A photograph showing a child's hands holding a piece of paper. The child is wearing a striped shirt. A pencil is visible in the background. The image is dimly lit and has a yellowish tint.

Exploring Childhood
Working with Children

**What about
DISCIPLINE?**

**What about
DISCIPLINE?**

WHAT ABOUT DISCIPLINE?

Written by:

Jeannette G. Stone

Photographed by:

Josef Bohmer

Dorothy Levens (pp. 9 and 20)

Editor:

Marcia Mitchell

Design:

Roz Gerstein

Ruth Evans

EXPLORING CHILDHOOD PROGRAM

Director:

Marilyn Clayton Felt

Curriculum Coordinator:

Ruth N. MacDonald

Module Head:

Susan Christie Thomas

Project Manager:

Kathleen L. Horani

Senior Scholars:

Jerome Kagan, Professor of Human Development, Harvard University

James Jones, Assistant Professor of Social Psychology, Harvard University

Freda Reblsky, Professor of Psychology, Boston University

Special Contributors:

Ronald and Peggy Lippett
Human Resources Development Associates
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Jeannette G. Stone
Director, Early Childhood Center
Sarah Lawrence College

Consultants:

T. Berry Brazelton, Pediatrician and Clinical Assistant Professor, Harvard University

Urie Bronfenbrenner, Professor of Human Development and Family Studies, Cornell University

Jerome S. Bruner, Watts Professor of Psychology, Department of Experimental Psychology, Oxford University

Betty H. Bryant, Nursery School Director, Center for Child Care Research, Educational Testing Service, Princeton, New Jersey

Courtney Cazden, Professor of Education, Harvard University

Joan Goldsmith, Co-Director, The Institute of Open Education/Antioch Graduate Center

Patricia Marks Greenfield, Associate Professor of Psychology, University of California at Los Angeles

John Herzog, Associate Professor of Education, Northeastern University

David Kantor, Director of Research and Development, Boston Family Institute

Beatrice Blyth Whiting, Professor of Education and Anthropology, Harvard University

Developers:

Norma Arnow
Wendy J. Barnes
Ellen Grant
Rogier Gregoire
Toby Grover
Patricia Hourihan
Margaret Janey
Karlen Lyons
Lucy Lyons
Pamela Matz
Jim McMahon
John Nove
Judith Salzman
Ianthe Thomas
Juliet Vogel
Sandra Warren
Dennie Wolf

Filmmakers:

Henry Felt
John Friedman
Mark Harris
Lynn Smith
David Vogt

Film Staff:

David Barnett
David Berenson
Frank Cantor
Elvin Carini
Edward T. Joyce
Allegra May
David Nelson
Charles Scott
Dan Seeger
Charles White, Jr.

Editors:

Marcia Mitchell
Marjorie Waters
Nancy Witting

Design:

Myra Lee Conway
Roz Gerstein
Diana Ritter
Michael Sand
Karen Shipley
Judy Spock
Alison Wampler

Production:

Patricia A. Jones
Scott Paris

Parent Education:

Louis Grant Bond
Naarah Thornell

Teacher Education:

Michael J. Cohen
Marjorie Jones
Edward Martin
Barbara S. Powell
Emma Wood Rous

Evaluation:

Geraldine Brookins
Martin Chong
Catherine Cobb
Joan Costley
Sherryl Graves
Aisha Jones
Eileen Peters
Caren von Hippel

Regional Evaluators:

John R. Browne
Karen M. Cohen
Judith McMurray
Mark Walker
Kaffie Weaver

Regional

Field Coordinators:

Florence J. Cherry
Thomas A. Fitzgerald
Andrea J. Love
Annie Madison
Janet Rayder
T. David Wallsteadt
Dianne H. Willis

Support Staff:

Marylène Altieri
Florence Bruno
Genevra Caldon
Bushra Karaman
Judith Knapp
Ruth Kolodney
Pamela Ponce de Leon
Maria Rainho
Denise Weaver

Distribution Coordinator:

Steve Westlund

EDC SCHOOL AND SOCIETY PROGRAMS

Director:

Janet Hanley Whitla

Senior Associate:

Peter B. Dow

Project Directors:

Marilyn Clayton Felt
Anita Gil
Nona P. Lyons
Earle Loman
Ruth N. MacDonald
William Southworth

Director of Evaluation:

Karen C. Cohen

Director of Field Services:

Dennen Reilley

Director of Publications:

Anne Glickman

Director of Teacher Education:

Rita Dixon Holt

EXPLORING CHILDHOOD has been developed by the School and Society Programs of Education Development Center under grants from The Children's Bureau, Office of Child Development; the National Institute of Mental Health; and with the support of the Office of Education.

Copyright © 1973, 1975
Education Development Center, Inc.
All rights reserved.

EDC
School and Society Programs
15 Chapel Street
Newton, MA 02160

Contents

Introduction:	5
What "discipline" means.	6
Causes of misbehavior	8
Children misbehave because of trouble in their lives	8
Children misbehave because the day's activities ask too much of them	13
Children misbehave because they act their age	15
dependent	16
egocentric	18
active, headlong	19
talkative	20
determined	21
honest and blunt	22
How to handle misbehavior: Some suggestions	24
What about punishment?	28
Speaking from habit	31

Introduction

The teacher is reading a story to a group of children at your fieldsite. One child, Susan, starts to wiggle, pinch, and talk loudly. If the teacher said to you, "Would you take Susan over to the table and play with her while the rest of us finish the story?", you might try to get the child to leave with you, wondering how to handle the situation.

Children are generally expected to learn how to "behave," at home and at school. But the word "behave" has different meanings for different people. There is no one right way to behave well; and what is misbehavior to one person is perfectly all right to another.

There is some behavior, though, that would be disapproved of by almost everyone. Most people would stop a child from attacking and hurting another child. They would stop a child who is disrupting a group of children on purpose. They would stop spitting or cursing, acts which don't hurt people physically but which are generally disliked and labelled as misbehavior.

The word "misbehavior" can be defined, then, as activity which is judged by one particular person or group to be wrong. For example, a babysitter at home might allow a preschooler to climb around on the furniture because the child is happy and not hurting anyone. But a teacher in school might think that climbing on chairs or tables is misbehavior. What is called out-of-bounds behavior depends on the situation and on who sets the bounds. The misbehavior depends on your point of view.

Questions for discussion

In your opinion, is it misbehavior, or not, when a little girl gets her clothes dirty during play? sucks her thumb when she's tired? spills milk at the lunch table accidentally? hits back when she gets hit? How are situations like these handled at your fieldsite?



What 'Discipline' means



Preschool discipline does not merely mean punishment. It does not mean simply scolding or spanking or sending a child out of the room.

What does discipline mean, then?

It means all the ways you talk and act with children (and this includes setting an example for them). One way of providing good discipline would be to see to it that children have things to do that really catch their interest — cartons to climb into on a rainy day, for instance, or fresh dress-ups to replace the old ones they're too used to. You would try to prevent trouble from breaking out in the first place — moving over to a group of children on the playground, for example, when you notice that they are getting irritable.

You would stop children who had gotten into serious trouble — with your voice, your hands, your whole body if need be. But you would not *just* stop them. You would try to show them a better way to behave instead.

