



By Donna Pitino

The Parent Connection

A Monthly Newsletter for Parents

Growing Pains

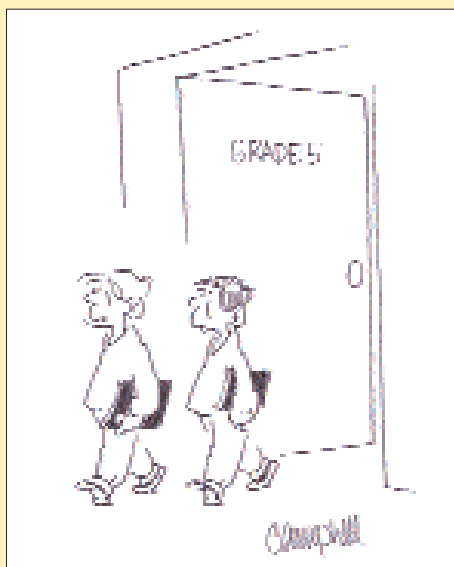
How families survive them

Children are exposed to different dangers and stressful situations as they get older, and therefore tend to have plenty of bottled-up emotions. They shake these emotions good and hard, pull the tab and release those pent-up frustrations into the place they feel most comfortable: home. Our children know we will love them no matter what, so parents and caregivers are often the recipients of “the Attitude.”

Here are some ways to build a better relationship and ease the stress on everybody.

- Focus on values. What your child learns at home goes a long way in helping him or her to make smart choices.
- Encourage a regular good night’s sleep. Studies have shown that teens need even more sleep than young children.
- Provide a healthful diet and limit your child’s intake of junk food.
- Communicate. Your child may not confide every detail, but it’s vitally important that our children know we will listen.
- Share a laugh. It’s a great way to strengthen the parent-child bond.

Quality time. Spending time together increases your chances for open communication. You and your child can rent a video, plant a garden or sign up for music lessons. Try volunteering together – you could sign up for a walk to benefit cancer research or collect food for the needy. How about asking your child to teach you something? He or she could give you a lesson on the latest computer technology or teach you the history of his or her favorite band.



“I didn’t talk in class, but I had a lengthy interior monologue.”

The school connection. The child who once talked nonstop and filled you in on the day’s events may be the same child who answers in monosyllables now. Some parents slowly pull away from the school scene when their children enter middle school, but communication between schools and parents can help to stop problems before they get out of hand. As you watch for changes in your child’s grades or friendships, you may want to talk to his or her teachers to see if they’ve noticed anything different.

Quote of the Month

“Grown-ups never understand anything by themselves, and it is exhausting for children to have to provide explanations over and over again.”

– Antoine de Saint-Exupéry
The Little Prince

Books Worth a Look

Little Bear’s Little Boat by **Eve Bunting** (Clarion, 2003). Little Bear loves his boat, but he grows and grows until one day he’s too big for it. What do you do when you out-grow something you love?

Baby Einstein: The ABCs of Art by **Julie Aigner-Clark** (The Baby Einstein Co., 2002). This book asks simple questions about paintings as the alphabet is introduced through famous works of art. The letter C is illustrated by Van Gogh’s *Cows* and D is illustrated by Picasso’s *Young Boy with Dog*. My favorite is Renoir’s *Reading*, showing two girls for G. The book includes a list of activities.

How Did You Grow So Big, So Soon? by **Anne Bowen** (Carolrhoda, 2003). Now that he’s ready for school, a boy and his mom remember other “firsts,” such as his first words and first steps.

Fight On! Mary Church Terrell’s Battle for Integration by **Dennis B. Fradin** (Clarion, 2003). Black and white photos tell the story of Mary, the first African-American member of the Board of Education in Washington, DC and a founder of the NAACP. For ages 10-14.

Continued on reverse

Donna Pitino was a teacher for 14 years and is now a freelance writer. She is the mother of two daughters.

