



PROVINCIA AUTONOMA DI TRENTO

Dipartimento Istruzione, università e ricerca
Servizio per lo sviluppo e l'innovazione
del sistema scolastico e formativo
Ufficio di coordinamento pedagogico generale

Welcome to the day nursery

Benvenuti al nido in lingua inglese



F.I.O.R.E.
FAMIGLIA, INFANZIA,
ORIENTAMENTI,
RIFLESSIONI EDUCATIVE
0-3 ANNI

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Miriam Pintarelli, Anna Tava
Collaborazioni
Monica Dalbon
Maria Fauri

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Contributi

Antonio Mazza, direttore Unità Operativa Pediatrica "Valle del Noce" - Cles

Giuseppe Demattè, pediatra I.s. Distretto Centro Nord - Trento

Elena Anzelmo, psicologa, Dottore di ricerca Facoltà di psicologia dello sviluppo,
Università di Milano

Lucia Carli, professore ordinario Facoltà di psicologia dello sviluppo, Università di Milano

Barbara Ongari, professore associato di Psicologia dello Sviluppo e dell'educazione -
Università di Trento

Emanuela Paris, neuropsichiatra infantile, responsabile tecnico scientifico del Servizio di
Logopedia APSP "De Tschiderer" - Trento

Paola Venuti, professore ordinario Facoltà di Scienze Cognitive - Università di Trento

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Let's imagine

Let's imagine a group of parents like you

They have children aged between 3 months and 3 years.

Some of them are parenting for the first time, whereas others already have an older child or another on the way.

They already bring or are about to bring their children to the day nursery, where they are sure they will find an environment that responds to their needs and wishes.

Here they will find people who know how to interact with children, prepared to listen, who can deal with tears and smiles and with lots of interesting things to offer and share with their child.

Let's imagine that being involved in this joint adventure makes these adults willing to open up, talk about themselves and reveal their doubts and curiosity.

Let's imagine the arrival on the scene of an 'expert', a person with special knowledge, stimulating the desire for dialogue

Experts are people who know about many things. They have read big books, gained extensive experience and are aware of secrets and strategies, so they are able to interpret the sense of things. The expert sits among the parents and says: "So what did you want to ask me?"

There is a moment of silence as people look around and wait for someone to start.

Then they all begin to express their worries, small or large, the conversation beginning and developing, with one question sometimes leading to another.



Protecting and caring

Let's ask the paediatrician

I don't know how to dress my child... do children have different needs to adults?

It is instinctive to think that babies are more susceptible to the cold. Actually this is only true in the first few days of life, whereas afterwards they are capable of keeping their body temperature constant, just as an adult does. So it is wrong to dress them too warmly, especially if they live in well-heated environments. At night it is a good idea not to cover them too much in order to avoid disturbing their sleep, remembering to keep the room temperature at around 18 degrees centigrade. It is advisable to choose simple generously-fitting clothes, in order to ensure they are comfortable to wear, allowing the blood to circulate and the child to move freely. It is also a good idea to use a hat or cap when the child is in the sun or a warm hat in winter.

Is it a good idea to take children out in the open air when it's hot or cold?

It is very important to take babies and children out in the open air: exposure to the sun is particularly important, stimulating the production of vitamin D, which is fundamental for the calcification of bones and for regeneration of the skin. The ideal time of day depends on the season: in the middle of summer the best times are early in the morning and later in the afternoon, if necessary protecting the skin with a high protection sun cream or total block; during other seasons it is instead better to go out in the central hours of the day. Finally, it is preferable to choose peaceful park areas, away from traffic and air pollution.

Since my daughter started going to the day nursery, she has got ill frequently...

Recurrent infections, mainly of the upper airways (common colds), are very common in children and usually begin when the child first begins to socialise, usually when he or she starts day nursery or nursery school. She will indeed come into contact

with the many viruses and bacteria present in the environment, while her immune system is still relatively immature: she may still have relatively narrow air passages, which encourage the stagnation of secretions and facilitate the proliferation of germs. Furthermore, the physiological “weakness” of the coughing reflex, which is used to eliminate secretions from the airways, means that the mucus remains in place. With a few exceptions, a certain number of colds, overcome in a few days without particular complications, should be considered normal in the early years of life.

How should I deal with illness, in terms of returning to the day nursery?

