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Dear Parents of Young Children – A Child’s Day?
Michigan State University Extension Service
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Issued July 1965
2 pages

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Dear Parents of young children

A Child's Day

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE, MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

WHAT DOES YOUR child do all day long? Is it just a matter of keeping him out of your way? Or can his day be planned so that it will have real meaning for him?

Most of a child's day is spent in play. Through it he learns many things. Ideally, the play of little children should contribute to physical, emotional, and social development. Toys can be selected to meet these different needs.

Occasionally I hear it said, "My child has every kind of toy imaginable and yet all he seems to do is sit and watch television." If this happens it might be well to see what changes could be made in the use of his toys and his time.

Let's take a trip around the clock and suggest activities to carry on at different times during the day that will best meet the needs of a pre-school child. Of course you can never follow a schedule exactly but out of a general plan you perhaps will find helpful ideas.

Wakes Up—Breakfast

Suppose that Tommy wakes up at 7:00 o'clock and by 8:00 o'clock is washed, dressed, and has had his breakfast. He soon shows an interest in feeding and dressing himself. Make it easy for him to help himself by:

- Placing a sturdy stool or steps in the bathroom for him to climb on.
- Providing a low rod for his towel and wash cloth.
- Selecting clothes that are easy for him to manage.
- Using dishes that little fingers can handle at mealtime.
- Helping him only when he seems to need it.

Now that he is dressed and fed, what can he do?

Plays—Indoors

While clearing up the breakfast dishes and getting organized for the day, let Tommy help. It may not be real help but let him feel that he is helping. He likes to be near you and do what you are doing. Think of jobs at this age as imaginative play. Through helping, Tommy learns what work is like and what adults are like as they work.

Jobs for Pre-School Children

Let him wipe up the breakfast table or his own high chair. Give him a bowl with a small amount of water and a sponge.

Empty waste basket or ash trays.

Sweep the back entrance with a small broom.

Dust parts of furniture that he can safely reach and which would not be easily damaged.

Pick up newspapers and magazines and put them where they belong.

Grease pans for baking.

Bring in newspapers.

Run errands around the house.

Plays—Outdoors

Enjoying play out-of-doors will depend on what he plays with and how secure Tommy feels out-of-doors and away from you. Playing in a large sand box just outside the kitchen door, the child can hear his mother moving around and feel more comfortable. What you plan will probably depend on the weather. This subject is a good place to start: talk with Tommy about what kind of a day this is going to be. If a cold rainy day, plan so that he can ride his tricycle in the garage.

Turning somersaults over a barrel is fun and it is also fun to climb in it and roll it around. Such activities help him to use his arms and legs. He needs a chance also to run, jump, climb, yell if he pleases, and let off steam.

Of course, Tommy cannot be given complete freedom out-of-doors until he has learned to stay off the street.

Mid-Morning Snack

A mid-morning snack helps children relax if they have become too tired or excited. Mother, sit down and relax with him; you'll never miss that five minutes. If a child can count on a mid-morning snack he is less likely to reach for the cracker box for lack of anything else to do. He may also make less demands on you if he has the firm feeling that you have given him some of your time. If you have more time, read him a short story. This might be a time for a children's T.V. program. This quiet relaxed period is apt to make for a more rested and satisfied child.





Plays—On His Own

Encourage Tommy to play by himself some of the time. This will help him to be imaginative in his play, to explore, and to try things. Change his toys from day to day; they will be more likely to interest him.

A toy is more interesting to a child if he can do something with it. This is a good test to apply when purchasing a toy. A wooden train with cars that lock together gives him more things to do than a complicated mechanical toy that father must operate for him.

Little children need supervision in their play but not interference or constant direction. Occasionally you may want to suggest—

"It's fun to pull the train."

"It is time to put your dolly to bed."

"Would you like to carry the blocks in the train?"

But remember it is not his ability to make something or to make it well that is important at this age. More important is the fact that he does it himself and has fun and satisfaction in it.

Rest Is Important

Little children need a mid-day rest whether they sleep or not. But if they do not sleep, we can not expect them to stay quiet very long with nothing to do. This might be a time to listen to records or to look at books in bed. Tommy needs an afternoon rest. You and Tommy may also need rest from each other.

Mid-Afternoon Snack

Vary this from the morning snack. A drink of water or juice may satisfy the child who does not seem to need food between meals.

Play With Others

The latter part of the afternoon is a good time for Tommy to:

- Play with other children in his own backyard.

- Visit the children next door or go with you to visit a neighbor.
- Go with you to the grocery store.
- Go to the park with you and just look around.
- Watch the men working in the street.

This is a time for being with other people and seeing different things.

Family Time

Just before the evening meal brothers and sisters are usually together. Remember they are apt to quarrel and

interfere with each other in learning to play together. Again, supervision—not interference—is needed.

This is a time also when Dad can help. One father tells me that he saves the evening paper until after the children are in bed—to make sure that he gives some attention to each child. Parents need not give them complete attention; children may carry on activities by themselves, near you, or with you, but they need to feel that this is family time.

If you plan a fairly active play period in the evening, be sure to follow it with a little quieting period before putting the children to bed.

Lucky is the child with memories of a full happy day; with things to talk about; with tomorrow's fun to look forward to.

This letter suggests that:

Since little children tire quickly of any one kind of play, allow for frequent changes during a day.

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What do you say about Santa Claus in your home? Many parents are teaching that Santa Claus is a pretend person much the same as Peter Rabbit is a pretend rabbit. Pretending that Santa Claus brings many surprises adds to the Christmas spirit and means that children can pretend also. This way there can be no disappointments and no loss of faith in Christmas.

Teaching children that Santa Claus is a magician who can do almost anything may be damaging to the child. Likewise it is unfair to tell the child that Santa Claus may not visit him if he misbehaves.

Try to see that your children have the kind of Santa Claus that will be fun to remember.

Are you planning ahead for more time in-doors for children? Be sure they have a place to run off some of their excess energy. Clear space in the basement or garage, where they can run, jump, hop, or ride a tricycle. This will be good for them and it will spare you on the days when it is unpleasant to be out of doors.