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the child from 5-6

Shirley S. Weeks, Ph. D.
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FOREWORD TO PARENTS

To be a parent or teacher, or to function responsibly and supportively in any caretaking/guiding role with children, requires a capacity for loving these children and a commitment to understanding them.

An affectionate, loving, and supportive environment is not a luxury in the life of a child, nor is its significance limited to the child's psychological well-being. Many studies support the statement that a basically loving environment is as essential to a child's physical development as food and shelter are. Sound principles of child guidance adhere to this fact.

A child's task is to grow—physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially. The task of the adults in his life is to make that growth as easy as possible. A child's freedom to grow toward his own highest potential is dependent on his confidence that (1) he is loved for the person that he is and (2) that he can readily get the help that he needs. The child who has to struggle unassisted with his own development cannot progress as he should in his early years, and his adolescent and young adulthood experiences are also likely to be limited on that account.

In order to function responsibly himself as he matures, a child must develop the understanding that the needs of others are as valid as his own. Such understanding is acquired by his experience of this attitude in the adults who surround him as he grows. Similarly, his capacities for civilized behavior, for cooperation, for sharing, and for sensitive, sympathetic, and compassionate responses to the needs of others are fostered by his perceptions of these qualities in the responses of his parents and teachers and other adults who are important to him.

Parents and teachers must also be learners, taking advantage of the continuing fund of knowledge that emerges from research. It is hoped that the references at the back of this booklet will encourage readers to explore further the many excellent works on child development and guidance that are available for borrowing at our public libraries. At the same time, however, it is essential to keep in mind that each child is different from every other. Only by understanding a child's special pattern of development can you provide him with the guidance and support he needs in order to grow into the healthy, confident, and caring person you want him to be.

Shirley S. Weeks
Exit the pioneer
For awhile now, the child is less demanding of himself and does not want too many demands made on him by others. He takes a rest from racing to meet new challenges. It is as though, at this point, he draws a deep breath and briefly stands back to enjoy the person he has thus far become!

"Home" is where his heart is
Having devoted his earlier years to thoroughly exploring it, it is no wonder the 5-year-old finds himself on friendly terms with the world around him and is content, for the moment, to focus his attention on the here and now.
A happy, stable, serene, day-to-day life is the 5-year-old's greatest need. The child who has a parent at home during the day is generally content to stay home himself and keep his parent company. Simple domestic chores carried out in cooperation with adults have real appeal for him. He will enjoy helping clean the house, working in the garden, folding the clean laundry, and doing whatever else is part of the daily housekeeping routine. Boys and girls alike enjoy all such activities, and are deserving of equal praise for their efforts.
Insofar as possible, the environment that is provided for children who are cared for away from home during the day should approximate this pattern of a stable, pleasant day-to-day schedule of activities in which the child can work along in close association with adults he knows and enjoys.

He settles down
For most children, their 5th birthday signals completion of one era of development and the beginning of another. During the first 4 years of life, the child's growth rate has been very rapid. From a tiny, helpless infant he has grown into a competent young child, able to attend to many of his physical needs, verbalize his thoughts and feelings, and socialize with other children and adults. Following his own pattern of developmental spurts and spaces, he has moved ahead, consolidated his gains, and moved ahead again, over and over, until somewhere around the age of 5 the child whose growing environment has been favorable has acquired the knowledge and skills he needs to function with considerable independence in the arena with which he is familiar. Also, from now on, his physical growth proceeds at a more moderate pace.
Some children are normally quieter than others. They may verbal-
ize less and interact socially in a quieter way. However, each child has his own normal pace for entering into the reality of social experience.

He affirms his ego
For the most part, the 5-year-old really wants to be “good”. He takes pride in his many established abilities and pleasure in doing the things he already knows how to do. He also enjoys all the social acceptance and praise that come his way. His great desire is to do things “right” and, thus, not only does he try to follow instructions but may even seek help when he thinks he needs it. At this age, the child views what is his as an extension of personal capabilities and tends to develop a strong sense of possession. Awareness of what belongs to him gives him special pleasure—his room, his mother, and his father. He has already learned to share, to some extent, but it is best if he is not forced to be overly generous during this stage of his development.

His individuality emerges
By the time he is 5, the child’s basic personality pattern is established. This does not mean that he will not continue to develop and expand and mature. Generally, however, by the age of 5, a child’s uniqueness has made itself visible. His talents, his temperament, and his ways of handling the demands of his everyday life are evident, and it is possible for people who know him to get a glimpse of the emerging man or woman.
A child should feel that he is beautiful. In this regard, if your child has physical defects or disabilities, there is a need for you and others in the family to be especially cognizant and sensitive. Do not hesitate to seek professional counseling for assistance.

Companionship—a new kind of relationship
More so now than at any time when he was younger, the child is now capable of sustained social interaction with another person on a one-to-one basis. In effect, he is now ready and able to be a companion to adults, as well as to other children who are at his stage in development. Thus, opportunities for him to practice companionship are important.

Take time to know him—and to let him know you
Hold onto the fact that the foundation for the relationship you and your child will be capable of when he is a teenager and a
young adult and a mature adult has been building since the day he was born, and that by the time he enters first grade it will be fairly complete. To a great extent, this foundation is shaped by the communication you and he have had with each other since his infancy and all through these preschool years.

Make the most of the year from 5 to 6, that is still largely yours and his. The intense questioning that is characteristic of children at this age provides many opportunities for adult/child interaction. Listen to him. Observe him. Talk with him. Know what he thinks about and how he feels about things. As long as he trusts you and knows you love him, and as long as he believes you are really interested, he will still want to tell you.

Equally important is his need to know you. Show him how you feel about things, too, and why. Help him to see why you respond as you do, in day-to-day encounters and in situations and circumstances that involve other people. The young child's concepts of right and wrong in human relationships are deeply affected by the attitudes and behaviors he observes in the adults he loves. At every level, modern society stands in need of responsible, caring responses on the part of its members, one toward the other. Ideally, the basis for sensitive, caring, and constructive social attitudes and behavior is provided by means of the early experiences children have within their own families.

