

# AP EUUnion



## AP EUUnion Newsletter

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- Please email me with and comments or news to include in our next edition. [Kate@attachmentparenting.eu](mailto:Kate@attachmentparenting.eu)
- AP EU is holding monthly On-Line Support Meetings in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday night of every month at 8.30pm GMT.
- At this stage the meetings are held in English but as time goes by we should be hosting meetings in other languages too.
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Good" Children - at What Price?  
The Secret Cost of Shame  
**by Robin Grille and Beth Macgregor**

A five-month-old baby is lying in his mother's arms. He is close to sleep, then wakes and begins to cry. His mother tells him that he should stop being a naughty boy, and that she will be cross with him if he doesn't sleep.

An 18-month-old child is taken to a restaurant with her father and uncle. Her father goes to the bar, leaving the child with the uncle at the table. The child gets down from the table to follow her father. She is grabbed by her uncle and told that she is a bad child, and to stay in her chair. She looks around worriedly for her father.

At an adult's birthday party, a six-year-old is awake long past his bedtime. He is running around the hall with the helium-filled balloons. His father yells at him to leave the balloons alone, and tells him to stop being a trouble-maker.

What did these children learn from these experiences? Many would say that the adults' responses were necessary to teach the child the difference between right and wrong: between "good" and "bad" behavior. Verbal punishment is common in almost every home and school. It relies on shame as the deterrent, in the same way that corporal punishment relies on pain. Shaming is one of the most common methods used to regulate children's behavior. But what if shaming our children is harming our children? Could it be that repeated verbal punishment leaves children with an enduring sense of themselves as inherently "bad"? If so, what can we do differently?

### **What is Shame?**

Shame is designed to cause children to curtail behavior through negative thoughts and feelings about themselves. It involves a comment - direct or indirect - about what the child is. Shaming operates by giving children a negative image about their selves - rather than about the impact of their behavior.

### **What Does Shaming Look and Sound Like?**

Shaming makes the child wrong for feeling, wanting or needing something. It can take many forms; here are some everyday examples: The put-down: "You naughty boy!", "You're acting like a spoiled child!", "You selfish brat!", "You cry-baby!". Moralizing: "Good little boys don't act that way", "You've been a bad little girl". The age-based expectation: "Grow up!", "Stop acting like a baby!", "Big boys don't cry", The gender-based expectation: "Toughen-up!", "Don't be a sissy!", The competency-based expectation: "You're hopeless!". The comparison: "Why can't you be more like so-and-so?", "None of the other children are acting like you are".

### **How Common is Shaming?**

Shaming is very common, and is considered by many to be acceptable. Shaming is not restricted to "abusive" families; in fact, it occurs in the "nicest" of family and school environments. A recent study of Canadian schoolchildren, for instance, found that only 4% had not been the targets of their parents' shaming; including "rejecting, demeaning, terrorizing, criticizing (destructively), or insulting statements" (Solomon & Serres, 1999).

As parents we tend to resort to shaming when we feel overwhelmed, irritated or frustrated, and we feel the need to control our children. Until very recently little consideration has been given to its harmful effects.

### **Shame: A New Frontier of Psychological Study**

The use of corporal punishment against children has been hotly debated, and under increasing negative scrutiny in recent years. More and more nations legislate against it, schools ban it, international organizations devoted to its elimination are proliferating, and research psychologists have amassed mountains of evidence of its long-term damaging effects. In the meantime, the issue of "shaming" as punishment has been largely overlooked. Only recently have psychologists begun to discover that shaming has serious repercussions.

Daniel Goleman, author of *Emotional Intelligence*, says that we are now discovering the role that shame plays in relationship difficulties and violent behavior. There is a new effort by psychologists to study shame, how it

"ignored emotion" is such a new frontier because it is the most difficult emotion to detect in others. Dr Paul Eckman, from the University of California, says that shame is the most private of emotions, and that humans have yet to evolve a facial expression that clearly communicates it. Is this why we might not see when our children are suffering from this secret emotion?

### **How Shame is Acquired**

No-one is born ashamed. It is a learned, self-conscious emotion, which starts at roughly two years of age with the advent of language and self-image. Although humans are born with a capacity for shame, the propensity to become ashamed in specific situations is learned.

This means that wherever there is shame, there has been a shamer. We learn to be ashamed of ourselves because someone of significance in our lives put us to shame. Shaming messages are more powerful when they come from those we are closest to, from people we love, admire or look up to. That is why parents' use of shaming can have the deepest effects on children. However, shaming messages from teachers, older siblings and peers can also injure a child's self-image. Since children are more vulnerable and impressionable than adults, shaming messages received in childhood are significantly more difficult to erase.

Messages of shame are mostly verbal, but there can be great shaming power in a look of disdain, contempt, or disgust.

### **Why Is Shaming So Common?**

Shaming acts as a pressure valve to relieve parental frustration. Shaming is an anger-release for the parent; it makes the shamer feel better - if only momentarily.

When made to feel unworthy, children often work extra hard to please their parents. This makes the parent think that the shaming has "worked". But has it?

### **The Damaging Effects of Shame**

To understand the damage wrought by shame, we need to look deeper than the goal of "good" behavior. If we think that verbal punishment has "worked" because it changed what the child is doing, then we have dangerously limited our view of the child to the behaviors that we can see. It is all too easy to overlook the inner world of children: the emotions that underlie their behavior, and the suffering caused by shame. It is also easy to miss what the child does once out of range of the shamer.

Even well-meaning adults can sometimes underestimate children's sensitivity to shaming language. There is mounting evidence that some of the words used to scold children - household words previously thought "harmless" - have the power to puncture children's self-esteem for years to come. A child's self-identity is shaped around the things they hear about themselves. A ten-year-old girl, for example, was overcome with anxiety after spilling a drink. She exclaimed over and over: "I'm so stupid! I'm so stupid!". These were the exact words her mother had used against her. She lived in fear of her parents' judgement, and learned to shame herself in the same way that she had been shamed.

