

## The Development of Fear

Are children born with fear? Last month we talked about children who experience feelings of shyness and its relation to fear. But it's not just more timid children who experience fear. Everyone has fear. Some of it's healthy and some irrational. But almost all of it is learned through experience or the experience of others.

All children are born with the ability to be startled by a loud noise or a sudden motion (Startle reflex). We know they will cry and show discomfort when they have a physical need such as hunger or feel pain. But these are reactions rather than fear, which Webster's defines as a feeling of "apprehension" or "to be afraid." We don't know the baby fears what will happen next if his needs are not met. In fact, he may not have the brain development to think that far in advance. He has not yet experienced or observed enough of life to be afraid. It's important to recognize how experience and observation effect the development of fear, so we can help children avoid learning unnecessary fear and help them overcome the fears that inevitably develop during daily living.

### Fears That Develop From Experience

Some fears develop because we are intelligent human beings who remember and learn. This ability keeps us safe. Very simply, we have an experience that causes pain or uncomfortable feelings, so we know to be afraid to engage in that experience again.

For instance: A child gets on his new tricycle for the first time. He rides down the sidewalk, loses control of the tricycle and falls. His only experience with the new toy is now pain. He is not a coward, nor is he overly sensitive, he is just smart. This is his only experience on the bike, and he is now very fearful of trying again.

Sometimes fear is more subtle. Susan gives



her favorite bear to a friend in your childcare group, who promises to return it in a minute. But the child has an accident and damages the bear. This is Susan's first experience sharing something special and the result has been very negative for her. She then becomes very fearful of sharing any of her toys with her friends.

### Fears That Develop From Watching Others' Experiences

Many times fear is developed simply from watching people be afraid. This is called Social Learning Theory and was developed by Albert Bandura in the 1960's. He proposed that children learn not just from experience, but vicariously through others. Let's propose that on a city street there's a diverse group of people crowding the sidewalk everyday on your daily walk with the children. Among that diverse group is a number of spirits and ghosts. They walk with the crowd everyday and no one pays them any mind at all. They are simply one of many. The children would never develop any fear of ghosts. No one else is afraid. The ghosts have never done anything to

harm them and so they have no reason to be afraid. However, if you stroll down that same street and the children see people screaming and carrying on at the sight of a spirit, they will become afraid. The crowd of strangers have taught them that there is something to fear.

This seems to be a very light-hearted example, but it's not very different than our children's development of racism. After years of working with preschoolers, I have never yet met one that has any fear or discomfort with another child's skin color. As a matter of fact they appear to remain "color blind" until exposed to the media, a racist adult or a situation where someone else points out that there is a reason to be afraid. The imbalance in the media of negative minority stereotypes teaches children through social learning to be afraid of those whose skin is different. Even a well meaning parent or caregiver who fears those of different cultures can pass that fear along to a child.

Even in the best of situations children can develop fear from watching someone else's experience. I remember my own child, who loved taking a bath, being riveted to a highly respected children's show that was doing a story about why you don't have to be afraid of things going down the bathtub drain. My son never even thought of such a thing until watching the story. He then made sure that he and his toys were all out of the tub before I drained the water. Even the suggestion of another child's irrational fear placed a seed of doubt in his mind.

## Avoiding the Development of Fears

We can't stop children from living their life and observing the world. This is how they learn and in fact is how they learn healthy fear. We certainly want children to have an intelligent fear of crossing the street or touching a hot stove. There are things we can do to make sure they don't develop irrational fears that keep them from moving forward in life.

1. If a child is experiencing something new, be there to act as a safety net. Do your best to have the child avoid any excessive pain, without totally protecting him from the learning experience. In other words if he's learning to ride a bike, allow him to teeter, but avoid having him hit the ground hard. Once a child learns the joy of riding the occasional fall will not sway him, but do your best to have him experience the joy of riding first.
2. Do not throw children into situations that are way above their ability level. If a child wants to try rock climbing and is happy climbing three feet off the ground, allow him that joy until he wants to go five and then maybe ten feet. If a child wants to stay in the baby pool, let her until she asks to experience the bigger pool and be there to protect her in case of mishap.
3. Avoid having children develop a fear of the dark by having them sleep in darkness from infancy. If a child wakes in the dark and is frightened, do not

immediately turn on the lights. Comfort children in the darkness.

4. Make children aware of things that may surprise or shock them, like the noise of fireworks or darkness in a movie theatre. Before going on rides in amusement parks, watch, and stay away from rides if the attendant can't tell you exactly what will happen during the ride.
5. Make sure children know that they are free to leave an uncomfortable situation if necessary. The only thing worse than being terrified is not being able to flee the situation.
6. Most of all, avoid having children learn others' fears and terrors through television, movies and the evening news.