**He needs to know older people, too**

Five marks the beginning of a highly favorable age for encouraging the child to enjoy and appreciate people of all generations, especially those of his grandparents' age group and older. Because of his preference for an orderly routine-type schedule and his pleasure in "fitting in" with things as they are, the 5-year-old is exceptionally suited to adapting himself to the quieter lifestyle of the elderly. These two generations provide fine companionship for each other.

**Play is for real**

The 5-year-old's main interests center around his immediate environs. He is gaining a sense of the real, and he wants to affirm it. His concern is largely with the present, and his play is consistent with his general preoccupations. The child at this age may choose to play house by the hour and his games often revolve around domestic scenes and issues. The imitative ability he demonstrated when he was 4 comes into full flower as he assumes the role of
father or mother and directs younger children in the performance of the family roles he assigns to them.

In keeping with this pattern, the 5-year-old tends to be quite factual and literal and relates even his make-believe activities to his experience of the real world. His favorite stories have a domestic orientation, also, and are concerned with real places, things, and events. Favorite toys for the 5-year-old also reflect his preoccupation with the routines and social encounters of his daily life. Dolls and doll clothes, doll houses and their furnishings, child-size tools and tea sets, toy cars and trucks and vehicles of all sorts are immensely popular with this age group. Clothes to dress up in when playing house, playing store, and the like may also be much in demand.

In this regard, during the years when children are so often engaged in adult role-playing activities, certain precautions should be taken. For example, parents and others who are in charge of children should be particularly alert to what a child is doing in the kitchen, laundry, garage, basement, or anywhere else where he might be tempted to handle potentially dangerous appliances, tools, and other equipment—even though he has been instructed not to do so. Similarly, household members who work with machinery, animals, etc., should take suitable precautions, keeping in mind that children are likely to try to imitate them.

Also, a warning to contact lens wearers: young children who see you putting things in your eyes are likely to try to imitate this behavior unless it is explained to them that you wear these little lenses in your eyes so that you can see better. You may also explain that nobody puts anything in his eyes unless the doctor tells him to do so.

In keeping with their efforts to assert and affirm their new found identity, 5-year-olds are often fond of looking at albums containing their baby pictures and those of family members, and may enjoy starting to make albums of their own. When a child is to be away from home for a period of time, a small album of familiar faces and places can provide a sense of continuity and contribute to his feelings of security.

By the age of 5, most children have learned to play peacefully in small groups and their play needs less supervision. Although possessive of their own playthings and belongings, children at this age are not, generally, unduly acquisitive or belligerent. Girls and boys usually play well together, with neither sex competing for
leadership over the other. By the time he is 5 the child understands the elementary aspects of timekeeping, and will delight in having his own watch and/or clock—especially a watch with a second-hand and a clock with an alarm. Some children at this age, given the opportunity, will spend happy hours learning to use a simple typewriter, pocket calculator, and tape or cassette recorder and player, and virtually all will take pleasure in owning a record player and records and a portable transistor radio.

Also emergent at this age is the child’s need to affirm his physical self. The average 5-year-old has attained good physical coordination, and many display considerable grace in movement. Such children will often skip along, in preference to walking, delighting in their ability to move in tune with their chosen rhythm. Many 5-year-olds enjoy dancing lessons, and those who show an inclination for music may also enjoy piano lessons. The fact that children at this age prefer to be at home a good deal, where their practicing can be done, is another reason piano lessons begun at this age may meet with more success than, say, a year or two later. The 5-year-old’s desire to please and to receive praise may also serve as encouragements for practicing. However, it would be unwise to push the child beyond his level of interest.

If a child at this age seems to be physically clumsy and awkward, parents should consult a pediatrician to find out whether this behavior is related to a specific learning disability. Early signs of learning disabilities in young children may include physical clumsiness, difficulty in dressing, and a dislike for drawing, as well as hyperactivity, quick frustration, and destructiveness. Early diagnosis means early help and a better attitude toward school for the child. The National Association for Children with Learning Disabilities (NACLD) can provide additional information, as can its statewide chapters, such as the Hawaii Association for Children with Learning Disabilities, (HACL). Children with learning disabilities are not to be confused with the mentally retarded or emotionally disturbed. On the other hand, learning-disabled children may suffer emotional problems if their disabilities are not identified early.

Swimming, hiking, and other active sports
Even though swimming may never become his favorite sport, every child should learn to swim for reasons of physical safety. If your 5-year-old has not yet learned to swim, either teach him
yourself or enroll him in a children’s swimming class. Information about these classes is available from your local Y.W.C.A., Y.M.C.A., and Red Cross offices. However, even though he knows how to swim, the 5-year-old should never be left alone at a pool or beach and should never be allowed to swim alone. He should wear a correctly fitting life jacket until he can swim at least 100 yards and he should always wear a life jacket when he is in a boat.

By the age of 5, many children who have already done a lot of walking, running and climbing have the physical stamina and skills to join in easy family hiking. They love to go on such excursions. Remember, though, that if you take a 5-year-old on a real hike you should arrange your plans so he can “drop out” and be taken home, or remain with adults at a rest stop, if he gets too tired. Needless to say, children at this age should not take part in hiking except when accompanied by responsible adults. Young children on outings need protection against insect bites and sunburn, and against becoming either overheated or chilled. Keep them away from poisonous plants. A first aid kit and first aid manual should be standard equipment on all types of outings with children.

The 5-year-old’s interest in other active sports will most likely be patterned after the interests of his parents. It is not wise to encourage real competition at this age, but children who want to learn to begin to develop their skills in swimming, tennis, golf, baseball, soccer, volleyball, and such should be given these opportunities when practical. Encouragement to improve skills in active sports can be increased as the child grows older, his physical strength and endurance have increased, and his athletic abilities become more clear.

