

much time examining the nipple with their mouths and their fingers. They push it this way and that way. They want to find out what produces what results. What must they do to get it under their tongues? What must they do to get it under their lips? They want results. This is work; but because it does not produce a salary, fame, or prestige, we use another name for it, and that name is mastery. There is also an important distinction between the results children have in mind and the results adults are pursuing. Children carry out their work to understand; adults carry out theirs to survive.

Mastery is work. Most of children's free activity is concerned with mastering things or people. This highly serious activity results in children's adjusting to their surroundings. They work at it night and day. They explore all the objects they can find. They explore their homes and their back yards. They attempt to manipulate other children into playing with them in their own way. They do their best to get their parents to do what they want. They do their best to act as their parents do. The greater part of childhood is passed in learning the art of mastery.

In the first several years of life it is not very easy to tell the difference between mastery activities and play because we cannot always see what results children have in mind. Without knowing what they have in mind, we cannot always make these distinctions. For this reason the two are mixed together in the early chapters of this book. We make no excuses for this. Until we have much better records (videotape and film) of young children's behavior, we will not be able to tell these differences easily.

In the past those educators who advocated the "playway" of schooling were generally talking about mastery, not about play. They wanted the schools to be places where children would be free to discover and to learn from the materials that they provided; but it was work freely pursued, or mastery, that they had in mind, not play.

6

On the Importance of Only Pretending: *From Two to Three Years*

"Daddy, will you play ball with me?"

"No, I'm busy. . . . All right, you can go outside." [It was snowing.]

•

"I'm not yours.

I'm not your child.

You can't wear my new white shirt.

This house doesn't belong to you."

•

"Who is that in the mirror?"

"Mary." [Age two and one-half.]

"Will she be there when you go?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Cause she can't get out. She would break the mirror."



Two-year-olds have problems determining who they are. What are their selves, and what are not? What are their choices, and what are not? Children become concerned with their self-identities, at about eighteen months. These feelings persist through the third year. It is better to cooperate with your children and help them now, rather than to give them orders. This goes for eating, toilet training, going to bed, getting dressed, and going to sleep, which are often crises for many parents during this second to third year.

Children's sensitivity about themselves is often expressed in their concern over what they are named. "I am not a baby. I am a little girl," they may say; although at a later time, when it fits a mood of greater dependency, they might well say the opposite, "I am a baby. I am not a little girl." The wise parent is able to accommodate these needs, to allow independence when it is wise and to give comfort when it is needed.

Actually, what strikes most parents about this age is children's great capacity for independent movement. Two- to three-year-olds, or *toddlers*, are everywhere and often are in great danger, because they have no appreciation of what might happen to them. They may run full tilt into objects. They want to dress and undress themselves. They want to organize their own toys, clothes, and books. They may carry about little piles of books for you to read to them. They begin to show some sort of distinctive personality. They are vigorous or timid, loving or detached, very interested in people or mainly interested in their toys, and so on.

But from the point of view of play the most interesting thing about this third year is that the new awareness of self and the new capacity for language, which create negativism,

also create an awareness of *only pretending*. Pretense is the play milestone for this year.

We need to make clear that even during the previous year there will have been some make-believe play with dolls and trucks that we might call pretending, but babies do not have that idea yet. During the prior year they may practice *imitating* adults by playing with dolls and trucks, but they do not yet call it pretending. It is having a name for what they do in this third year that gives them a whole lot more freedom than they had before. Pretending can take them anywhere.

Children of two to three move easily in and out of pretense if they are allowed to. At one moment they are cowboys, at another they are themselves. The very flexibility of the boundaries between being cowboys and being themselves appears to be a great help to them in growing up to be what they want to be as well as what they have to be. At the very least the word "pretend" gives children a useful defense, so they can obtain the right to be left alone when they are working things through for themselves. If we ask a question and they say "I'm just pretending," it is important not to push them. Do not ridicule them. Just leave them to their privacy. When children are given space in which to pretend, it seems to make them optimistic. Children who can pretend can also believe.