If children's emotional needs are dismissed, if their experiences are trivialized, they grow up feeling unimportant. If they are told that they are "bad" and "naughty", they absorb this message and take this belief into adulthood.

Shame makes people feel diminished. It is a fear of being exposed, and leads to withdrawal from relationships. Shaming creates a feeling of powerlessness to act, and to express oneself: we want to dance, but we're stopped by memories of being told not to be "so childish". We seek pleasure, but we're inhibited by inner voices telling us we are "self-indulgent" or "lazy". We strive to excel, or to speak out, but we're held back by a suspicion that we are not good enough. Shame takes the shape of the inner voices and images that mimic those who told us "Don't be stupid," or "Don't be silly!"

Shame restrains a child's self-expression: having felt the sting of an adult's negative judgement, the shamed

***Children have a natural desire to develop a social conscience. When treated with the same respect as adults, and exposed to adults who respect each other; children will naturally develop a capacity for empathic, caring and respectful behavior.***

child censors herself in order to escape being branded as "naughty" or "bad". Shame crushes children's natural exuberance, their curiosity, and their desire to do things by themselves.

Thomas Scheff, a University of California sociologist, has said that shame inhibits the expression of all emotions - with the occasional exception of anger. People who feel shamed tend toward two polarities of expression: emotional muteness and paralysis, or bouts of hostility and rage. Some swing from one to the other.

Like crying for sadness, and shouting for anger, most emotions have a physical expression which allows them to dissipate. Shame doesn't. This is why the effects of shame last well into the long term.

Recent research tells us that shame motivates people to withdraw from relationships, and to become isolated. Moreover, the shamed tend to feel humiliated and disapproved of by others, which can lead to hostility, even fury. Numerous studies link shame with a desire to punish others. When angry, shamed individuals are more likely to be malevolent, indirectly aggressive or self-destructive. Psychiatrist Peter Loader states that people cover up or compensate for deep feelings of shame with attitudes of contempt, superiority, domineering or bullying, self-deprecation, or obsessive perfectionism.

### **Severe Shame and Mental Illness**

When shaming has been severe or extreme, it can contribute to the development of mental illness. This link has been underestimated until now. Researchers are increasingly finding connections between early childhood shaming and conditions such as depression, anxiety, personality disorders, and obsessive-compulsive disorders. In his book, *The Psychology of Shame*, Gershen Kaufman goes further to assert a link between shaming and addictive disorders, eating disorders, phobias and sexual dysfunction.

### **Shame Doesn't Teach about Relationship or Empathy**

While shaming has the power to control behavior, it does not have the power to teach empathy. When we repeatedly label a child "naughty" or otherwise, we condition them to focus inwardly, and they become pre-occupied with themselves and their failure to please. Thus children learn to label themselves, but learn nothing about relating, or about considering and comprehending the feelings of others. For empathy to develop, children need to be shown how others feel. In calling children "naughty", for example, we have told the child nothing about how we feel in response to their behavior. Children cannot learn about caring for others' feelings, nor about how their behavior impacts on others, while they are thinking: "There is something wrong with me." In fact, psychotherapists and researchers are finding that individuals who are more prone to shame, are less capable of empathy toward others, and more self-preoccupied.

The only true basis for morality is a deeply felt empathy toward the feelings of others. Empathy is not necessarily what drives the "well-behaved" "good boy" or "good girl".

### **The Myth of Morality**

We are naive to confuse shame-based compliance with morally motivated behavior. At best, repeated shaming leads to a shallow conformism, based on escaping disapproval and seeking rewards. The child learns to avoid punishment by becoming submissive and compliant. The charade of "good manners" is not necessarily grounded in true interpersonal respect.

### **What Should We Consider Shameful?**

Shame varies among cultures and families: what is considered shameful in one place may be permissible, unremarkable, even desirable in another. What is called "naughty behavior" is usually arbitrary and subjective: it varies significantly from family to family.

In one family, nudity is acceptable, in another unthinkable. Being noisy and boisterous is welcome in one family, frowned upon in another. While one family might enjoy speaking all at once around the dinner table, another family might find this rude. Such examples help us to realize that our way is not the only way: that our own way of deciding what is shameful behavior can be arbitrary and variable.

### **The History of Shaming**

Children have been shamed for many hundreds of years. Historically, they have been thought to be inherently antisocial, and their behavior was seen through this lens. One seventeenth century author, Richard Allestree, wrote: "The newborn babe is full of the stains and pollution of sin, which it inherits from our first parents through our loins"<sup>1</sup>. In the Middle Ages, the ritual of Baptism actually included the exorcism of the devil from the child. Children who were felt to be too demanding were thought to be possessed by demons. Some early church fathers declared that if a baby cried more than a little, she was committing a sin. It has been an age-old pattern to blame the child for the numerous challenges and difficulties encountered by parents.

This way of thinking about children has persisted into modern times, although in less extreme ways. For example, a child having a tantrum is often seen as "spoiled", and deliberately trying to antagonize his parents. A crying child risks being described as a "little terror" or "whiner" who is "just trying to get attention".

There is no question that parenting can be frustrating sometimes. But it is groundless to automatically assume that the child is out to upset us, or to attribute some kind of nasty intention to the child. This imagined malevolence is usually what underlies the impulse to shame children.

### **A Shift in Attitude: Respecting the Child**

It is entirely possible to set strong boundaries with children without shaming. However, this requires a fundamental attitude shift, beginning with re-evaluating what we think is motivating our child's behavior.

Children have a natural desire to develop a social conscience. When treated with the same respect as adults, and exposed to adults who respect each other; children will naturally develop a capacity for empathic, caring and respectful behavior.

