

# 10

## The Absurd:

### *From Seven to Nine Years*

Mary had a baby and named him Tiny Tim.  
Put him in a bathtub to teach him how to swim.  
Timmy swallowed water. Mary called the doctor.  
In came the doctor, in came the nurse,  
In came the lady with the big fat purse.

•  
"What did one flea say to the other as they  
went off for a stroll?"  
"Shall we walk or take a dog?"

•  
Kirk takes his first train trip. He goes to the  
toilet. The conductor calling out the stations  
cries, "Dunkirk." The boy cries back, "Not yet."



By seven years of age children have acquired the main habits of the adults around them, and they have acquired the beginnings of important skills that they will need to survive in the parent society. Seven years is the time when children of many tribal societies become, in effect, small adults. They work in the fields. They look after babies. They do the cooking.

It is a time of responsibility. In the Middle Ages children were apprenticed at this age. In a similar manner we choose this age to teach children reading, writing, and arithmetic. At the same time we teach them the good habits of work, orderliness, cooperation, and competition. We expect them to be able to conduct themselves properly in school all day and follow all its multiple rules as well as to behave themselves on the playground, which is equally bound by rules.

The thing that saves their imagination during this high peak of social achievement is their rich sense of nonsense in the world about them. They perhaps need a clear sense of absurdity at this age so that by the time they are adolescents they can carry out original ideas.

### GAMES AND OTHER THINGS TO DO

You will see throughout this chapter the way in which children of this age swing from rigid order to wild disorder.

#### *Participation*

As children reach the end of early childhood, which runs from birth until about seven or eight years, you can be flexi-

making suggestions, or initiating... and that might go somewhere. Your playfulness may now be just as momentary and interludial as was your three-year-old's with you some years earlier.

You can do this during meals, in the car on the way to school, or at any other time they can stand you. You can be a ham for the next two years and get away with it. But after that you will have to be more subtle. When accused of some injustice or infringement, you can sometimes pantomime your way out of accusations. "You said you would bring home a ball." "Well I got this big iron ball, and I carried it, and I carried it [miming], but it wore me out and I dropped it on my foot [hopping]. And if you go out in the car, you will find it on the back seat." You can still play dead, gasping and wheezing, as you receive a mafia bullet in the stomach. It is always the stomach because that is noisier. Breakfast or dinner allow hammed-up recollections of your own childhood. They are still acceptable, but not for much longer.

Sometimes hamming will help you through your refereeing and coaching role also. These are the years when children readily call one another a cheat, and just as readily cheat themselves, without being fully aware of the difference between their freedom and someone else's cheating. Larceny and righteousness reach an all-time high. You can make up a story of a guy who played just to cheat, with exaggerated examples of how he would have bare feet so he could pick up the other guy's marbles between his toes, how he would kick the marbles by accident, and how he would stick them up his nose to hide them, but one stuck and he rolled around in agony until the doctor came.

In games with your children you will find they are now sharper about winning and losing. They can be overwhelmed

is a reality to contests of skill now, and it does children no good for you to fudge the difference. Their concern with skill is very real, and whether you are dealing with baseballs, jacks, jump ropes, marbles, cards, checkers, or dominoes, you should play with them fairly straight with mild but realistic effort. They have to know how to play. You can show them. They have to know what is fair and what is not. You can tell them. They have to see what skill looks like. You should show them.

### *Play, Playfulness, and Frenzy*

We have said that there are differences between play and mastery. We should also distinguish between ordinary enjoyable play and that wildly inventive sort that occurs now and again. We could call this playfulness. In playfulness the players are more explosive than usual; they laugh a lot. There is a feeling of great fun as the player spins from one play idea or action to the next with great diversity and a freewheeling spirit.