The act of pretending should not be taken for granted. In many cultures, children are treated in a most authoritarian and confining way. The adults live on the fringe of economic uncertainty, and there is little scope for changing their lives. Here a widespread attitude of fatalism prevails. There is an unwillingness to believe that one's own actions can alter life or one's circumstances in any way. There is little scope for a belief in pretend play in such places.

We would seriously suggest that two-year-olds who can intersperse the optimistic banner of pretense through much of their everyday activities are adjusting to them without giving

up hope, courage, optimism, and the belief in possible worlds. What may seem an annoyance or even a lie to the adult may be pure optimistic character development for children.

This optimistic character-forming function of pretending may not be obvious to all, because of our past habits of training most children for routine work. Civilization is only now beginning to think about the problem of training children for creative work. The same negative attitude toward pretending has existed in psychology also. The psychologists who have had the most to say about such things as pretense, daydreams, imagination, wishes, and dreams have been mainly concerned with abnormal psychology. They have observed the way in which an abnormal person is often trapped in his daydreams, and they have thought of his daydreams and pretending as a defense against adjusting more adequately, when they were really a last-ditch effort to be human. Recent research, however, has shown that normal people daydream and pretend also. In fact, they have richer daydreams (though less repetitive ones).

In the fourth year many children will, for example, create imaginary companions. They have no one to play with, and they tend to be children with initiative; therefore they create their own playmates to remedy the situation. This is not to be lamented. It is a sign of considerable resourcefulness. When adults do this sort of thing with creative competence, we call them novelists or dramatists. Along with children they have the desire to create new worlds, just as real, but *other* than, the one that is.

It pays then to think of pretense as a poetry of possibility playing around the edges of necessary fact. If we realize that the third year is when children become indubitably selves, with a name, and refer to themselves as *I* and yet also come to realize that they are relatively powerless and small and have relatively little say in most events, we also realize that

they will have a need to buttress their confidence with thoughts of the way things might be. Pretense is both a natural power and a power in adversity.

GAMES AND OTHER THINGS TO DO

In this year many of the games will be brought to you by your children. Most of the time they are taking the initiative, and your role is often to respond rather than to begin things as you did in the first year.

Interludes

Interludes are the mixing of play with ordinary activities. Inter means "between." Ludus is Latin for "play." Interludes are plays in between. In the middle of your vacuuming your little child will suddenly appear with a suitcase and, going to the door, will wave good-bye. "I'm going to the hospital. Good-bye, Good-bye." This small act of leaving may be repeated twenty times. Your role is to enter into the play just a little but not too much. Wave good-bye but go on vacuuming. Wave good-bye and make a mock crying face but then go on with your vacuuming. Finally go to him and ask, "Have you come home now?" "Yes," he replies. Then hug him to pieces, exclaiming how happy you are.

This little game, like many others, is likely to crop up particularly if you have been leaving home a lot and have not been able to take him. The game represents the child's reversal of the circumstances. Now *he* leaves, and *you* stay home. But of course all he wants to consider is the possibility; he certainly does not want to lose you. If he really should leave, then he would lose you. So you play with the game around the edges and do not respond with such belief that

the child is forced to go through with it almost as a reality. An error made by some adults is to take a child's pretenses so seriously that the child is more frightened by a pretense than by reality.

We have to understand that *power through play* always means turning life about-face, so that those who were powerless are now powerful. We spoke earlier of children who were concerned with mastery or accommodating themselves and eventually learning to control circumstances. But the players always rise above circumstances, which means they *reverse* their customary relationship with them. It is difficult to understand play without this idea of reversibility.

Other *interludes* of children may have to do with dangerous or frightening things they have merely witnessed, such as an elephant in the circus, a monster on "Sesame Street," or a crab in a picture book. The usual procedure is for children to react to the danger sometime later by reversing the situation and becoming the thing that frightens them. "I'm an elephant," they cry. Your cries of mock fear are a good response. "Oh, I'm going to get squashed," you cry. You can have some roughhouse fun on the floor here or, if not, you can pretend to be scared and then laugh with them as they laugh at your exaggerated reaction. Your reaction to their threat is in a sense something like their original fear. So you have helped by reversing the roles and becoming the helpless child. They have acted powerfully. You have acted powerlessly.

