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## The Future of Make-Believe: From Three to Four Years

“I’m going to get big and you’re going to get little,” he says.

“What will you do to me when I get little?”

“I’ll put your coat on.”

“Why do you like playing with dolls?”

“If they are bad you can spank them. If they’re real bad you can stick a pin in them. And you couldn’t do that with babies cause they’ve got real tender bottoms.”

He burps.

“What’s that?” we ask.

“A fart of the throw-up,” he replies.

“Yesternight I dreamed that Daddy fell over and hit his head on the table.”

“I have a cut on my eye. That’s why I fell over.”



## GAMES AND OTHER THINGS TO DO

The games that follow are impressive for the increasing flexibility that they demand and for the reversals that occur in the players and in the moves they make.

*Role Reversal*

Now that children can pretend to be adults, fathers, or mothers in their own play and can portray some of the feelings of those adults, they can also accept and enjoy your pretending to be a child. At this age children are not particularly clear on the reversibility or irreversibility of age differences in any case. At this time television adds to the confusion by making grown-ups appear to be little. A popular child-image at this age is that there are little people inside the television box.

It is fun for the parent to pretend to be small and to be ordered about by the child, particularly since the parent can be disobedient and naughty, although it is important in these games not to become too powerful, even in the inferior role. Power is to be diminished, not exaggerated. You may have to set limits if the child becomes too tyrannical. The aim is humorous role switching. "I told you to eat the carpet." "I can't, cause I just turned into a sleeping dog." The general rule is that it is all pretending. "I *am* eating the carpet. I'm pretending." A danger is that you will be utterly superior, even in role switching, and it may be a further case of one-upmanship rather than shared play.

*Story Dialogues*

You have been and are still telling many stories in a fairly conventional way. You repeat them and repeat them and re-

Three to four years of age is a fairly stable period for a child. In the two preceding years you and your child have more or less ironed out your mutual family relationships. Children at this age have developed considerable competence in moving around (they can skip, jump, and run smoothly), and they are capable now with the smaller movements of threading, building blocks, and drawing. They can use pencils, paints, crayons, and paper in the ways they are supposed to be used. They are more efficient in dressing, eating, toileting, social exchanges, and talking. This is a year for much, although not very logical, talking.

Not surprisingly, the first forms of child-to-child social life begin to take place. Children create their first societies. In addition, the beginning of group play raises the question of play management—of who shall be boss and who shall be bossed.

Some children take important steps ahead in make-believe play and some do not, which raises the question of whether make-believe should be taught to those who do not use it very well. This is a revolutionary notion. People have often thought play to be useless. Those who thought it to be valuable felt that it was instinctive and that all the child needed was privacy and perhaps some equipment. We have suggested that playing games with your baby from birth is legitimate. Now we add the even more heretical suggestion that children might have to be coached in make-believe play.

Some children rise to a new level of play in this year that takes them beyond exploration and testing, beyond even imitation—namely, *play construction*. In addition to their social play, play construction is the play milestone for three- to four-year-olds.

peat them. But one way to make them more fun at this age is to make a dialogue out of them. "There were three bears, and then what happened?" A more advanced step is to have children tell you the story. This a marvelous event because the retelling is usually quite selective and tells you much about what they enjoy.

Our four-year-old loves "Hansel and Gretel," but what she always remembers first and cares about most is when they eat the candy off the old witch's house. The notion of a house made of candy is simply too much. In "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" she remembers the broken chair that Goldilocks sat in. She hurt her bottom when it broke. After the child has fallen off her chair countless times and hurt *her* bottom, this interest is not surprising. In "The Three Little Pigs" she delights in the wolf's coming down the chimney. Why, we do not know. In "Snow White" it is the prince—the prince all the way—and so much for those cunning little dwarfs.

Another possibility for these stories is to act them out together. The beach is a good place for this. Snow White is carried off by the witch and then rescued by the prince. Older brothers and sisters, as well as parents, can play the supporting roles, while the four-year-old is the princess or prince, the triumphant heroine or hero. This is like living out a fairy tale and completely fascinates three- or four-year-olds.