Playfulness sometimes leads off into uncontrollable excitement, and a child gets to laughing and laughing and screaming in a way that is clearly out of control. This is not unusual during the first seven years. The feelings of self only gradually become stabilized and often are not enough to hold back the effects of overexcitement. A birthday party is a good example, and one that lasts throughout childhood. The additional stimulation and excitement of opening parcels leads in a crescendo through more parcels and to even higher expectations and fantasies. Thus, when children reach the end of the presents, rather than feeling pleasure they feel let down. Then there

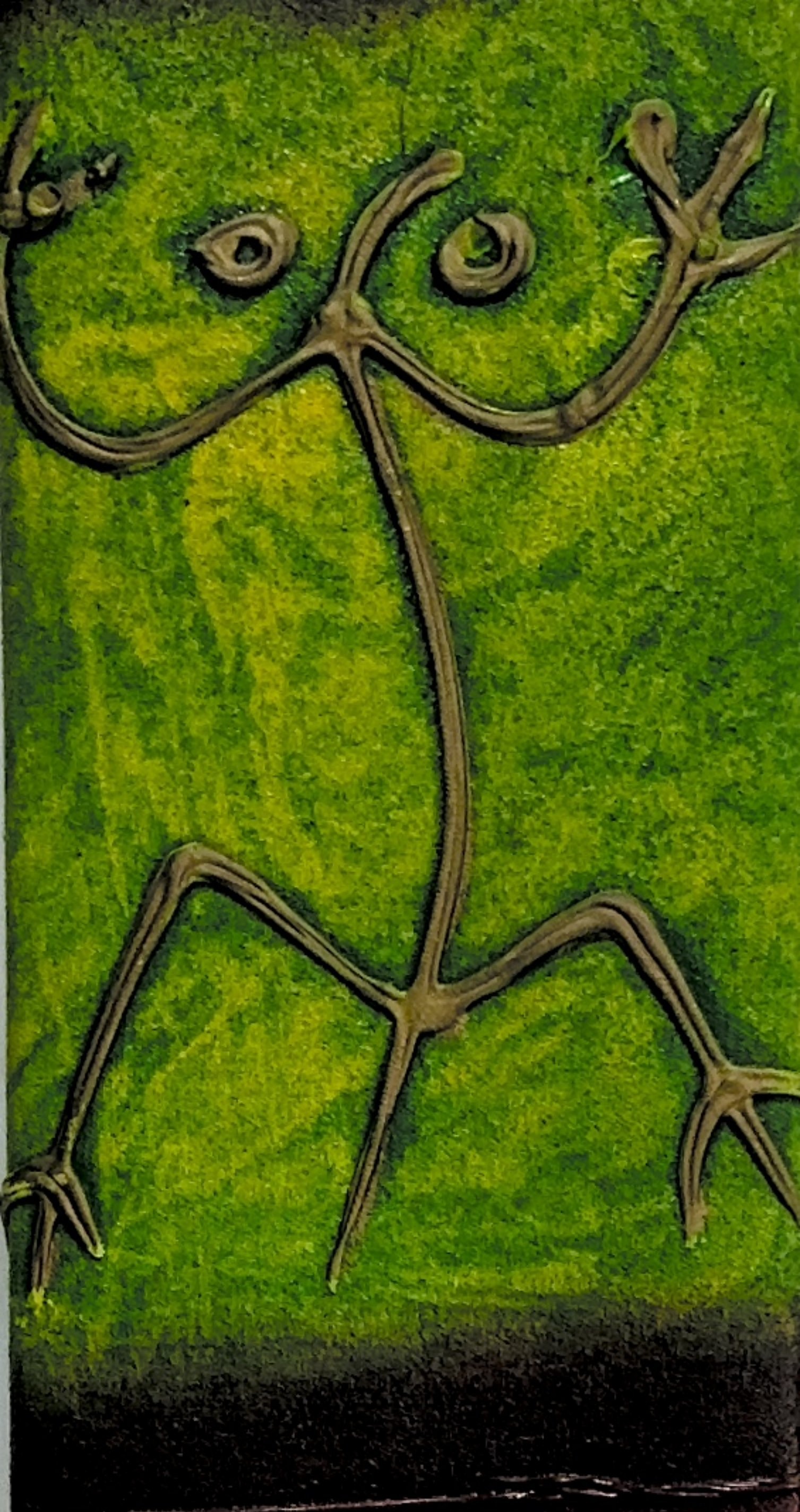
mastery or mastery expectation for the next novel object, and so on until there is no more.

But truly playful activities, like rough and tumbling, can similarly lead to expectations for greater stimulation, and children may increasingly throw themselves into the horseplay. Their usual control may break down so that they become almost frenzied with excitement. Their own feelings know no boundaries, and they are overcome with screaming, shrieking, etc. These extremes happen once in a while when children are being playful, just as they may get blue and depressed if they are never playful.

