

# Wonder Years

Helping parents and caregivers make the most of a child's early years.

**YOUR CHILD  
48–54 MONTHS**

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## Ready, set, dial!

By *Rachelle Hughes*

### Teaching your preschooler to use the telephone

**T**he telephone is a wonderful little box that tempts your child with all kinds of fun and mystery. Preschoolers see adults spending hours using the phone; no wonder they are eager to try it themselves.

You may have heard horror stories about children who misuse the telephone: children accidentally calling 911, or telling callers embarrassing stories about bathrooms. Yet sometime during the preschool years you will want to teach your child to use the phone. Once they understand the phone is not a toy, preschoolers can learn to use good telephone manners—and to use the phone for safety.

### *Make sure your child is ready*

**First**, before teaching your child to use the phone, teach her how to recognize the numbers one through ten.

*Continued on page 2*



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## Ready, set, dial!

*Continued from page 1*

**Second**, be patient. This is a learning process, much like potty training. Praise good phone behavior and calmly fix behavior that needs to improve.

**Third**, help your child understand that the phone is not a toy. It's an adult tool meant to be taken seriously and used according to your rules.

### *Learn important phone numbers first*

There are a few phone numbers every child should know: her home phone, the local emergency number and a parent's cell phone number. Explain when and why your children should use these phone numbers. Knowing their home phone number is important in case they are lost or in trouble. When they are away from home, they can tell a safe grown-up how to reach their parents. Teach them the emergency number is only to be used when someone is hurt or in danger and the grown-up in the house cannot get to the phone. Be patient! Learning these numbers can be a real challenge for 3- and 4-year-olds.

### *Learn first to dial your home phone*

Some children find it easy to memorize numbers. Others need to see the numbers



before they can learn them. A combination of both tactics will usually ensure success. Here's a game that uses both these learning tools.

#### *The Pretend Phone Game*

Write your phone number on a piece of paper so your child can refer to the numbers he will dial. Use a toy phone or draw a picture of a keypad on a piece of paper. Let your child practice dialing

(or punching) the phone number while looking at the written numbers. Later, have your child try to remember the number and dial it without looking at the paper. Once your child can remember the phone number, reward him by letting him call your home phone from a cell phone or a friend's home.



## Help your child to use good telephone manners

It can be frustrating when a child answers the phone only to leave you hanging on the line, never to hear from a living soul. At my home, it's also been a challenge to teach my child not to discuss his life story with callers.

Before allowing your child to answer the phone or make calls, you may want to work on a few skills. Again, you can practice these skills by playing phone games with your child on toy phones or on multiple phones in your home.

**Teach a proper greeting**—"Hello, may I ask who is calling?" (You may have to settle for a "who's calling?" at first.) "I will get my mom or dad."

If you can't come to the phone right away, tell your child to ask the caller to call back in a few moments. This is easier for a young child than trying to remember the name of the caller. Remind your child to hang up the phone after saying goodbye.

**Speak clearly**—Some children get shy and speak too quietly, or not at all, when they use the phone. Teach your child to speak clearly into the phone, especially if you receive important phone calls in.

**Use indoor voices**—Don't let your child yell into the receiver. Teach her to cover the mouthpiece when calling for you to come to the phone.

**Set answering limits**—If you are expecting an important call, tell your child to let you answer all calls until you say it's ok for her to answer. Be sure to explain you are expecting a call.

**Keep conversations short**—Do not let children chatter endlessly when they do answer. Too many questions from anyone other than a friend or relative can put your child in danger. Plus, most callers do not have time to hear stories on the latest addition to your child's toy box.

**Teach your child to wait patiently**—A preschooler is old enough to wait until after a phone call is finished to speak to you. Unless the house is on fire or your toddler is playing in the toilet, your child should respect your phone time. Pay attention to where your child is and what she is doing while you are talking on the phone. Remember to reward her patience by focusing on her needs after you hang up.

### *Practice makes permanent*

Ask your child to repeat your home phone number at least once a day. She will need to repeat it several times in the beginning. Try making the phone number into a tune or rhythm. To test recall skills, surprise your child by asking her to repeat the number at odd times: during meals, in the car or while playing. Make sure your child can reach your phones. Point out pay phones in public, and practice using a pay phone with your child.