Books Worth a Look, cont'd

***The Big Book for Peace* edited by Ann Durell and Marilyn Sachs (Dutton, 1990).** Over 30 writers and artists contributed stories, poems and pictures to this book that will help young adults think about the meaning of peace. Proceeds from sales of the book are donated to organizations that are working toward peace.

***Granny Torrelli Makes Soup* by Sharon Creech (HarperCollins, 2003).** As Granny Torrelli and Rosie cook a variety of foods for their pasta party, Rosie opens up about the fight she had with her best friend after Granny shares a few childhood stories of her own. Eight-to-twelve-year-old Sharon Creech fans may also want to check out her books *Ruby Holler* (HarperCollins, 2002), the Newbery Medal-winning *Walk Two Moons* (HarperTrophy, 1996) and *Love That Dog* (HarperTrophy, 2003).

PICK FOR PARENTS

***Get Out of My Life but First Could You Drive Mme and Cheryl to the Mall?* by Anthony E. Wolf, Ph. D. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2002).** This realistic book gives parents practical advice on raising teenagers. The helpful chapters include topics such as: "What They Do and Why;" "Communication and Trust;" "Conflict;" "School" and "Drugs and Drinking."

What Works?

Has something worked well for you as a parent? Why not share it with other parents? Send your parenting tips to me at mdbc@atd.com

Staying Healthy

Dr. Tasso, pediatrician with Pediatric Associates of CT, reminds parents to check with school nurses about entrance requirements for each grade.

"Most school systems require certain shots by certain ages, beginning in kindergarten," Dr. Tasso says. "Also, physicals for adolescents are important; they allow physicians to do preventive work with preteens and teenagers regarding their attitudes toward such topics as safety, diet and exercise. We can connect with adolescents on an independent and mature level, talking with them about their goals and aspirations."

As parents, we know that our children's health is important. We shouldn't neglect our own health, either – our children learn from watching us.

Be a Manners Model

A 2003 survey conducted by an independent research company and co-sponsored by HIT Entertainment (the creators of *Barney and Friends*) and *Parents* magazine ranked good manners as the most important quality to nurture in children. The survey, which was given to more than 1,000 adults with at least one child between the ages of six months and five years, yielded the following information:

- 98% of parents believe that the earlier you start teaching manners, the easier it will be for children to learn them
- 86% of parents feel that the most effective way to teach manners is to be a good role model yourself.

So, be a model of good manners for your children. The results will be worth it!

Time Out – for You!

There are ups and downs for parents of children of all ages. Why not form a parent group that meets once a month to discuss successes and struggles? Sometimes it can make you feel better just to hear someone else say, "I know exactly what you mean!"

Childhood Depression

Depression can be a condition that requires treatment. According to Healthwise, Inc., signs of depression include (but are not limited to) a change in appetite (weight loss or gain), change in sleeping pattern (sleeping more or less than usual), feeling guilty or worthless and having difficulty concentrating or making decisions. If symptoms occur daily for at least two weeks, help should be sought. It's helpful to keep communicating with your child, your spouse, the school and your doctor. Any suicidal statement should be taken seriously and reported to your doctor immediately.

Moving to Middle School

Even positive changes can be stressful for children. One big change is when children move to another school, either due to an advance in grade level or a new home address. Before a change in schools – or any kind of change – ask your child how he or she feels about it. Sometimes just knowing we'll listen is enough to ease a child's tension. In addition to talking with a child before the change occurs, it's also helpful to check with the child several times during the year to see how things are going.

My daughter had general anxieties about the move to middle school, but that anxiety became specifically geared toward homework once the school year got under way. It wasn't that her homework was too hard; rather, it was the amount that seemed overwhelming at times.

When I asked her about it, she said, "Do you realize how much homework I get? It takes up basically my whole night. Plus, I need time to relax like everybody else in this world."

To reduce her frustration, we worked out ways for her to manage her time and plan step-by-step deadlines for longer assignments. We also encouraged her to ask her friends how they were handling homework. Knowing that other kids her age were finding the transition a bit difficult made her feel better. Being aware of the transitions our children face can make a big difference in their ability to cope with those changes. ↓