This is obviously a very complex subject, and we raise it here just to point out that there is an opposite maxim to our "If it isn't fun, forget it"; namely, "When fun becomes frenzy, forget it." Practically speaking, that may mean holding and calming your children, rhythmical rocking and singing to them, distracting them to some more-sober activity, distracting to some eating activity, etc.

### *Improvisation*

Children are generally ready for stage behavior by now. Fantasy roles (Santa Claus, grandfather) are no problem. Portraying emotion is also OK. But more interesting is the stereotyped *exaggeration of character*. This is the time for children to overact. They can now begin to play the clowns that they have seen played by the Captain Kangaroos of the world. In order to play a clown, one must also have some sort of *plot*. The actor has to introduce the scene, develop it, and let it collapse. For children this may be little more than coming on stage, pretending to act seriously (for example,



one and one. That is very difficult. Perhaps I should look at the dictionary." The humor for this age is reaction to the sacred documents of the time: school books, dictionaries, time tables, poetry, etc.

Increasingly several children can take the stage and play out small dramas of their own. You can keep them informal, for example, by suddenly joining the group yourself as a visiting spaceman or as another character that will add interest and novelty to the plot. In a school classroom you can send in other children to join the action in roles that at first you suggest but later they add. "Can I be the grandmother?" "Can I be the owner of the house who makes them get out?"

What you are ultimately aiming for, but which will be difficult to achieve until about eleven years, is the kind of situation in which children can improvise before an audience. One child begins as one character, she is engaged by another character, but after some time both children begin to switch roles. Every time this happens the opposite player must adapt to the change. Children find it difficult to be versatile like this even at age eleven unless they have been well prepared during these earlier years.

In children's own play the same improvisation often takes the form of putting on stunts, circuses, and TV shows and making newspapers. They need you to provide material early in the game and to provide an audience later. When this sort of make-believe event is contrived, arranged, and presented by seven- to eight-year-old children, they are showing a capacity for cooperation and innovation that is way ahead of anything they have done the previous years and even more sophistication than has existed in their formal games.

Children are undoubtedly further ahead in this kind of play with friends than in their other forms of group play. Un-

which means... feel with when they are older. To be able to improvise well is to have other ways of working through alternative actions and ideas.

### Riddling

Children begin trying out riddles about the age of four; however, at this age these are simply silly questions without an answer that anyone can puzzle out. But that is the first step with riddles, asking questions that have an arbitrary answer. "Why did the man build his chimney?" "To see the bricks," says the four-year-old. By six years we are on to the favorite riddles of childhood, which are the moron-type riddles. "Why did the dog get out of the sun?" "He didn't want to be a hot dog." Riddles continue to be *the* favorite jokes of children for the next few years. After that age other kinds of jokes take their place.

Where do you fit in? Your role here is mainly to be patient. As far as we know, children enjoy riddles because they are a way of interrogating other people and of being superior at the same time; that is, unless someone else knows the answer. Throughout history many people have held riddling contests for adults. The societies that did so were usually ones in which older people spent time interrogating their young. Thus, the riddle, like much other play, is a way of reversing the circumstances. The child gets to be the one who asks the unintelligible questions.

When we remember that much of what we say to children must seem unintelligible to them, this exercise becomes more sensible. It is interesting too that riddles play with words in arbitrary ways. Riddles seem to say to us that what children



means both hot by the sun and hot by cooking, and the word "dog" means an animal and a sausage. But the puzzle exists because the questioner acts as if only one meaning of "hot" and "dog" are intended.

The game to play at seven or eight years is to think of words that have double meanings and then use them as the basis for a riddle. In riddles we act as if words with the same structure (dog) have the same meaning (animal, frankfurter) when they do not. The lesson that children learn from this is again not to be gullible. So, for example, "What has ears that don't hear?" "Why, corn." In this riddle the corn's ears are not hearing ears. "What has feet that don't walk?" "A table." "What turns without moving?" "Milk." "What has a head that doesn't think?" "A pin."

A little later on children also begin to play not just with the double meanings of words but with the double meaning of things people do, as in the riddle about the fleas at the beginning of this chapter. Here the fleas have reversed the usual order of events. They are taking the dog. The dog is not taking them. Besides moron-type riddles with word or alphabetical meanings the other major type of riddle today is the riddle that is a parody. You expect to get a word puzzle, but you get something obvious. "What did the elephant say to the other elephant?" "Nothing. Elephants can't talk."