An important note in this day and age is that when you tell a folk story, try to make the hero or heroine the same sex as your child. In "Hansel and Gretel," if you tell it to a girl, Gretel can be the one who has the idea of dropping stones and crumbs to find the way home and ends up pushing the witch into the oven. In "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" there is no reason why the appealing little baby bear cannot be a girl bear. It is an unfortunate fact about fairy tales that the heroines usually get their rewards only by being rather sweet and having magic come their way—bc sweet and your

prince will come. But as we have emphasized throughout, you can be as flexible with fairy tales as with anything else. After you have read these stories once to refresh your memory, it is better thereafter to tell them yourself.

At the same time do not be too embarrassed about some magic here. This is a preschool age, and one needs a sense of being protected, of good things happening, of being in a good world. Do not expect your child to want to be a fully grown person yet, a feminist for example. That can be scary also, because it imposes burdens when your child is still too young. Children at this age want to feel that they can protect others and that they will be protected. Unfortunately many of them get only the message that they are helpless and will not be protected, to which they react by feeling completely inadequate or by being very aggressive and hostile. So do not underestimate the *benevolence* and magic in fairy tales; it is important at this age.

### Board and Card Games

Children cannot really understand board and card games yet, but they can enjoy "playing" at playing them with you. They give you half the pack, and you each take a turn at putting down a card, which they then put somewhere else. You can assist in minor ways by picking the cards up and dividing them. Sometimes they partly understand you when you sort reds and blacks, but they cannot do it consistently. Likewise with board games there is a certain amount of throwing dice, counting the dots, sorting the counters, tracing the journey on the Parcheesi board, etc. They feel that they are playing the game. Similarly they can roll marbles around and store them in containers, and because they appear like other players, they feel that they are playing a game. But in our terms it is mainly a mastery exercise in the mystery of

these properties—tolling them around, seeing what they will do, etc. Sometimes the throwing or rolling will excite them, and they will laugh and get involved in their own game.

#### *Hide and Seek*

You are both really taking turns at hiding and seeking now, but children do not really understand you as the seeker when they are the hider or you as the hider when they are the seeker. Thus, they get upset if they cannot find you fairly quickly, and they wander out of their hiding places when you are supposed to be seeking. Still, much of the time the finding and hiding, even though they only partly understand it all, are fun.

#### *Telephone Conversations*

Just as a dialogue between you and the child becomes more possible in the telling of stories, such dialogues are even easier with toy or pretend telephones. You can talk about the events of the day, and requests for immediate help in an accident are common content. Further, you can call "others" to the phone and imitate other voices, so that everything gets hilarious after a bit.

#### *Races*

You can race with children now. They race a tricycle; you use a four-legged crawl. First to touch the door wins. But you never win—you keep falling over, or you get a pin in your hand—anything. Competition is too intense and loss is too overwhelming yet for you to win, but you can draw.

#### *Winning and Losing*

There are some parents who cannot wait to get on with the competition—the winning and losing. There are others who abominate the competitive system and think if we could cut out all winning and losing, that would be the end of war and the atom bomb. Either way, let us postpone the issue until about the age of seven years. Losing experiences carry too much weight in these early years; they are overwhelming. The adults who think it is OK generally are not very sensitive to the needs and feelings of those around them. They are the ones who throw children in the water to get them used to it. This kind of thing does not always fail, but it usually does. The odds are against its helping much. Having fun together and trusting and believing in one's playmates are probably a better basis for building courage at a later age. At this point you are the reassuring playmate.

#### *TEACHING PLAY*

Up to this point we have been playing or teaching games that have been above the level of the child's own solitary play. The question whether we shouldn't also play with children *at*, rather than *above*, their own level of play has been raised by those who are worried that some children are not developing their imaginative powers to a sufficient extent.

In the last chapter we talked about participating in children's make-believe play. This is something that intelligent parents and nursery school teachers have always done to some extent. In recent years, however, the suggestion has been made that there are large groups of disadvantaged children who do not engage in make-believe play and who should be taught to do so; otherwise they will not develop

their imaginative powers. Since the whole theme of this book has to do with playing with children in various ways (through games and through their own make-believe), for us this is a central issue. Although we talk here mainly of children in nursery school, kindergarten, or day-care centers, what we have to say applies equally well to parents who are concerned with knowing just where their own child's play level is and how to play with the child beginning at that level.