Entertainment
By the time he is 5, the child’s power of concentration has developed sufficiently so that short periods of formal entertainment can be enjoyable for him. Puppet shows, animated humorous cartoons, short films developed around pleasant domestic scenes, animal pets and wild life, and short instrumental and vocal concerts and dance recitals are all examples of appropriate and enjoyable entertainment. Many fine narrative programs, including stories and poetry, as well as musical programs especially chosen for children are now also available on cassettes and records.
When taking the child with you to concerts, opera, theater, and the like, the pleasure and enjoyment of other members of the audience deserves your consideration. It is unreasonable to expect a 5-year-old to sit through a long performance without becoming restless. He will need books and crayons to occupy himself when his interest in the performance lags. You may also need to simply take him on your lap and let him go to sleep. However, not all 5-year-olds are ready for this kind of experience under the best of conditions, and noisy, hyperactive children should not be taken to concerts, plays, and lectures that are planned for attentive adult audiences.

**Television**

It is impossible to overemphasize the importance of monitoring what children see and hear on television and the responsibility of parents to see that this is done. An excellent plan at this age, as well as throughout the child’s school years, is to sit down with him on a weekly basis and make a list of the programs he may see each day. Firm decisions need to be made both as to the actual programs he may watch and the total amount of time he is permitted to spend in this activity.

The 5-year-old is mature enough to have a part in these decisions, but when there are differences as to a program’s suitability parents should affirm and exercise their preferences for their child. Always give the child your reasons for the restrictions you place on his televiewing. Tell him why you would be glad for him to see certain programs and why you believe some programs are not good for him to look at. Your statements should reflect your values for what is good and desirable in human behavior. At the same time, parents’ judgement as to the suitability of selected television programs for their children should be based on the parents’ own acquaintance with the programs and with the children’s responses to the programs. Take time to watch television with your child.

Under no circumstance should children witness portrayals of violence, either on television or in movie theaters. Unfortunately, news programs as well as many so-called children’s cartoons fall into this category. Erotic films produced for adult entertainment are equally unsuitable, and scenes depicting violent sex acts are not only unsuitable from a
moral viewpoint but are potentially very dangerous in terms of the child's total psychological development. The parent who provides a young child with a television set in the child's own room loses opportunities to teach the child about sharing, about different values illustrated in television programs, and about the parent's concern for him. With regard to television watching in general, parents need also to keep in mind the importance of providing young children with many opportunities to experience enjoyment in direct conversation, in reading and being read to, and in listening to music, as well as such factors as the child's needs for sleep and rest, for active play, and for protection from eyestrain. Consideration should also be given to potential impressions of television advertising, and to helping children evaluate the advertising they see.

For the 5-year-old, as well as on through the preadolescent years, 90 minutes on weekdays and 2 hours on weekend days should be a maximum for television watching, (except, of course, for older children who may need to watch a school course taught via television).

The foregoing discussion relates to factors for consideration by parents who have made the initial decision to have a television set in the home and to permit their children to view programs on a home television set. Although they are but a very small minority today, there are parents who have made a different decision, and who by choice do not have television sets in their homes. Children in families that do not have home television, but whose playmates and acquaintances do have television equipment, need to have very clear explanations about their own parents' decisions in this matter.

Eating
Children from 5 to 6 years of age are likely to be so conversational that their mealtime eating progress is slow, but they are also likely to "clean their plates" if you are patient. The child at this age usually prefers simple foods, but unless he is influenced by adult prejudices he generally eats whatever is available at family meals. It is best not to comment, now, on what he does or does not eat. Just act as though you expect him to eat what you give him at each meal, but don't attempt to force him to eat what he doesn't want.
Give the child small servings and provide a balanced diet, letting him ask for more if he is still hungry.
At the same time, however, the child at this age is old enough to learn basic facts about proper nutrition, and it is desirable for him to understand in a general way that the foods that are included in family meals are selected with nutritional values and benefits in mind.
Modern research steadily adds to our knowledge about relationships between food and health. Public Health nurses and County Extension Home Economists can help parents stay alert to developments in this important area.
Meals which the child eats at school, and other food he eats away from home, should also contribute to a balanced diet for the child. Since so much television advertising appears to be directed to child consumers, parents should give attention to limiting junk food snacks and to providing nutritious alternatives.
Be patient where the 5-year-old's table manners are concerned. In this area of accomplishment, as in others, what he does so expertly today may be done less well tomorrow. Meanwhile, it is sensible to assume that he will eventually adopt the same manners he observes in his parents.

Toileting, bathing, dressing
The average 5-year-old can look after his toilet needs himself, though he often becomes so interested in what he is doing that he needs to be reminded to go to the toilet.
Encourage young children to make a firm habit of washing their hands before eating, and after using the toilet. The child at this age can also bathe himself quite well, but needs adult help in drawing his bath water or adjusting the shower. With children of this age, there is still danger of slipping on wet surfaces and getting burned by hot water—even though you have put red tape on the hot water faucets and told them what it means)—and they should never be left in the bath or shower unsupervised.
Except for special occasions, the 5-year-old should be expected to dress himself. His clothes should be simple, sturdy, and easy to care for. At age 5, children vary a good deal in their interest as to what they will wear on any particular day. Insofar as possible, the child should select what he will put on. However, if he lacks interest, simply make
it a bedtime practice to put out the clothes he is to wear the next morning. In time, he is likely to take over this habit for himself.

Five-year-olds should also be expected to put their soiled clothes in the family laundry basket or hamper, and they should be encouraged to clean their own shoes and slippers. This kind of training is but one more step toward learning to look after their own possessions and will make life easier for them when they go to school or visit relatives and friends. It is also an important part of the child’s training to share in the work of the family. He should be encouraged to help with simple household tasks and some of these tasks should be assigned to him. However, the child at this age is still too young to handle power-operated household equipment and machinery and should not be allowed to do so.