The goal of good discipline is to have children gradually gain inner control and become self-disciplined. There are differences of opinion among teachers, and others, about how to reach the goal of self-discipline. If you find that your ideas are different from the teacher's, you can figure out other methods that you think might work, but it helps to discuss your thoughts with the fieldsite teacher and to talk over your experiences with your own friends and teachers.

Questions for discussion

Do you find that you are reacting to children the same way your parents reacted to you? What qualities in young children do you enjoy? What qualities surprise you, or annoy you?

Do you learn about children mostly from other students, or from your teachers? From observing the children directly, or from reading about them?

It would be convenient if you could remember how it feels to be a young child; you could learn about child development from your own experiences. But most adults are unable to remember back very much before they were five or six — around the time they were starting to attend first grade. Therefore, all adults have to learn about children by watching them and listening to them. You can also learn from class discussion; and from books, films, and research reports on child development, and from talking with parents and others who have worked with children.

Imagine yourself as a teacher. Would you know what to expect of the children in your group? Would their behavior puzzle you? Would you wonder why they act the way they do?



Do you learn about children from observing them directly, or from reading about them?

Causes of misbehavior

There are at least three possible causes for children's misbehavior. (You may think of more.)

- Think about a "problem child" at your fieldsite. Is it possible that this child has serious problems that result in misbehavior?

- Then think about the program at your fieldsite. Is it possible that children misbehave sometimes because too much is asked of them?

- Finally, think about the whole group of children. Is it possible that they misbehave sometimes simply because of their age? that they act "immature" because they are immature?

Children misbehave because of trouble in their lives.

People who persist in thinking of childhood as a time of happy innocence are fooling themselves. Every child's life includes some stress and frustration and it comes out in the child's behavior. Young children are not good at covering up their feelings or at expressing them in words.

Teachers often see children fall apart "for no reason," except that there is a reason even if it is not apparent. Here are a few reasons why a child might misbehave at the fieldsite: The child has been teased, or humiliated, by older brothers and sisters and neighborhood children, or even by parents. It is no wonder if such a child turns on the children at school to tease *them*. Children have to absorb difficult changes in their lives — changes which are hard for them to understand, like moving from one home to another or having to be cared for by someone they don't know; children who are victims of severe physical punishment at home have been observed in their centers to use violence themselves, as if it were the only way they knew to respond to other people.

While most of these troubles fall under the category of normal stress, there are children whose lives are marked by deep unhappiness. Some children have to endure scenes during which their parents or other relatives fight, strike each other, or abandon the family. Children feel helpless at such times, as they do in the face of divorce, illness, and death.



*Some worries are hard
to put into words.*



*Come on! Let's run
away from the teacher.*

When people are going through trouble in their personal lives, most show it in all other parts of their lives. Adults may be unable to concentrate, for example. They may brood about their problems and not see or hear what is going on around them. They may try to deny their feelings, but then get into arguments or fights because they are angry or worried. It is the same with children.

Children's behavior also falls apart for lesser reasons, of course. They may just be trying to see how it feels to be "bad" or they may be testing the teacher when they throw materials around, or spit, or bite, or run away when spoken to, or hit other children.

But if they act that way most of the time, as if driven to get into trouble, they may be struggling with serious problems. There is no doubt that they cause serious problems in their schools and centers.

Some people are good at listening when children want to talk about their troubles. (People must remember to treat what they are told at these times as confidential and to discuss the information revealed by children only within the staff.) An adult can listen, sympathize, and stay close by — helping the child feel better so that he or she can work with materials or play outdoors instead of being paralyzed by worry.

One morning in a day care center, Fred, the student, noticed that Paul, usually an energetic child, was just standing around silently. Fred asked if something was wrong. Paul didn't answer. Fred stayed beside him awhile. Soon Paul began to talk about an auto accident he had seen on his way to the center.



Paul happened to react to trouble quietly that morning, but another child might have reacted by racing around or by attacking other children.

The child who is racing around the room or attacking other children has to be stopped regardless of his or her problems. The question is: do you then deal out quick, strong punishment and scolding? Those who would answer Yes may believe that children are growing up in such a hostile world that when you take time to understand and explain, you do not prepare them for the realities they will face later.

Those who would disagree believe that although the world is a rough place and may get worse, bearing down too hard on young children will weaken them — not strengthen them.

Ms. Brown sees Benjamin rush around her nursery school pushing materials onto the floor, threatening other children, kicking and shoving. She stops him, grabbing him around the shoulders, anchoring his feet, and holding him. After a few minutes, when he quiets down and can listen, she tells him she will not allow him to act that way. Then she takes him to the work table and gets him started at the table with the clay. She makes sure all during the day that some adult is with him. When he starts to misbehave, he is stopped short and re-directed, kindly but firmly.

Questions for discussion

If you were the teacher in the situation just described, how would you deal with Benjamin? Punish him? If so, how? If not, why not? Would you try to talk with him? To help him? Is helping him a part of the responsibility of the center?



Children misbehave because the day's activities ask too much of them.

If children get tense and cranky in a particular situation, if they start pinching or hitting, then the situation itself may be to blame.

Try listing three or four examples of children's misbehavior at your fieldsite which may have stemmed from an unrealistic demand you made upon them. For instance, might you have:

arranged play materials on an open shelf, but told the children that the materials were for the next morning?

given a group of four or five children one new doll to share?

showed a picture book at story-time to a large group of children, when half of them could not see the pictures?

set up a project of making cookies with the children — with only one mixing bowl and spoon, so that some of the children had not had a turn to stir the batter when time ran out?

ordered four-year-olds to walk slowly (not run) down the long hall to the lavatory?

expected the children to wait for their mothers to come for them at noon — with sweaters and coats on, in a warm room, and with play materials put away?

In what way does discipline break down in each case? What might have worked better?





Children misbehave because they act their age.

Children often act the way they do just because of their age. That means that we as adults have to know something about child development. Not always, but often, children misbehave because they don't know any better or because they can't yet make themselves be any better. They can't skip any of the stages of growth.

They learned to say "No" when they were about two years old, and they said it a lot then. (They still like to say "No" and we don't always have to argue with them.)

They still tend to look like Linus, with thumb and blanket, even when they are three and four years old. And at four and five, they develop a real flair for dirty words and teasing.

What is needed from teachers and parents, first of all, is good humor — combined with a sensible kind of discipline. Adults see that rules are followed, but they don't blame and shame preschoolers for being childlike.

Rules should fit. A rule that forces a group of young children to stand in line to go to the toilet on schedule is a poor rule. Children do better going on their own when they get the urge, not by the clock. If they must wait in line, they will wait more peacefully if they are allowed to sing and talk.

In order to make rules fit, we have to remind ourselves of where children are in their development. What are they like?

Preschool children **express their feelings openly**. They burst forth with their feelings — striking out in anger or shoving when somebody gets in the way. They will gradually change from expressing themselves physically to more self-controlled behavior and to the use of language.

A big part of what adults call misbehavior is this direct physical action. We say to a child, "Don't just grab it! . . . tell her you would like a turn." But we have to say it, and show just how it is done for a long time. Adults learn — from experience — that children also learn from experience. Susan will learn not to pinch people; Mike will learn to cope when he's lonely; George will be able to ask for things without shrieking and yanking; Judy won't have to punch when she's mad.

There is no One Way to help children grow and become self-controlled. You will arrive at some conclusions of your own about working with preschool children; and in the final section of this book, you will find some ideas about how to deal with misbehaving children — ideas that have been tried with varying degrees of success.