In sum, you can explain some of these principles. You can help them to make up riddles, and you can do your best to enjoy being the victim. It is not a bad idea to develop a family *groan*. This is the "Ohoh" with which all members greet a corny joke. The groan acknowledges the joke, but lets the listeners keep some distance from its awfulness. We are all familiar with its use with pun makers at a later age. Punsters

children start to use now. You are playing cards with them, and you say, "Why did you smash up the cards?" "I didn't smash them up." "You did so." "I did not. I only bent them." The other side of knowing double meanings through riddles is to become aware of what words actually say, so that those who speak loosely can be untied.

### Nonsense

Just as riddles are based on children's now having some understanding of the meaning of words and letters, so nonsense requires that they understand the rules of behavior. From four to seven we have been putting them together as social and acceptable human beings. There has been a lot of group pressure there. Children of seven and eight gain some play freedom from all that by reversing the meaning of everyday events.

Thirty days has September,  
April, June, and November.  
All the rest eat peanut butter,  
Except grandma.  
She drives a Buick.

Children begin to enjoy nonsense about authority figures because the orderly world that they have now accepted is run by authority figures. At the end of the school year it is "no more spelling, no more books, no more teacher's dirty looks"; it may be the character "Shut-up" who gets to the police station when "Trouble," his friend, is lost. "What's your name?" "Shut-up." "Are you looking for trouble?" "Yes."





slipped from adulthood to the upper reaches of this age group, nine and ten years. "Mother, I don't like this tomato juice." "Shut up kid, and drink your blood."

As a parent you probably cannot deal with this kind of thing unless you accept that this is not a perfect world. Even the good things create frustrations. Even the things we want to keep and sustain can also be a bore and a nuisance at times. The happiest way to deal with our very natural conflicts is through humor and play, and at this age children are excited by these and other forms of humor that make the sensible seem momentarily nonsensical.

Your role is usually a mixture of the participating ham and the referee. You share some types of nonsense, and you argue that other types are going too far. How far too far is depends on your own value system. But the technique here is the same technique as for all play; namely, that there can be a special time and place for being funny. That may be the only place for certain forms of humor. What you can say around the table you may not be able to say in school or to your neighbors.

If you do not feel comfortable in dividing the world up in this way, then this book is not for you. It preaches versatility, and sometimes the only way to be many people is to be them in separate places. The tie that binds people to themselves and to each other in this book is the general respect for, and enjoyment of, a life that can be shared, that is interesting, and that does not hurt anyone in any fundamental sense. The other tie that binds is the realization that love does not endure easily without laughter.

Children are... you can share in one way or another. They are into collections—stamps, postcards, license plates, hockey cards, jokes, lists of friends. These are interesting ways in which they manage parts of the world. Children who have stamps, for example, have a system for controlling the world. Their stamp collection is a construction that deals with the world in a particular way. It is not unlike a corporation in that sense. It is also an exercise in putting things into groups or classes.

The interest in collections comes at age eight, when children have just acquired the ability to sort things out systematically in several ways. By then they can put all the red triangles in one group and the red squares in another without confusing them because they are both red. You can tell them about your own "loony" collections: insect legs for science, bandits' ears for the police, types of ice cream for your refrigerated house. This leads them to invent their own loony collections.

One way children play with gullibility now is by using *magic tricks*. If you teach a few of these (such as card tricks, mirror drawing, tic-tac-toe, hangman, and the like), it will be a great asset to them in their social life. Tricks lure the watcher into something. On their own level they like surprises, such as jumping out on people, telling jokes, pretending to be a monster. They wish they had the "magic" to order their own food in the restaurant, to give hot dogs to their friends, to have their room cleaned, to have a plastic man take their place at school. This enjoyment of both surprises and magic makes them hungry for "tricks."

At this age *children's drawings* are somewhat stereotyped, like their riddles and their games. They draw by the rules. You can introduce fun and flexibility by posing problems for

Make mad people that are half people and half automobiles. In this way children have to put together their set ideas for people with their set ideas for cars, and that challenges them to try something new. Doing cartoon sequences is another good challenge, especially if it is something like walking up stairs, because they have to make their fixed body drawings different in the different positions on the stairs. This is hard, and it is something they do not usually do.

