

Your Child and the Outside World

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but there are facts out there he must know



Objective

Discover ways of introducing children to the outside world in ways that build their self-confidence.

Introduction

Part of growing up is learning to associate with others and to adjust well to new experiences outside the home. A child who feels secure and loved goes forth to meet new experiences with a spirit of enthusiasm. He comes out triumphant in his encounters with new places, new materials, and new friends.

Family Members Influence a Child's View of the Outside World

Family members can influence a child's ideas about the world outside the home. An overprotective mother who constantly keeps her young child home and does not allow him to play with other children unless she is present can instill in the child a fear of the world. Consider the following situations:

1. A twelve-month-old is learning to walk. His mother constantly hovers over him as he clings to walls and furniture to balance himself. Occasionally he falls and bumps his head slightly. Whether he cries or not, his mother quickly picks him up and says, "Did Mommy's baby get hurt?" or "Mommy's baby has to be careful." How can parents encourage a child to act independently without developing a fear of new experiences?

A possible solution is to encourage the child by giving him space to learn for himself. The mother could stand a few feet away with arms outstretched and say, "I know you can make it," "Pick yourself up and try again," "You're doing better," or "I'm glad you want to keep trying."

Although the child may not understand the words, he will understand the tone of voice and encouraging attitude. A hug, kiss, smile, or words of praise will communicate his mother's confidence in his ability to succeed.

2. Sue's parents tried to teach their four-year-old daughter about the Word of Wisdom, telling her, "Heavenly Father doesn't want us to smoke. It's bad for us, and could even kill us." They were shocked when they heard Sue tell her friend Mary, "Your daddy is bad and will soon die because he smokes." How could Sue's parents correct her misunderstanding of their teachings and help her relate better with others? Sue's parents could explain to her that, while smoking is harmful to our bodies and can cause sickness, people who smoke are not necessarily bad.

Parents can help their children adapt to most events outside the home. For example, they can help children enjoy Church meetings by displaying a positive attitude about the meetings, making such comments as, "I appreciate the time the speakers spend preparing their talks," "The beautiful prelude music helped me to be reverent," "I like the way the bishopric greets us as we enter the chapel," "The choir sang beautifully today," or "I like to think about Jesus as we partake of the sacrament."

A young child learns much from his parents' attitudes. He can discover through his family that his abilities are trusted, that his fears can be overcome, that we should be kind, and that we should appreciate the efforts of others.

Helping a Child Have Good Relationships and Enjoy New Experiences

Children tend to treat others the way they have learned to treat family members. When you teach your children to respect the rights and property of family members, you prepare them to behave well with people outside the home. If, for example, you

want your children to be courteous to others, you must treat your children courteously.

You can help children have positive relationships with others by refraining from comparing one child with another. "The child who is compared will tend to feel he lives in a world of superiors and inferiors and that his place is only secure as long as he is able to put others down. This is disastrous for constructive social living. . . .

"When mother is noncomparing, trusting, interested in people, and genuinely interested in what the child does, he will tend to be encouraged to relate to people in cooperative, constructive ways" (G. Hugh Allred, *Mission for Mother: Guiding the Child* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968], p. 83).

Letting a child enjoy other children will help him adjust to others. As he plays games with friends, he learns to observe rules and to be considerate of others.

The Church provides many opportunities for children to play, work, and learn together in the nursery and Primary. As they have experiences together, knowing that you are close by, they prepare themselves for greater independence.

If older children argue during play and expect you to settle the problem, you might tell your child, "I know you and your friend can settle this argument by yourselves," thus expressing your confidence in his ability to solve problems and get along with others.

You can prepare your child for school by taking him through the school building so he can become familiar with the new surroundings. If possible, introduce him to his new teacher. If your child will walk to school, teach him the route and safety rules and help him find another child in the neighborhood to walk with.

You can help your children acquire skills they will need in school by—

1. Teaching them to obey rules and to follow directions.
2. Allowing them to make decisions, act independently, and put some of their own ideas into practice.
3. Helping them have successful experiences and expressing joy in their efforts and achievements.
4. Helping them learn to relate socially and cooperate with others.
5. Allowing them to suffer the consequences of their own actions.

