

## ***EXPLORING NEW WORLDS WITH YOUR 5 YEAR OLD***

As your child starts kindergarten, he will be exploring exciting new areas of life. Five year olds are eager, enthusiastic, and excited to learn about their world, their friends, and their family. But they are also a little uncertain as they try to learn new rules and master new ideas. You will enjoy your 5 year old if you are aware of the developmental tasks she needs to learn.

### **NUTRITION**

Five year olds love routine and so will often want to eat the same thing for breakfast, lunch and dinner. You can encourage your child to try other foods by taking advantage of his great imagination. Decorate food by making faces on it, cut sandwiches into strips and call them trees or caterpillars, or make funny faces out of vegetable arrangements. If your child sees you making healthy choices about food and eating a variety of foods, she will eventually do the same. In the mean while, please consider using a multivitamin/multimineral tablet once a day to help make sure your child has these nutrients in her diet.

Everyone in your family should limit the amount of fried foods, fatty foods, and junk foods that they eat. Since you control the shopping list, choose your groceries carefully. You can help your child by not buying sodas, chips, candies, cookies, crackers, and cupcakes. Nutritious snacks include fresh fruit, popcorn, pretzels, cheese/string cheese, raisins, nuts, carrot sticks, celery with peanut butter, yogurt and dried fruit. Juice is not recommended, but if you allow your child to drink juice, limit the amount to 4 ounces a day.

Encourage your child to eat breakfast and include a source of protein (cheese, eggs, nuts, peanut butter, yogurt, beans) in that meal to help maintain your child's blood sugar throughout the morning.

### **DENTAL**

Your child should have had several dental visits by now and should have the habit of brushing and flossing at least twice a day. Children begin losing baby teeth between 5 and 6 years of age and usually lose the front lower teeth (incisors) first. Oral habits like pacifiers and thumb sucking should be discouraged by this age. Please talk with your pediatrician or dentist if you have questions.

### **TOILETING**

Many 5 year olds still have accidents at night and may wet their bed several times a week. Your child should gradually have fewer accidents as she grows and her nervous system matures. If your child has accidents during the day (either urine or stool), or has started having accidents after being totally dry, please let your doctor know.

You will probably notice that your child is becoming more modest and wants to make sure that he has private time and space, especially when dressing or using the toilet. It is important that you respect his modesty and not make fun of his need for privacy.

### **SEX ED**

Many 5 year olds have been exposed to information about sexual activity and reproduction and will openly talk about this at school. If you have not already started reading and talking to your child about the differences between boys and girls, and some simple concepts of how babies are made, this is likely the right time to begin. It is best to use anatomically correct terms ("labia", "penis") to help your child (and you) feel comfortable talking about genitalia. It is also important to discuss with your child that his/her private parts should never be touched by other people. (It is easy to define these private parts as those parts that are covered by the bathing suit or underwear.) Remember to tell your child that secrets should be for happy times and surprises. If someone asks your child to keep a secret that makes the child unhappy or sad – the child should NOT keep that kind of a secret, but should tell a parent or another adult.

### **SAFETY**

You can teach your 5 year old many safety lessons:

1. Look both ways before crossing the street

2. Do not open the house door without an adult being present
3. Learn your full name, address, and phone number
4. Know which people you can go to if you are lost or need help – people working at cash registers, people in uniforms, people wearing name badges
5. Learn bike safety rules, including always wearing a helmet
6. Learn the proper way to hold and use a knife and scissors
7. Learn how and when to dial 9-1-1

#### SPORTS / EXERCISE

There are many organized sports activities available to children in the Bay Area. You may want your child to experience several different activities (swimming, dancing, soccer, Little League, gymnastics, martial arts) or you may just want your child to have one sports activity. Sports activities at this age should emphasize playing together as a team and learning new skills. Be careful if too much emphasis is placed on “winning”.

Children today need more exercise. Encouraging your child to play outside (in a safe area) is better than letting your child sit inside and watch television. You can also benefit from exercising and playing with your child.

Be careful that your child is not “over scheduled”. Children need some quiet, relaxing time to put together all the things they are learning. They also need quiet time to read, day dream, play creatively – or talk with you!

#### HOUSEHOLD TASKS / FAMILY WORK

Children learn that they are important members of the family when they are needed – when their work is important and appreciated. Make sure your 5 year old has specific tasks that are important to the functioning of the family. Making her bed, setting and clearing the table, feeding pets, putting away toys – these are all ways that your 5 year old can help the family and develop self-esteem from a job well done.

#### ALLOWANCE

This is probably a good time to begin thinking about a weekly allowance or a way for your child to have access to money. Most children learn about money in kindergarten or first grade, as they are taught how many pennies are in a nickel, how many nickels are in a dime. Some families choose to give their young children a small allowance, feeling that it is important for children to know that everyone in the family benefits from the parents’ employment. These families do not equate allowance with doing chores. Other families believe that children should learn they earn money by doing work, and so they are given an allowance after chores are completed. In either case, it is helpful for parents to teach children how to “use” money – how to put some money away to be saved, how to count the pennies, nickels, and dimes, and how to pay for small items at the store. You can also begin teaching generosity – how to give something to others.