**Rest and sleep**

By the time he is 5, a child is usually less self-demanding. Many children at this age, however, are simply so industrious that they wear themselves out just keeping busy. Whereas the younger child will often cry when he is tired, the 5-year-old may express his fatigue by restlessness, fidgety behavior, and general crankiness.

The average 5-year-old still needs 10 or 11 hours sleep at night, and his bedtime should be set accordingly. He should usually be in bed by 7 or 8 o’clock if he is to eat his breakfast with the family. Children who have difficulty falling asleep will enjoy books or other quiet playthings beside their beds. However, if parents participate in social activities with the child at this hour his sleep is likely to be delayed even longer.

Many 5-year-olds wake up during the night to go to the toilet, but most can attend to their own needs without bothering parents. Night-lights in the bathroom and hallways are both comforting to the child and a good safety precaution. Some children will also want night-lights in their bedrooms. The year from 5 to 6 is also a time when many children are disturbed by dreams and nightmares, and may awaken screaming. Teasing the child about his dreams will not help. Comfort him when he is frightened. If he seems seriously upset try to stay with him until he falls asleep again. Few 5-year-olds take daily naps, but a planned rest period
from 30 minutes to an hour—usually after the mid-day meal—is a good idea. The child should have the option of quiet play or sleeping at these times.

If he has not already started to do this, the 5-year-old should begin to take responsibility for making his own bed and for helping to keep his sleeping place tidy.

Your child needs his own doctor and dentist
If you have not already selected a doctor and a dentist for your child, do so now. A doctor needs to see a child on a regular basis in order to monitor his development and progress. Also, a child who knows his doctor can be comfortable with him and is often able to have a more positive attitude toward health care and treatment. In the same way, a dentist who examines a child’s teeth on a regular basis is better able to care for his dental health needs.

Physical checkups
Ask your child’s doctor how often you should bring your child in for checkups. It may be once or twice a year, or more often. On these occasions the doctor will check the child’s progress and answer your questions. Be sure you understand from the doctor the kinds of symptoms and conditions that mean you need to consult the doctor immediately.

Immunizations
It is the parents’ personal and social responsibility to obtain medical protection for their children against diseases such as polio, diphtheria, smallpox, whooping cough, mumps, tetanus, roseola, rubeola, and rubella. If your child has not been protected, discuss this with his doctor without delay so that this can be taken care of before he enters kindergarten or first grade. If he is protected already, find out from the doctor when he will need boosters. (And remember to discuss your own immunizations with your doctor, too.)

Take care of his teeth
By the time he is 5, a child should understand the importance of brushing his teeth after each meal and be able to do this without assistance, although he may still need reminders. Keep the child’s toothbrush and toothpaste in a place he can easily reach.
Make appointments for your child to have regular dental checkups. Cavities, if any, and other dental problems common to children are more easily treated when discovered early. Many dentists advise fluorine treatments for children's teeth to help prevent cavities. Ask your child's dentist about this.

By this age, the child who has gaps between his teeth may become quite self-conscious and worry that he has a permanent impairment to his appearance. Reassure him that these problems will be taken care of in due time.

**Kindergarten**

If he has already been in nursery school, kindergarten will simply be an extension of a familiar experience and the average 5-year-old will take it in stride. He enjoys being taught, and revels in the satisfactions of achievement. In these ways, kindergarten provides the ideal setting for him. This is not, however, the time to try to push him intellectually. The 5-year-old tends to make steady progress at his own speed, but if demands on him are too great he is likely to resist going to kindergarten at all. Should this in fact happen, it may be wise to let him stay at home. As he approaches his sixth birthday, he will again be growing eager and restless for new experience, and look forward to becoming a first grader.

For many children, as they begin to walk to school or wait for the bus or carpool that will take them there, the year from 5–6 marks their first unsupervised mobility. Without using scare tactics, parents should caution young children against approaching strange animals and strange people. By the time he is old enough to go to school or elsewhere alone, the child also needs to know how to get home or to obtain help if he is lost. Teach him his home address and telephone number. He should also learn how to reach whomever you want him to contact if you are not at home when he needs help.

**First grade on the horizon**

Whether or not your child attends kindergarten, there are a number of things you can do to make his entry into first grade
easier for him and his teachers. These include:

1) Planning his wardrobe so he can put on and remove all his everyday clothing without help.

2) Teaching him to recognize and look after his own belongings—clothes, books, toys, and whatever else is “his.”

3) Taking him on frequent excursions out into the community so that he can develop both a sense of direction and an awareness of important places—the post office, the grocery store, the fire station, the police station, his school, the park, and so forth.

4) Teaching him how to cross streets alone, and how to get on and off buses. Whether he walks to school or goes by bus, he will need both these skills if you are to feel confident about his physical safety.

5) Arranging for him to be away from you for a few hours at a time. The 5-year-old’s attachment to his mother may cause him to be wary of even brief separations, but you can make it easier for him by arranging to leave him now and then at the homes of playmates he knows and enjoys. Keep these visits brief, and alternate them by inviting his playmates to your home. This type of activity is especially desirable for children who will enter first grade without having attended nursery school or kindergarten, and for children who have always had either their mothers at home or who have been cared for at home by others, rather than being left at the homes of child-sitters.

6) Teaching him how to get home if he is lost. As mentioned above, this requires teaching him the name of his street, his house and apartment numbers, if any, as well as his home telephone number and the names of his parents.

7) Teaching him to be a good listener. The first grader who understands the importance of listening will already have a skill that many less fortunate children will have to spend many months learning.

**Discipline and guidance**

Be consistent. This is one special rule for parents to keep in mind with respect to discipline and guidance for the child of 5 to 6 years. This child wants to conform, to cooperate, and to please you. In being consistent in your expectations for him, you make it possible for him to realize these objectives. A child also needs to
learn to enjoy what he has to do, and this teaching, also, is the task of the parent. At the same time, keep in mind that the child now has some well thought out ideas and plans of his own, and is likely to balk if he finds himself overly thwarted. Try to avoid arguing with your child and try to be flexible enough to give in once in awhile. In order to function gracefully in the outside world, the child must also be able to concede a point now and then. He needs to learn to negotiate. He will be able to acquire these skills more easily if he observes them being practiced by his parents. It is important, however, that he understands what you and he are doing—rather than feeling he has simply "worn you down."