Preschool children are **dependent** on other people.

Jerry, who is three-and-a-half, has been brought by an older brother to Head Start for the first time. He stays close to Ms. Nelson — asking many questions, clinging to her from time to time — as he tries to get used to being on his own away from home.

Questions for discussion

Do you remember your first day at school? If so, what do you remember about it?

Children vary in how independent or self-confident they feel when they enter new places — a new neighborhood, for instance, or a new classroom. But they usually learn to get along. A little boy who plays and works hard in a kindergarten in April may have yelled for his mother the previous September. (And why not? He was just expressing his dependence out loud, unlike some adults who bottle up lonely feelings and fears of seeming strange and awkward in new situations.)

Preschool children act dependent because they are dependent — physically, legally, and emotionally. They have been fed and cared for by their families, and kept safe for as long as they've been alive.

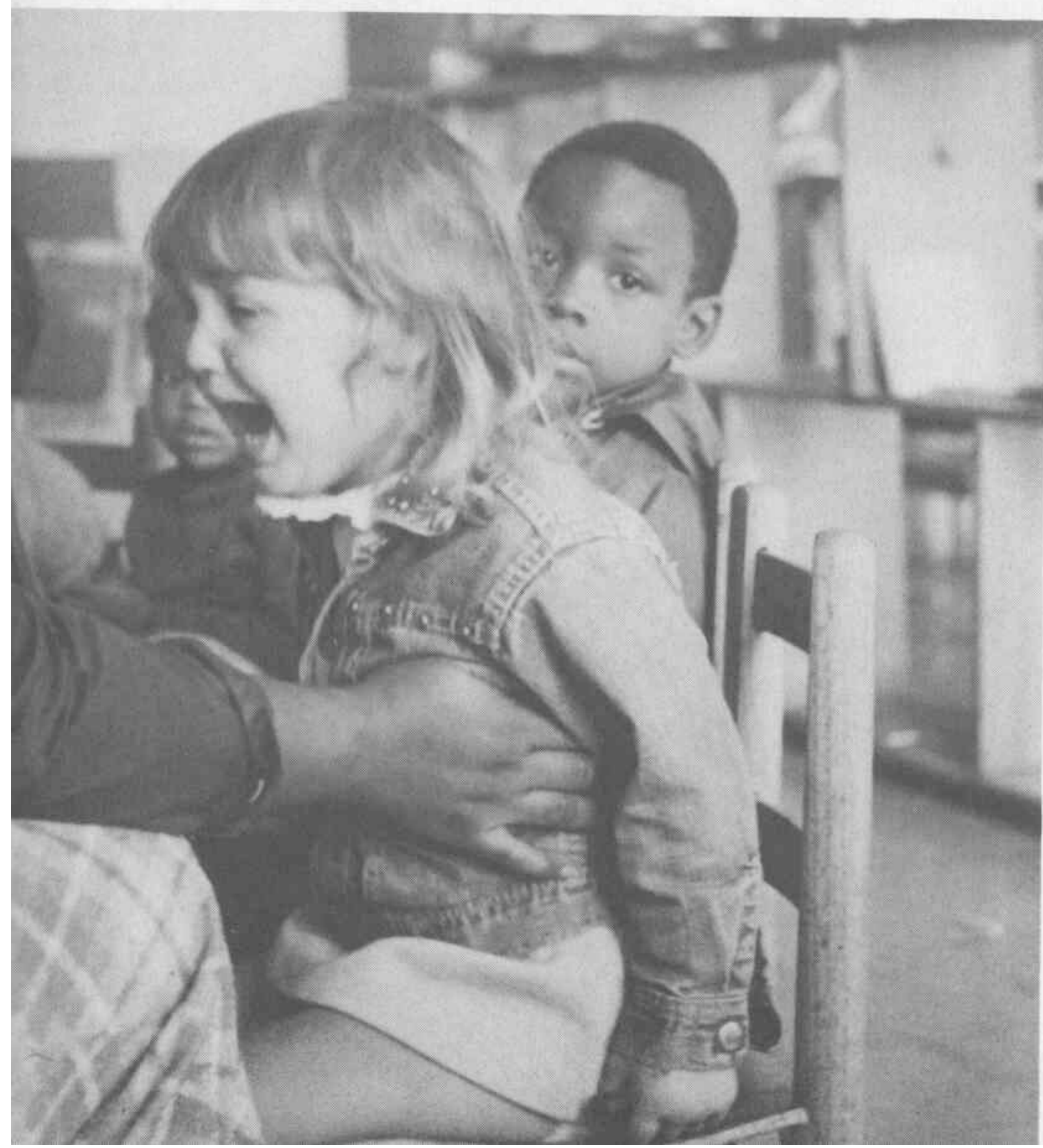
But even after getting used to a new situation, children still depend on their parents, on the teacher, and more and more on each other.

One day in kindergarten, Mike's best friend is absent. Mike asks repeatedly for his friend. He refuses to play, whines, clings, asks you to read to him.

But adults sometimes feel uneasy around children who are in need of comfort or cuddling. An adult might say to Mike, "You're too old to sit on my lap." Or, "Stop acting like a baby." Or, "Big boys don't whine and cry."

Can you imagine what Mike's response to these comments might be? Can you think of comments which would be more helpful to him?

Karen, four years old, teases the other children at the lunch table. When they tease back, she bursts into tears and seeks your help.



Questions for discussion

How do you feel when children cry? cling? run to you when they are afraid? refuse to climb or jump without your help? ask you to help them with their buttons and zippers? In the example above, would you respond differently if the child were a boy?

There is one special and very important way in which young children depend on adults. Children are *dependent on others for self-esteem*. Between the ages of about two to five, when a child's image of himself or herself is forming, the statements which families and friends make to the child sound like *The Truth*. If an adult calls a child "bad" or "crazy" or "stupid," then the child sees himself or herself that way, even though the adult might have just been teasing.

You as a student can help children feel respect for themselves. They tend to see themselves as you see them; if you tell a little girl she is bad, she may view herself that way. She needs you as an adult to find something good about her.

One final idea: you may notice that dependence is a trait which people never outgrow entirely. Can you see ways in which a person of any age is a mixture of both dependence and independence, whether a parent, a high school student, a grandparent, or a preschooler?

Children are **egocentric**. Preschoolers are just learning to share. A little girl in nursery school says, "Sharing means you have to wait." She doesn't get the whole picture — that after you wait, you get your turn. (Maybe she doesn't, sometimes.)

You are helping to supervise the playground. Nathaniel stubbornly refuses to give Marybelle a turn on the swing.

What if you were to get mad and demand that he share the swing? Marybelle would take the hint and yell louder for her turn. Nathaniel would grab the swing more tightly and shout his refusal to get off. And you would have yourself a scene.

How else might it work? You take Marybelle off to the sandbox with you, explaining simply that Nathaniel can't give up the swing for awhile and there are other things to do. Or: you sit down near the swing with Marybelle. You sing songs with her and tell her a story. Finally, Nathaniel runs out of steam and gets off the swing.

Children learn by imitation, and adults are not always perfect models of generosity. Trying to act like an adult and then finding that there is something wrong with acting that way can be confusing to a child. When Sharon hears her mother say, "Don't touch that, honey, that's Mother's," she uses the same line for her own purposes. "You can't have that! It's mine!"

