

## Kids need time alone too

"Please do not disturb!"

The big sign on the bedroom door may make parents wonder if this is a new form of rebellion — a barricade to keep them out.

It is not unusual for grade school children to seek some time to be alone, according to Growing Up, the child development newsletter for school age children. In fact, it is a healthy sign. This time of solitude serves many purposes.

### Information overload

There is such a wealth of new information being passed on to a child in school that some time is needed to integrate all of it.

A child whose mind has been bombarded with new information needs periods of quiet to make those things her own. Otherwise, new knowledge remains superficial and may soon be forgotten.

### Emotional stability

Preteens and teenagers, especially, are pulled in many different directions by their emotions. At one moment they think they can handle the responsibilities of adulthood. The next moment they do something that reminds them they are still children. They need time to fit both parts of their personalities together.

### Self-identity

"Who am I?" "Who do I want to be?" A young person needs solitude to ponder her own individual strengths and weaknesses. She also needs time to dream new dreams about who she might become.

### Personal pride

Every young person needs time alone to do whatever she enjoys doing. It may be practicing a particular athletic skill or playing the piano. Too often parents rush in to give their applause or "show off" their child to friends. The child, however, may prefer to be

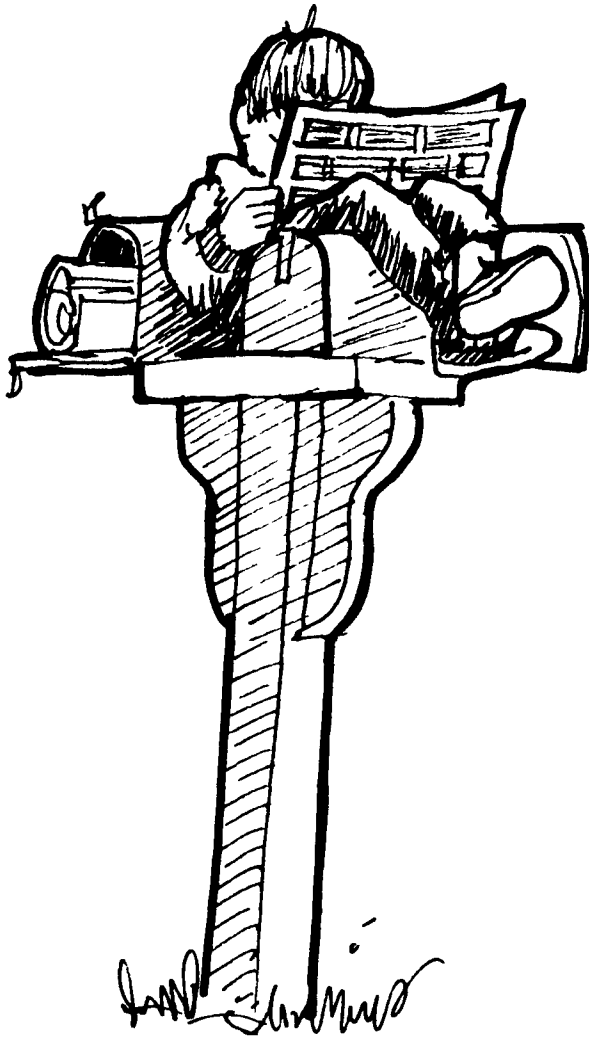
alone to enjoy the self-satisfaction she gains from her own efforts.

### The lonely child

There is, of course, the extreme of always wanting to be alone that may be a sign of loneliness. Frequently this problem of withdrawn behavior may not be detected in school, since the quiet child rarely gets the teacher's

attention. If the child chooses to sit alone in the school cafeteria every day, no one may notice.

Parents are usually the first to detect the problem and should discuss it with their child. If the problem persists, parents may want to seek professional help to find out why the child is lonely and withdrawn.



## Tips for parents with emerging preschoolers

**MEDIA** — Two- and three-year-old children are sometimes described as 3-T, terrible, troublesome and talkative. Living with an emerging preschooler is a challenge, says Extension Home Economist Greta C. Vairo. She offers several suggestions for parents to keep in mind during this stage of development.

A two or three year old can do more than just walk. The child can now climb, open, close, drop, push, pull, hold and let go. The child's growing muscle and motor abilities, along with developing mental capabilities, enable him or her to explore the environment more fully.