### **"Misbehavior"? Or Developmental Stage?**

Sometimes what we condemn as "misbehavior" is simply the child's attempt to have some need met in the best way they know, or to master a new skill. The more parents can accept this, the less they are tempted to shame children into growing up faster. For instance, it is normal for toddlers to be selfish, possessive, exuberant and curious. It is not unusual for two-year-olds to be unable to wait for something they want, as they don't understand time the way adults do. It is quite ordinary for three-year-olds to be sometimes defiant or hostile. If we shame instead of educate, we interrupt a valuable and stage-appropriate learning process, and our own opportunity to learn about the child's needs is lost.

***Toddlers can be exasperating. But does this mean they're "misbehaving"?***

A three-year-old who defies her mother by refusing to pack up her toys - after being told to do so repeatedly - may be attempting to forge a separate and distinct self-identity. This includes learning to exercise her assertiveness, and learning to navigate open conflict. Toddlers can be exasperating. But does this mean they're "misbehaving"?

Sensible limits are essential, but if children are shamed for their fledgling and awkward attempts at autonomy, they are prevented from taking a vital step to maturity and confidence. In the period glibly called the "terrible twos", and for the next couple of years, toddlers are discovering how to set their own boundaries. They are learning to assert their distinct individuality, their sense of will. This is critical if they are to learn how to stand up for themselves, to feel strong enough to assert themselves, and to resist powerful peer pressures later in life. If we persist in crushing their defiance, and shaming children into submission, we teach them that setting boundaries for themselves is not okay.

Even babies are thought to misbehave, such as when they don't sleep when they are told to. How could a five-month-old baby, for example, possibly be "naughty" for failing to go to sleep? Though it can be difficult for parents when babies experience disturbed sleep, it is nonsensical to see a non-sleeping baby as "disobeying" the parent, and to blame the baby for this.

Consider the example of an eight-month-old who crawls over to something that has flashing lights and interesting sounds. He pulls himself up to it and begins to explore. He does not know that it is his father's prized stereo. He finds himself being tapped on his hand by his mother, who tells him to stop being naughty. He cries. At eight months, a baby is unable to tell the difference between a toy and another's valuable property, and would be incapable of self-restraint if he could. Children's ceaseless curiosity - a frequent target

way, rather than castigated, their self-confidence grows. Unfortunately, we frequently call a behavior which may be entirely stage-appropriate "naughty", simply because it threatens our need for order, or creates a burden for us.

A flustered mother and her distraught four-year-old daughter emerge from a local store. The girl is sobbing as she is forcefully strapped into her stroller. "Stop it, you whiner!" screams the mother, as she shakes her finger in the little girl's face. Children are often berated for simply crying. Many people believe that a crying baby or child is misbehaving. Strong expressions of emotion - such as anger and sadness - are the child's natural way of regulating their nervous system, while communicating their needs. Children cry when they are hurting, and they have a right to express this hurt! Even though it is often hard to listen to, it must be remembered that it is a healthy, normal reaction that deserves attention. It is tragic to see how often children are shamed for crying.

Here is a further example of what happens when we are unaware of developmental norms. Until recently, toddlers were started on potty-training far too early, before they were organically capable of voluntary bowel control. Many found this transition to be a battle, and toddlers were commonly shamed and punished for what was a normal inability. What was once a struggle for both parents and children has been greatly alleviated through more accurate information about childhood development. Shaming often takes place when we try to encourage or force a behavior that is developmentally too early for the child's age.

We have come a long way in our understanding about child development in recent decades, and made many advances in childcare as a result. Easy-to-read child-development books fill the stores, by authors such as Penelope Leach, Katie Allison Granju, Pinky McKay and Jan Hunt, and these can help parents to have reasonable and realistic expectations of their children. Children and parents are both happier when parents have reasonable and age-appropriate expectations of their child's behavior.

### **Understanding Instead of Shaming**

Is it possible to understand what motivates children when they are "behaving badly", instead of shaming them? What might "bad" behavior be a reaction to?

When we don't seek to understand a child's "bad" behaviors, we risk neglecting their needs. For instance, sometimes children repeatedly behave aggressively - over and above what can normally be expected of children their age. This could be due to conflict in the home, bullying at school, or competition with a sibling. Often what we expediently label as "bad" behavior is a vital signal that the child in question might actually be hurting. Research has repeatedly shown that a consistent pattern of antisocial behaviors, for example hostility and bullying, are children's reactions to having felt victimized in some way. Children often "act out" their hurts aggressively, when they have not found a safe way to show that they have been hurt.

Ironically, shame itself can be the underlying cause of difficult behavior. Since shaming is a judgment from someone with more power than the child, this makes the child feel small and powerless. Sometimes, children turn the tables: they reclaim this lost power by finding another person to push around - usually someone smaller or more vulnerable than themselves.

Children are usually highly sensitive to the "vibes" in their environment; they pick up tensions between their parents, or other family members. At times "naughty" behavior may be the child's way of reacting to this tension.

Children are less given to act out when they are receiving enough attention, when their hunger for play, discovery and pleasurable human contact is satisfied. Provocative behavior can indicate boredom, or perhaps the need for another "dose" of happy engagement with someone who is not feeling irritable, someone who has the time and energy to spare.

Finally, children can be grumpy or "difficult" simply from over-tiredness. In this case, what is dismissed as "bad" behavior might be a child's way of saying "I'm over the edge, and I can't handle it". Curiously enough, when we as parents react with verbal assaults, we are communicating the same thing. Isn't yelling at children that they are "naughty" or "terrible" (or worse) a kind of adult tantrum, a dysfunctional adult way of coping with frustration?

It is worth remembering that some causes of "misbehavior" are a lot less obvious. For instance, children need to feel our strength - they are uncomfortable with weakness in our personal boundaries. They need exposure to our true feelings, and they sense when we are hiding or pretending. They need their feelings and opinions validated, and are highly sensitive to poor empathy. Frequently, they react to any of these conditions by becoming provocative. Sometimes we blame and shame children for their vexing behavior, because the causes are hard to see.