Other interludes have more to do with simpler things, like wishes. "Let's take Barbie to the store. Let's buy her some shoes," says your baby daughter. In this one suggestion she wants to go to the store, and she wants to get some shoes. But Barbie (the doll) is the pretend one who prompts the suggestion. "Well," you say, "she has such small feet. We could buy her a hundred pairs." Usually further playful discussion follows. If it does not, and the child wants to go, and go now, then you shift gears into reality. You come back

to whatever makes sense for you: "We're going tomorrow" or "You don't need shoes" or "Let's go."

Reports

Increasingly you are asked to be responsive to *reports* of visits, to Santa Claus or wherever they have been lately. These reports are mixtures of expressive acting out, some words, and some small sentences that they can speak by now. Since their expressions and words are sometimes ahead of their full understanding of what they are saying, it often sounds quaint. But to be a good listener is a very important part of this game, and since you can be that while you go on with other things, the expense in time may not be too great.

Dinner time and the captive audience, as well as the desire to get in on the conversational act, prompt them to an endless discourse on how Santa will come down the chimney or whatever. Younger babies enjoy the dinner-time social hour. We remember our youngest daughter holding forth loudly "talking" while the older children talked about school. Sometimes she drowned us all out, no small feat against six other talkers. They will also enjoy your "reports" of their activities at an earlier period; that is, their personal history.

Chasing

Chasing has become embellished. They can now both chase and be chased, although this is generally a one-to-one-person game. But now they may chase you, with hands outstretched and with Frankenstein grasp and monster face. There are many new faces this year. They can pretend to cry and to be angry. We have added the *mask* of drama. In addition, they may put their heads down and pretend to be count-

ing. If they are regular "Sesame Street" fans, they may know some numbers. Some children indeed can count right through to ten at this age. It is of the same order as being able to sing "ABC," which some can do. In both cases they are known by rote.

Another part of the game is to pretend not to see someone when they know where they are hiding. Then again there is a surprise peek-a-boo type of ending, where they say, "They're not there; they're not there; there they are!" with great acclaim. As before we are both still *acting out* this game rather than playing it. All our social games with babies and young children seem to be as much like dramas as they are like games.

Being an Audience

You have a performer on your hands. The game is to watch and enjoy. It may be gymnastics. Babies somersault with the help of older brothers or sisters (once-over on the carpet). They *sing*. In the singing family you will have been singing with them a whole host of favorites, including "Jack and Jill," "Frère Jacques," "Twinkle, Twinkle," "ABC," and, the most important of all, "Happy Birthday." And we should not forget the TV commercials. Snatches of these will appear off and on continually in the life of the frequent television watcher. They *dance*. Now with a scarf in their hands they do not look unlike Isadora, or in a different mood they do straight-out mod rock.

Ring Games

It is a little early for ring games, but where there are older brothers and sisters, "Ring Around the Rosy" produces great excitement, particularly falling on the floor at the end.

Ring around the rosy,
A pocket full of posies,
Ashes, ashes,
We all fall down.

A ring game of this sort, as well as chasing, does not come fully into children's repertoires until they are about four. If you or other children play this with them frequently, however, they will pick up a great deal of its character, even if they do not understand the whole game.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that much of learning is in the first play imitation. In nearly all games with older persons, the younger player has only an idea of what is really involved, and yet with help they are able to make a reasonable response for some years before their ability matches their performance.

The more active two-and-one-half-year-olds can play other *circle* pantomime games, where everyone does the same thing together. These are games where everyone acts their way through the weekday routines together, for example, "This is the way we go to the store," "This is the way we watch TV," "This is the way we wash the clothes," etc.; but two-year-olds can only really participate if there are a group of elders for them to hold hands with, "On a cold and frosty morning." But we will have more to say of these circle games in the next chapter.