Teachers of preschoolers provide enough materials if at all possible — at least two toy telephones in the playroom; and several hats, purses, and ties for dressing up; and three or four boxes of crayons at the work table. Teachers of older children would expect them to share materials, but the teachers who are used to working with younger children know that the ability to share and take turns develops slowly. The way has to be shown over and over, patiently.

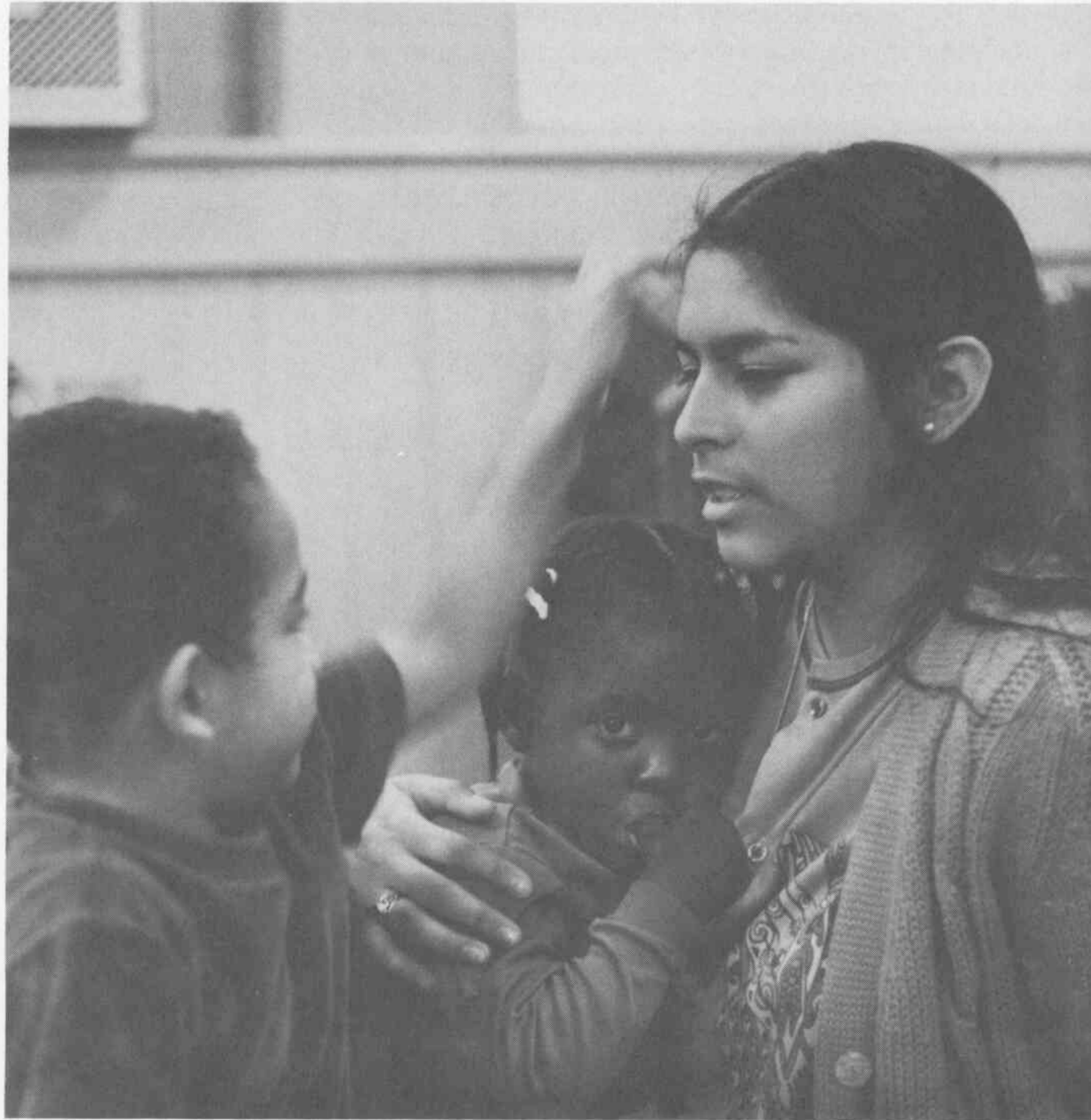


Preschoolers are **active, headlong**. Young children need a balance of active and quiet play because they wear out quickly. You may have noticed, though, that they don't know when they are tired. Sometimes preschoolers play until they are so exhausted and irritable that the teacher switches the schedule and reads a story sooner than planned in order to get them off their feet and help them relax. Fatigue catches up with a child the way illness or hunger catch up, and then it's hard for a child to be "good."

Laurie plays almost all morning on the new climbing frame in the day care center gym. At lunch, she droops, whines, eats very little. She cries hard at naptime, declaring through her tears that she doesn't want to take a nap. She disturbs the other children. Finally (with the help of a back rub) she drops off. When she wakes up, she's herself again.

Young children throw themselves impulsively into activity without plan or thought. You sometimes see a group of preschoolers begin to race through a playroom as if suddenly turned on by an invisible switch. They crash through block buildings and the easel corner, squealing and giggling. They are rough, and they are noisy. They disrupt the room.

What do you think of an adult's moving in and playing with a restless group of children just long enough to steady them? not taking over, not trying to entertain them, but rather focusing their attention on a new or different idea (playing "train" for example) which helps to settle them down?



A pat on the back can soothe, ease and restore an unhappy child.

Children can be **talkative**. Many preschoolers chatter, ask endless questions, announce opinions in loud voices. They experiment with words: silly words, bathroom words, grownup words which they like to say but don't understand. In a nursery center or kindergarten, children are expected to talk, but a non-stop talker is probably due for some discipline.

Teachers and parents vary in how much childish conversation they can stand and in how interested they are in what children are saying. A few people even want children to be silent.

It's a matter of your goals. Those children who like to talk have a way to communicate with you and you have a way to communicate with them, and that's good. But you may want to limit the flow of words, especially if someone else needs a chance to be heard.

Children who have been forced to be silent, who are discouraged from saying what is on their minds, who don't receive answers to their questions, who are seen and not heard — these children may be in trouble with learning (and with self-esteem) even though they may seem "good."

