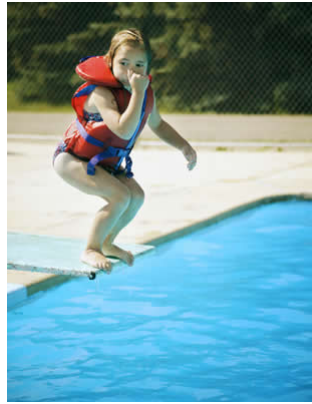


Understanding Montessori

The Kids Talk Way



How To Know When Development Is Going Awry

February 7, 2010

"Is my child going through a stage or is something wrong?" is a question that runs through our minds, usually in the wee hours of the morning. We worry because the question addresses the art of being a parent, that is, knowing when to act and when to step back and watch.

For the young child, learning skills and appropriate behavior doesn't follow a straight line. Instead it is a zigzag path of peaks and valleys. As parents we can be mystified when Wednesday night Sarah can get her pajamas on all by herself, and on Thursday she can't and cries in frustration.

It requires a lot of patience, (I'm talking mythical and biblical here), for us as parents and teachers to deal with these ups and downs. It is important for us to follow through when giving instructions. For example, if you've asked your four-year-old to set the table for dinner, you need to be prepared to reteach the skill, or walk through the job with your child, and then remind them to do it each night, until he or she can be fully responsible. While learning to set the table, children have many details to remember, such as how many places to set, where to place the plates and utensils, filling water glasses, etc. We need to be there to assure success.

Learning skills and memorizing rules of behavior can take frequent repetition for child and parent. One familiar lament we might remember from

our childhood is "How many times do I have to tell you to close the door?" We need to understand the answer may be a "few gad zillion".

Certain skills may take a long time to develop. If you are concerned that your child is not developing an age appropriate skill, write down in your calendar one month ahead the desired skill, such as "close the door properly". When you see on the calendar after a month of reteaching, the skill has not progressed, visit with your pediatrician about your concerns.

Behavior is of course a key component to our children's development. In normal development we should observe children that are joyful, pleasant, eager to please and connected to their families and homes. Two "emotional vitamins" for proper child development, recommended by Robert Shaw, M.D., are clear structure and expectations.

Dr. Robert Shaw, author of *The Epidemic: The Rot of American Culture, Absentee and Permissive Parenting, and the Resultant Plague of Joyless, Selfish Children*, says that "excessive tantrums, persistent bedtime issues and aggression towards playmates" are signs that development is going awry in the three to six-year-old. These behaviors are a cry from the child for the parent to take charge and provide clear family structure and expectations for behavior. If unacceptable behaviors are given in to and the child placated, you have started on the path to a defiant unruly child. Left unchallenged, the child's behavior will become more and more difficult to handle.

As parents and teachers we need to observe our children's behavior. If a behavior, such as not closing a door properly, is due to weak skills we need to teach and reteach the skill, then wait and watch. If the behavior is defiant, rude, unkind or aggressive, we need to act immediately to stop it. We can eliminate tantrums, along with defiant, aggressive and unkind behaviors, by providing clear structure and expectations.

When you are lying awake at night, concerned about your child's behavior, ask yourself these two questions:

1. Is my child's behavior due to needing to learn a skill?
2. Is my child's behavior due to a lack of clear expectations for behavior and clear family structure?

With the answers to these two questions, you'll know what you need to do.

Next Week: Home Responsibilities Make Us Feel We Belong