In the interests of the ill child, and to protect other healthy children, it is indispensable for him to stay at home when he has a temperature of over 38°C or when he has symptoms which would prevent him from participating in nursery activities (indisposition, difficulty breathing, abdominal pains, vomiting, diarrhoea). It is a good idea for him to stay away until he feels completely well. Readmission to the day nursery when he has not entirely recovered exposes his companions to a strong risk of contagion and may lead to a possible serious relapse. There may indeed be late complications, even in the case of not particularly serious illnesses, if they are not treated appropriately. Such complications include ear infections, which can lead to a reduction in hearing even several years later, if neglected.

Our problem is getting him to sleep.

The sleeping-waking pattern of a child in the first months of life is very different from that of the adult; indeed, in this phase he is not aware of the difference between night and day, his rhythms are independent of the environment and regulated by internal needs linked to hunger and thirst. After the first 4 months he gradually adapts to external patterns and regular habits help him to synchronise his internal clock with the external clock and concentrate sleeping at night.

But in the meantime he never wants to go to bed...

So here is some good advice. It is useful to feed him as late as possible in the evening so that he is full and sleeps longer. If the child cries or wakes up crying, check that he is not

sweating, that he is not thirsty and does not have a dirty nappy, but do not take him out of his cot. Instead hold his hand or caress him, making him aware of your reassuring presence. Keep the lights in the room on low in order to help him to go back to sleep. In the first year of life a gentle massage or bath before putting the baby in his cot can help him to go to sleep. Towards evening it is a good idea to slow down the pace of games, taking the child towards a peaceful state before going to bed. At this time he will enjoy listening to slow melodic lullabies and nursery rhymes, while older children can listen to fairytales, but avoiding witches, wicked wizards or big bad wolves; choose reassuring stories which do not encourage tension.

Is it really true that dummies ruin teeth?

It is spontaneous for the child to suck, whether we are talking about the breast, a dummy or his thumb, and sucking has a nutritional purpose. It sparks off a complex neuroendocrinological mechanism which facilitates digestion and increases the assimilation of food. Moreover, sucking also represents a form of consolation, producing pleasant sensations. However, the use of a dummy should be limited in time, although there is no specific moment when it should be abandoned.

So when should I remove it and above all how?

Around the age of 2, children tend to abandon dummies spontaneously, but if this does not happen it is better to avoid sudden and traumatic removal. The adult can gradually reduce its use, by offering a dummy only when the child is tired or distressed.

So when is the best time?

It is not the same for everyone, there is no specific moment. However, one can often see children sucking dummies while they are playing, when they are walking around peacefully or even when they are talking to their parents. In these cases they do not need a dummy, quite the opposite! So one can say to the child: "Give me your dummy so you can speak to me better" or "Give me your dummy now and I'll give it back to you when you've finished playing". In short, management of the situation and reduction in the use of the dummy is the adult's task.

At the age of 2 they tell me I should start cleaning his teeth. It seems early to me!

The enamel of teeth which have just emerged is not fully mineralised and this makes them particularly sensitive to caries. Thus correct dental hygiene from an early age and an adequate fluoride intake is necessary in order to prevent dental caries. Caries can already form in the child's mouth during weaning, due to prolonged contact of his teeth and gums with liquids containing sugars, such as milk, powdered foods and fruit juices. For this reason it is best not to allow the child to fall asleep with a bottle of milk or fruit juice in his mouth and to clean his teeth and gums with a clean damp cloth after every meal. Subsequently it is a good idea to clean all the surfaces of the child's teeth, first without using toothpaste and subsequently with a small amount of toothpaste, which is only useful for providing a sensation of freshness. However, try to avoid the child swallowing toothpaste, as this could lead to gastro-intestinal problems.

I'm worried about accidents at home.

When there is a child in the home it is important to "rethink" the apartment in order to ensure his safety, removing ornaments and knick-knacks, making detergents inaccessible and blocking drawers containing potentially dangerous instruments. Avoid leaving any tools, medicines, cleaning products, make-up and perfumes around the house, preferably locking them up in cupboards or putting them in places which are difficult to reach. When possible, remember to remove plugs from sockets after use, ensuring that there are no easy-to-reach electric cables and using the special plastic covers available commercially to cover sockets. Chairs and stools close to windows and balconies are dangerous. Children tend to bang objects, so they may also hit TVs or PCs, glass display cases or mirrors.

If he falls and hits his head, how do I know if it's serious?

Disturbing signs following a fall or blow to the head include persistent headache, visual disturbances, loss of balance or repeated vomiting, both immediately or several hours later, or loss of blood or transparent liquids from his ears or nose. Continued crying, changes in mood or talking or moving in an

unusual manner are also warning signs. Naturally if the child loses consciousness or does not wake up even if roused energetically, or if he sleeps too long or appears to be sleeping in a different way, it is necessary to respond immediately and take him to hospital.