### **Cultivating Empathy: Through Remembering**

Parents often do to their children as was done to them. It is known that violence can be passed down through generations. Many parents realize that they are perpetuating a cycle in which they are shaming their children, in the same ways that they were once shamed by their own parents. Those that have forgotten the sting and humiliation of being shamed, risk being insensitive to the shame they inflict on their own children. Change requires deepening one's empathy toward the child, and this comes from remembering how it felt to be a child. The understanding that comes from seeing the world through a child's eyes can help adults to influence children without shaming them.

### **Managing Emotions**

As parents, it is not unusual to find ourselves struggling, frazzled, or nearing an emotional boiling-point. When we don't find healthy ways to discharge this frustration, we risk taking it out on our children. Although irritation is a normal part of parenting, this is not because children are "too demanding". Children are children, and the fact that child-rearing can be difficult is not their fault. There are many ways to reroute our excess anger, such as chopping wood, going for a walk, or talking our frustration through with friends.

Everyone's capacity for loving patience is finite; that's human. When parents experience excessive strain this is largely due to our adherence to the myth that it takes just two adults to raise a child. Our society has grossly underestimated the energy required to truly meet children's needs. We can avoid shaming simply by sharing the load - by asking for, and accepting, practical help from trusted friends and community. When we hear ourselves shaming our children, we might take this as a sign that we are needing more assistance.

### **What Do We Do Now? A New Paradigm for Boundary Setting**

Respectful boundary-setting implies a strong statement about you, as opposed to a negative statement about the child. In this way, children gradually develop a good capacity to hear and comprehend the feelings of others. Children benefit from open expression of emotions; from seeing when their parents are angry, or upset. It is OK to be angry with your children, to let them see you are annoyed at something they have done, (as long as you don't shock or terrorize them). Children learn best when they can see the kind of impact their behavior has on the feelings of others. Finally, it helps children to listen to and respect your feelings, if their right to express their feelings is equally respected.

### **Redirecting the Child's Impulses**

From time to time, we are compelled to intervene in our child's activity, when we fear that either a person or a treasured object might get hurt. Shaming can be avoided if, instead of just chastising or stopping the child, we also provide a safer, alternative activity. Occasional aggression is part of normal, balanced healthy development. Children are often shamed and punished for this, when instead they could be shown ways to channel their natural aggression safely. Sometimes it is important to re-evaluate whether we need to chastise at all. A guideline comes from considering whether the behavior in question is actually causing harm to anyone, or creating a concrete risk.

### **The Role Model**

Role-modeling is the most powerful teaching tool. Children don't do what you say, they do as you do. The kind of respect they show others and themselves is a reflection of the kind of respect they have themselves been shown - and the respect they have witnessed displayed between the important people in their lives. Are we role-modeling the kind of behavior that we want our children to display?

### **Conclusion**

behaviors in children. The suggestion of giving up shaming or smacking is misinterpreted by some as attempts to disempower parents; to turn them into guilt-laden, ineffectual and permissive wimps. Not so. The most effective and healthy boundaries can be set without resorting to violence or shaming. Being strong with children does not mean being harsh, or humiliating.

There are alternatives to shaming that are healthier and more effective. Children who are shown consistent boundaries by parents who are able to express their feelings and needs in a trusting and respectful way, grow up with stronger self-worth and social awareness, free of the toxic effects of shame.

<sup>1</sup> Richard Allestree, *The Whole Duty of Man* (London, 1766), p.20.

**Share your thoughts about this article / shame and how to heal or in the forum at [www.attachmentparenting.eu/forum](http://www.attachmentparenting.eu/forum)**

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## Book Corner Thumbs up ...

### **The Continuum Concept by Jean Liedloff**



An excellent book documenting time spent with the Yeqana tribe and how evolution has created a blueprint for human expectations and experiences.

### **Becoming a Family by Lark Eshelman**



This book is a must have book for any person thinking about or following the path of adoption, especially international adoptions. The tips and ideas for pre-adoption, bringing you child home and encouraging attachment are invaluable. It is a clear and concise book and very readable. The questionnaire in appendix A is excellent at helping you to evaluate yourself and your partner as an adult with a path towards attachment viability. The therapy section gives great advice and many options including alternative ideas for enhancing attachment between the forever family team.

### **Parents do Make a Difference by Michelle Borba**



This is an encouraging book about building children's self esteem and confidence.

### **Parent Teen Breakthrough by Mira Kirshenbaum and Charles Foster**



This is a great book for parents with teenagers in their lives. It looks at both parent and teen perspectives and gives the parent a clear understanding of why their teen reacts and behaves the way that they do. It then describes why we react and behave (as parents) the way that we do. Then comes great communication strategies, tools and ideas for dealing with more serious issues like drugs and pregnancy. The book is very friendly and readable.

### **Nurturing Baby & Me During Pregnancy by Arlene Matthews & Susan Fekety**



This is a light relaxation programme with pregnancy bonding and maternal calmness and balance as its focus.

## Observations from a Large Family...

### Sleep and the Night



A typical morning scene in this house!

Everyone snuggles and asleep although the night doesn't start like that. By 4am this is the result. Its nice that they feel welcome and also unafraid. I have learned so much about being a mother from the night time. I started off when my eldest son was born sitting up, nursing him to sleep. Putting him down in a cot and him waking immediately. A lovely lady then said, take him into bed – I have to say he is 17 now and sleeps very well and not in our bed although he would pop in for a chat on a Sunday morning and snuggle in. I remember doing that as a teenager too with my grandparents.

We continued along in that way and have a good laugh as Daragh who is 5 and Cian who is 7 have a bunk bed, the top bunk remains empty every night as Cian sleeps with Daragh at the foot end of his bed. On asking why he replied – 'my bed is cold, Daragh is warm so that's better for us both'.

I was lucky never to fear but rather embrace the night as a mother and cosleeping in our house has been of great benefit many times. After my 7<sup>th</sup> son I was very weak and having him there allowed me to rest and gain strength at night. I can respond fast to a sick child who is near to me and a warm cuddle has relieved many a stomach cramp in the early hours. My husband has enjoyed the closeness to his sons whom he is apart from all day and reconnects with at night. None of them snore thankfully so I am not woken and there have been few nightmares or fear of bed time in our home as sleep for the boys has been a secure haven rather than a scary place to go.