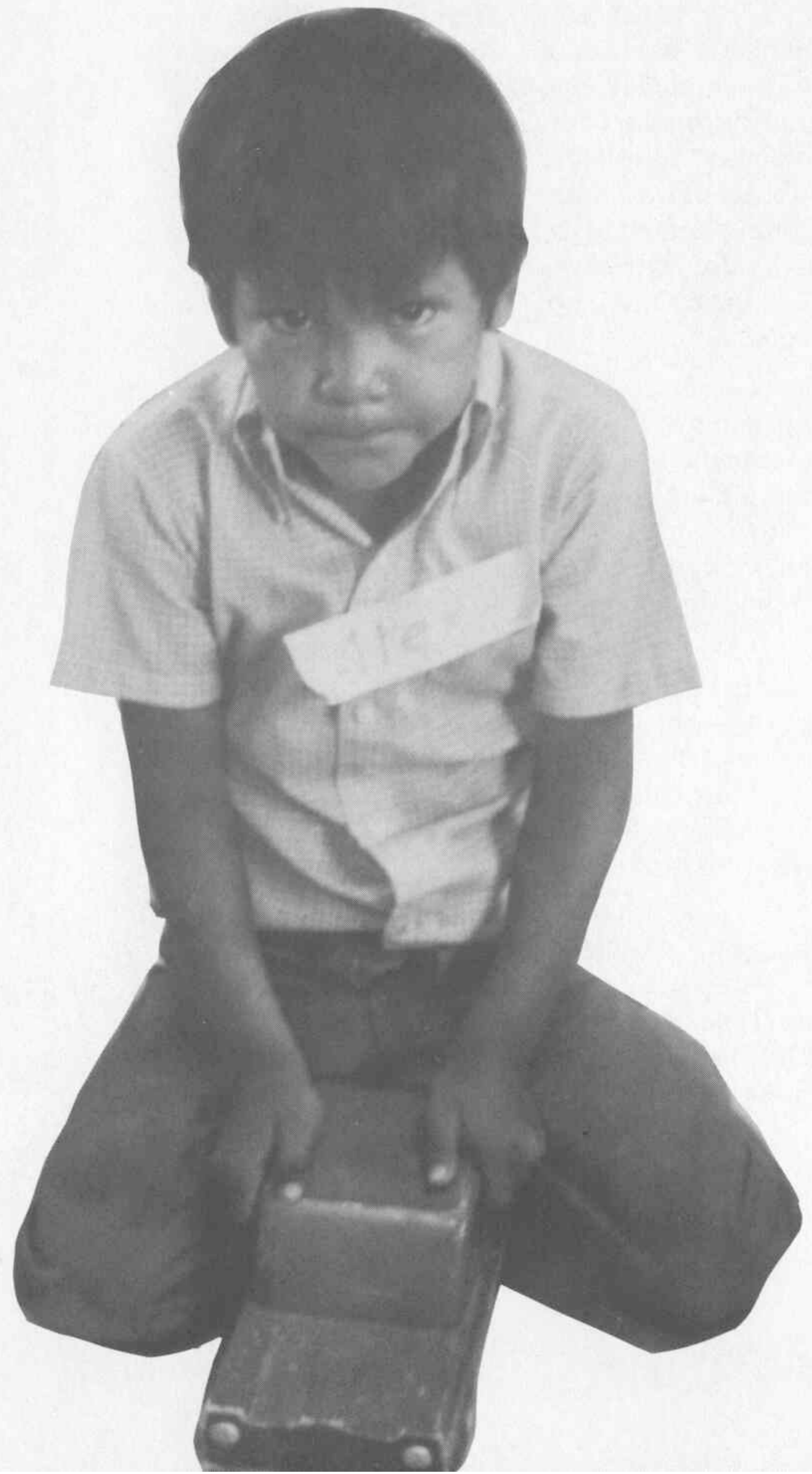
Questions for discussion

What does being "good" mean? Is it the same as being "quiet"?

How can teachers provide ways for shy children to express themselves? Does it help to challenge such children to "speak up" or "say something"?

How can children who monopolize the conversation learn to give other children a chance?

Can you think of ways to persuade a child who is yelling to quiet down, without nagging or embarrassing that child?



Preschool children are **determined**. They like their new feelings of power and decision-making and haven't learned how to be reasonable once they start being unreasonable.

Lucy is usually peaceful and easy-going. But one day during music, she decides she wants to sing Jingle Bells, and she wants to sing it over and over again. The other children get bored with it. Lucy sings the song by herself loudly while the others glare and complain.

One of the hard parts of keeping good discipline is knowing how to balance one child's need to have his or her way against the needs of the other children and of the adults.

Questions for discussion

What do you do about Lucy? Do you just let her sing and hope that the group doesn't fall apart? Do you take Lucy out of the room? Do you pass drums and bells around hoping to help everyone have fun with the song? Do you break up the music period entirely, announcing that it's time to play outside?

You will probably say that it depends on the child. It does. And it depends on the adult. Some children need to be stopped in their tracks (separated from the group bodily if necessary). Some need gentle explanations and another chance.





Preschool children are **honest and blunt**. They say what comes to mind. Some haven't yet learned how to be tactful. They make embarrassing remarks about each other, about the teacher, about the neighbors.

How do you teach children to tell the truth if you must sometimes ask them not to tell quite the exact truth?

A crisis often builds when two children trade insults, each believing he or she is stating facts. Sometimes these insults lead to hitting and screaming.

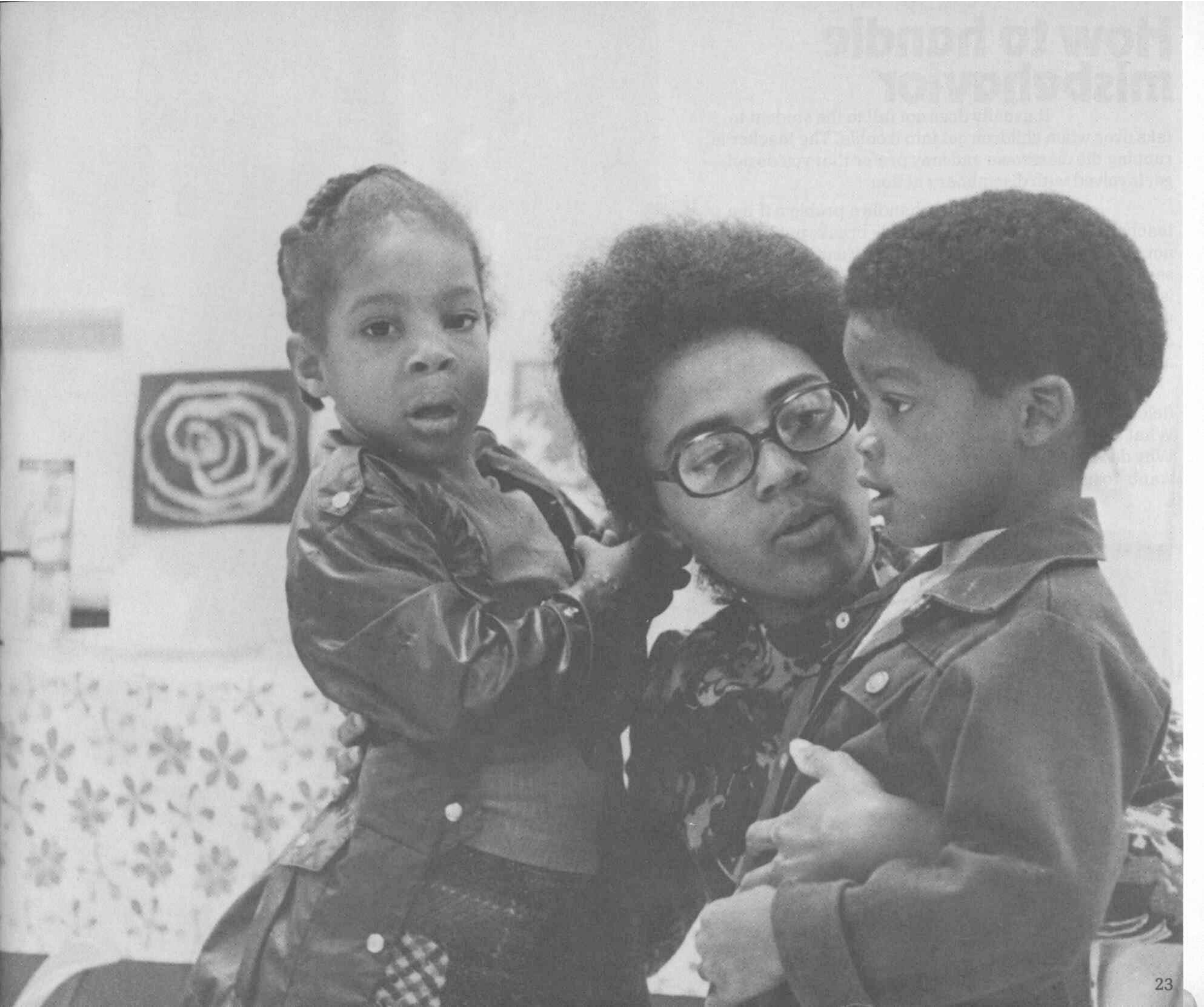
Jonathan examines Cheryl's drawing. "Look at that scribble! That's not the way you draw a house . . . you didn't even write your name right!" etc. Cheryl hits Jonathan. Jonathan hits back, harder.

