

HEALTH VISITORS' LEAGUE SECTION

The Health of the Pre-School Child

The first six years of a child's life, before school begins, give the home a golden opportunity. The little child knows father, mother and home during these early years. Father and mother should give the child a home in which he can have the right food, the proper clothing, the proper physical life, a home in which he feels and sees those qualities upon which his character is to be built—love, unselfishness, honesty, loyalty, purity, truth.

Home is the whole world of a little child. These early years are the first big challenge to parents. What your child will be at 21 is so intimately related to what he is at 7 that not one hour is to be wasted or neglected. Understanding and love are as important as clean milk and fresh air.

I. THE LITTLE CHILD'S NORMAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Parents cannot play the health game squarely with their children unless they know the rules, and these rules are determined by what the parents expect



in the matter of growth and development. How can father or mother know for certain just what a child is doing? The only way is to have a definite goal for each year of the child's life and see that the child takes the definite steps which lead to that goal. Few children drift toward the sound health goal. That voyage must be carefully charted and there must be an intelligent hand at the wheel. The new baby

must never be allowed to crowd the runabout child off the course! "Not to be mother's baby any more" is hard enough for the three-year-old to swallow without depriving him of the old-time care and regularity of habits of his period of babyhood! The need for such care of the little child is constantly revealed by the number of little children who reach the school gate with physical defects. Too many parents make growth entirely a matter of the child's clothes. The child is growing if he outgrows his clothes! Quite true, but he may not be developing properly at all or he may be growing in spite of serious defects rather than because of good care. We must know what to expect of the little child if we are to help him attain the sound mind and sound body.

Average standards are safe guides for your child's normal growth and development, but *only* guides. Children vary as individuals and all schedules and tables are based upon the figures of averages. In rejecting such figures as guides for your child's growth and development, however, be sure you are doing so from an intelligent understanding of your particular child and *not* from the angle of a grown-up prejudice or your neighbor's children or what you were at 6 yourself.

What should the average expectations of a child's normal growth and development say to parents? From 2 to 6 years the body *weight* is nearly doubled. Has your child increased nearly twenty pounds in weight during this period? *Height* increases about twelve inches from 2 to 6, a gain of about three inches a year. The child's skull reaches its adult circumference by 6 years, and the brain almost its adult weight. What does this mean for you in relation to your own child? It means that you will understand as never before the nervous instability of that period caused by the rapidly growing

brain. You will avoid shocks and excitements, tempers and scenes for your little child. You will be more patient with "upsets" and you will protect those growing nerve cells from disease or damage or overstimulation of any kind.

What does the growth of bone say to you? The soft baby structure of cartilage is ossifying into the bony framework and the long bones are growing rapidly. This must all grow properly, and the way your child sits, walks, runs, stands still, lies in bed are all important matters to him, determining whether that far-away adult you sometimes dream of is going to be straight and supple in form without the slightest bone or posture defect of any kind.

The heart almost quadruples its weight in the first five and a half years from the thickening of the heart muscles. That heart must be protected from overstrain, and we must remember as well that certain diseases affect the growing heart muscles. Diphtheria, scarlet fever, bronchopneumonia, influenza, tonsillitis and certain forms of rheumatic fever are to be strenuously avoided for a rapidly growing little child, because the risks of damage to the heart are so great.

Indeed, the runabout child who is exploring a bigger world with many more contacts with other children needs to be carefully protected from disease, particularly the infectious diseases. The whole bodily instability of this rapid growth period renders him more susceptible to disease—respiratory diseases, acute infectious diseases and contagious diseases. Statistics show that 81 per cent. of the deaths in the United States result from contagious diseases, and 85 per cent. of these illnesses from contagious diseases occur under 5 years of age. To give the child a "good chance to catch measles or whooping cough because he might just as well have the disease and get through with it" is as ignorant and foolish as to give him a shotgun to play with. Every child should be protected from such diseases before he is 6 years of age and after he is 6 years of age.

II. THE MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL LIFE OF THE NORMAL CHILD

The physical development of the child is paralleled by the mental development and an *understanding of the growth of the emotional life and of the more subtle traits of character* is just as important as the appreciation of the more tangible physical aspects of growth. The sense activities develop rapidly and with amazing keenness—*touch* begins to show very fine discriminations during this period as anyone knows who has tried to pacify a crying youngster by putting the wrong doll into her hands in the dark of her little bed. It saves time to turn on the light and find the right one! The child's *powers of concentration* at 3 are often a challenge to the endurance of an athletic grown-up. The third, fourth and fifth years are the "what," "why" and "how" stages of the normal child's curiosity in the world around him.

This period offers a most severe "intelligence test" to parents. Slapping or otherwise silencing the young questioner is a cruel and ignorant way of meeting this normal mental development. If children have intelligence enough to ask a question, they surely have a right to an intelligent answer from us grown-ups, an answer true and adapted to their mental powers.

It is especially important for parents to know how to answer safely the difficult questions about birth and other phases of sex that are usually asked before the child is 6. The child's interest in all parts and functions of his or her own body is normal. Any questions he asks about where babies or little animals come from should be answered truthfully and simply enough for him to understand. Any embarrassment or lack of helpfulness in this matter on the part of the parents will make the child suspicious of the parents' wisdom and good faith.

on other important questions. The way in which some parents repel such questions causes actual fright in the child, and fright or shock of any sort is a danger as great as physical illness and sometimes more lasting.