Is it possible that make-believe and imagination are not universal? It hardly seems so. We know that every human culture is a creative product. Each culture is like a "human" experiment in being alive at a certain time and in a certain place, and the responses to that problem have varied most widely from place to place. Now what we call imagination in modern society or, in the present case, make-believe play is something we have come to identify as the result of the writings of people highly gifted in fantasy (Lewis Carroll, James Barrie, Walt Disney) and the result of writers famous in the nursery school movement (Friedrich Froebel, Susan Isaacs). Whether these people meant to make it this way or not, the common-sense notion of make-believe play used these days means playing with dolls, houses, blocks, and trucks in a playroom. A sceptic would say that this is make-believe adapted to living in a comfortable suburban house, tucked away at a safe distance from the rigors of the outdoor world and the dangers from the people of the streets.

Because most modern psychologists have been brought up in this tradition, they have tended to assume that if children did not play this way, then they did not play at all. Yet this is clearly not true. The anthropological record shows that there are many different ways of playing and many different kinds of games. Children do not all grow up the same way. There is no single language of play. There are many foreign languages of play. There are groups that do not have any of the games that we regard as so natural.

Let us look for a moment at the Australian aborigines, who have many imaginative games. These groups have often been said to be the most "primitive." Perhaps what is really meant by that is that their struggle for survival has been sufficiently difficult that they have had little time left for the kinds of development that we regard as complex. The evidence is however that many of their terminologies for plants, animals, and social relationships are just as complex as ours.

Their play is indeed a long catalog of preparation for tracking, tree climbing, canoing, hunting, spearing, animal identification, boomeranging, fighting, swimming, marriage and family, cooking, fire making, corroborees, sand drawing, storytelling, singing, string figures, memory training, and mimicry. There are very high requirements for *mastery* in exploration, testing, and imitation.

Thus, in historical aboriginal Australia adults reward children who make the best imitations of kangaroos, emus or other birds, iguanas, tortoises, cockatoos, and crocodiles. Adults reproduce with great care the various forms of animal tracks. The children are encouraged to imitate them and are praised or criticized accordingly by their elders. The foot tracks of individual tribe members are also practiced. It is not unusual for a mother to "lose" her child away from camp and so make the child find her tracks and follow her home.

The children have to know what their natural world is like and how it functions, and they have to know who they are and what they can do in relation to their world if they are to survive. But in many cases there is a playful and "imaginative" extension of these forms of mastery. Even the most important of tribal festivals, the corroboree, is imitative. The boys paint their bodies and perform their mimicry of dances for the younger children. Clowning and individual wit are as valued as in the true ceremony. At the other end of the scale children make playthings of frogs tied by the legs or iguanas

ried by the tail. Even carpet snakes, with their teeth rubbed down, are treated as pets.

In a game of water birds one child, unseen by the others, hides himself at the water's edge and imitates the call of a particular bird. The others must use their hunting skills to attempt to "catch" the bird, and the mimic has to try to escape using only the physical actions of the bird. To do this he might dive under the water, surfacing with his head covered with duck weed in imitation of various water birds and animals. Now clearly in games like this one the imagination is disciplined by the requirements of the game, but it is hard to deny either that the game as a whole is an imaginative exercise or that in the course of the game considerable make-believe elaboration is required by the central player.

The situation is much like that in those parts of the modern world where children grow up with adults for whom physical skill is still their major mode of living. Children who grow up on farms, for example, spend most of their mastery time and playtime perfecting physical skills. They physically explore their environment and physically test themselves against it. They are imitating their hunting and laboring fathers and mothers.

For poverty children who grow up in city streets there is the additional need to do battle against all the other deprived. The struggle for survival involves doing physical battle with others on a day-to-day basis. The greater proportion of mastery focuses on these urgent matters. When there is scope for play (some free time, some familiarity, some safety), it centers upon the same issues. There is chasing and fighting of a mock character.

What has shocked many middle-class nursery school teachers dealing for the first time with poverty children or those from homes where physical struggle is the essence of survival is that these children do not fit in very easily with the middle-class, carpeted, and sedentary climate of the nursery school.

They do not know what to do there. Often they fight over toys. They are relatively at home outdoors with tricycles, jungle gyms, racing about, jumping, climbing, chasing, and fighting, but they do not have much use for blocks, sand, water, or playing house.

Some teachers think, therefore, that these children are without imagination. But as we have been demonstrating, this is not completely true. The children simply do not show the type of imaginative development with which the professionals are familiar; their imagination has been applied to survival in the streets.