**Aggression**

In view of the extent to which aggression is used as adult problem-solving behavior in comic strips and television movies, as well as in news reports from real life, parents must actively concern themselves with their children’s needs to deal with aggression and violence which they may encounter daily.

A child should be taught how to behave if he meets aggressive behavior on the part of others, including his reaction to both physical and verbal attacks. He needs to understand what causes aggression, needs help to avoid being psychologically intimidated, and needs to learn appropriate non-aggressive responses. However, by the time a child leaves his parents’ protection and enters first grade, he also needs to know how to protect himself from actual harm and what to do if he needs help.

Be alert to all neighborhood and school situations in which aggressive behavior has taken place. Be sure the information you receive is accurate. Know the parents of neighborhood children and know who is responsible for your child’s safety at school.

In the event you have reason to believe you child is in actual danger, seek help from authorities and from other parents. Try to avoid frightening your child. Avoid unnecessary discussion, but take proper steps to ensure his protection from harm when necessary.

**Holdover habits**

If your 5-year-old still sucks his thumb, carries around a security blanket, or continues some other such habit, it is generally best to simply ignore it. He will eventually give it up. In this kind of situation, some parents try to "bribe" the child to give up the
habit. The trouble with bribes is that when a child finds you will bribe him to change one behavior, he is likely to demand a bribe to stop doing something else you don't like. If you find it really necessary to encourage a child to give up a behavior that is satisfying to him, it is important to be sure his life is as happy and pleasant as you can make it in all other respects. The less a child lacks in terms of his general physical, psychological, and social well-being, the more free he is to get involved with the world outside himself. His satisfactions can then be realized through his accomplishments and his awareness of his acceptance by others.

Immunize your child against prejudice, too
Parents' prejudices, along with other attitudes, are quickly learned by the 5-year-old, and are likely to become a serious handicap to him when he enters school, moving further from his home circle into the larger society. Most serious are the prejudices against people of different ethnic backgrounds, skin color, nationality, religious faith, and socioeconomic status, and those who for any other reason are physically different in appearance. Prejudices held by modern parents are often no more than reflections of attitudes they themselves learned during their own childhoods. Parents who have not already rid themselves of prejudices of this kind should thoroughly examine their attitudes toward people who are different from themselves, and their reasons for holding these attitudes. Prejudices against normal genetic and culturally inherited characteristics are, at best, indicative of social lag, and wholly inappropriate in today's "small world." Ways in which parents can help immunize their children against prejudice of this nature include:

1) Helping them to see and understand how group differences come about—for example, that people grow up in different parts of the world, in different kinds of homes, with different kinds of opportunities for education, with different kinds of religious training, and so forth.
2) Helping them feel secure and safe in their own group, so that the differences they encounter in their contacts with other groups do not threaten or frighten them.
3) Helping them to accept their own limitations and differences, so that they do not need to use prejudice and hostility as a crutch for any personal inadequacies they may feel.
4) Helping them learn how to make their own decisions and to understand the moral responsibilities that go with their choices.

5) Helping them learn the art and skill of communication, so that they can honestly express their thoughts and feelings in ways that are courteous and sensitive to the feelings of others.

If he has not already done so, the child at this age also needs to develop sensitivity and understanding concerning developmental disabilities and physical handicaps. This teaching is also the responsibility of parents.

Some new fears
By the time they are 5, most children have enough understanding of reality and are sufficiently secure in their normal environments to have overcome the common fears held when they were younger. Witches and ghosts are less likely to be viewed as real threats. Large animals will have moved to a position of inspiring respect and fascination, rather than fright. But his new levels of awareness often result in new kinds of fears for the child from 5 to 6.

At this age, the child is likely to express fright during a thunder and lightning storm. Noisy wind and screaming sirens may be scary to him and his fear of the dark may increase.

Young children should not be teased or scolded because of their fears. Instead, they should be comforted and assured that they are safe. If a child is frightened by a storm, let him stay close to you until it is over or he goes to sleep. Never require a young child to enter a dark room or closet alone, or to go out of doors alone in the dark.

During this stage, a child may be afraid to go to sleep unless there is a lighted lamp in his room. He will get over this more quickly if you respect his feelings and let him have a night-light he can turn on and off according to his preference.

More serious in its ramifications is the child’s fear of losing his mother. This fear often appears quite suddenly and its origins can be hard to trace. Certain programs he sees on television, stories he hears from other children whose parents are separating or separated, and his new awareness of illness and death probably all contribute to the 5-year-old’s fear that his mother may suddenly disappear and not come back.

Periods such as this can be trying to the mother, too, for the child may not even want her out of his sight. Children who are already
accustomed to being cared for by someone else while their mothers are at work each day may even show unwillingness for the mother to leave, and display anxiety until she returns. Mothers who have not already taken outside jobs should make a real effort to further postpone this step until the child enters first grade. New involvements with peers and school activities will then absorb so much of the child's time and mental energy that he can let go of some of his attachment to her. Also, the child who leaves home each day for school is better able to accept in a matter of fact way that his mother also leaves home, each day, to go to work—and then they both also return.

He begins to understand death
The child's first persistent questions about death are also likely to arise during this year between his 5th and 6th birthdays. Keep in mind that the child at this age is not ready for long philosophical discussions, nor can he understand the medical aspects of aging, illness, or physical trauma. What he is mainly in need of is reassurance that what has happened was a normal happening in those circumstances. When possible, your replies should simply be honest but casual. "Yes, everybody dies someday, but most people don't die until they get very old and tired." If his questions are related to the death of a young person, either by sickness or accident, your explanation will have to be adjusted accordingly. "Yes, sometimes people get so sick they can't stay alive any more." Or, "Yes, sometimes when a person gets hurt very badly he can't live any more".