After separating the bodies, you could put into words what Jonathan has just found out — that he hurt Cheryl's feelings, and people can get mad enough to hit when their feelings are hurt.

We have been discussing misbehavior that occurs because of the ages and stages children are going through. The fact that a child misbehaves (using bad words, for example) because he or she is "going through a phase" does not mean that adults should just shrug it off while they wait for the phase to pass. However, a certain amount of shrugging and looking the other way makes sense for minor infractions that really aren't important.

The phase does pass, usually, as the child grows older. But as it passes, adults make it clear that they like certain behavior and don't like other behavior. Children want and need to know what adults like and don't like.

A child's misbehavior can be so infuriating that an adult is tempted to smack or shake the child. But adult self-control is absolutely necessary in the preschool classroom. If you find yourself seeing red because of something a child has done, you will have to grit your teeth, or leave the room until you calm down.



How to handle misbehavior

It usually does not fall to the student to take over when children get into trouble. The teacher is running the classroom and may prefer that you do not get involved with disciplinary action.

But how do you handle a problem if the teacher is out of reach when trouble breaks out? You may not agree with some of the disciplinary methods you observe at your fieldsite — you may think that the teacher is either too soft on the children or too hard on them. But whether these methods would be right for you or not, they are right for the teacher, and you must respect them as such.

There is a lot to see and think about at the fieldsite. How did the teacher get Nancy to stop spitting? What can be done to keep Maria from hitting everybody? Why does Anthony seem to invite trouble — as if he wants to be a scapegoat?

How do you fit in? What do you do when . . . ?



Feelings run high and children show their emotions. What can the teacher do and say to help both children?



Some suggestions

What do you do when there's a fight?

(We are pretending here that you are in charge.) You don't always stop the fight. Adults sometimes allow children to fight it out if no one is getting hurt or frightened. But let's say you decide to stop the fight because it looks too serious to go on. How do you stop it?

Words won't help much. You may need to move in with your hands and arms, or even plant your whole body in the middle of those battling faces, fists, and feet. You might have to carry a youngster bodily out of the room to be left with someone else (not to be left alone, preferably).

When you have brought the battle to a halt, you talk — *briefly* — in a voice that gets the children's attention. You lay down the law in a few words:

Enough, Joe. I know Terry made you mad, but you both have done enough beating up. We'll talk about it later. Now I want you to come with me.

Steer each of the fighters (forcibly if necessary) into an activity that he or she likes and will accept.

Later — but not too much later — you can sit down with the children who had the fight, not to take sides, not to scold, but to help them talk it out. You listen to them and help them listen to each other. You state your own feelings and wishes.

If the children learn that you are a fair-minded person, they will pay attention to you and trust you. They will try to act according to your standards because of this trust.

What do you do when a child spits?

You see Jacob spitting at Katie. Get to him. In this situation, scolding does not get through. Take the boy off to the side of the room or into another room and let him spit where it's "legal."

"Spit in the sink if you want to spit — but absolutely not on people." You don't scream at him. You don't wheedle. You say it straight.

You certainly do not suggest having somebody spit back "to show you how it feels." As the saying goes, two wrongs don't make a right.

Spitters tend to be teasing, defiant children. Try to keep such a child busy and productive, so that there are times each day when he or she feels decent and competent.

What do you do about kicking, screaming, etc.?

The answer is roughly the same: if it is simple, half-playful aggression without much anger, you watch it or direct the children into another activity. If harm is being done, though, you stop the action. You stop it by getting there, interrupting the violence, separating the children. You are quick, strong, decisive. You may feel indignant, but you avoid threats and angry shoving of the children. You need to feel the security of being in control of yourself.

After a minute, when the children have had time to take a deep breath, a few words make an impact. You take your stand.

“If you have to hit, then bang on the floor over there.” Or: “Don’t kick people. It’s too rough. Kick the side of the door (or file cabinet) (or wall) if you have to kick.” Or: “Screaming is too loud in here. You can scream outside.”



What do you do when a child bites?

You are at your fieldsite and you see Hilda, who is four, bite Amy. If it is her first offense and she is a child who usually is not fierce, you will probably tell her simply that you won’t have it. She will get the message.

If Hilda bites constantly, though, she and everyone else there is in trouble. Conferences between the teacher, her parents, and perhaps with professional workers will be needed.

But the problem is here and how: she has bitten someone. First, you step in and separate the children. You make sure that the bitten child is all right; if the skin is broken or the child is terrified, you find someone to help. It is important to reassure the other children. You don’t say, “Hilda was bad but everything is going to be all right.” You say, “Everything is going to be all right.” Nobody needs a sermon at times like this.

With the biter, you take a strong stand. You will not tolerate biting. You say that you don’t want her to bite anybody and you don’t want anybody to bite her. You do not push Hilda around, although you may take her out of the room as a punishment. Even for serious misbehavior, punishment should be brief, so that children don’t forget the reason for it before the punishment is over. As soon as possible, with Hilda, you would get her involved with a low-keyed activity like working with puzzles or clay, to relax her.

A child who bites constantly is a tense and troubled child. Such children must be stopped, but they may need a great deal of help, perhaps more than the fieldsite alone can supply.

Sometimes words don't help (until later).

What do you do with a child who hits other children all of the time?

You notice that Louis often hits other children, sometimes hurting them. What can you do? First of all, you try always to stay near him. You may even have to take him around the room with you, so that you can stop his blows before they land. Suppose you grab his fist just as it rises to hit somebody. You hold on, and say "No!" . . . but no long speech. If he hits someone in spite of your watching, you get right down on his eye-level, holding his hand or whole body if necessary. You say something brief: "I don't want you to hit people. We want everyone to be safe here." If the child who was hit is hurt, you have to take time to comfort that child or have someone else take over.

If the boy who did the hitting loses control at this point and lashes out, he has to be restrained — perhaps by being carried off to another part of the room or to another room. There is no point in trying to talk to him; he cannot listen or learn while he is struggling. You hold and restrain; you don't spank. The difference between holding a child, and hitting him or her is enormous. When you hit a child, you're in danger of losing control and you are doing exactly what you do not want the child to do. When you hold and restrain Louis, you are protecting him as well as physically controlling him.

The struggle ends after awhile and things begin to calm down. Then you find something soothing and interesting for the child to do. You do not necessarily demand that he or she apologize. Apology can be an empty gesture, and it lets a child think that it's an easy way to slide out of a tight spot. (However, you might tell the child who was hit that you are sorry it happened.)