Should we teach make-believe play? We have pointed out that imagination is everywhere, although the modern forms of make-believe are of one type only and that type is very extensive. A number of modern investigators have tried, fairly successfully, to teach modern kinds of make-believe to poverty children. They have been able to show that teaching make-believe improves make-believe play and also that children who have gone through quite a short program of make-believe teaching also improve their scores in creativity tests. (In creativity tests one gets a high score for having original or unusual ideas about how to use different objects, words, or diagrams.)

Children of the future, who are more likely to work with computers and must understand automation, may need a lot more make-believe play than they are currently being taught. In make-believe, as in most modern work, one deals with *symbols* rather than *things*. Make-believe play is symbolic play. Children play with representations of things rather than with the things themselves, and that is what so much of the modern world is like. We manage our lives with words, pictures, or numbers, all of which are symbols.

As with all game playing, the make-believe that is introduced should be made consistent with the current make-believe of your children. Sometimes three-year-olds who are being judged not to indulge in make-believe can be seen

doing quite a bit of it on the jungle gym or while chasing in and out of the swings. Often these high moments of social interaction are overlooked by many teachers because they are rowdy and boisterous. Yet surely a first step might be to encourage these higher moments of interaction and to add to their symbolism.

Why not give the chasers some monster costumes to wear? Have a safe base that is painted like an apartment. Gradually develop rules for being safe on white sidewalk lines painted on the playground but not safe off these lines. This, of course, requires teacher or parent participation; they must give examples of how to play. They have to set limits and insist on turn-taking. Perhaps in the beginning tagging will not be essential. A player who is being chased should walk innocently until the monster emerges and then run for the safe base, always arriving safely. The monster's job is merely to threaten and to chase, but events can be so arranged that the monster never catches the player.

Many more examples can be developed of make-believe extensions of the highest level of social play that the children have already reached. This seems a natural way to proceed but has seldom been followed, perhaps because we as parents and teachers are not used to applying our imagination to the development of children who imagine in other ways.

The most important principle in all this is that you *teach this kind of play by playing*. You do not talk about it. You do not say "What do you want to play?" or "What shall we do now?" That is fatal. You act out playing with a doll yourself, being its mother, or you play the doctor examining the baby in make-believe. Are we talking about make-believe too early here? No; make-believe can be in the child's own behavior as early as three years of age. If we do not assist at this point, it gets harder as the years go by. All of our current research would also suggest that we will have a greater long-term effect

on children if we teach their *parents* how to engage in the make-believe with their own children. Teaching children is not as effective as teaching parents.

## THE CHILD'S OWN PLAY

### Social Play

One of our problems in writing about children's social play is that traditionally children as young as two or three years old have not been studied extensively. Thus, when we say that four-year-olds can do something, it may well turn out that as there is more opportunity for children to be together in the earlier years, even two-year-olds will be able to do these things. For that we must wait and see. The point of this part of the chapter is that just as you can observe children's levels of solitary play, you can also observe their levels of social play.

Between the ages of two and four years it becomes increasingly difficult to tell the difference between solitary and social play because there is a mixture of both. In the nursery situation or in your own home individual children play at their own things but quite often watch others, imitate something the others are doing, share something with someone else, and very occasionally participate in somebody else's play idea. A few moments of shared play may be sufficient for the announcement that they have a "friend."

As we have said earlier, most people, including children, spend most of their free time watching others. Football and baseball were not the earliest spectator sports. In the nursery school or anywhere else where there are other children about, they attract each other's attention. If one child is doing something that can be copied, another child may soon be doing

the same thing. If one is piling blocks on top of each other, another will probably soon be doing so. This is *contagion play*.

Occasionally as children imitate each other, they accidentally do the same thing together. One child is banging a block, another does the same, another does the same, and in no time a table full of three-year-olds are busy thumping more or less in time. The teacher comes running in great annoyance, but at that moment the three-year-olds have reached a very high peak of social existence for them. This can be called *unison play*.

When we realize that rhythm, group prayer, ritual, and choral activity have played a leading role in every society that we know of, it becomes clear that the children's discovery is one that is universal with mankind. It is not cynical to say that in some ways unison activity is the highest social peak of which people are capable. It is the only time when they are truly *at one* with each other in a way that provides evidence of everyone's involvement.

Anyway, this is what three-year-olds discover and what intelligent teachers of three-year-olds use in their rhythm and movement classes, with simple songs or the beating of a drum. At this age children rise to a new peak when they are helped to sing along or move along at the same time with others.