We all learn to be afraid of things as we live and grow. There is always a reason a child is afraid, whether real or imagined. Just telling a child to face the fear is not always helpful, especially if they follow through and the result is the same terrifying experience that seeded the fear. You need to change the result of the experience.

And remember, social learning is not just responsible for the learning of negative things. Children can learn fearlessness, courage and joy from watching others' positive experiences. Fill your childcare home with people who experience joy from learning new things and who deal with fear and insecurity in constructive ways.

# Keep Moving Into Autumn

## I Hug Myself 'Cause I Love Me So!

The following is sung to the tune of *Turkey in the Straw*. The words describe the movement.

Oh, I love my knees, and I give them a squeeze.  
And I bend them and stretch them as I please.  
I love my toes, and I love my nose.  
And I wiggle, wiggle, wiggle them until they grow.  
I love my back and I give it a slap.  
I curl it up and I give it a nap.  
I love my head and I take it to bed.  
And I can shake, shake, shake til my face turns red.

## Head Shoulders Knees and Toes

This is a classic that children never stop enjoying. Start the poem out very slowly having the children touch each body part they hear and then repeat it increasing the speed until everyone gets very silly.

Head, shoulders, knees and toes, knees and toes.  
Head, shoulders, knees and toes, knees and toes.  
Eyes and ears and mouth and nose.  
Head, shoulders, knees and toes, knees and toes.

## Everybody Jump by Skip West

This is an incredibly simple song that the smallest children in your group can keep up with. You can listen to the music on [www.songsforteaching.com](http://www.songsforteaching.com)

Everybody jump, everybody jump,  
Everybody jump with me.  
Everybody jump, everybody jump,  
Everybody jump with me.

Replace jump with any movement you like. Allow the children to pick some movements.

## Rumble to the Bottom

This is a traditional Puerto Rican game. The children can use any movement they choose. When they rumble to the bottom and top they simply move their own dance closer to the floor and bring it back up again. At the end the children can turn until they finally fall to the ground.

Oh, I'm going to Fiesta.  
I'm going to the fair.  
To see the senorita,  
With the flower in her hair.  
Oh, shake it, shake it, shake it.  
Shake it if you can.  
Shake it like a milkshake,  
And do it once again.  
Oh rumble to the bottom,  
And rumble to the top.  
And turn a round and turn around  
Until you make a stop.

# Get Back to the Basics: Classic Toddler Art

## Macaroni Art

Macaroni has so many uses. It can be strung as beads, pasted on paper and used to make sculpture. Purchase the most inexpensive you can find. Taste is of no significance. If you have children under three, you must supervise the project closely. While the macaroni is not toxic, a child can choke on a hard piece of pasta while tasting.



## Macaroni Jewelry

Purchase shoe laces of different lengths and colors. Have the children string ziti or large elbows to make necklaces or bracelets. Use pasta wheels as decorative accents.



## Macaroni Collage

Place bowls of assorted shapes of macaroni in different bowls. Give the children heavy construction paper and glue. Let them create a macaroni collage.



## Macaroni Sculpture

Purchase long pipe cleaners. Have the children string ziti or large elbows on the pipe cleaners and then bend them to make a sculpture.

## Dyeing Pasta

Children will have plenty of fun doing their projects with plain macaroni. If you'd like to make it more interesting, you can purchase macaroni colored with beets, spinach or carrots. These are colorful and tend not to release the colors when played with. It will cost a bit more and you may not have the variety of shapes you want. If you want a great variety of shapes and colors, you can dye your own. However, this is not a project for young children.



Macaroni  
Sealable Plastic Bags  
Rubbing Alcohol  
Food Coloring  
Plastic gloves

Use the plastic gloves to keep the dyes off your hands. Divide your pasta into plastic bags. You will need one bag for each color. Place 1 cup of macaroni and approximately 2 Tablespoons of rubbing alcohol in the bag to coat the pasta. Place food coloring in the bag to achieve the desired color. Generally 8 - 12 drops are needed to achieve deep color. Shake the bag so everything gets coated and leave for ½ hour. Empty the bag onto a paper towel that has a metal pan underneath. You don't want dyes seeping through to your counter. Let the pasta dry completely. This may take 24 to 48 hours. Once dry allow the children to play. Please be aware that pasta dyed after production tends to release some dye if it gets wet. It is best played with at a table.

