an adult is guiding the group
- Often want to be the leader
- Can often work out their own problems
- Are beginning to realize the needs of others
- Can use words instead of fists when angry



### References

Hurlock, E. B. *Child Development* (5th edition). New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972.

*Social Development in Young Children*. (National Institute of Education, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare). Washington, D. C., 1976.



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