At three also, with a little bit of pressure from the teachers and later from each other, they can manage social behavior if they take turns. *Turn-taking*, which is being studied by Dr. Catherine Garvey, of Johns Hopkins University, is one of those universals of human behavior that facilitate all sorts of social activities (from concert performances to getting on buses). There are several levels within this that deserve mention:

1. We take turns, but we do the same thing. We echo each other. One child bangs her block twice, the next

child bangs his block twice, the first bangs hers again twice, the second bangs his again twice. Thus, we have alternation of the same behavior.

2. We take turns, but we do different things that we repeat. One child makes the sounds of a lion, the other responds by making the sounds of a bear; the first repeats the lion, the second the bear.
3. We take turns, but we change as we go. One child is a lion, the next a tiger; then the first is a gorilla, the second a dog; the first is a cow, the second a cat; etc. Most conversations in early childhood are like this.

Obviously more-complex forms would be involved if more children participated, as they will in the succeeding years. At this point managing two together is a significant accomplishment.

The easiest form of play for a child is where everyone does what he wants them to, and that is the basic form of organization in authoritarian societies. It is the most natural thing in the world for three-year-olds to want to be the center pin of any play activity. Their capacity for insight into the feelings or behaviors of others is as yet very limited. A great deal of young children's play during this and the next four years will be structured around one dominant player—that is, *central-person play*.

You might ask how the other children put up with it. They are also egocentric. They also want the play structured around them. Although that is true, even more important for young children is to be included in play with others. So if a dominant child actually has ideas for play and can tell the others what to do, which takes a fair bit of precocity at three years but will be more common by five years, others will often willingly join in, because the maintenance of social play, the being with others, hardly otherwise occurs.

It is important to stress how fundamental this kind of play is. Most of the games children will play up to ten years of



age center on the actions of a central person. All the chasing games, all the circle games, focus on the player who is "It" and what that player does. So central-person play is not just egocentricity; it is the mutual fitting together of the dominance of one child and the dependence of the others.

So strong is such central-person play that occasionally in later years a particularly strong leader child will lead a whole group of peers off into some wild escapade, even of potential danger, such as stone throwing, running across the road, pursuing some other frightened children, etc. But this is more typical of four- and five-year-olds than of three-year-olds. It is the first form of charismatic leadership.

Occasionally at this age a group of children will be welded together by their real or fantasied fear of some dangerous central figure, such as a dog or a monster, and they will all run squealing into some place of retreat. This is a unison activity in its way. It is usually very temporary, because most of the children cannot manage the potentially real quality of the fear. They are not quite brave enough to play this yet, unless the feared person or thing is really thoroughly familiar and reassuring.

Sometimes even at this age children are able to aggregate together in a loose form of play association around a *common theme*. Most often this has to do with houses and families, which are the most familiar common theme for all the players. Another common theme is going to the supermarket. At this stage each player's imaginings are different from the others'. But the objects, the words, and some of the processes are similar, so there is considerable parallelism within the same space. They occasionally exchange and go through cooperative processes (handing over goods), but this is ritual rather than insight.

As before, however, the presence of a slightly older child will support many of these common themes. Thus, one will

be the witch, and the other runs away, each taking turns in frightening the other in a chase up the stairs; or one is the fireman and wakes the other up out of bed, and they both run from the fire; or one is the teacher and the other the pupil; or one the doctor and the other the patient; or one the storekeeper and the other the buyer. In each of these only one or two simple interactions occur. They run away from the witch; they run together from the fire; the teacher spansks the pupil; the doctor gives a shot to the patient, who goes to sleep; the storekeeper gives articles to the buyer, who takes them away.

Although children of three can seldom do these things with age peers, they can participate quite well in these fairly one-sided exchanges with older children. In fact their reaction may help to guide the older child, but their reaction may also be irrelevant to the general plot. Still, there is a reciprocation of sorts that does move the younger player closer to true sharing.

Social life is half cooperation and half bossiness. We have been discussing how three-year-olds get it together; now we shall take up the question of how they decide who is boss, which is a form of social testing. The business of central-person play shows that often they get together by agreeing that someone is in charge. There is little verbal agreement in this, and the person in charge may have only temporary status. All that child may do is be the one that starts something. After that it is follow the leader for a little while. A good example of this is a group of three-year-olds eating lunch outdoors. One of them starts to roll down the grassy bank. Soon all are rolling down the grassy bank and copying what any other innovative child newly introduces.