You can play *card* and *board* games for a really long time with your children at this age, if you can stand it. Most card games for seven-to-nine-year-olds involve simple comparisons between cards. In war the two players take half the cards each. They turn up one card each at the same time, and the player with the highest card number takes both. Players aim to win all the cards. In grab players similarly put down their cards together, and the player who calls "grab" first when two cards are of the same value takes all the accumulated cards.

The board games of this age are Ludo, Chutes and Ladders, Parcheesi, and others, in which the players race each other toward a destination and the outcome is determined by the luck of the dice. Each rolling determines the number of steps forward they can take, but the board itself provides many hazards that either speed them forward or send them back to base. There is some minor decision making on the part of the players as to which counters to move forward or the like. Naturally they enjoy it also if you continue to join in all their other home play activities, including puzzles, Lego, blocks, collections, wrestling, tickling, music, cars, fixing things, word games, and chess.

Finally we come to the part of children's developing intelligence—guessing. Here are some guessing games that your children may play and in which you can participate. More important, just seeing how many things guessing does for them opens it up as a tool for games that you would like to invent.

We mentioned that shrewdness was a virtue taught in the mass media during the previous age and throughout childhood. A key competence through which shrewdness must be expressed is *guessing*. In early childhood, from five to ten years, guessing is the everyday form of native intelligence. After all, one never has enough information at that age (or at any age), nor does anyone else that one relates to. So whether we call it guessing or not, we are always guessing. Guessing is putting together what little information we have with a little bit of luck in order to come up with the best answer.

Given the interest in guessing, there are dozens of games that you can invent. The simplest variety of games are those in which the player has to guess an initial, word, name, or color that the other player has thought of. Most popular is the universal I spy, in which players have to guess what the player who is "It" is thinking of in the room after being told what its first letter (or color) is.

There are many other such games. You have to guess where objects are hidden, which takes a lot of careful attention. In blindman's bluff you have to guess who you have taken hold of, which is guessing someone's identity. In some games you have to guess who is hiding the ball behind their back. The children have to keep their eyes on movements and guilty looks.

There are also a group of games in which players have to

trades seems the most common. In trades the players divide themselves into two groups by choosing up. Then they line themselves up facing each other, about twenty to thirty feet apart. One group calls out to the others, "Here we come!" The second group calls, "Where from?" The others reply, "New York." Then the players of the second group ask, "What's your trade?" The answer is "Lemonade!" The second group then says, "Go to work!" They begin to act out some kind of work, such as shoveling snow, picking cherries, planting potatoes, or whatever, and the second group tries to guess what they are doing. As soon as they guess it, the actors run back to their station, and the others chase them. If any of the actors are caught, they join the opposite side. The game usually continues until all the players of one group have been caught.

There are a number of children's games in which the player must guess in turn how many objects the other players are holding in their hands. Games like this have been named Hul Gul, How Many Eggs in the Bush? or Jack in the Bush. In one version each player is given an equal number of buttons, beans, grains of corn, and the like, and then each in turn holds out a handful to the guesser, calling "Hul Gul!" The guesser replies, "Handful," and then the first player asks, "How many?" If the number named by the guesser is too high, the guesser must give the other player enough counters to make the difference. If the guess is too low, the first player must give the guesser enough to make the guess right. If the guess is exactly right, the guesser gets the whole handful.

There are other variations of the game using fingers, odd or even amounts, and so forth. Although the game is ostensibly a game of guessing or chance, there is a minor element of

is that it requires close attention to detail. It was probably a good way of getting to know numbers before children regularly went to school.

### *Some Other Games*

There are many many games we have not mentioned. But hopefully there have been enough to give you some sense of what to do and what it is that your children care about at this age. Let us finish by just mentioning a few other games you might want to play with them. In the car you can play games with points for all the different kinds of animals that you all see or for different kinds of cars or house colors. The first one to see the animal (or whatever) gets the points.

This is also an age for making finger shadows on the wall. It is one of their bag of tricks for creating illusions, not merely being taken in by them. It is probably the end of Easter egg hunts, although you can do new things with a kitchen orchestra of pans, combs, and buckets. Paper games (such as fortunes and paper planes) and practical jokes (such as "I saw a dead horse. I one it. You two it. . . . You ate it," sending someone for a left-handed hammer, or putting a toy snake or spider on a friend's desk) are popular tricks.