The child is very eager to use these new skills and may use them over and over again, sometimes to the dismay of the parent who has not yet adjusted to the child's mobility and sense of adventure. At this time the parent must become more aware of safety hazards in the home, because the child has no sense of anticipating danger or recognizing the consequences of his actions.

Parents must also recognize that

the young child needs to use these new skills at his own pace and in his own time. If the child is allowed and encouraged to do things, he develops the feeling that he is able to control his body, his muscles, his whole self and his environment. Some experts maintain that if the child does not develop this sense of control, he will develop a sense of shame and doubt. This feeling may occur when parents become impatient and do for the child what she can do for herself. This situation is permissible once in a while, but problems may arise when parents rush in too often. An overprotective and constantly critical parent may cause the child to feel shame and doubt about his own abilities.

Parents must also make adjustments during this time. The docile, smiling, consistently eager-to-cuddle child is gone, replaced by a much more active one. This change puts a great deal of stress on some parents as demonstrated by the high rate of child abuse during this stage of development.

Parents will be better able to cope if they recognize that the child is a normal person. One thing

parents can do is to encourage the child to do dozens of little jobs around the home. In this way, the child and the parent will not be meeting head on. The child will develop a sense of control, a sense of being able to do things, and an assurance that the parents acknowledge his abilities.

While encouragement is important, the parents will still need to allot time for the child and to exercise the necessary patience with him or her. Parents may need to consider their own lives, too. Because time is given so liberally to the young son or daughter, parents may have to make an effort to reserve a certain amount of time for themselves.



## BACK HOME

By Michelle S. Rodgers



Berks Extension  
Home Economist

### TAKING THE FEAR OUT OF FIRE

Chills went up and down my spine the other night as the screaming sounds of the fire sirens were heard racing down the street. "Would they get there in time?" and "Was everyone out of the house?" were questions running through my mind. Thanks to our volunteer fire company the family was OK and the fire damage was minimized.

Home fires always remind me of an experience when I was younger and "back home." I remember waking up one night to hear my dad yelling, "Great scott, Bill's house is on fire!" Bill lived in a little shack on the property at the end of our long farm lane. I remember Dad racing out in the truck and the flames engulfing the house. Bill had been rescued but the house was gone. I remember this prompted discussion in our family of how we would get out of our bedrooms if there ever was a fire.

Fire is a big hazard for preschoolers. Children under age five comprise seven percent of the American population but account for 17 percent of all fire deaths. Case studies indicate that thousands of these injuries and deaths could have been prevented if the children had been taught a few basic concepts about fire and burn safety.

Taking the fear out of fire may be an important step in preparing your children for a fire in your home. A first step is to discuss with the child what to do and where to go in case there is a fire in the home.

Fire drills will reinforce this knowledge any may help prevent panic. Some professionals encourage their preschoolers to keep shouting "fire" until they have made their way out of the smoke filled room. This makes it easier for the parent or firefighter to find the child if he or she cannot get out.

Another concept that can easily

be taught is to "keep low" in case of fire. Smoke and toxic gases are more often the cause of death in a fire than burns from flames. Because of this, it is important to move out of the burning building with your head under the smoke. Smoke tends to rise, making it easier to breathe closer to the floor.

Older children and adults should crawl close to the floor to avoid smoke inhalation. Since preschoolers are small in size, bending low under the smoke is recommended as a safe, fast way for this age group to exit a burning building.

Another important lesson that can be taught to preschoolers is what to do if their clothes catch on fire. Parents can teach that there are three things to do right away if their clothes catch on fire. The child should stop where he is and drop to the ground with his hands over his face, and roll over and over until the fire is out. Have a mini-drill where you demonstrate Stop, Drop and Roll and practice it together.

Probably the simplest fire prevention measures include a smoke detector (with an active battery) and "Tot Finder" decals for windows in your child's bedroom.

By explaining fire safety to your children, you are taking the panic out of fire. The creators of Sesame Street have prepared an excellent resource for parents and preschool teachers to make this important subject less threatening to young children. The booklet includes poems, songs, skits, activities and even a record. The "Fire Safety Resource Book" may be obtained by writing: Children's Television Workshop, Community Education Service Division, Department FS, One Lincoln Plaza, New York, New York 10023. The cost is \$1 plus postage.

Remember, the child's life you save may be your own!

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## Family Living