### *Create a child-friendly phone book*

Once your child has mastered some phone skills, you may want to teach other important phone numbers. Steer clear of long distance phone numbers for now. Create a small book with pictures of friends and relatives. Print phone numbers beside each picture. This will allow the child to easily call grandparents or friends. Make clear rules about asking permission, times to call and how long they can talk on the phone.

Just remember to be patient as your child learns. Expect mishaps, missed calls, and embarrassing moments. These will pass and, with your help, your child will learn to use the phone.

*Rachelle Hughes is a freelance writer and the mother of two young children in Utah.*

## MYTH BUSTERS

### **Parenting Myth #18: Children who “act up” or use bad manners in public have poor parents.**

**Fact:** Most of us can all recall a time when a small child acted up in a public place. We’ve shaken our heads wondering, “What kind of parents does this kid have?”

The answer is not always what we think. Some of the rudest children have loving, polite parents. So where is the missing link?

No one knows for sure, but many experts point to a lack of time, which makes it hard for busy parents to limit, correct or reinforce children’s behavior.

Raising polite children today is not so much about putting your napkin on your lap as it is about teaching how to take turns, cooperate and consider the needs of others. Any parent—even the busiest—can find the time to try these five basic family strategies to guide children down the path to politeness.

1. **Talk to your children.** They probably see a lot of ugly behavior on television. Teach them that what they see on TV is for entertainment, and not to be taken as “real life.” Talk about which words are ok to repeat and which are not.
2. **Eat together.** Sit-down family meals teach children about how to act at the table, eat politely and take turns when talking. They also teach the importance of family commitments.
3. **Set a good example.** It’s important for parents to set ground rules by which they themselves abide. Children are like sponges, soaking up what they hear, and repeating it—often at times you wish they wouldn’t!
4. **Catch your child being polite and showing acts of kindness.** Positive reinforcement will help your child learn the behaviors you value.
5. **Set boundaries.** Correct the behavior rather than putting down the child. Say, “we don’t use words like that,” instead of “you have such a foul mouth.”

In a world where school and job success rely on “people skills,” raising your children to be thoughtful and polite may gain them more than just a pat on the back.

This article was adapted from a longer article, “Raising polite children in impolite times” by Wendy Burt. Read the article, along with more “good-manners” tips, at [www.WonderYears.info](http://www.WonderYears.info).

**Almost all of us fall victim to “Parenting Myths” of one kind or another.  
If life with a child isn’t quite what you expected, this column is for you.  
Look for it each time you receive Wonder Years.**

## On the move—safely

**F**our-year-olds love to explore. Road trips can be great times to learn through touch, taste, sound, and smell. Four-year-olds also love to ask questions. Talk about all you experience and help your child learn new words.

### *Safety first*

Around age 4, many children outgrow their old toddler car safety seats. But they never outgrow a need to be safe while traveling. Remember:

- After age 4, laws in every state require children to use a safety belt while riding in the front or rear seats.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends children under the age of 12 ride in the rear seat if the vehicle has a passenger-side air bag.
- Safety belts are made for adults. According to a study conducted by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, children do not fit modern seat belts until they are 54" tall (4.5'), and weigh 80 pounds (usually at about age 10 or 11).
- Booster seats can be a good choice for children from 4 to 8 years of age (60–70 pounds). Look for models that meet Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (they will have a label saying so). Always follow the advice and instructions provided by the seat’s manufacturer.

For more information, call the Auto Safety Hotline at 800-424-9393 or visit [www.michigan.gov/msp](http://www.michigan.gov/msp). Click on “Special Divisions,” then “Office of Highway Safety Planning.”



# Making the most of story time

## Part 3

By Tiffany Spaulding

*Did you know that reading to your children can do more than just entertain them? Reading meets their needs in many areas, including physical, spiritual, emotional and intellectual. How does all that happen in one 32-page picture book? You can help by following three steps to story time success: cuddle close, choose the right book, and talk about what you read.*

### *Introduce language and vocabulary*

**T**he larger your child's vocabulary, the easier and more effectively he will be able to communicate. Many children get frustrated with trying to communicate,



because they can't find the words to express what they are thinking or feeling. The more words they know and understand, the easier it is to talk about their needs and desires.