But this kind of thing is not an accident. In any free nursery school situation there is an incessant vying for power. Individual children try to influence others to do what they want

to have done. Children vary greatly in doing this by temperament and by prior experience. Some try incessantly to influence others, while others do not. These efforts are not simply a clash of egocentric wills. Much of it has to do with social and play management. You cannot play together unless there is some consensus, and that consensus has to be worked out.

The management of play is a difficult problem, and up until about the age of ten or so children may spend just as much time in arguing about management as they will in playing. This is the reason why many psychologists feel that free play is so valuable for children. They really do have to work out the rules for creating social life in their play. These cannot just be given to them by telling them to be cooperative. Sometimes a parent can discreetly support the authority of individual children so they can organize the others for a little longer.

In a study of our own we found that children even at the age of three use a wide diversity of power tactics with each other. They use physical means, they use verbal means, and they use strategies. Sometimes they just cry for help. They scream, put out their hands, plead, ask, pretend to cry, or offer gifts. They threaten to exclude others or offer to let them into the group. They try to get in by smiling, bribing, requesting, reasoning, distracting other children, or making someone else the target.

We found that girls more often used the technique of threatening exclusion than did three-year-old boys. Boys more often used physical attack and also verbal and strategic attack. (An example of strategic attack is creating a fantasy of what will happen to the other child if that child does not oblige. "If you don't give me that, the teacher will shut you in the closet.") Boys also use more straight bossy behavior. In fact, the three-year-old boys in our group used more power tactics than did the girls. This was surprising because these

were children of professionals where the mother and the father both worked and the children had few other differences in their kinds of play.

Our feeling is that although it is possible to discover many differences between boys and girls in their play, there is little that is inevitable about any of these. Each sex can learn the play and the games that the other sex does. Individual differences are always more pronounced than are group sex differences, even though in the history of human culture the division of work between the sexes has apparently been a good survival technique. Other research also shows that although boys and girls do not differ greatly in the amount of activity that they show in play, boys get much more active when they are around other boys. It seems that in some way parents give to boys the notion that it is their job to struggle and to be concerned with power relationships with other boys.

These present sex differences are in accord with the general finding that boys are more aggressive in play and in other behavior at all ages. The parents of boys would not argue with that. The differences are not only in physical aggression. The aggressiveness hides a variety of more-subtle influence attempts that have to do primarily with establishing one's place among a group of other children. An animal psychologist, for example, might argue that males are more concerned with pecking orders and their place in them than are females and that this is reflected in the play activities of both animals and children. It seems that in school playgrounds, as well as in more-informal situations, boys are much more concerned than are girls with their power relationships. These power relationships are not well sorted out until about seven years of age, when pecking orders take on a fairly stable form. Girls, on the other hand, tend to be more concerned with power relationships in small groups of one or two friends. In-

cluding and excluding are power tactics for the family or for friends. Perhaps these differences will change as time passes. At present they are still strong.

#### Solitary Play

It is becoming harder to separate progress in social play from progress in solitary play, and these lines will begin to break down in this chapter. Exploration and testing will concern us less from now on, partly because we are dealing predominantly with the urban world. For better or for worse, those who have written about children's play have not had very much to say about rural children or poor children, who still carry on many very serious encounters with a difficult and dangerous environment.

If we can assume that more and more children will gradually learn to play like children of comfortable means, then this chapter has value for the future. If, however, we decide in some novel way to turn our children back into some more challenging physical environment, new books on play will be necessary. This may be the way we will go, in view of our current interest in ecology. Perhaps we need a series of playgrounds changing in scope from small-scale adventures with climbing and building possibilities to increasingly larger natural territories for exploration, going all the way up to mountain ranges for late adolescents. The latter group is better catered to, with scouts and searchers doing pretty much what we advocate.

The most interesting development that becomes obvious in three- and four-year-olds is verbal and intellectual *exploration*. In a sense these intellectual forms of mastery become more obvious, since the older physical forms now extend into much larger territorial concerns, such as making visits and exploring alleyways.