Memory is a strong development of this period. One might say it becomes the background of curiosity. Every answer given the little child is stored away in the active brain to be used often to our complete "undoing" later if we have been careless in satisfying the curiosity. *Imitation* is perhaps the earliest and strongest "urge" we find in the little child. He learns almost everything from those around him; his smiles, his frowns, his quality and intonation of voice, and his moods all reflect what he sees and hears.

Burns would not have sung to-day,

"O wad some Power the giftie gie us
To see oursel's as ithers see us!"

He would have advised us grown-ups to watch our own children from 2 to 6 for accurate pictures of ourselves. The little child is a perfect mirror, so perfect that we often feel he is more of a high-powered magnifying glass! He wants to do everything we do, he tries to say everything we say and often succeeds with amazing and disconcerting accuracy! But imagination in the end saves him from us grown-ups. By 6 years of age other worlds crowd in upon him and he is not so interested in imitating us just when we think it might be worth his while! He begins to imagine himself playing his own part and his young adventurous spirit begins to build a world of his own. He does not copy us literally any more but uses, as stage properties, the things he saw in us that will best serve his purposes. We are often sobered and saddened by his choices. The only hope we have for any peace of mind for ourselves is to realize before it is too late that our little child is not just an amusing, adorable plaything, but a definite individual developing so rapidly that each year is fixing certain habits of mind and body so securely in his make-up that they can only be changed with gravest difficulty and perhaps never can be.

Reasoning begins by the time a child is 2 years old and by 6 or 7 his whole reasoning process is well under way. And what is reasoning in its simplest terms but that method of thought by which we arrive at judgments? The little child is slowly but surely building up his *method* of approach to any subject or issue, and how many parents say when meeting a problem of an adult child, "It is strange but that is just the way he used to argue when he was a little boy." Not strange at all, but the normal result of the little child's methods.

All the *emotions* of a child are growing and expanding during this pre-school period. Love, anger, fear, hatred and jealousy, buried deep in the race for hundreds of thousands of years, are all there ready to be used when the fire strikes. The child's social instincts develop as rapidly as his brain and heart. Every mother sees with a little pang how quickly *her* baby begins to be interested in others around him. Until he is 3, mother and father are his most familiar friends, but by 6 he is really ready for school and his schoolmates.

The child's sense of ownership appears very early. His own things are very much his own, but, with his instinct to play with others, comes the chance to teach him to share with others. His play with his own brothers and sisters gives him his first concept of the idea of companionship.

These guides to normal growth and development teach one great lesson. The pre-school period offers opportunities that must not be lost. Here is where our child lays the foundation stones of his mental, physical and spiritual adult life. This period is essentially the *period of the home and the parents*. If we are blind to the possibilities of this period, we have only ourselves to blame for later disasters.

The Andamanese

I am going to finish off my account of the Andamans which I began last month while on the ship which is carrying me back through a sea like blue glass, to India. It has been a perfectly fascinating holiday of which perhaps the last week, when we went on a cruise down to the Nicobar Islands, was the most memorable, for those Islands are so exquisitely beautiful.

And the people were so interesting; the Nicobarese. They hardly take any interest in a ship anchoring off their coasts, the chief men come off in canoes to bring presents and to receive them, because it is a sign that they are not hostile, but having done that, they go back to their huts again and go on with their occupations. The women and children do not appear at all, and if one lands from a rowing boat, they take no notice of one. The Andamanese now, are different. They are a pigmy race, coal-black, and for the most part wear no clothes at all, except the women, who wear tufts of grass suspended from a string round the waist, like a Scotch soldier's 'sporrán.'

On the last day of our cruise, we landed on an island where the Ongay tribe live. They have not often been visited, and are not always friendly, but we evidently struck a fortunate day. Twenty-nine of these funny little people appeared out of the woods and were given presents—iron axe heads, files, tins of condensed milk, cigarettes and matches, etc., and they seemed delighted. Later, I made wreaths of leaves for some of the children, they were awfully pleased, and laughed charmingly. We decided to bathe as it was very hot, and several of the boys came into the water too and we had great fun playing ball with them and teaching them English words, which they were very quick to pick up, and in exchange they taught us their words.

The population of Port Blair and the Islands round is very mixed, consisting as it does for the most part of convicts from every part of India and Burma, or their descendants, who have stayed on the islands.

There used to be a very large population, numbering many thousands, but in 1921, the Government of India decided it was too expensive a scheme, and that it was to be given up as a convict settlement.

The convict population was then greatly reduced and the development of the settlement suffered a great set-back, as there were not enough men left to keep up the public works, roads, tram lines, sea walls, etc., and to continue draining the salt swamps, which has to be done before any fresh land near the coast is planted with rice or coconuts.

But now, convicts with life sentences are once more being sent down, and propaganda is being carried on in the provincial prisons to try to persuade prisoners to volunteer to go too, rather than to stay in the overcrowded jails, where they have not nearly such a splendid opportunity for 'making good' as they have in the Andamans, where they are permitted to have their wives and families sent down to them at Government expense, and where they receive an adequate allowance for each dependent until such time as they become self-supporting. There is a large Central Jail in a very healthy part of Port Blair, and the men with life sentences for murder or dacoity are sent straight there on arrival.

I was surprised at the care which is taken of them; they never even travel from Calcutta to Port Blair unless a doctor forms part of their escort, and of course there are excellent hospitals and dispensaries there. The present-day policy is to get a man out of the jail as soon as possible, before he loses his sense of independence. For those who have no occupations, there are various workshops where they are taught trades, and of course there are some incorrigible criminals who have to be kept in jail always. But the great majority