Restraining protects a child (and the other children) at the same time as it controls him.

What about punishment?

But don't you need to punish the child? Is it enough, when children spit or bite or hit, just to stop them and tell them you don't like what happened? Don't children need to know that adults will not let unsafe or unsettling things happen at the fieldsite?

Many adults do punish children for serious and repeated misbehavior. Punishing is one way to express disapproval and to try to persuade a child to stop doing something. It seems to work best when the punishment fits the "crime" and when it occurs immediately after the offense.

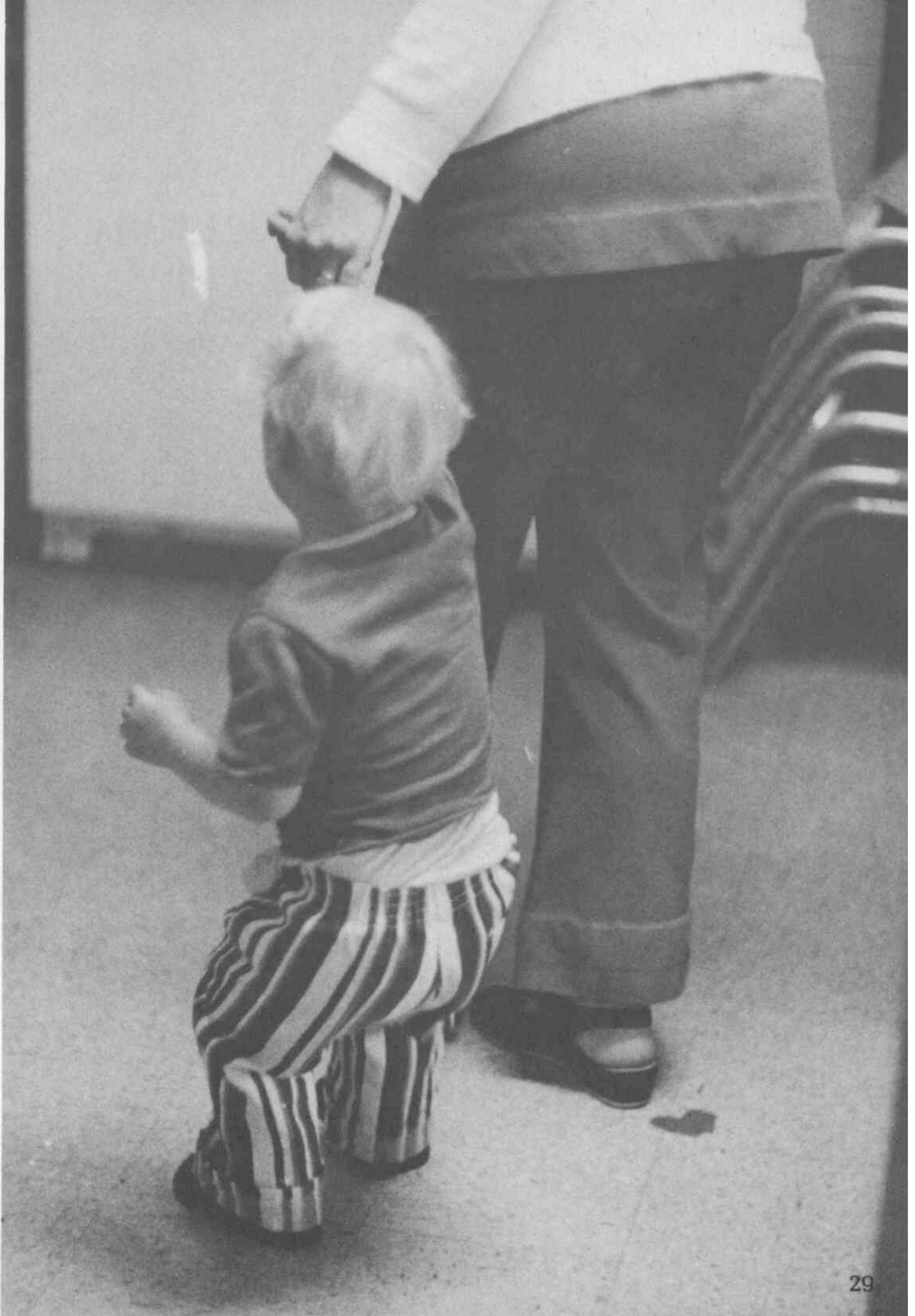
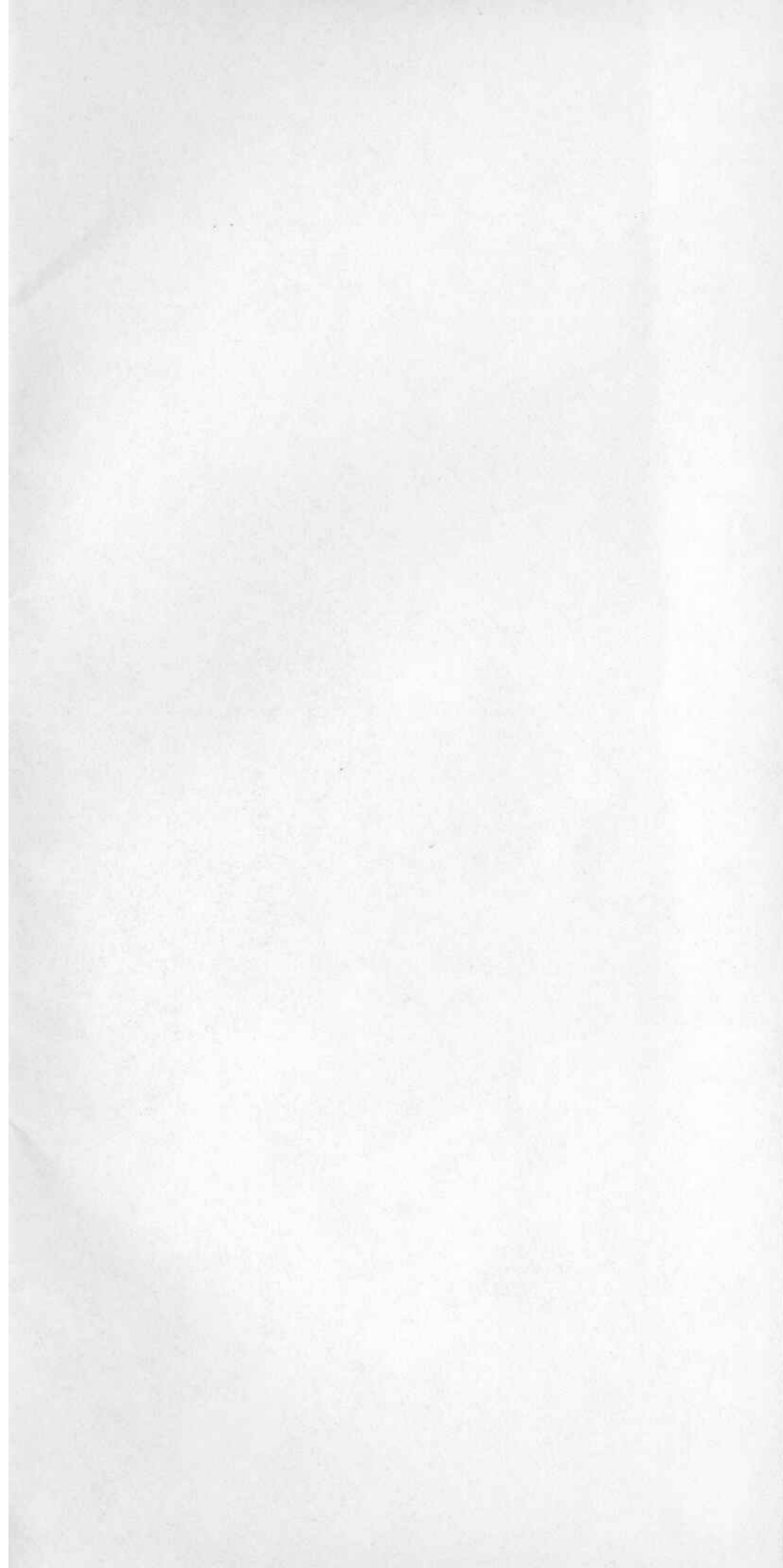
For example, if a child writes in a book with crayons, you remove the crayons. If a child runs away from the group or into the street, you fetch that child and take him or her back inside. If a child repeatedly spills food on purpose (and you are sure it's on purpose) you remove the child from the table for a few minutes. If a child yells and screams during music or story or nap-time deliberately to disturb the peace, you remove the child from the group.