### *Introduce concepts, from basic to complex*

Some books deal with basic concepts like alphabet, shapes and numbers. Other books can introduce your child to more complex

concepts. The book *Miss Spider's New Car* by David Kirk deals with motion. The book *20 Is Too Many* by Kate Duke talks about subtraction. Your library staff can point you toward books that deal with other concepts that interest you or your child.

### *Spark imaginations*

It would be impossible for us to do the things *Flat Stanley* does, but what a great imaginary adventure to take with your child. Books like *Flat Stanley* also offer a limited number of pictures, which lets your child's imagination run wild.

### *Build memory and comprehension skills*

Pause during your reading and ask your child a question. "What was the cat's name?" "What time of year is it?" "How did the main character get to school?" These questions will help develop your child's comprehension skills (understanding what is read). Also asking questions will help your child feel "smart" and confident when he gets the right answer. (Be careful not to ruin the story with too many questions!)

### *Develop problem solving skills*

In almost all stories, the main character faces a problem and then figures out how to solve it on his own. Use this as a main topic of conversation after reading. How was the problem solved? How would your child solve it differently?



## Wonder Kids

**K**ayla is 4 years old and lives with her family in Detroit. Kayla loves going to school. She also loves to read. In fact, her family says reading is her best subject and her favorite hobby. To be honest, they know Kayla cannot "read" in the traditional sense. However, her words bring her books to life. While she pages through her books, she says many of the words on the page. Kayla eats with a book, travels with a book and at bedtime, she even sleeps with a book!

Someday Kayla wants to become a doctor. Her family knows that all this reading—wherever she goes—is building word-power. Reading also helps Kayla get ready to learn in school. For now, though, Kayla is just having fun.

## Stretch attention spans

By the time children leave preschool and enter kindergarten, they often are expected to be able to control themselves in “circle time” for 10 to 20 minutes. Reading time at home is a great way to practice.

## Awaken a budding author

One last note: read the names of both the author and illustrator when you start a new book. You’ll be amazed how easy it is for children to connect books by the same authors and illustrators. If your child seems to have an interest in learning more, read the brief author biography on the back or inside cover of the book. You never know, you might have the next Dr. Seuss or Maurice Sendak sitting in your reading chair.

*Tiffany Spaulding is a freelance writer and a mom in Tacoma, Washington.*



## See also:

Parts 1 and 2 of this series, “Cuddle up,” “Stacking the shelf” and “Book talk,” which appear in the Wonder Years development guides for children 36–42 months and 42–48 months. If you don’t have a copy, click Development Guides at [www.WonderYears.info](http://www.WonderYears.info), ask for a copy from the organization that gave you this issue, or call 800-832-2464 and ask for a copy.

# Getting School Ready

*What do children need to be ready for school?*

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS	YOU CAN...
I need to know how to talk with others and to listen.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Talk with me about things I’m interested in.</li><li>• Teach me how to know when it’s my turn to speak and when I need to listen.</li><li>• Teach me words to describe my feelings and needs, and when to use them.</li></ul>
LEARNING SKILLS	YOU CAN...
I need to learn to try things and keep trying even when it seems hard.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Give me activities that hold my interest.</li><li>• Help me explore and try new activities.</li><li>• Help me learn step by step.</li><li>• Teach me that making mistakes is part of learning.</li><li>• Show me different ways to understand my world.</li></ul>
I need many ways to express myself.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Help me dance, sing, whistle, play instruments, paint, draw, color, build, invent and make believe.</li><li>• Help me care about others and help them, too.</li><li>• Help me notice and talk about flowers, trees, animals, clouds, sky and water.</li></ul>
USING WORDS AND NUMBERS	YOU CAN...
I need to know shapes, sizes and colors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Give me things to sort by shape, size or color.</li><li>• Help me find and name shapes and colors all around me.</li></ul>
KEEPING SAFE AND HEALTHY	YOU CAN...
I need to have bathroom and self-help skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Teach me the words to tell other grown-ups when I need to go to the bathroom, or am feeling sick or hurt.</li><li>• Help me practice going to the bathroom, washing my hands, dressing and tying my shoes.</li><li>• Encourage me to try things I’ve learned before I ask an adult for help.</li></ul>
I need to be able to use my hands and fingers to do small tasks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Help me learn to pick up, hold and use pencils, crayons, markers, paintbrushes and scissors.</li><li>• Help me make things with blocks, paper, cardboard and tape.</li></ul>