## Basic Abilities and Play Preferences: Birth to Age 12

This article is intended to serve as a handy reference guide and starting point for understanding and distinguishing children's basic abilities and preferences as they grow. These abilities and preferences play an important role in attracting and motivating children to interact with toys.

Developing physically, for example, changes the ways in which children are able to coordinate their gross-motor skills. Increased mobility opens up new ways to use toys. A higher level of fine-motor skill permits greater manipulation of objects. Ultimately, such knowledge helps to identify and distinguish the characteristics of toys that are appealing to children at a given age.

Although information of this sort is noted throughout the guidelines in relation to a specific subcategory of toys, this section summarizes typical play behaviors regardless of the toy used, and identifies appropriate and appealing toy characteristics that are generally consistent among all subcategories of toys. With this information, the reader will be better able to make an age determination for a given toy, even if that toy is not specifically addressed within the guidelines.

### Birth Through 3 Months

Object play is limited during this period since learning occurs mostly through the reflexive actions of the child, such as spontaneous kicking or arm movements. Initially, they explore with their eyes and ears only. Newborns can focus best at about eight inches from their faces, but this increases over time and they may be able to see objects several feet away by the end of this period. Play objects should fit within their visual field at these distances. They are attracted to bright and vibrant colors, especially yellows and reds, and to objects with high-contrast patterns like black and white spirals. These children prefer the human face to all other patterns, and will watch faces intently. They will turn their heads in the direction of a sound, and are more attracted to objects that emit a gentle, soothing sound and that move slowly than to those that remain still or are too loud, too sudden, or otherwise extreme. Much of these infants' play involves watching and exploring their own body. They have a reflexive grasp, which only allows them to explore objects briefly, and at 3 months they begin to swipe or reach towards a dangling object to grasp it. Any object grasped is likely to be mouthed and to be handled with jerky, unpredictable motions. Therefore, soft, lightweight, washable, easy-to-grip objects with rounded corners are best. They start to learn and enjoy toys for which simple actions produce a clear, direct effect; for example, toys that light up, move, or create sound as a result of simple kicking or shaking.

Brightly colored and patterned toys that make gentle sounds are both appealing and appropriate for these children. Mobiles or images with bright, highly contrasting colors and patterns are appealing, as are mirrors.

### 4 Through 7 Months

Children now actively engage with their environments in systematic ways. Distance vision is more mature, and these children can track moving objects with smooth, efficient eye movements.

Bright colors, high contrasts, and complex patterns continue to be appealing. These children learn to differentiate among objects, as evidenced by their ability to group visual stimuli into categories. By 5 months of age, children can roll onto their backs and push up onto their hands and knees, so mobiles and suspended gyms are no longer appropriate at this age. They have mastered the ability to grasp and manipulate a dangling object by 6 months, and begin to engage in more active play by reaching, grasping, tugging, pushing, patting, shaking, and squeezing objects. At 6 to 7 months, children are sitting independently, which provides them with greater visual capacities for grasping objects or bringing objects to midline for exploration. They can manipulate objects more readily, though their fine-motor coordination is still rudimentary.

Objects are grasped using a claw-like grip or raking motion rather than a pincer grasp (i.e., using the thumb and index finger). They can transfer an object from hand to hand, and begin to use both hands independently; for example, one hand may hold an object while the other hand manipulates it. These children continue to mouth objects, so suitable toys are washable.

Near the end of this period, infants develop the ability to recognize oft-repeated words, and some are beginning to crawl and stand with support. At this time, they are also beginning to understand object permanence - that an object that is hidden or partially hidden did not actually disappear, but still exists somewhere. Soft, lightweight, rounded, and textured toys that make gentle sounds are appropriate. Hand-held objects, like simple musical toys, should be sized so these children can easily grasp and manipulate them. Books and images with bright pictures and high-contrast images are appealing, as are mirrors.

### **8 Through 11 Months**

Much of the play during this period focuses on developing gross-motor skills as these children exhibit more outwardly oriented movements and become increasingly mobile. They can crawl forward and backward, pull themselves into a standing position, walk with support (for example, along furniture), stand momentarily without support, and complete a couple of unassisted steps.

They also begin to climb. These children explore objects in many different ways such as through grasping, shaking, squeezing, throwing, dropping, passing from hand to hand, and banging.

Although they can hold two objects and bang them together, they cannot coordinate the movements of both to use them together. They begin to develop a pincer grasp, which is used to pick up small objects between the thumb and fingers. Patterns of exploratory play begin that suggest older infants can make inferences about novel objects. For example, these children may infer what functions may operate beneath the surface of an object. They explore objects from every angle, and this often involves mouthing. Therefore, suitable toys are washable.

Many of these infants begin to use items in typical relational patterns; for example, dumping items out of a container, putting them back in, and then repeating the process. They repeat pleasurable actions often, and start to show an interest in marking on paper. Basic memory skills are developing and object permanence becomes more entrenched. When a toy is hidden or not within view, these children know the toy still exists and did not simply disappear. Infants of this age can understand simple words related to their immediate context, and need repetition and reinforcement of the words they hear. At the end of this period, these children begin to imitate gestures and the use of products. Sensory toys are highly appealing because these children are beginning to understand simple cause-and-effect relationships. Bright colors, especially yellows and reds, continue their appeal for this age group, as do high contrasts and complex patterns.

Pictures that represent familiar objects are also highly appealing. Suitable toys are soft, sturdy, have rounded edges, and are easily grasped or manipulated by the child.