Find My Hand

Even last year's game of looking for objects gets reversed. Now they are asking you to find their hands, which are buried under the newspaper, behind their backs, or wherever. Why is the pretense of not finding, of almost finding, and then

of finally finding, with loud triumph, so much fun? So much of what we have called games throughout these chapters is really the *pretense of games*. Essentially we reduce the apparent game (hunt the finger, hunt the slipper) to the simpler anticipation game of surprise. We are pretending a game on a higher level but actually playing one on a lower level. The name of the game may be hide and seek, but the real game is anticipation and surprise.

Picture Misnaming

You may have begun telling them the stories of "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" or "The Three Little Pigs," although they may not be ready for that yet. Still, they will certainly be very ready next year, so there is no reason not to try and see how it goes. Usually you will do well with picture books and straightforward accounts of people, houses, and other things around them. In other words it is the descriptions of their familiar world that they like this year, rather than the story.

On the story level we are still into imitating everyday life. Children can name many things now, such as colors, numbers, and animals. That is partly the pleasure of going through books with them. What we can do for fun, however, is make foolish mistakes; for example, we can say, "Hey, here's a lion," when we know it is a horse, and then, "Oh, my mistake." When this is done gradually, it can lead to riotous games of misnaming. But, again, do not proceed unless they enjoy the joke. In due course they will be making them themselves. This is a preparation for next year's mangled nursery rhymes.

We should add here, though, that as stories are begun,

children do by and large like them straight. At this age routine, order, and continuity are ways in which children borrow a stable ego from the world in which they live. Our child can get very annoyed if you do not tell the story in the same way and in the same place at the same time. This should be respected for a while; then you can suggest alternatives. Be flexible but not absurd. It is easy to act farfetched for one's own amusement, but in the process one can completely bewilder a child.

For children who do appreciate stories ("Goldilocks and the Three Bears," "The Three Little Pigs," "Red Riding Hood"), they can join in more and more. The child puts in the noises of the animals or adds the words; thus, "This is a story about three . . ." and the child shouts "bears!" Throughout the story gaps are presented and questions are asked. This type of technique, carried on for the next year or so, finally gives you a situation where, in effect, you carry the scenario, but the child tells most of the story. The story becomes a dialogue for two, with noises and much wild invention. Do not miss this kind of fun.

Follow the Leader

The game of follow the leader can take multiple forms. It can be activities around the backyard or in the sitting room, such as walking, sitting down, balancing on one foot, hopping with two feet, skipping (all very hard at this age); it can be pretend actions, such as sleeping, telephoning, washing your face, putting on clothes; or it can be small motor acts, such as opening and closing your hand, mouth, or eyes or drumming with your fingers. Three-year-olds love games of this sort. The amazing thing is how few of them they get.

Hide the "What Is It?"

Hide the "what is it?" is every form of hiding and *naming*. It is really a word game. You may hide a part of the body or an object, and the child has to guess what it is that is hidden. The game progresses from the obvious things, like your hand, to smaller objects that have been standing nearby. A variation of the game is to have the child guess what an object is just by feeling it.

Destruction

Breaking up sand castles, jumping on them, bashing down block towers, and smashing down block houses are naturals for destruction. You build them, and they destroy them; or you both build, and you both destroy. In part, this destruction is the natural opposite to a long period of concentrated construction that you first begin to see signs of in this third year. Constructing takes much hard work and self-control. It is not strange that it leads to its opposite. It was mastery to do it one way, and it is fun to do it the other. Probably the wise recommendation is for *both* of you to build and for *both* of you to destroy. You should not see this simply as aggression, although aggressive force is involved. Destruction is also liberation. It is a new beginning again. It is the thing that all artists must learn if they are to progress. We are caught by our own conventions. Some modern ideas in art have destruction as the keynote. Make your art object; tear it to pieces; and make something new out of the pieces. Too often we have been so frightened by destruction and violence that we have not been able to see the essential function of demolition in creative rebuilding.

THE CHILD'S OWN PLAY

At this age, as before, we have much to say about exploration and testing again. They become more sophisticated. But the really new event in children's play is pretending to imitate other people.