Their ability with small motor skills means that many conventional (Montessori) types of toys or apparatus will keep children busy for a long time. Sorting and matching games and jigsaw puzzles of increasing complexity become more challenging. They become more interested in hammer and nail sets, sorting boxes, buttoning books, paper cutting, and design matching. At the same time they are more interested in visits and excursions; exploring new playgrounds; learning about plants, trees, and animals; and even growing things. Children like to assist in being gardeners.

Their intellectual exploration is endless. They want to know why but end up coupling things together without understanding, as in the example at the beginning of this chapter: "I have a cut on my eye. That's why I fell over." Children find it difficult to disentangle cause and effect. Two things are known to be linked, and the word "cause," which is associated with linkage, is used, often with amusing reversals.

"I love you Daddy."

"Why?"

"Cause you went in an airplane yesterday and you brought me a present. A doll."

Coming home in the airplane is confused with going, but she puts together the bringing of the present and the love she feels.

Some other examples follow in which relationships are explored but not always put in the "logic" of adults:

If you get mad at me, I won't come to Christmas.

What's that thing you've got hanging off your pee-wee?

some toys. One of the unfortunate things in our society is that those who have the most fantasy and need manufactured toys the least are the ones who have the most. But where poverty stalks, there is also poverty of imagination. There is a tendency for the poor to buy toys that are momentary, mechanical gimmicks rather than long-serving toys, such as miniature cars, blocks, tea sets, and doll sets, that provide a way of thinking imaginatively. Although, as we said earlier, they do not provide such a way if you have not learned how to use them imaginatively, and you learn that best from your parents.

## 8

### Primitive Society— Order and Disorder:

#### *From Four to Five Years*

“Who are you going to marry?” she asks.

“My father,” says the boy.

“You can’t marry him.”

“Yes I can; he goes to work.”

• “Where do people come from?”

“From seeds.”

“Do they have pictures of people on the packets?”

• “Little girls are made of spice and all things nice,” says her mother.

“They are not, they’re made of skin,” answers the daughter.

"I'm a person from the city."

"Why?"

"Cause I bring things."

Little children cannot be made to go to bed.

When it's warm, it's warm, and then we can go out to winter.

"What will you be when you grow up?"

"I'll be a twin. I'm going to be a Cinderella with long hair down to my sleeves."

I haven't had a bath cause my dirty legs are here. [pointing]

"Why are you a girl?"

"Cause I eat poisoned apples." [after hearing "Snow White"]

You're nice 'cause I like you.

The important step in children's *imitative play* is that they really begin to put some personality into their characters. Up until this year children have played the roles fairly straight; that is, they have been a mother or a father carrying out everyday actions like dressing and washing. Now, however, they begin to play an "angry" father or a "naughty" child. In this third year they really begin to get some feeling into their make-believe people.

In addition, they can now run a small society with their truck drivers or dolls, with several people being represented by toy figures. They may even occasionally use different "voices" when speaking the parts for these characters. This is another aspect of the personality differences that they now attribute to people. Most of the characters played are adults or other powerful people. Although babies are used to vent childish feelings, the general tendency is to play out the roles of the powerful people that the child would like to be.

In addition to exploration, testing, and imitation, we notice *construction* now. It is our fourth type of mastery and is to be found in children's organization of their personal space in their bedrooms and in their attempts to make a building out of wood or boxes outdoors. Since they cannot master the adult world, most construction happens in their play world. First they learn to handle their toys, then they start to construct things with them. Toys become worlds of their own.

Play construction borrows from play exploration, testing, and imitation, but particularly from imitation. The word "construction" is used to refer to things that are made and constructed with objects (small houses, forts, cities, etc.) through which children can imitate adults by manipulating things. In imitative play there is a more direct imitation through playing roles.

When our own children were of this age, they would always take one of their constructed worlds into any new environment. Their major worlds were those of houses and stores. Whenever we went away for the summer, stayed in another house, or even simply went to the beach for a day, this group of two-, four-, six-, and eight-year-olds would immediately set up their space in the new environment. Different families or groups of children within a family tend to have a game that travels with them. For some they are always competitive; others have traveling intellectual contests (particularly while riding in their car); and yet others transfer constructed worlds, as ours did.

In general at this age children's imaginative play is helped by having such miniature toy worlds to play with. If children are not particularly imaginative, such toys help. For children who are already very imaginative, toys are not quite so necessary; they can make their own toys out of anything. Thus, it is important to know which children we are talking about before we praise or condemn giving them toys to play with.

Within moderation we feel it is wise for all children to have