### **12 Through 18 Months**

Increasingly, these children can walk without support. However, they are still unsteady on their feet and their walking resembles toddling more than mature heel-to-toe walking. Now they want to explore everything; though their curiosity far outweighs their judgment for predicting outcomes or foreseeing dangers. They are trying out a variety of basic gross- and fine-motor skills, and are gaining confidence as climbers. They can sing to themselves and will move their bodies to music. Since they are more mobile, they can self-select toys that were once outside their reach. They find basic grasping easier, and can manipulate toys that require simple twisting, turning, sliding, and cranking. Through trial and error, they continue to explore cause-and-effect relationships like dumping and filling activities, and now they enjoy a variety of actions with objects, such as pressing, pushing, pulling, rolling, pounding, beating, clanging, fitting (for example, fitting a round peg into a round hole), stacking, marking, scribbling, carrying, and poking their fingers into objects. They delight in the many effects their actions cause, and enjoy toys that take advantage of this by the use of, for example, various sounds, blinking lights, and spinning wheels.

Children of this age can recognize the names of familiar people, objects, pictures, and body parts. Long-term memory and the development of simple vocabulary using one-word utterances now provide the foundation for make-believe or pretend play, however these children do not make clear symbolic connections until about 18 months of age. These children often imitate common actions they see - such as talking on the phone, "drinking" from a bottle or cup, or putting on a hat - but only in brief, sporadic episodes. They can defer imitating something for up to a week, and can also do so across a change in context (for example, away from home).

Simple toys that encourage pretend play, such as dress-up materials, dolls, stuffed animals, and small vehicle toys, are appropriate.

### **19 Through 23 Months**

These children are more confident and stable at walking, and are exploring other skills such as balancing, jumping, and running. They can pull a toy behind them while walking, climb on and off furniture without assistance, walk up and down stairs with assistance, and - by the end of this period - may be able to kick a ball. They can now pick up and manipulate much smaller objects due to their more developed pincer grasp. They like to sort objects, often grouping them into two categories, and can now fit together simple objects. These children can match angles, which allows them to fit a square peg into a square hole. They can also start to use very simple coupling mechanisms like magnets, large hooks, and hook-and-loop or touch fasteners.

Representational and symbolic thinking emerges during this time frame, and children understand that some toys represent other objects. Representational art, however, is still in its infancy and may seem nonrepresentational to adults. Most of their artistic forays take the form of gestures, or a series of dots may represent, for example, a rabbit hopping. They can use simple phrases, a few active verbs, and directional words, such as "up," "down," and "in." Social play also emerges because children of this age can now communicate with and play alongside each other.

Rudimentary pretend and role-play emerge; these toddlers can pretend to be asleep and can role play a variety of commonly observed actions. As they approach 2 years of age, they may make dolls or stuffed animals assume roles, expecting them to eat pretend food. Though they still use trial and error, these toddlers can mentally consider solutions to problems before taking any action. This means they can remember and work with mental representations of familiar objects, pictures, letters, and numbers as they ponder appropriate actions. They are more goal-oriented and object permanence is more advanced. These children can help dress or undress themselves.

Toys with low to moderate cause-and-effect features - such as those with push buttons or pull cords that cause actions or sounds - are appealing to these children. Simple remote controls are also usable.

### **2 Years**

Now that pretend play is established, 2-year-olds can perform social roles like mommy, daddy, or baby. Role taking becomes a bigger part of social pretend play, and their pretend play becomes more elaborate as they use a variety of objects to carry out longer episodes. These children need the object to resemble the real item to some degree, so they might use a cloth rather than a shoe to represent a pillow. Two-year-olds can now engage in true construction play.

They understand that pictures can depict pretend objects, and scribbles gradually become more representational pictures during this period, though they are still more interested in the process than the product. They become increasingly interested in color variations and using simple art materials. Children at this age begin to show an interest in television and television characters.

They are drawn to familiar cartoon characters from shows that they can incorporate into their play themes. They often want to know "why," and can start to use simple learning or educational toys. They understand the purpose of numbers in counting objects.

Toddlers have increasing control over basic gross- and fine-motor skills. Interest in gross-motor activity increases with newly found physical strength and basic coordination, and they especially enjoy balancing, climbing, running, jumping, throwing, catching, playing with sand, or pushing and pulling wheeled objects. They learn these skills separately during this period, and with each passing year they gradually combine them with other skills as coordinated movement. They can perform somersaults, and like to dance, twirl, and gallop to music. Although their control is still uncertain, they can kick and throw a ball. They can manage simple screwing actions, and can use simple one- or two-turn wind-up mechanisms provided they are of low tension. Smaller buttons or snaps may be difficult for these children to manipulate, but they can use large hooks, buttons, and buckles. They prefer more realistic toys, so colors other than bright primary colors (for example, pastels) become attractive. However, these toys do not need to be elaborately detailed.

### **3 Years**

These children are entering the time of peak pretend play, and like to use replica objects as the actors in themes they sequence. A doll, for example, might be prepared to attend a birthday party with her doll friends, and they will drive in a car, eat food, and play chase or dance at the party.

Realistic props, like a realistic toy telephone, enhance pretend play at this age, but these children also start to use objects that are unlike the real item, so they might use a shoe to represent a pillow. They show greater interest in structured games. Gender preferences also become more evident. Girls typically choose dolls, household props, dress-up activities, and art materials, while boys tend to play more with blocks and small vehicle toys, and will engage in more aggressive or rough-and-tumble play.

These children progress considerably in their gross-motor skills. They can tiptoe and balance on one foot, hop, climb and slide on play structures with ease, kick or catch a large ball thrown from a short distance, and throw and aim at short distances. For example, they can now put a ball in a basket or target from 4 to 5 feet away. They now have the fine-motor skills to take on the challenge of more complex construction play, piecing together smaller puzzle pieces, cutting, pasting, and other art activities. Children at this age are still interested in different ways of manipulating a given art medium and learning about its properties, rather than creating a finished product. They start using lines to represent boundaries; this fosters the ability to draw people.