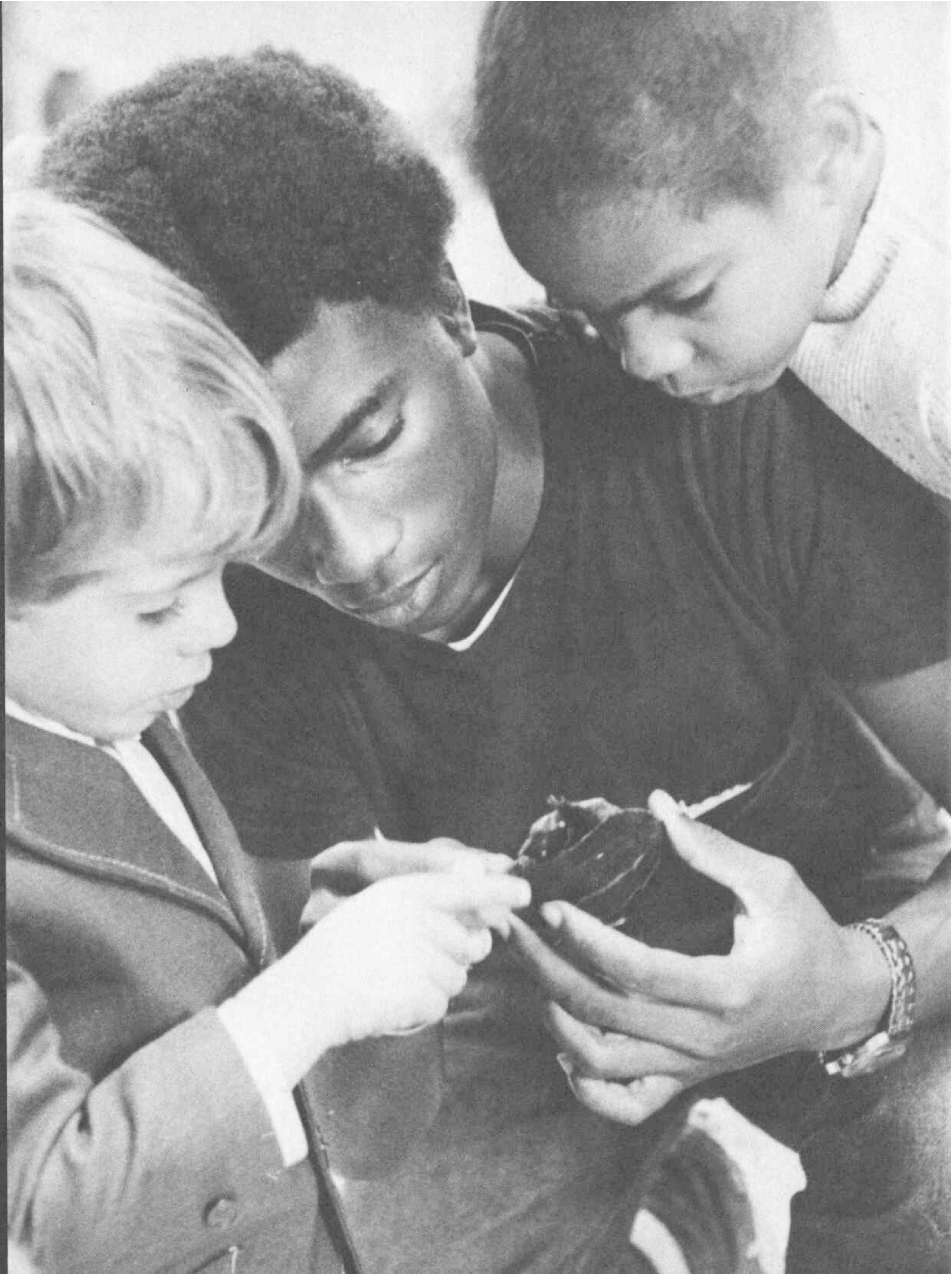
Children almost always want to be with each other, so that having to leave the group serves as a real punishment. There are other punishments used in some fieldsites: having a toy removed, sitting for a short time in a chair, being sent to "the office," even being sent home in the most uncontrollable (and uncommon) situations.

But what does punishment by itself teach children?

Punishment alone is not enough, in the opinion of many educators. The child needs to learn *what to do* — as well as what *not to do*. He or she needs to learn *how to get along*: for example — to wait, to give turns, to talk instead of strike, to listen to another child's wishes. Children learn all this from being told and, especially, from being *shown what to do*. And they learn from being praised for doing well.

Whatever method the adult uses in discipline, he or she sets an example for dealing with the problems. Even though young children tease and defy and lash out at adults, they also depend on adults and look up to them as people who set much of the tone of their lives. The teacher whose rules are fair, who states those rules clearly, who holds an upset child instead of hitting him or her, who talks and listens to children — this teacher gets across the disciplinary message.





Speaking from habit

One word about disciplinary messages. Everyone has heard those old familiar questions and demands that are supposed to “discipline” children — who probably tune them out these days just as they probably have always tuned them out through the years.

“Who did that?”

“Why did you do that?”

“Who had it first?”

“Who started it?”

“How many times do I have to tell you to stop that?”

“That wasn’t very nice.”

“We don’t do that here.”

“Don’t let me ever see you doing that again.”

Try to listen to yourself as you talk to young children. Perhaps you have found ways of talking to them in words that are direct and respectful and strong — not making children feel guilty, but, instead, letting them know that you think they *can* do well.

“Try to let her have a turn soon.”

“Make yourself slow down a little.”

“Next time, try it this way.”

“I think you’ll be okay; you can do it.”

“Keep the sand low — down here.”

“There’s plenty of space; you don’t need to push.”

“You don’t have to say that word anymore . . . we’ve heard it already.”

“Don’t hit him. Tell him with words.”

“Help me remember that you need a turn.”

“Come on over and sit down. We need you.”



This has been a look at young children as they are — small, tough, exasperating, interesting, lovable. To be “good” with children, you watch each face and listen to each voice. You observe what each child is like — how each is feeling, how each plays, how each moves around. You get to know the weaknesses and strengths of each child and of the group. That is how good discipline begins.