The child's first experience with the death of a loved one will vary greatly depending on whether it was anticipated, as in the case of a person whose death followed a long illness, or unexpected and sudden. In any case, his first experience with sudden death may be very difficult for him. If it is the death of a person he loved, the child will be in need of a great deal of comforting. When a death causes grief and mourning in the family, it is unrealistic to try to hide your feelings from the children, nor should you attempt to lessen the children's expression of their own grief. It is far better that they get their feelings out, and that you and they share your sadness with each other. If possible, however, children should not be subjected to long-drawn-out periods of mourning. The eventual message a child needs to get is that however much we miss the person who has died, we are glad to have all our happy memories to share together.
Depending on their own orientation, parents may wish to explain death and its future in religious terms, such as "Yes, he has died now, and we will miss him a lot, but he has gone to live with God, and God will take very good care of him. So we don't have to worry."

Families differ in their views as to the suitability of taking young children to wakes, funerals, burials, and other ceremonies relating to death. Children who do attend these ceremonies should always be prepared in advance as to the purpose of the occasion and what will happen there. Also, when children are taken to visit graves, vaults, or urns, emphasis should be on respect for the memory of loved ones—not on loss and sorrow.

As the child becomes aware of death as the permanent disappearance of a person (or pet) that he knew and loved, he may suddenly become very fearful of separations from parents, grandparents, siblings, and others he loves and is used to being with. It is important to make this period as secure and peaceful for him as you can, and at the same time introduce him to new and challenging activities to divert his interests and energies away from disturbing thoughts.

Consistent with his growing awareness and effort to comprehend the vast concepts adults speak of as life and death, the 5-year-old may also ask about life and death in relation to insects, birds and animals. "Does it hurt the mosquito to die when it gets swatted?"  "Did the robin go up to heaven?"  "Does the worm feel sad when he gets put on the hook to be eaten?"  "Will God take care of my doggy?"  Parents, teachers, and others who may be posed with questions such as these, need to have some ready answers. What you say will reflect your own philosophical view, but try to avoid frightening the child when you speak to him about any aspect of death and dying.

Children at this age will often hold "funerals" for birds and butterflies and turtles, and their grief over the death of a pet can be intense. Respect their feelings.

**Imagination versus lying**

The "tall" stories of the 4-year-old have generally quieted down by the time the child is 5. However, his imagination may still cause him to exaggerate to some extent, especially when the subject is new and intriguing, or when he is testing you to find out how much you know about it. Compliment him on his imagination and fine stories, but from now on it is wise to keep him aware that you recognize his departure from facts.
If, on the other hand, you have reason to believe the child is deliberately trying to deceive you, it is your job to find out why he is doing this.

Aside from their pleasurable flights of imagination, the 5-year-olds normally want to be open and honest with the adults in their lives. They want to share, because they want the feedback and enlargement on their own experience that you can provide for them. They are beginning to understand the excitement of intellectual discovery and the role of adults as a primary resource for expanding their mental world.

Thus, when a child at this age intentionally lies and tries to deceive you, he is likely to have a serious reason for this behavior. There is something happening in his life that he can’t cope with. He is fearful either that you, too, cannot cope with it, or that he may be punished or even lose some of your affection for him if you find out about it.

Whatever it is that is going wrong for him, remember that the child is already under considerable pressure or he wouldn’t lie to you in the first place. You will only make matters worse if you try to “force it out of him.” Instead, show him steady affection while, at the same time, being very observant of what he is doing, and where, and with whom. Talk with the parents of his playmates and with his teacher. If you are still puzzled, make an appointment with your child’s doctor and get his advice about where to go for help.

It is highly important that social and psychological disturbances in the lives of young children be given immediate and competent attention. With good professional help, the problems a child encounters at this age can nearly always be resolved, but if left unattended the consequences can be lasting and serious.

**Sex interests, behaviors, and activities**

Whereas the average 4-year-old asks many questions about where babies come from, the 5-year-old is apt to be more interested in the baby itself. Both boys and girls at this age are happy helping take care of babies and younger sisters and brothers in the family, and this interest should be encouraged.

However, by the time the child is 5, it is important that he does understand the basic facts about human reproduction. If he has not yet seemed to ask about it, his parents need to look for ways to get this information across to him. Parents sometimes assume that, because the child hasn’t asked, he is either innocent
and never thought to ask or that he is just not interested. Neither of these explanations is apt to be true. Most likely, the child has somehow got the notion that these are questions his parents don’t want to hear. In such cases the child will commonly have pursued his inquiries elsewhere—most often among his playmates—and the information he will have picked up is apt to include many misconceptions and half-formed ideas.

If you or another family he knows are expecting a new baby, this provides an ideal opportunity for you to review with your child the facts surrounding conception, pregnancy, and birth. The child from 5 to 6 is also very capable of learning a great deal from books, and sitting down with him to look at and explain pictures that illustrate human reproduction should be a fascinating experience for both of you. Your children’s librarian can assist you in locating the book or books you are looking for to share with your child at this age. Always read a book yourself before reading it with your child, and never simply hand a 5-year-old a book about “where babies come from” and expect him to make sense of it on his own. Even a book consisting entirely of pictures needs explanation to children of this age. However, once you have looked at it together, the child may ask to see the book many times, and once you have explained it there is no reason not to leave it where he has easy access to it.

Occasionally a child who is intensely interested in the whole business of reproduction and birth will ask to see the place where he came out of his mother. Most parents may feel that it is not appropriate to meet this request. An illustrated book which clearly shows the vulva (external female genitals), vagina, and uterus, and the development and birth of a baby will usually satisfy the child’s need for understanding.

(Note: When selecting a book to help a child understand the process of human reproduction, give special attention to the clarity of the book’s graphic illustrations. Photographs or anatomically correct drawings are easier for a child to understand than diagrams.)