### **4 Through 5 Years**

Drama and pretend play are at their zenith. These children like to invent complex and dramatic make-believe scenarios. They can build upon each other's play themes, create and coordinate several roles in an elaborate scenario, and better understand story lines. Many of these children still have difficulty understanding the differences between fantasy and reality. For example, children of this age may believe that monsters are real. They enjoy stepping into roles of power, like a parent, doctor, policeman, lion, or superhero, which helps them to better understand these roles, to make them less scary, or to fulfill wishes and express a broad range of emotions. As their cognitive and fine-motor skills improve, they begin to desire objects with more realistic detail, yet they still are not very concerned about mirroring reality.

These children further master gross- and fine-motor skills. They enjoy frequent trips outside to run, climb, hop, skip, and chase. They are learning to ride small bicycles, first with and then without training wheels. They are much more able to cut with scissors, paste, trace, draw, color, and string beads than 3-year-olds. They also have enough dexterity and coordination to start using a computer keyboard.

### **6 Through 8 Years**

These children continue their interest in physical play outdoors, seeking to master more specialized physical skills. They are much stronger, have greater endurance, and are ready for more challenges. Their play includes more rough-and-tumble or risk-taking behaviors. They focus more on playing their games and activities by spontaneous or set rules, either of which can be complex. Common games outside include hide and seek, tag, and sports of all kinds. They often want to focus on and develop specific skills, and are adept at a variety of activities requiring great dexterity, such as complex hand games, jacks, snapping fingers, tying a bow, constructing models, operating hand puppets, needlepoint, sewing, weaving, and braiding. They can make small, controlled marks or movements while drawing or writing. They pay much more attention to detail, which facilitates a desire for collecting. At this stage they start using logic more often to solve problems, organize, or choose from a variety of alternatives. Their appreciation for simple jokes and riddles grows during this period. Licensed characters based on action superhero themes or friendship themes are very popular early on with this age group.

### **9 Through 12 Years**

Children during this period continue to develop their skills at many of the sports, games, and activities from their early elementary years, however, some games become predictable and boring. Therefore, they are looking for a new range of activities to challenge their more advanced motor skills and thinking. Instead of finished products, they often prefer raw materials for creating their own unique products. These children enjoy a variety of activities at a more complex, exacting level of performance, such as woodworking, manipulating marionettes, making pottery, staging plays, advanced science projects, and generating

computer graphics.

They are beginning a stage where they seek to clarify and express more complex concepts, moving from the concrete to the abstract and applying general principles to the particular.

Excerpted from [Age Determination Guidelines: Relating Children's Ages To Toy Characteristics and Play Behavior](#), U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, September 2002 (public domain reprint)



## Parenting in England – by Pendella Buchanan, AP EU Solent, UK

Britain is the birthplace of Newton, Darwin, Shakespeare and the Beatles; home of the world's largest foreign exchange market, the world's richest football club - Manchester United, the inventor of the hovercraft and JK Rowling, the author of the Harry Potter books. The family in Britain is changing. The once typical British family headed by two parents has undergone substantial changes during the twentieth century. In particular there has been a rise in the number of single-person households. By the year 2020, it is estimated that there will be more single people than married people. Fifty years ago this would have been socially unacceptable in Britain. (1)

In the past, people married before they had children, but now about 40% of children in Britain are born to unmarried (cohabiting) parents. People are generally getting married at a later age now and many women do not want to have children immediately. They prefer to concentrate on their jobs and put off having a baby until late thirties. On average 2.4 people live as a family in one home Britain. This is smaller than most other European countries. (1)

Britain is a wealthy country with a relatively high standard of living, a land of opportunity, a peaceful place to live and in many ways parents living here are extremely privileged, and want for little. So is it really all good, or does living in Britain pose any challenges for parents, particularly those of us taking the road less travelled on our journey with attachment parenting?

The green and pleasant land certainly presents us with a great deal of challenges when it comes to raising our children. Our society is one comprised of nuclear families generally spread across the country so it can be hard to get family support and even harder to admit we need help in the first place. We are the first generation of parents for a long time who are trying to raise our kids instinctively and naturally, and many are battling with the legacy of their own upbringing as they strive to make different choices. Thankfully there are many support groups and 'coffee morning' style meetings where we can gather with like-minded parents and form strong supportive bonds.

Our heavily materialistic society puts great weight on producing compliant, acceptable, controllable children and all the printed 'support' material and 'health visitor' back up is driven by fear of spoiling and fear of permissiveness. Images of parenting show babies being carried around in plastic bucket seats or buggies, led around on leads, sleeping in pretty nurseries in cots or bouncing around in swings and playpens; in the meantime perfectly groomed parents sip their decaff. skinny latte and read a celebrity gossip magazine. What is generally considered normal here is dysfunctional families, junk food, TV violence, a disdainful attitude towards full time mothering and a deep assumption that children are problems which need solving. It can feel uncomfortable to respond to our babies cries in public amid the tutting and eye-rolling of judgemental on-lookers. It takes a great deal of confidence to stop caring about what other people think and to trust our instincts.

There is a big focus for mothers to return their lives to 'normal' as soon as possible after giving birth –sleep training, getting back in shape, resuming old activities and a general air that children shouldn't disrupt our lives. It isn't surprising that post natal depression occurs in up to 15% of our new mothers. (2) The government have recently extended maternity leave from April this year to mean that all women from day one of employment are entitled to one year maternity leave (9 months paid) and all employers large or small have to keep their jobs open for them. Fathers get up to 2 weeks paternity leave (3) and after a qualifying period, parents also receive 13 weeks

parental leave per child to take e.g. if the child is sick, up to the child's 5<sup>th</sup> birthday. (18 weeks for disabled child) (4) There are day nurseries, child minders, playgroups, out of school groups, family centres and holiday schemes. It is good that we are giving mothers choices, but the messages are mixed. It's no wonder individuals are confused about the roles they should perform –women are encouraged to stay at home for a while but then get back to 'normal' work where you are valued and appreciated and let someone else train your troublesome children.