Used with permission from the Getting School Ready Project (Seattle/King County, Washington). [www.gettingschoolready.org](http://www.gettingschoolready.org)



## Grandparenting 101

# Family Feuds? Find a solution—quick!

By Heidi Hoff

**G**randparents can add so much to a child's life. Experts agree that a positive relationship with your child's grandparents can benefit everyone in the family. However, distance, lifestyle and personality conflicts can all get in the way of family affairs. Strained relationships cause stress that even the youngest child can feel.

Most disagreements between parents and grandparents can be easily resolved if both sides are willing to compromise and communicate.

### Problem

Four-year-old Devon's grandparents shower her with gifts the minute they walk into her home. Devon runs toward them with arms outstretched. As soon as she has unwrapped everything, Devon goes to her room to play with her old dolls. She leaves her grandparents alone with her parents; the gifts are scattered across the living room floor.

### Solution

Devon's grandparents don't realize they might be trying to buy her love by spoiling her with gifts. They might also be hurt by Devon's behavior. The grandparents should

cut back on gifts and spend more time with Devon. She will soon value them for who they are, not for the gifts they bring her.

### Problem

Your in-laws live near by but don't make the effort to visit very often. Your children sadly ask why they seldom see their grandparents.

### Solution

Talk privately with your in-laws and tell them how your children feel. They may think they are violating your privacy or family time if they visit too often. Agree on how often they should visit, perhaps alternating houses so you both feel you're not imposing.

### Problem

Your in-laws stop by too often and urge your child to break your rules.

### Solution

Remind your in-laws that you prefer a phone call before most visits. Talk with your children about family rules and the reasons for them; keep rules simple. Tell children family rules stay the same at home, even if Grandma and Grandpa's rules are different. If your in-laws break a

rule, ask the children to restate the rule. It might take a bit of practice, but sooner or later your in-laws will have no choice but to abide by your house rules.

### Problem

Your parents love your children but don't believe grandparents should be relied on for child care. They say they have raised their family without anyone's help and now it's your turn to raise yours.

### Solution

Though you may wish your parents were a little more "hands-on," you can't change the way they feel about wanting to enjoy their freedom. Speak kindly about them and tell your children their grandparents love them, but they're simply enjoying other activities. Hire a babysitter instead.

### Problem

You and your family live thousands of miles away from your children's grandparents. Visits are few and you worry your children will grow up having no sense of extended family.

### Solution

Encourage your children to send grandparents notes, or drawings if they are too young to write. Help them call, send e-mail messages or a print a few sentences on the back of a post card. Keep a memory book of visits together and look at it often. Make a photo journal of your lives, either on the Internet or in a scrapbook. Share it with grandparents, who can add their own pictures, then send it back to you.

*Heidi Hoff ([www.heidihoff.com](http://www.heidihoff.com)) is a freelance writer specializing in parenting and health topics. She lives with her family in British Columbia, Canada.*



## What the bears taught us

By Michelle Jones

**I** was looking forward to a peaceful day with my three-year-old daughter, Allison. We planned to visit the animals at our local zoo. Our favorites have always been the two black bears; we enjoy watching the zookeepers feed them broccoli and strawberries. Allison cannot believe bears eat the same foods she does. We have watched the bears play in their pools during hot summer days. At times, we wished we could take a dip in the water with them.

On this day, there was only one bear. My daughter looked at me with her big

trusting eyes and asked, "Mommy, where's the other bear?"

A small sign explained that the bear had been very old and sick and had to be put to sleep. Hoping to sidestep the issue of death, I told my daughter that the bear was simply gone.

