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Dear Parents of Young Children – Naughty or Learning?
Michigan State University Extension Service
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Dear Parents
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"Naughty" or Learning?

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE, MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

DO YOU HAVE a "naughty" child? Or does your child sometimes act "naughty"? There's a difference. If you believe that your child is thoroughly and hopelessly "naughty," you will probably spend much of your time trying to stop such behavior. If, however, you believe that a little child sometimes acts "naughty" because he is learning, you will be likely to think more about better ways of helping him learn.

If you talk with other parents of young children (and this can be very comforting), you soon find out that your little child is not the only one who misbehaves at times.

One study attempted to find out just how much little children are alike in this respect. This study listed several kinds of undesirable behavior in more than 500 pre-school children and found, for example, that—

90 percent of these children wasted time at routines. This reached a peak between 2 and 4 years.

80 percent ignored requests. This was most pronounced between 2½ and 3 years.

85 percent left tasks incomplete, especially those between 2 and 3½ years.

75 percent wiggled a great deal while sitting. This was high between 2½ and 3½ years.

Maybe these items would not be in your list of "naughty" behavior, but at least they can be annoying at times.

Parents often mention different kinds of behavior that are annoying, or more than annoying. Some parents say, "It nearly drives me wild."

What are some of these situations and how can parents "keep their san-

ity" and live with these little children whom they dearly love?

Gets Into Things

Two-year-old Susan makes a bee line for the kitchen cupboards when her mother answers the telephone. Susan is on her way to opening a third box of cereal when her mother finally reaches her. She makes a mess and her mother must spend time cleaning it up.

Susan's real purpose, however, is to explore that cupboard when she knows she isn't going to be stopped. It may be that Susan has been stopped so many times in so many of her attempts to look at things that she takes advantage of just such occasions. (The little child with more ideas will also find more opportunities.)

Children of this age are curious about everything. They want to touch, look, feel, explore, widen their experience. In so doing, they make lots of mistakes. Some chance to look inside a drawer or touch something that looks fascinating (with your supervision) should help. Why not keep one special toy near the telephone and



save it just for those times when you must telephone?

Has Temper Tantrums

Two-year-old Tommy bursts into tears because he is unable to fit the picture puzzle together. So he reacts the way most children do—he probably cries, screams, or throws himself



on the floor. Tommy's hands are not yet skillful enough to do all the things he would like to do. In this case, he needs time to grow. In the meantime, you can ease the strain by helping him briefly with the puzzle, or by giving him a simpler puzzle or another activity.

Temper tantrums and explosive behavior of this kind usually drop off as a child gains more control over his body and surroundings. Most children show improvement around 3½ to 4 years of age.

We cannot excuse all undesirable behavior in the hope it will pass. It is sometimes hard to judge between



the usual and the unusual. A good rule of thumb is—whenever a behavior problem is prolonged or severe, parents may assume that some phase of the child's development needs attention. (For further ideas on this subject, turn to *Baby and Child Care*, by Dr. Benjamin Spock, pages 330-331.)

Incidentally, we need to remind ourselves that little children may annoy us more at certain times, such as during winter months when the family is indoors more, when there is sickness in the family, or when parents are tired or busy.

Resists Rest

What about the little child who resists going to bed? Would it help you to know that about 60 percent of children, particularly during ages 2 to 4, do resist rest? Why do little children hate to go to bed and often climb out of bed? Some of the reasons are:

- They may not be sleepy. Check the actual amount of time they sleep in 24 hours. You may be expecting them to sleep too much of the time. Children also differ as to the amount of sleep they need.

- They may have played too hard just before bedtime and find it hard to settle down. (Read him a story before bed, Dad, instead of rough-housing with him.)

- There may be some excitement going on in the home or an unusual amount of noise.

Perhaps they are asking for some of your attention which you have been unable to give them during the day.

Happily to bed is more apt to mean peacefully to sleep.

Talks All the Time

The mother of 4-year-old Mary says: "Oh, if she would only stop talking for just a few minutes so I could think what I'm trying to do."

Let's face it, pre-school children talk constantly. As children learn new words, they tend to say them over and over. An accurate count of the talking of pre-school children, showed that 3-year-olds used 12,000 words in one day. Another count on one 4-year-old showed that he asked 397 questions in a single day.

Within limits, children should be talked to and read to in order to satisfy their need to talk and to aid them in speaking and understanding words.

By the way, if you are looking for a book to read to your child, try some of the old favorites that 3- and 4-year-olds always seem to enjoy. Two such books are, "The Little Fire Engine" and "The Little Train" by Lois Lenski.

There is, of course, the child who talks to gain attention or the child who talks louder and faster as he becomes more tired. In either case, treating the cause rather than trying to stop the flow of words will bring better results.

This letter suggests that:

Since pre-school children often act in ways that are "naughty" or annoying, it is well to think of it as "naughty" behavior rather than as a "naughty" child.

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Use ordinary soda straws and a bowl of liquid detergent for blowing soap bubbles. Use this in the kitchen or bathroom or, save the idea for out-of-doors. This may satisfy Susie who insists on getting into water.

Children are fascinated with gadgets that move or turn. Such items can be discards, such as, an old light switch, an old-fashioned lock with keys, a clock that winds up, a faucet, a flour sifter, etc.

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