Games in which no one must laugh until the balloon strikes the floor or where you must stroke the kneeling players saying, "Poor kitty, poor kitty," without laughing or where you say, "The first to speak is a monkey," appeal at this time. Children are just beginning to use these games as ways of handling their own emotional control. To be provoked and

more of an institution and less of an adventure by now, which is part of the reason that paper games appeal. Rubber bands also create excitement at school, being flicked about or used to flick paper.

### THE CHILD'S OWN PLAY

This is an age when children begin to acquire friends, and such relationships sometimes last for weeks and months and even years. This is more likely to happen if they live close to each other. When possible, children tend to choose others of the same age and sex and interests. But sometimes it does not matter all that much because they are not all that set in their ways yet.

What is often interesting in the play of seven-year-olds is how rigid their own rules are. We have seen that our adult society molds them into decent behavior. We have seen that in their nonsense and riddles they show some appreciation for the absurdity of these pressures. But in their own group play behavior they are often even more coercive than we are. They are much harder on each other. What they call being "fair" is often a one-eyed claim for their own point of view.

In a way, this is not surprising. We have seen how hard it is for children to get their groups together. Ever since we started our analysis of their social play at three, we have been documenting a rugged struggle. They have had to work out who was boss, and they have had to develop techniques for keeping together. In addition, they have had to work out many common themes and, with the beginning of games, common types of relationships (accept-reject) that are important in the larger culture and that they have to understand.

though they do not really observe them very well. They do not realize this yet, however; although they lie without too much self-awareness, they condemn it as a major crime. In all of this they are helped by adults, who make rules very clear and who are very fair in enforcing them.

Often their game rituals stray over into *private rituals*, showing again a desire for *order* in their personal feelings just as much as in their social world with other children. Thus, "You have to be on your bed before the door slams or else *IT* will come out from under the bed and get you" or "You have to get upstairs before the toilet stops flushing or else *IT* will get you." Sometimes the child's precarious relationship with God enters into these private dramas. "If I get to the utility pole before the bus does, God will be kind to me."

### Chasing and Escaping

At this age children are not satisfied merely to get away from the player who is "It" and then when caught to take that player's place. Now they like to tease that player too. Thus, in a game like kick the can, while the person who is "It" is chasing someone else, the other children run back and kick the can, letting everyone else go free; or in freeze tag they run around tagging the children that have already been "frozen," freeing them. It is an age for testing out what they can do against authority. Seven- and eight-year-olds begin to be "cheeky" in school. They say sassy things, and they know the language well enough now to make it sound silly.

There is a famous old game called ghosts in the garden that nicely captures the dualism of good and bad parents

to go and wash their hands. The children run out into the garden, see a ghost, and come running back crying, "Oh Mommy, there's a ghost in the garden." The mother says, "It's only my pink pants on the line," and she tells them to go and wash their hands as before. They do so but come running back with the same complaint that there is a ghost in the garden. This time the mother says, "It's only Daddy's white pants on the line."

The same thing happens again, and this time the mother tells them to go and feel the pants. They run back crying, "Oh, it's got fur on it, Mommy." The mother says, "Come with me and I'll go and see." To the ghost she says, "What are you doing in my garden?" "Picking up sticks," he replies.

"What do you want the sticks for?"

"To light a fire."

"What do you want the fire for?"

"To boil a pot."

"What do you want the pot for?"

"To boil a stone."

"What do you want the stone for?"

"To sharpen a knife." (At this point the children scream.)

"What do you want the knife for?"

"To cut off your heads."

The ghost then chases the mother and the children, and the player who is caught becomes the next mother. In some versions the game finishes with a game of fox and geese, in which the mother tries to get her children back from the ghost (or witch or fox). The ghost stretches out its hands, the children hold on behind the ghost in a chain, and the mother tries to get around behind the ghost and tag the children. Those she tags are then free. In most versions the recaptured children get a good licking and are of course naughty

There are other chasing games. In cross tag the other players help the pursued player by passing between her and the person who is "It." The person who is "It" must then chase the player that passes in front of her. In caught and free the players not caught try to free those who are. They have to stand still but can be freed by a tag from the untagged players. This game is also known as pebbles and stones and as candlesticks. In cat and mouse the person who is "It" chases the mouse in and out of a circle of players, who aid the mouse by holding their hands when the person who is "It" tries to pass but lowering them for the mouse to go through.