By the time they are 5, children are beginning to think about what they will become. They seek to identify with people they admire. They need models.

In the two-parent family, the 5-year-old boy will ordinarily try very hard to be like his father and the 5-year-old girl will ordinarily try very hard to be like her mother. They will adopt their parents’ manner of speaking and responding, and will rapidly absorb their parents’ attitudes toward other people, situations, and objects.
Children of this age who lack parents for models need other adults to identify with and pattern themselves after, especially adults of their same sex. Single fathers should make an effort to provide their daughters with adult female models. Single mothers should try to provide adult male models for their sons. Relatives and family friends whose values and lifestyles are compatible with your own are sometimes able to take on these roles. Patient and warm-hearted teachers, as well as the dedicated men and women who serve as volunteers in the Big Brother and Big Sister programs, can also be wonderful identity figures for the young boy or girl who has no father or mother to pattern themselves by.

A not unusual stage in the development of a child between the ages of 5 and 6 years is one of very possessive affection for his parent of the opposite sex. This behavior is related to his efforts both to identify with his own sex and his growing awareness of his own sexuality. If they have not done so earlier, girls at this age are likely to tell their fathers they are going to marry them some day, while boys will announce that they are going to marry their mothers. The correct response for the married parent is to say something like, “Thank you—it’s a nice compliment that you feel that way—Mother (or Daddy) is already married, but when you grow up you will have a husband (or wife) of your own, too.” Single parents will vary this statement in whatever way is appropriate to their own situations. The important message for the child is simply that children do not marry their parents but that they may, however, expect to have mates of their own.

Masturbation is both common and normal among 5-year-olds. It is not physically harmful, nor should it be regarded as simply undesirable. Among present day specialists in human sexuality, masturbation is viewed as a common stage in the child’s development as a sexual human being. Of special significance to the child’s emerging self-image is the relationship between his feelings about masturbation and his development of positive attitudes toward his own genitals. Ideally, a child whose parent happens to observe him masturbating should not need to feel embarrassed. For his own protection, however, a child needs to understand that masturbation is an intimate behavior and that he should not do it in public. Mutual sex play, both with same sex and opposite sex, is also not unusual for children in this age group and seems mainly concerned with exploration and the affirming and reaffirming of self. Again, it is important that parents who find their children engaged in this
behavior do not show alarm or disgust or otherwise react in such a way as to frighten young children or lead them to believe their sexual activities will result in something bad happening to them. Except for this avoidance of spontaneous negativism, however, parents will need to handle such activity according to their own values, keeping in mind the importance of every child’s learning which kinds of behavior are socially acceptable and which are not, and why.

What is important, overall, is for the child to develop a positive yet socially respectful attitude toward sexual expression. Parental responses to children’s early manifestations of sexuality are vital to this development.

Regardless of their own philosophical orientations regarding sex, parents in our society should be alert to indications of sex activity between children and older youths and adults. In the event that such activity is or has been taking place, the parental response most supportive of the child’s physical and psychological health is one that avoids causing the child to regard with fear or disgust whatever has happened to him. Discussion with the child should probably be limited to obtaining the child’s view of what the activity consisted of, if that is possible, and to reassuring the child who actually was hurt or frightened that he or she is all right and nothing bad is going to result. The child’s need for medical attention will depend on what was involved, but due to the possibility of infection it is always wise not to delay in asking the child’s doctor about this. A competent pediatrician will be able to examine and treat a child in a calm and easy manner, whatever the circumstances, and there should be no adverse effects upon the child from this medical attention.

Contrary to messages often implied by popular media, lasting harm from sexual activity between young children and persons older than themselves, whether opposite or same sex, is most apt to result from over-reacting by parents rather than from the event itself. While keeping in mind the prime importance of protecting the child, as well as the desirability of preventing social injury to the other person(s) involved, parental over-reacting should be avoided.

Not well recognized in our society is the high incidence of adult-child genital fondling and exploration, generally among people who are relatives or close friends. More subtle is the fact that, whereas children lack the ability to understand or discuss this aspect of their own behavior, children as well as adults can be seductive.
Parents also need to keep in mind that childhood sexuality is not only entirely normal and to be expected—it is part and parcel of growing up, and an essential phase of the child’s preparation for adult sex roles. Just as the child needs to know the alphabet before he can read great books, he needs to understand his own sexuality as a first step in preparation for mature, responsible, sex relationships in his own adulthood.

Of equal importance is the recognition of the relationship between the child’s affirmation of himself as a sexual person and his capacity for self-esteem. As is true regarding other areas of his development, the child’s self-esteem in the sex area needs parental encouragement.

For all these reasons, it is the responsibility of parents to see that their children develop positive, healthy attitudes toward sex, and also to educate and supervise their children in such a way that sexual experiences they do not wish their children to have, or that could be harmful to them, will not occur. This means that by the time a child is 5-years of age, and will increasingly be away from the protection of his parents, he should have been taught what is socially appropriate behavior. He needs to understand what is appropriate both so that he will have this protection from people who might get angry with him if he behaved in inappropriate ways, and so that he does not invite or incite people to molest him. For both girls and boys, this kind of teaching needs to be very plain and direct, and parents should be certain it is clearly understood.

In view of the frequency with which sexual violence appears in films shown on television, as well as the pornographic nature of many newstand publications and media advertisements for adult entertainment, the importance of sound sex education cannot be overemphasized. For children who have not had good sex education, both pornography and visual portrayal of sexual violence are potentially harmful, because the child who lacks understanding of the role of affection in human sexuality may come to believe that harshness and violence in sexual behavior are the rule. Similarly, for the child who has not had a sound sex education, pornography could lead to distortions of male and female roles and his expectations for sexual expression in others.