Exploration and Testing: Activities and Materials

The exploratory play of two-year-olds was simple and piecemeal. Play now becomes more a part of *combinations* and *building*. There is more novelty in the combinations of motor elements. They can manipulate and watch the results at the same time. It is a big step from the direct use of their hands to using tools. Still, certain major *actions* occupy much of their time, as the following list shows.

EXAMPLES OF EXPLORATORY ACTIVITY

Activity	Tools
Combining	Counters, blocks
Molding	Clay, play dough
Spreading	Sand
Heaping	Blocks
Squeezing, making holes	Clay
Breaking, mending	Clay, silly putty
Using tools (sticks, etc.)	Clay
Finger painting	Water-soluble paints
Crayoning poster colors	Easels
Stringing	Wooden beads
Scissoring	Paper, scissors
Lacing	Cards with holes
Fitting puzzles	Geometrically shaped pieces, animal-shaped cutouts, peg boards

Recommended objects are egg beaters, linking blocks (for trains), water, sponges, pans, soapsuds, soda straws, bubble pipes, floating toys, clay, flexible plastic for cutting out, and cigar-box blocks.

With testing all of the second-year tests are still important: running, throwing, jumping, climbing, pedaling, pushing, pulling, hitting, punching, picking, balancing, and splashing. But instead of running at large and climbing only simple steps children can now perform these and other tests at a higher and more specific level. For example, they can climb onto a narrow space or seat, walk a line heel to toe, hop two or three steps on one foot, walk on a balance beam, throw a ball about ten feet, hang by their arms from low parallel bars, march and dance to records, roll down grass slopes, jump in puddles and on sand castles, and do simple gymnastics like somersaults.

There are even more toys that are useful now. There are three-piece puzzles, hole-punches, drinking straws, pipe cleaners, hand puppets, clay, tricycles, bean bags, swings, slides, painting and drawing materials, play dough, blocks that interlock, egg beaters, bubble pipes, soap suds, water, finger paints, poster paints, parallel bars, tunnels, plank bridges, packing cases, cardboard boxes inside cardboard boxes, wheelbarrows, pull and push cars or wagons, beads, shoelaces, pebbles, miniature playing cards, marbles, and buttons; toy scissors are also manageable.

Regarding social testing with other children, at this age children are often desperately eager to be with other children but not usually very adequate at managing the play situation. What they usually try to do is to get adults to help them. Even while in the midst of other children they will be urging the adult in charge to look at what they are doing, help them with their play, play with them, and/or chase them; or they will be urging you to intervene on their behalf with the other

children to make the others do what they want, give them the toy they want, and/or make them leave them alone.

It is an interesting time, in which although drawn to other children, they still find adults more important, and they use adults as a bridge to the other children. One of the best solutions to this problem is for the adult actually to participate in their play. A careful adult can foster play in groups of children through participation in make-believe, and yet the individual children can at the same time be safeguarded from the excesses of each other.

We have to be careful in how we participate at this early age. Most adults are not particularly good at this. They are so self-conscious about their "baby" behavior that they may overact in the role, either acting in too grown up and sensible a way, like a lecturer, or indulging their own infantile selves in baby talk. Our advice is to take it easy. Sit on the floor quietly. Intrude only occasionally, with a mild example here and there—for example, by rocking the doll or building with the blocks—all the time being very responsive to the children's imaginative suggestions that will keep the play going.

The problem is that this is the period of life that most of us have pretty nearly forgotten. We come back to it like complete strangers who may well act adult-centered in making false steps. Imagine yourself in China or Japan as a friend of the host. You are living in a house, all of whose customs are very strange, but you dearly wish to create a favorable impression. A similar tentativeness with respect to joining in the group play of two- to three-year-olds will serve you well. To ignore these precautions is perhaps to plunge in with the sins of your own childhood showing, whatever they may be.

We should perhaps point out that we are here talking about participating with children at their childish level, unlike the games mentioned earlier, where we were concerned with lifting them to our own level.

Often children at this age do very well when they are

"bossed" by older children and become babies when they play house. It is good for them, even if they are restricted in the roles they get to play. Here at least they can see the roles of the older child. Also, just as in the examples of chasing we have given previously, they have to learn one side of these reciprocal roles (parent or baby) before they can learn the other.