The government are attempting to recruit more midwives (an extra 1560 employed now since 1997) (5) to address the huge shortfall in staffing numbers. Yet they are making it more difficult for independent midwives to practise lawfully. Caesarean rates are up to 23.5% from 17% 10 years ago with a 'normal' birth rate of 46.7% and homebirth rate of 2.53% (2005) showing a slight rise over the last 10 years. (6) The standard of care for pregnancy and birth is somewhat of a 'postcode lottery' varying enormously from area to area. We are fortunate enough though to be able to choose where we give birth in most circumstances, either hospital or home and there are also 90 birthing centres in England alone (7) mostly midwife led.

Breastfeeding is considered the best for baby but this is not generally supported by government or society. For every £18 spent on formula advertising only £1.80 is spent on promoting breastfeeding. A breastfeeding mother can still legally be asked to leave a public place! 77% of women (England and Wales) initiate breastfeeding (figures include every woman who even puts the baby to the breast once) but this reduces to 22% still feeding at 6 months, the majority of whom have given up before 6 weeks largely stating 'insufficient milk' as their reason for stopping. (8) There is plenty of breastfeeding advice, support and information available but only if it is earnestly sought after. Many healthcare professionals are not trained in breastfeeding and, preferring the relative predictability of formula feeding, encourage this over problem solving with the new mum.

However! We have free public healthcare and a great choice of alternative medicine practices. We have choice about schooling –free education for all children, private schools, home schooling, unschooling and now flexi-schooling. We have low risks of disease and are not under threat from dangerous animals, war or extreme weather (mostly!). There are strong multicultural influences and a wealth of accessible cultural heritage. We have a mostly comfortable standard of living allowing good choices for parents. We get to choose how and what we eat including a wide variety of foods and increasing amounts of organic produce. We can choose cloth nappies, disposables or even elimination communication. Last but not least we have a fabulous array of beautiful countryside and coast to explore and the freedom to do it.

Life would be easier for English parents if mothering were better valued, breastfeeding were the 'norm', there was more 'community living' and our children were treated respectfully as the valuable individuals we believe them to be. But we do have the power to choose how we parent which not all parents in all countries do. Therefore it's our right and our privilege to step up with courage, fly the AP flag and make a difference for our kids and the generations to follow –that's not a bad challenge to rise to!

(1) <http://www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/customs/questions/familylife.htm>

(2) [www.news.bbc.co.uk](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk)

(3) [www.thislondon.co.uk](http://www.thislondon.co.uk)

(4) [www.compactlaw.co.uk](http://www.compactlaw.co.uk)

(5) [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk)

(6) [www.birthchoiceuk.com](http://www.birthchoiceuk.com)

(7) [www.babycentre.co.uk](http://www.babycentre.co.uk)

(8) [www.nct.org](http://www.nct.org)

News, Views and Research...

Maternal food consumption during pregnancy and asthma, respiratory and atopic symptoms in 5-year-old children

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Background: Associations between maternal vitamin E, vitamin D and zinc intakes during pregnancy and asthma, wheeze and eczema in 5-year-old children have previously been reported. A study was undertaken to investigate whether maternal intake of specific foods during pregnancy is associated with asthma and allergic outcomes in the same children.

Methods: A longitudinal birth cohort study was conducted in 1924 children born to women recruited during pregnancy. Maternal diet during pregnancy was assessed by food frequency questionnaire (FFQ). Cohort children were followed up at 5 years by symptom questionnaire and FFQ. Food groups of interest were fruit, vegetables, fruit juice, whole grain products, fish, dairy products and fat spreads. Trends across outcome groups defined by level of food intake are presented.

Results: 1253 children participated at 5 years and maternal FFQ data were available for 1212. No consistent associations were found between childhood outcomes and maternal intake of the analysed foods except for apples and fish. Maternal apple intake was beneficially associated with ever wheeze (OR highest vs lowest tertile 0.63, 95% CI 0.42 to 0.95), ever asthma (OR 0.54, 95% CI 0.32 to 0.92) and doctor-confirmed asthma (OR 0.47, 95% CI 0.27 to 0.82) in the children. Maternal fish consumption was beneficially associated with doctor-confirmed eczema (OR  $\geq 1$ /week vs never 0.57, 95% CI 0.35 to 0.92).

Conclusion: There was no evidence for associations between maternal intake of most foods during pregnancy and asthma, respiratory and allergic outcomes in 5-year-old children, except for apples and fish. Consumption of apples and fish during pregnancy may have a protective effect against the development of childhood asthma and allergic disease.

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Interesting research on Infant Crying

<http://www.excellence-earlychildhood.ca/documents/BulletinVol6No2sep07Ang.pdf>

Web Forum set up for Mums having experienced Birth Trauma

<http://ptsdsupport.freeforums.org/>

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A lovely article from Mothering Magazine

[http://www.mothering.com/articles/body\\_soul/inspiration/lessons-learned.html](http://www.mothering.com/articles/body_soul/inspiration/lessons-learned.html)

Article on Infant Abuse

[http://www.childtrauma.org/ctamaterials/infant\\_abuse.asp](http://www.childtrauma.org/ctamaterials/infant_abuse.asp)

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Link to The Bowlby Centre and their new Journal.

<http://www.johnbowbycentre.org.uk/JournalA1.htm>

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Slide Show Links to the AP EU Ireland Sling Fashion Shows

Saturdays show <http://homepage.eircom.net/~sbusto/sling/>

Sundays show

<http://tinyurl.com/2clmcs>

and

<http://tinyurl.com/2hkqjd>

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## **Our Children**

### **What they Say.....**

Boris (3 years old) is in this funny stage of making up his own functional descriptions of things we use.

When we were sorting out clean wash I started to put away my (breastfeeding) bra's and he asked what was that named? I said, a BH (Dutch word) and he said . No it's an "'omhoog en omlaag ding" "that is an up and down thing!"

Bernadette in The Netherlands

### **What They Do...**

I came home from a very bad afternoon in the car and my lovely 14 year old son had made dinner for the family. Couldn't get a better gift than that.

Kate in Ireland