"Where did the bear go?" she questioned in typical three-year-old fashion. "How did he leave the zoo? Did he drive a car out of the parking lot? How did he learn to drive?"

Taking a deep breath, I tried to find the right way to explain death. So far, Allison

had been sheltered from death, and she had such a carefree way about her. Would the reality of death scare her? Would it change the way she looked at life?

I decided an honest explanation would probably be best, so I told her what the sign said. This sparked many more questions about death. Over the next few hours, we talked about how everything has a birth, a life, and a death. Our discussion didn't make Allison sad as I had feared, but it did help her better understand our world. I want her to trust me to answer her questions truthfully, even when they are difficult.

**Her simple questions about death make me step back and really think about my job as her parent.**

It is easy to get wrapped up in the day-to-day tasks of parenting. Juice must be poured, clothes must be washed, and peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches must be made. Her simple questions about death make me step back and really think about my job as her parent. She looks to me for so much more than just kissing boo-boos

and reading stories. For now, I am her expert on life. I won't always know the answers to big questions, but I'll always be willing to look for answers with her.

We went to the zoo to visit the animals. She left with many new ideas to think about, and I left with a better understanding of my role as a parent.

## Good grief: Guiding children through loss

Times of sadness offer teachable moments. With our help, children can understand the feelings that come with grief. They can also learn new coping skills and to embrace life.

How can you help your child through times of loss? Remember two general rules: Children grieve differently than adults do, and they grieve over time. In addition, remember preschoolers between the ages of three and five:

- Will sense a loss, even if you don't talk about it. They pick up signals from adults around them.
- Don't understand death. They often think dead people continue to eat, drink, and go to the bathroom in heaven.
- Have magical thinking. For example, preschoolers may believe if you walk on a grave, the person feels it. They may wonder if bad thoughts about the person caused the death or if wishing can make them alive.

### Preschoolers may:

- Seem more dependent or cling more to you.
- Have more tantrums.
- Wet the bed or suffer from constipation.
- Have nightmares.

### What can you do to help?

- Use the word "death" or "dead"; never say "went to sleep" or "passed away." Get used to saying the word so it becomes less upsetting.
- Answer questions in short sentences using simple, honest words.
- Give comfort, hugs, and touch as needed.
- Stick to schedules, including the same bed time every night.
- Use dolls or pictures to help you answer questions or explain what happened.

These tips are adapted from a longer article by Brenda Nixon. Read the full article at [www.WonderYears.info](http://www.WonderYears.info).

## Resources

**800-942-HELP**—This Parent Helpline offers 24-hour answers to your parenting questions, with referrals to services that can help.

**Project Find**—All children develop at different rates. But if you are concerned about your child's development, **Project Find** can refer your child for a free evaluation and, if needed, help you locate educational services. Call **800-252-0052** or visit [www.earlyonmichigan.org/PF.htm](http://www.earlyonmichigan.org/PF.htm).

**A Lullaby of Sounds and Words**—This booklet by the FACT Coalition at Michigan State University offers tips on how children develop and how to reach them at each stage using words, song, and actions. Available for \$1.00 from the FACT Coalition at **517-432-9207** or download at no cost from

[www.fcs.msue.msu.edu/earlyliteracy](http://www.fcs.msue.msu.edu/earlyliteracy).

### Countdown to Kindergarten

**Successful Kindergarten Transition: Your Guide to Connecting Children, Families, and Schools** by Robert C. Pianta and Marcia Kraft-Sayre, Baltimore, Md. Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 2003. This hands-on guide helps

early educators, parents and schools prepare children for school and schools for children.

### Ready Web

<http://readyweb.crc.uiuc.edu/index.html>  
Links to dozens of tips and articles on topics related to school readiness. Click on "Virtual Library, and you'll find a whole set of Tips for Parents.

### Getting School Ready

[www.gettingschoolready.org](http://www.gettingschoolready.org)  
offers the *Getting School Ready Guide* and Resource Kit, along with links to resources for parents, child care providers and teachers.