Occasionally small groups of two-year-olds play quite well together without the help of elders. This is usually when there is plenty of space and plenty of toys. It is more often outdoors. The space and the play objects allow them to get away from each other if necessary. Again with tunnels or hills, occasionally they will do things in parallel fashion with great enjoyment, all rolling down the hill or running in sequence through the tunnel. These events do not happen too often though.

Imitation

We have said that this is the year for beginning to pretend. The earliest pretense takes the form of imitation. Imitation is learning by paying attention to what other people do. *Imitation is a form of mastery.* This route to knowledge—copying what others do—has always been the way to learn social behavior. We see this in children's first gestures, their first expressions ("good-bye") and words ("Mommy"), which are taken directly from their parents. It is not until the second year that they copy their parents more carefully. Children who can now walk and run about try to do what they see their parents do. They try to sweep with brooms, to wash dishes, to turn on ovens, or to drive cars. Naturally you have to interfere quite a bit; they are too small or it may be too dangerous. But it is still the basic way children learn from their parents.

Many formal systems of education are based almost completely on imitating the teacher. In general, it seems that the more authoritarian the family or the society, the more it tends to rely on teaching children this way. In more open and flexible societies children get to do more on their own. There are wide individual differences in the use of this form of mastery. Some children spend most of their time at first in imitative play, then later in the more advanced form of imitation, which is dramatic play with other children.

The modern world forces imitative play. Actually our modern world is so complex and so dangerous that we have made children imitate us less and play more. We have forced them away from mastery of the actual environment (imitative mastery) and have given them mastery of toys and play with toys instead (imitative play). The billions of dollars that we spend on toys and models, which are miniatures of the world, is unheard of in human history. We do not want our preschool children to try to master our cars, our ovens, and our roadways. "No, you can't wash the dishes, you'll break them." Instead, when they are two or three, we give them a toy tea set and let them wash the dishes in a small pail of water. We take the broom from them because they have just accidentally hit us on the head with the handle and insist that they play with their toy house set.

So we definitely push for toys as among the only forms of mastery we allow. Naturally children like them, and they are of some appeal to all of us because at least with them we can feel in control, can be relaxed, and can handle them our way. But by pushing for so much use of toys we are doing something special to human nature. Instead of having competent little aborigines who are masters of their physical and social worlds, who can survive fairly well even when quite young, we have children who have acquired many many alphabets of toys and play but are completely dependent on their elders for survival for many years to come.

What does it do when you have a head full of toys instead of a head full of animal tracks? As we proceed in the chapters ahead, perhaps we can answer that question.

Toward the end of the second year we see the first signs of imitative play. Children pretend to sleep on the carpet or they pretend to drink with a block. They call the block a cup. By the time they are in their third year, they are making their teddy bears or dolls take a drink. Usually they put their dolls through much the same routines that they must go through themselves. The teddy bear is put to bed, is put on the pot, is given a drink, etc.

Later in this same year they become the actors in their own imitative play. Thus, children are the mothers and fathers, and the doll is the baby. At these early stages they seem to be helped by having toys that represent the people and activities that they wish to imitate. Increasingly elements of feeling enter their play, so we can no longer speak of imitation but must call the activity make-believe. The parents now spank the babies, and the babies act as if they are naughty. This is usually a statement of what they feel might happen or what they feel they would like to do rather than any strict imitation.

What impresses us about these pretend imitations and make-believe plays, however, is that children can represent their lives and feelings more completely here than in any other way. They are not able to make such a complete statement of the way they feel in words. They certainly cannot make it in their drawings. As a form of self-representation play is therefore far ahead of these other forms of expression. Apparently play not only gives them a chance to be flexible because they have the power but also allows them to make a statement about what their world means more fully than they can do anywhere else.

At the end of this book in an appendix we have listed in much greater detail the steps that we think children go

through first in imitative play and later in games. A scale of this sort is most valuable for parents or nursery school workers who want to have some way of knowing just where their child is in his development. Or of knowing after they have been training him in some way whether they have brought about any change in his level of imaginative play.