## Don't Dismiss Crayons

Crayons should be a staple in every art corner. They're a great fine motor exercise that readies a child for a pencil. Not only that, they are inexpensive, come in hundreds of colors and aren't very messy, so they can be made easily accessible to the youngest of children. Start toddlers out with the Jumbo size crayons, move them to the large and eventually to regular size crayons at age four or five. See page five for how to recycle all your broken crayons.



# All About Town

## NAEYC 2006 Annual Conference

What could be better than learning during the day and relaxing with friends in the evening at a great restaurant or perhaps visiting one of Atlanta's many Museums?

Join others in the Childcare and Early Education Community at the 2006 Annual Conference in

Atlanta, Georgia  
November 8 through 11

Go to [NAEYC.org](http://NAEYC.org) for more information

## NJAEYC 2006 Annual Conference

Want to stay closer to home and still benefit from a great variety of educational sessions and exciting night life. Visit:

Atlantic City, New Jersey  
November 3 and 4

Go to [www.NJAEYC.org](http://www.NJAEYC.org)  
for more information

## Programs for Parents Autumn Training Schedule

Watch next month for Programs for Parents autumn trainings. Keep current by attending trainings through Programs for Parents or other approved educational programs.

## No Fear of Artistic Expression

How do children become afraid to express themselves artistically. Perhaps they have been hurt or have watched someone have their feelings hurt over an art project. Remember to be very sensitive about the art that young children produce. Don't hold up others' art as an example of how a project should look. Just let them create and have fun. They have time in their lives to meet others' expectations. Let them enjoy this time to meet their own.

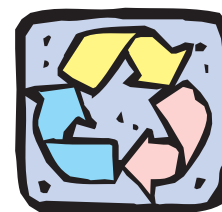
## Recycle Old Crayons



Small Cookie Cutters  
Wax Paper  
Microwaveable plastic cups (preferably disposable)

Place your cookie cutters on the wax paper. Gather up all your old broken crayons, remove the paper and sort them by color. Place each color in a disposable microwaveable plastic cup. Melt the wax in 10 second intervals. Check after each interval. As soon as it's liquid, pour the wax into the cookie mold. Let it cool until it's solid.

You can make solid colors or a rainbow crayon by mixing colors in one mold. You can use these as little gifts or just place them out for the children to play with.



## Recycle Old Paper

Children go through lots of paper when coloring. Pile up all the used sheets that children don't want. Put them through a shredder and use them to make collages.

## Courage: In a Small Way

If you know a child that has already developed fears, such as a fear of the dark or monsters under the bed, there are many helpful picture books that can help ease these feelings. Use the search engines on the more popular book sites to find the appropriate book. The following books are stories that illustrate living life without fear and enjoying the adventure that comes from discovering new things.

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### I'm Big by Milton Schafer

I'm Big! Confident, strong words from a toddler. With that confidence comes a vivid imagination. This toddler starts out being big enough to dress himself and sit in a chair and make his feet touch the floor. But then he becomes big enough to jump a ten foot fence, feed a lion a hot dog and finally easily lift 100 pounds. So perhaps he's not really that big, but his confidence will certainly get him to wherever he wants to go. Lyrical, rhyming text make this a great read aloud. (Ages 2½ - 5)

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### Swim, Little Wombat, Swim by Charles Fuge

It's a beautiful summer day and Wombat and Platypus are playing near the pond's edge. Platypus jumps in and Wombat tumbles in and discovers he is unable to swim. Platypus quickly rescues him and then begins to teach him step by step. Wombat learns all day and rests with a full tummy at lunch. In the afternoon he paddles and frog teaches him to dive. There is absolutely no mention of fear in this story. It's a beautiful celebration of the joy of learning. (Ages 3 - 6)

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### Way Far Away On a Wild Safari by Jan Peck

Dressed in his full safari gear, binoculars in hand, this little boy is hiking away on a wild safari. He has no fear of the animals in the wild. He politely addresses them and moves on to search for the a lion. "Hello, hippopotamus. Big bottom-a-mus, hippopotamus. See you later, hippopotamus." He continues on his way until he finally meets the lion and returns home where we see him helping his Grandma bake animal cookies. The illustrations are bold and bright and the little boy always wide-eyed and happy. (Ages 2½ - 6)

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### I Went Walking by Sue Williams

A small child only needs to walk around a farm to see new and wonderful things. This tiny board book follows a curious red head as she spies a cat, horse, cow and other familiar animals. She looks, plays and touches and then just goes along her merry way. A perfect little board book to put in the car, especially if you have a child that loves animals. (Ages 1 - 4)

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### Childcare Matters

September 2006

Newsletter 94

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*Childcare Matters* (copyright pending) is a monthly newsletter published for Registered Family Child Care Providers and parents using their services.