If parents understand the individual needs of children, they can make experiences outside the home more pleasant for them. Consider the following examples:

1. "Four-year-old Harold had a careful approach to others. His parents usually talked for Harold when he seemed hesitant. Sometimes they would avoid activities to save Harold any anxiety. Then the family decided they were only strengthening Harold's tendency to avoid others. His parents quit talking for Harold and began to give him more opportunities. 'Chocolate ice cream does sound good. We'll go by the counter and if you decide to tell him what kind you want, I think I'll have one too. If you don't feel like telling him, we'll do it another day.' Harold was not pleased at first, but regular, supportive exposure to mildly threatening situations helped him build the confidence to attempt more challenging involvement.
2. "Marianne was an outgoing five-year-old. Her parents did not worry about her because she captured the attention of new acquaintances quickly. As they evaluated, her parents saw that although Marianne moved easily in the neighborhood group, she had no special friends. Marianne was good at thinking of ideas for play but had never learned to listen to the ideas of other children. When children left after becoming tired of doing only what Marianne said, she involved herself enthusiastically with a new child. Her family was able to help Marianne see that other children also liked to think of play ideas. With family help, Marianne learned to use her enthusiastic approach in listening to others" (*Relief Society Courses of Study, 1972-73, p. 162*).

If a child is timid, he may have difficulty developing confidence in the world outside the home. If his parents help him understand and overcome his timidity, he will relate better to others. John, a timid child who is very attached to his mother, resists when his parents encourage him to play with other children. He often whimpers, cries, and complains of physical pains to avoid attending school. This kind of behavior requires the mother to be firm and kind without being harsh. Consistent comments such as, "When children are five they go to school," may help. Another supportive approach is to have prayer with the child and help him talk his problem over with his Heavenly Father. When parents see that the child is becoming less timid, they should praise him for his efforts.

You can help your children feel comfortable in the outside world by introducing them to grown-ups. However, if they are timid, forcing them to talk to unfamiliar adults may increase their shyness and make meeting people so unpleasant that they will try to avoid unfamiliar people altogether. Saying, "Bradley is a friendly person when he gets to know people well," shows consideration for the child's feelings and avoids embarrassing him or the person he is introduced to. If the parents practice with the child what to say and do when an introduction is made, he may feel more at ease.

Although at times it may seem difficult, we must help our children learn to cope successfully with events outside the home. We can feel great joy as we see our children learn to get along with others, solve their own problems, and meet new experiences with confidence. A well-adjusted child can say to himself, "I know there's a big world out there and that I may have problems and may even get hurt, but I know I can succeed if I keep trying."

Gospel Principles Fortify a Child as He Deals with the Outside World

The gospel can be a great strength to a child as he grows and meets the outside world. If he understands the gospel, he will see himself positively and will be more capable of avoiding unrighteous pressure from playmates. He will see greater meaning in life and will understand its purposes. Children whose lives are not influenced by the gospel will not have these advantages. This point is illustrated by Elder Marion D. Hanks:

"Recently I listened to a lovely young lady just leaving her teens as she spoke in a stake conference, her first address ever. She had never known a true family of her own. She had experienced many temporary homes, made many mistakes, had much heartache and hopelessness. Then an older Church couple found her, and loved her, and taught her. Her prepared talk was witty and interesting, but when she laid it down and bore witness through tears, it became magic:

"'No one ever helped me to understand that I was worth anything,' she said, 'that I was special in any way. And then the missionaries taught me about Jesus Christ and his love and the God who sent

him. They taught me that Jesus died for me—for me. I am valuable! I am valuable! He died for me'" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1983, p. 29; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1983, p. 22).

The gospel offers a child a secure foundation of values which guides and strengthens him as he leaves home and begins to deal with the outside world. Through the gospel—

1. He understands his unique worth as a child of a loving Heavenly Father.
2. He realizes that Jesus has taught and shown us all we need to do to be able to return to live with our Father in Heaven eternally.
3. He knows there is a difference between right and wrong.
4. He is taught to resist temptation.
5. He is taught to consider others' needs as well as his own.
6. He realizes that Christlike service influences others for good.
7. He realizes that "now" is not the most important moment; he is developing an eternal sense of perspective.

As a child is taught the gospel by loving parents and adults and sees them living its principles daily, he will come to have a testimony of his own. That testimony will lead him to find an abundant life instead of becoming lost in a world filled with false philosophies and empty promises. His influence for good on the outside world can greatly help to build the kingdom of God.

Conclusion

Family members can do many things to influence the way a child sees the outside world. By understanding each child's personality and giving him opportunities to safely explore the world outside the home, parents can prepare a child to have good relationships and enjoy new experiences. As parents teach a child the gospel, they give him a solid foundation of values that will keep him from being influenced by false teachings and will allow him to influence others for good.