



From a Parent's Perspective

by Roslyn Duffy

Baby Rules. Ready! Set! Go!

– Situation –

Our baby granddaughter spends a lot of time at our house. We, her adoring family court, practically take numbers as we vie to hold her. The sound of her laughter, her plump cheeks, those button brown eyes — but I digress.

The point is that our dear Princess has learned to crawl. We anticipated her mobility, by moving all of the dish soap, cleansers, and carving knives to spots at adult shoulder level or higher. In spite of these precautions, our busy grandbaby was most willing to point out those few stray items that we had overlooked.

There was the matter of the coils of cable cord next to the TV, the sharp edge of the fireplace bricks, and of course the candies that were in the decorative can, which we did not suspect she could open. So now that our cords are hanging from the ceiling, there is a thick rug sitting lopsided in front of the fireplace and all available containers are empty, my husband and I are reminded of the rules that brought us through the years of raising our original brood.

– Solution –

Rule #1 Get Ready

Babies, toddlers, and preschoolers are explorers. They are also scientists, archeologists (Oh, look, that's where my earring was!) and animal lovers. They practice these various professions with the same restraint as a bulldozer going downhill without brakes.

At a preschool parenting class one of the parents asked, "How can I keep my child away from our home computer? How do you handle such problems here?"

The school's director, who was leading the class answered, "Well, there isn't anything here they shouldn't touch. If there was, it would be out of reach."

I trust that every care provider reading this could give that answer. If you couldn't — look around. What needs to be changed? At home it may be harder to give such an answer, but whenever possible move items out of reach.

A 'Yes – Yes' Place

It is the life work of young children to learn about their world. Make your home or center a 'yes-yes' place. Children learn through their senses. They taste it,

What problems do you experience? Send a description, a short word "snapshot" of the situation, to From a Parent's Perspective. Each month, we will address your real-life issues. To assure confidentiality, names of those submitting problems will not appear. Elements of several problems may be combined for this column. Only situations appearing in the column receive responses.

“Hmm — cat hair, tastes nasty.” Spit it out. “Ooohh, cat food. Yum!” (Time to relocate or cover-up the pet food!) They smell, listen and touch. “Flowers. Nice.” “Singing. Yippee!” “Ahhh! Warm bath.”

Our job at school and at home (or at Grandma’s) is to make sure that each experience is safe. If your home is a ‘no-no’ zone, then you might be standing in the way of scientific breakthroughs for that growing little brain rampaging through the room. Make your house or center a place of magic and discovery.

There are bells hanging from my counters, so that cause and effect can be practiced. We have velveteen blankets, flannel blankets, and sheep skin to crawl on, cuddle in, and keep our darling warm. The air blowing from our heater produces a look of wonder when she cruises past the vent. Look around and see the magic.

Rule #2 **Set the Stage for Safety**

It takes effort to make a ‘yes-yes’ environment. In spite of my most magical blanket collection, the carpet creates quite a competition, especially those interesting, unidentifiable specks that fit so nicely in one’s mouth. (My vacuuming schedule has quadrupled.)

The dangling phone cord can seem more inviting than tinkling bells, and the call of the garbage pail can be quite compelling. Magic aside, there are still going to be dangers lurking.

Young children require constant supervision. The supervision is easier when the environment is explorer-friendly.

Explorer-Friendly

Those crystal bowls, the charming collections of glass-blown frogs or delicate ceramic roses are not bottom shelf

material. As your child moves from crawling, to pulling himself up to standing position, and then to walking and climbing, the height of the family heirlooms should rise accordingly. This is now your child’s home, too, and she has a brain to grow.

Fill a low kitchen drawer with pot lids, wooden spoons, and other safe utensils. Devote a cabinet to plastic bowls, pans and toys. While you stir the gravy on the stove, your little one can stir his pots at your feet.

When he is older, he can splash away at the sink, washing the night’s potatoes, readying them for baking. He can play on the floor or at a table with a basin of water and some cups and spoons, (place a towel under the area to protect the floor and don’t worry — kids dry off just fine), or he can enjoy the feel of warm clothes right out of the dryer as he helps you fold them.

Wherever you are in the house, bring your child along. If at all possible, provide an activity related to what you are doing, and both your child and his brain will thrive.

Rule #3 **Get up and Go!**

When it is difficult to remove something from a child’s reach — try distraction. Please note that the base of that word is action! In other words, get up and go. Distraction does not mean yelling “no-no” into outer space. Distraction means getting up and going across the room, lifting her royal highness off the keyboard, and then repositioning her in front of — the cat. (Note: This only works with extremely mellow cats capable of making fast getaways.)

“Look at Kitty’s tail!” The next minutes will pass peacefully as she forgets the computer and spends a most devoted time stalking the cat. (Our own cat has developed a preference for staying outside lately.)

If you don’t have a congenial cat — a nice blinking rattle, pot lid and wooden spoon or jack-in-the-box toy will work fine. Just remember that action, yours that is, is part of the cure.

Persistence: **Yours and Theirs**

“What if my child persists?”

Persistence is a great life skill but tiring in the early years. It also shows that your child is beginning to understand object permanence, another developmental plus, but a real minus for a parent’s drooping energy level.

Keep at it. Swoop in, pry off those little fingers, and move her. Better yet, move the item out of her reach. If the off-limit computer can’t be moved, cover it up, create a barrier or block it off by placing a gate or small shelf in front of it.

Get ready for your explorer, set the stage for safety, and get yourself up and going — right along with that little one.

Oh dear. Excuse me, please. I believe my granddaughter just identified a potted palm that needs to be relocated to a higher shelf.

“Come with Grandma dear. Here Kitty, Kitty!”

Roslyn Duffy is the co-author with Elizabeth Crary of *The Parent’s Report Card* (Parenting Press) and co-author with Jane Nelsen and Cheryl Erwin of *Positive Discipline for Preschoolers* and *Positive Discipline: the First Three Years* (Prima Press). Roslyn, a 17-year veteran director of a child care program in Seattle, Washington, lectures and teaches classes for both parents and teachers, and is a counselor in private practice. She has four children and one grandbaby.

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