While it is neither possible nor desirable to shield children from the sexually oriented materials they are likely to encounter in modern everyday life, a good sex education can help them to an intelligent interpretation of what they see and hear, and help buffer and protect them against harm from the kinds of sexually
dysfunctional experiences one is likely to encounter—either personally or indirectly—in modern society. Thus, in light of the importance, to the child’s present and future mental health, of a sound sex education in these early years, parents need to make a special effort to prepare themselves to carry out this task—both now, while the child is very young, and in succeeding years as he proceeds through the stages of puberty and adolescence to his own adulthood. Of greatest significance in this task will be the parents’ success in conveying to the child (1) the goodness of his own sexuality and (2) the affectionate nature of desirable sex relationships.

The child’s increase in overt sexuality that usually begins at about age 3 often quiets down as he approaches his 6th birthday and becomes involved with school and other new activities. However, both parents and teachers should be aware that just because his behavior is not overt does not mean that the child is no longer interested in sex-related matters, including his own sexuality. The child who has received his fundamental sex education at home during his preschool years is ready for an elementary school curriculum that reviews basic facts about human reproduction, and introduces him to the fascinating worlds of physiology, biology, genetics, and other studies relating to the well-being and future of the human race.

(Note: Children who are burdened with severe physical handicaps, children who have been medically diagnosed as suffering from acute psychological disturbances, and children who have been diagnosed as mentally retarded all need special guidance with their sexual development. Parents should consult with the child’s doctor, while the child is still very young, as to the best local sources of counseling in this very sensitive and specialized area.)

Trust your common sense

The newborn baby—especially the firstborn—is usually such a wonder and delight to his parents that their responses to him center around meeting his every need and admiring each new evidence of his progress. As the baby takes his first steps, as the toddler walks and talks, as the three and four-year-old becomes progressively more competent, sociable, and winsome—but still reasonably tractable, dependent, and obedient—parents continue to bask in the joy of their child’s company and their fascination with his developing personality.

This mutual pleasure between parent and child generally continues
during the “homebody” phase of the child’s 5th year. Then, as the child approaches his 6th birthday, his feelings toward his parents and theirs toward him are apt to undergo a major change. As his anticipation of his “growing up” expands, the child himself begins his push toward independence. At the same time, his parents—often quite suddenly, it seems—look around them and experience their first real awareness of what is involved in being mother and father to a schoolager, a preadolescent, and a teenager! As you approach this awareness, don’t panic. The average parent—and most parents are average—knows a good deal more than he or she realizes. Guiding your child through his school years and teens does not need to be nearly as complicated as the popular media would have you believe.

Know and trust your own values, and be sure your child knows what your values are. Take seriously your responsibility to behave in a way that you would be pleased to have your child behave, and trust your own common sense and his.

Foster his self-esteem
An essential ingredient for the success of the child’s inner preparation for launching himself into the world of school and community is his confidence in his self-worth, i.e., his self-esteem. For the 5-year-old, self-esteem is inseparable from his beliefs about the opinions of him held by his parents and the other significant people in his life. This is not a time to be sparing of praise. Give your child honest but constant reinforcement for his efforts, his accomplishments, his good behavior, and all of the pleasing aspects of his personality. Do not be fearful that this kind of reinforcement will “spoil” the child. A child gets spoiled by pampering him—failing to correct his misbehaviors and failing to provide him with appropriate discipline. Pampering tends to weaken the child’s character. Praise, correctly used, strengthens it. Except when he is not feeling well or is overly tired, the child’s natural response to praise is to try even harder to behave in ways that meet with your approval.

In all aspects of guidance for your child, try to keep your goals clearly in sight. You want your child to grow into a stable, happy, kindly, sensitive, and responsible person. You want him to be both loving and lovable. You want him to have integrity, you want him to be trustworthy, and you want him to be able to have good relationships with other people of all ages and those who are very different from himself as well as those who are more similar.
The foundation for the child’s capability to develop all of these qualities is established before he is 6-years-old. This is a sobering thought but it need not be a frightening one. What it means is that you, his parents, and his other adult relatives and friends and early teachers, are the people who have the power to set him on the road toward a happy, creative and fulfilling life. Helping the child develop self-esteem is vital to this effort.

**Keep on loving him as he is**

More than anything else you can do for him, this child who is now on the threshold of venturing out as an independent personality in the world of school, peers, and the community needs to know you love him exactly as he is—the way he looks, the way he acts, the level at which he performs—and that he does not have to change himself in order for you to *continue* to love him or love him even more—and that whatever he does or does not do in the future you will still love him.

This is what is meant by unconditional love, and unconditional love from at least one other person is the need of every human being throughout his lifetime. The fact that it becomes increasingly rare in the lives of adults accounts for a great deal of the misery afflicting the human race—much of it, but not all, self-inflicted. Unconditional love for your 5-year-old does not mean that you *like* all of his behavior. What you *don’t like* at this age is the subject for guidance and discipline, and will be so for as long as he is under your protection and guardianship. But it does mean that, whatever his limitations, failures, and shortcomings prove to be, your love for him is steadfast.

Over the long haul, the importance of unconditional love is that it is the basis of hope. In time of stress, it is the bottom line. To be able to give it requires the greatest maturity a parent—or any other—can have, and to be the recipient of it is the greatest good one human being can receive from another. Thus, it is not too soon for the parent of the 5-year-old to begin to struggle with these thoughts and their meaning for themselves in the future of their parent-child relationship.
Early Child Development and Guidance References for Parents and Teachers


Ibid. *The 1 Year Old*, Leaflet 183, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Hawaii, Honolulu, 1973/1

Ibid. *The 2 Year Old*, Leaflet 184, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Hawaii, Honolulu, 1973/2

Ibid. *The 3 Year Old*, Leaflet 185, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Hawaii, Honolulu, 1973/3

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1,2,3 These three leaflets are available in the English, Tagalog, and Ilocano languages.
Sex Information Sources for Parents and Teachers of Young Children


Special Situations In Family Relationships—References for Parents and Teachers


Maddox, Brenda, *The Half-Parent*, M. Evans, New York, 1975


NOTE: The word he is used as a generic term throughout this publication to refer to both the male and the female child.

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