#### TRADITIONS

Children thrive in families that have traditions. Think of some traditions from your ancestors and think of new traditions your family can begin. Celebrating half birthdays with a cupcake, taking walks after dinner, reading a story before bedtime, waking the birthday child early in the morning with a funny song, writing notes for lunch boxes – traditions do not need to be fancy or cost a lot of money.

#### DINNER HOUR

One of the best traditions a family can share together is to eat meals with each other as many times during the week as possible. The dinner hour is especially important, and we encourage families to try to share dinner together. This time allows the family to “regroup” and to share the day’s events with each other. You can use this time as a time for fun, sharing jokes (which 5 year olds are just beginning to enjoy), talking about feelings and emotions, talking about experiences and how family members handled them. Try to make dinner time a relaxing time, and not a time for discipline. Turn off the television during

dinner to encourage everyone to talk. You can ask questions to encourage conversation – “Let’s each tell about something funny that happened today.”

#### LYING

5 year olds are trying to learn the difference between what is real and what is pretend. They enjoy stories like Paul Bunyan and Amelia Bedelia as they learn how to determine what is true and what is not. You can help them by using interesting new words like “fantasy” and “reality” or “fact” and “fiction”. Point out when things they see are not actually real – like cartoons. Then point out things that are real – like the car, bus, people. Expect your 5 – 6 year old to tell lies. When she does tell you something that you know is not true, ask her if it is “fantasy” or “reality”. Then ask her to tell you again in a different way. You can tell her it is important to tell the truth, but don’t label her as a “liar” because she is still learning.

#### STEALING

5 year olds are also trying to learn what it means to “own” something. Many schools have a time for “sharing”, when children bring special items from home to show to the other children. Since the child may interpret “sharing” as meaning he can take or use the toy, expect to have some toys appear in your home that do not belong to your child. When this happens (or you find candy from the store in her pocket), do not label her as a “thief”. Explain calmly that the item belongs to someone else and must be returned. Then, go with your child and help him return the object. He will be very grateful for your support, and you will be showing him how to correct a mistake.

#### PETS

If you do not have a pet in your home, consider choosing a small pet. Children learn many qualities by having a pet. They learn responsibility, caring, empathy, and they often learn about birth and death. Small pets that are good for younger children include goldfish, guinea pigs, and lop-eared rabbits. Hamsters are nocturnal and are often sleeping when children want to play. Mice, rats, and goldfish have short life spans, so if you choose these as pets, be prepared to help your child experience the death of a pet. Turtles and salamanders can carry an infection that is dangerous for children, so please don’t have these pets in your home. If your family already has a pet, allow your child to assume more responsibility for the pet’s care.

#### TELEVISION/VIDEO GAMES/COMPUTER GAMES/MEDIA

5 year olds will learn a lot from television, video and computer games, and other media. Unfortunately, much of what they learn may not be helpful. They may see violent acts that are not punished. They will often see sexual experiences that are inappropriate for their age. They will spend time sitting when they should be exercising, reading, exploring, creating, or just day dreaming. Children who watch more than one hour of television each day tend to be more aggressive and less creative. They also read less and may not do as well in school. Children who watch more television also have a tendency to become overweight.

**YOU CAN HELP YOUR CHILD AND YOUR FAMILY BY TURNING OFF YOUR TV. LIMIT ALL “SCREEN TIME” TO ONE HOUR A DAY.** Whenever possible, if your child is watching television, be there with your child to explain the story. (Young children see individual events and may not be able to link cause and effect.)

#### RELIGION

Children have different fears at different ages, and many 5 year olds develop fears of death and of being separated from parents. So, your child may begin asking questions about death. The answers to these questions often depend upon the parents’ religious beliefs. This is an important time for parents to discuss their religious beliefs so they can provide consistent answers to the children. Consider attending worship services together.

#### DISCIPLINE – Teaching your child self-control

By this age, your child should know how to listen carefully to what you say and to obey you without arguing with you or questioning you. If your child is having trouble obeying you, she will probably have difficulty doing what the teacher tells her. There are many useful discipline “teaching tools” that you can

use at this age:

1. *Time out.* Time out allows a child to think about what he has done wrong and decide how to change his behavior. You can allow your 5 year old to stay in time out until he is ready to behave appropriately. After time out, remember to tell your child you love him. It was his behavior that was unacceptable.
2. *Natural consequences.* When you allow your 5 year old to go hungry at lunch time at school because she forgot to take her lunch – that is the natural consequence of her forgetfulness. This tool should obviously NOT be used when the child's safety is involved.
3. *Logical consequences.* When the child colors on the wall, he can lose the crayons for the day or help you wash the wall.
4. *If this...then this.* Telling your child, "If you clean up your toys, then we will have time for a story" helps her learn that actions and behaviors have consequences.
5. *Rewards.* Children love to "earn" rewards by doing a job well. This helps their self-esteem and teaches that good behavior is rewarded. Sticker charts, pennies in a jar – there are so many ways to set up a reward system. If you use a reward system, work on just one or two behaviors at a time and make sure the reward chosen is something the child is eager to earn. At this age the reward should be given quickly after the task is completed. Delayed gratification can be learned as your child gets older.

### SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

Kindergarten entrance is usually the first opportunity the child has to participate by herself in activities such as another child's birthday party, sports practice, or possibly an overnight at a friend's home. Now is the time to begin paying attention to your child's friends. Who does he like to play with? What do the children enjoy doing together? What books do they like to read? Take the opportunity to meet your child's friends' parents. Do they share your values? Many parents have been shocked when their children have spent the night with friends only to learn much later that the children were exposed to domestic violence or pornography.

Remember, you are your child's only advocate. Only you can decide what is right for your child. Being "overly protective" of your 5 year old may make you feel uncomfortable and awkward with other adults – but may be the best way to spare your child frightening or dangerous experiences.

### DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS

Elementary age children have many tasks to master as they prepare for life. Your 5 year old is just beginning to learn to solve problems, make decisions, and take responsibility. Here are some of the tasks that your child will be tackling:

1. Develop and maintain self-esteem – usually by accomplishing a difficult task
2. Find social acceptance – through opportunities to play with friends
3. Discover and copy role models – parents are a child's most important role models
4. Learn values: begin to question differences between family's values and others' values
5. Feel accepted at home – feel assured that she is an important part of the family
6. Acquire new knowledge and skills
7. Learn to handle fears
8. Learn to handle desires

As your child goes through each day, he will be learning in each of these areas. Take time to think about what he is learning and how you can encourage his development.

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## READY FOR KINDERGARTEN?

Every parent wonders if his / her 5 year old is ready for kindergarten. Unfortunately, there is no test that can tell us if a child is ready for kindergarten since "ready" can mean so many different things. Although tests are sometimes administered to determine whether a child is accepted to a school, none of the tests used can predict how well a child will do in kindergarten. Each child has things she can do well and tasks that are difficult for her. During the first year of school (usually kindergarten), children will learn to master many new tasks. This means that if a child cannot do one task (like using scissors), he should probably not be held back from starting school, since this may be a task that the child will learn during kindergarten. You as your child's parent will probably be the best judge as to whether your child is ready for kindergarten. This handout should only serve to give you some idea of things most other children are able to do before they start school. This list is not complete and is not meant to be a test of school readiness. If you feel your 5 year old has difficulty in several areas, please talk with your pediatrician.

### LARGE MUSCLE MOVEMENTS (Gross motor skills)

- Hops on one foot
- Goes up and down stairs, alternating feet
- Throws a ball overhand
- Can stand on one foot for 5 - 10 seconds

### SMALL MUSCLE MOVEMENTS (Fine motor skills)

- Can copy a square and triangle
- Uses scissors
- Can print some letters, can write first name

### LANGUAGE

- Can follow a three step command
- Can understand how items are the same and how things are different
- Speaks in 5 word sentences
- Is understood by other people all the time
- Can tell a story; can describe the day's events

### KNOWLEDGE (Cognitive)

- Knows most colors
- Knows his name, address, and phone number
- Can count 5 - 10 objects
- Can tell the difference between objects like bird/dog; milk / water
- Can answer what body parts do - eye = see; ears = hear
- Can say the alphabet; recognizes some letters

### ATTENTION

- Can sit still and listen to a short story
- Can obey a command - can do what the teacher says

### SOCIAL

- Has learned to take turns with other children
- Has learned to share toys with other children
- Has learned to ask for items rather than grabbing them from others

When your child starts kindergarten, he understands that he is representing your family “out in the world”. When he brings home a gold star on his paper and you praise him, he learns he has done a good job and has made you proud. She also knows she can tell family secrets at school, making parents feel vulnerable. (“Do you know what my Mommy told my Daddy last night?” is a common kindergarten theme.) Be aware of these underlying themes as you respond to the daily events at school.

Children depend upon the adults in their world to protect them – at school and at home. Teachers of young children must be responsible for closely observing the interactions of children and assuring that teasing and bullying are not tolerated. Since you are your child’s best advocate, you must also pay attention if your child complains that she is being teased or threatened. Please talk directly to the teacher if you have concerns that your child might be experiencing bullying – or might be a bully. Your pediatrician is also available to help you.

#### SCHOOL PHYSICAL

Before your child enters kindergarten, he will need a complete physical examination, a vision test, a hearing test, and possibly a skin test to see whether he has been exposed to tuberculosis. If you, or anyone in your family, has been exposed to tuberculosis, please let your pediatrician know.

Your 5 year old may need booster immunizations before beginning school. These immunizations can be given any time after 4 years of age, so your child may already be up to date. If not, please prepare you child for the fact that she will need some shots at her school check up.

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