Notice in all these games how harassed the "It" figure has now become. Clearly the children are expressing an independence of power figures that they will not show in their own behavior until preadolescence, several years off. The game allows them to experiment with revolution in its own limited way. But note that the game relationships are still one-sided. Some roles are more powerful than others. It will not be for a year or two yet that children go into games with strict equality before the law, as in baseball, football, etc.

### *Dominance and Usurpation*

Chasing and escaping and the challenging of good and bad parents are one of the themes of the day. Another is being bossy and then having your position taken away from you. Two illustrative games will be discussed below. Traditionally these games were more often played by girls, suggesting perhaps that they were expected to be more interested in these forms of arbitrary power and status.

what they can do as they try to get down to where he is. The first to reach him becomes the new person who is "It." There is a terminology of movements; for example, needles (put the heel of one foot in front of the toe of the other foot), pin (move forward half a foot length), lamp post (go down on hands, feet staying where they are and hands stretching out as far as possible, and then stand up on point where outstretched fingers reach), umbrella (whirl around and forward until commanded to stop), etc. The person who is "It" tells the number of steps to be taken in each case. This game is known also as giant steps and as cauliflower and cabbages.

Mother may I is the same game, except that the players ask what they can do. "Mother may I take five jumps?" "No, you did not say please." "May I take five jumps please?" "You may. No, you cannot. You did not say thank you." Here the game has a similar movement pattern, but the "It"-controlled bossiness has increased tremendously. Cheating seems to be the rule. "You can cheat by edging up when the leader is not looking." "They're supposed to be fair, but they often favor their own friends."

#### *Correctness or Mistakes*

We mentioned earlier that this is an age when children begin to understand competition, just as they understand work at school. They are now interested in winning, although they are frightened of too great a challenge. The most important games that girls usually play from this age onward throughout Western civilization are jump rope, hopscotch, ball bouncing, and jacks. In all of these games the aim is to progress slowly through a series of actions and not to make mistakes. That is what most girls remember about these

you may carry on from where you left off. The winner being the one to get through the whole series first. Everyone makes progress even if one player is the most successful.

Perhaps there is a relationship between the careful step-by-step progress in these games, the emphasis on not making mistakes, and being a traditional woman; that is, one who is concerned with etiquette and formal behavior, one who is frightened of mistakes, one who is not so much concerned with winning as with not breaking down. Girls will tolerate a less than competent player as long as she is amiable and brings something to the game. She could be a good rope turner or just a pleasant audience. A girl who fusses about not winning or is constantly berating herself for not being in form "today" is more likely to find herself hanging on the fringes, not invited to play. The society of the game has traditionally been more important to girls than the outcome has been, rather like afternoon women bridge players who will socialize more than the mixed sex evening groups, where the quality of the play and the outcome of the game is more important.

Some examples of these games follow. In jump rope two girls turn a rope over while others take turns jumping and others chant the rhymes. Some of the rhymes refer only to the speed of the skipping, usually requiring the child to speed up as the rhyme progresses.

One to make ready  
And two to prepare,  
Good luck to the rider  
And away goes the mare.  
Salt, mustard, vinegar, pepper.

interested in, the occupations and interests of women.  
Hopscotch is played on a diagram marked out on the ground. There are various kinds of diagrams: circles, rectangles, and rectangles with arms. In all games the child throws (or kicks) a stone or piece of wood into the numbered compartments in the diagram. If the marker does not land in the right square, the child is out and it is the next child's turn.  
Ball bouncing is a solo performance by a player who tries to see how far he can get without a mistake. In competition players take turns to see who can get the furthest. It may be done with or without a rhyme. One such rhyme follows:

Two, four, six, eight,  
Mary's at the garden gate,  
Eating cherries off a plate.  
Two, four, six, eight.

Children go through complicated gymnastics as the game gets more difficult.

Jacks is a game played with five small objects; for example, stones. The movements are very complicated and difficult. The first to complete the sequence wins. The movements include those in which a player throws the stones in the air with her right hand and tries to catch them on the back of that hand.

In all the games in this chapter the child is one player in the middle of a group of players. Generally we do not have one child competing directly with another at this age. That is too direct a form of competition. It is easier if one child plays among the others, so that although one may win, *all* the rest lose. This makes losing easier to bear. Marbles is like that. There are many other informal skill contests that children get

petitive, and for that reason.  
We finish, as does the age, with its most famous poem, which begins as follows:

Ladies and jelly spoons  
I come before you to stand behind you  
To tell you something I know nothing about. . . .