### Reading aloud

**Reading Magic: Why Reading Aloud to Our Children Will Change Their Lives Forever** by Mem Fox, Harcourt, 2001.

**The Read-Aloud Handbook** (5th ed.) by Jim Trelease, Penguin USA, 2001.

### Helping children through loss

**The Mourning Handbook: The Most Complete Resource Offering Practical and Compassionate Advice on Coping with All Aspects of Death and Dying** by Helen Fitzgerald, Simon & Schuster, 1995.

**Tough Boris** by Mem Fox, Scholastic, 1994.

About a pirate who cries when his parrot dies. Teaches that people can be both tough and tender.

**The Hickory Chair** by L. Fraustino, Scholastic, 2001.

A family that includes a boy with visual impairment grieves the death of a grandmother.

**It's O.K. to Cry** by L.C.

Anderson, Children's Press, 1979. A four-year-old tries to tell his older brother that their favorite uncle is dead. Includes questions and answers relating to the story and the topic of death.

**A Look at Death** by R. Anders, Lerner, 1978. Pictures present the concept of death and the customs of mourning.

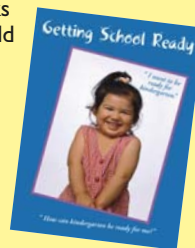
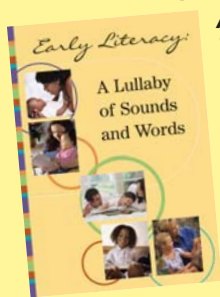
### Compassionate Friends

[www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)  
Assistance to parents, grandparents, and siblings following the death of a child of any age.

**National Association of School Psychologist's website**

[www.nasponline.org](http://www.nasponline.org)  
Resources to help you identify symptoms of severe stress and grief reactions.

**You can find all the resources mentioned in this publication at [www.WonderYears.info](http://www.WonderYears.info).**



Helping parents make a difference, right from the start.

Wonder Years is a collaborative publication of:



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Editor: Linda Wacyk  
Reader Relations: Jan Mason  
Design: Blue Pencil Creative Group

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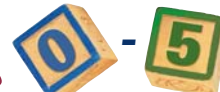
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# Wonder Years

AGES



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## Tricks of the trade

### Parents, don't talk back.

**B**attling with your child? You're not alone. At some point, every parent asks, "Why won't my child listen?" The answer may be that you're talking too much.

When children are involved in an activity they enjoy, it can be very hard for them to stop what they are doing and move to something new. When parents beg, plead or demand, they make the battle worse.

A child who resists transitions is not necessarily misbehaving. Look at the situation from your child's point of view. He spends much of the day in settings where he has little control with adults who can out-

talk, out-smart and overpower him. No wonder children try to be in charge.

So how can parents make transition times easier?

- **Make the struggle between the child and the rule, rather than between you and the child.** Instead of saying, "You need to clean up," say, "The clock says we need to leave soon." Instead of saying, "Put on your coat," say "Remember, when the weather is wet, raincoats stay on."
- **Join the play.** Children are always in play mode; why not make the best of it? Pick up a doll or action figure and have a little "talk." Say to the toy, "We're going shopping, but will you wait here until we come back?" This reassures the child that he *will* get to play again soon. Get your child involved. Ask him to tell his truck, "Park under the footstool until I get back, and then we'll haul these blocks."

- **Tell, don't ask.** Say, "It's time to put your coat on," instead of asking, "Ready to get your coat on?" In fact, avoid questions with yes-or-no answers—unless you're willing to accept "no" for an answer, of course.
- **Talk about the behavior you want.** Instead of saying "Quit dawdling," say, "Be ready before I finish turning out the lights."

Child's play may seem unimportant to a busy parent on the go, but it can be critical to a child's development. Next time your child says "no" to leaving their play, try to remember that some resistance is normal, and even healthy for his growth.

You can't always control your child's behavior, but you can control what you say. Stay positive, get in the game, and don't engage in a war of words.



Send tips or tricks to *Wonder Years*, Tricks of the Trade, 321 N. Pine, Lansing, MI 48933. We'll post the best tips to the *Wonder Years* Web site at [www.WonderYears.info](http://www.WonderYears.info) for other parents to read and try with their own children. Each person who sends a tip will receive a free gift.