What are the most dangerous situations?

Never leave a baby alone on the changing table and before changing him make sure you have everything necessary nearby.

If you move away, even for an instant, pick him up or put him on the floor. It is preferable for him to play on the floor! From the very first months the child moves and turns over. Put him in his cot on his back, preferably without a pillow. Choose simple cots without ties or objects which could cause suffocation. When you give him his bath never leave him alone, even for a moment. Due to the weight of their heads and the lack of muscular development, newborns and young babies are not yet capable of lifting their faces out of the water, even if it is only a few centimetres deep.

What about toys?

Children tend to put everything in their mouths, so do not allow them access to small objects (with a diameter of less than 4 cm), such as peanuts, buttons and sweets. Avoid toys with detachable parts, strings or bows. Plastic bags are also dangerous, as children may put them over their heads and then be unable to breathe.



Bon appétit!

Let's ask the paediatrician

I am breastfeeding my 4-month-old daughter, who will be going to the day nursery in two months... would it be better to start giving her artificial milk?

Certainly not, mother's milk is the best food for your daughter! It will satisfy her nutritional needs entirely for the first 6 months of her life and perhaps even longer. Your milk will also protect her from the infectious diseases that she may come across in her daily life at the day nursery, but above all it will give her a healthy start to life. Day nurseries encourage breast-feeding: they will always guarantee every possible collaboration to ensure that breast-feeding can continue.

What about weaning? Is it better to begin before starting at the day nursery?

In actual fact, we do not need to decide when to start weaning a child. If we observe him carefully, he will tell us himself when the right moment has arrived. Weaning is a natural event and the child will let us know when he is ready. You'll see that when he approaches the age of 6 months and his intestinal, immune and neurological systems are ready you won't be able to avoid weaning him. Trying to anticipate things would be frustrating, both for the child and for his parents.

I don't like not being there for his meal at lunchtime...

For the child there are no main or secondary meals. He has learnt, by breastfeeding, to take the nutrients he needs according to internal signs of hunger or fullness. Fortunately he does not recognise external signs such as lunchtime or dinnertime, so there is no reason why you should not try out a new meal in the evening, which brings the family together. Children are attracted by what they see on their parents' plates and it is good for them to begin a process of enriching their dietary experiences.

Is it true that homogenized baby food is safer?

In the uterus, your child was already exploring his mother's cooking through the amniotic liquid. Then, through breastfeeding, his experience of the flavours and odours of his mother's food developed further. Now he demands a diet with familiar tastes and we need only worry about making his food suitable for his chewing ability. Readymade homogenized baby food was indispensable when weaning took place earlier, because of the child's more limited ability to chew and digest food. Now however we wait for children to be ready and so this kind of food is no longer necessary. Furthermore, despite insistent advertising, while nutritionally valid, it can never reflect the heart and soul of the family's diet.

Can you suggest a programme for the introduction of different foods?

I don't think there is any ideal programme. Diet is the fruit of one's own identity, character and the relationship between the child and his family. I believe that in the period going from six to nine months it is appropriate for children to try most types of food. The tastes that the child explores in his family or at the day nursery in his early childhood will remain in his archive of flavours forever.

I am allergic to various things and I ask myself: is it right to give all foods to my son?

Nutritional science agrees that a baby between 6 and 9 months old has no more risk of allergies, intolerance, diarrhoea or inhaling foreign bodies when eating any food than a child who is one year old. Certainly, as there are allergic people in the family, it is best to introduce new foods one at a time, at intervals of three or four days.

At the day nursery they tell me that my 18-month-old daughter eats everything, but at home she only wants a bottle!

In the second year of life children need less energy and what is more their interest in diet and new foods is low. It should be said that at this age children should not consume more than 500 ml of milk a day, otherwise their nutritional requirements can be entirely satisfied by milk.



Fruit juices and other sugary drinks are also not part of a nutritionally correct diet. A healthy diet must bear in mind real needs and the variety of foods. At the day nursery the menu is always supervised by a dietician.

But why does he have no appetite when he is with me?

Undoubtedly excessive use of the bottle – both with milk and fruit juice – reduces the feeling of hunger and adds calories in an unbalanced way.

One important factor is how food is presented: meals should represent an enjoyable moment for the whole family and the portions offered should be appropriate for children, who are sometimes intimidated by plates that are too full.

At all events, the day nursery will take the lead in encouraging a healthy diet!

The family has an important role in this context. The child learns from the behaviour of family members rather than from words. It is therefore advisable for everyone in the house to eat healthily starting from the morning, giving importance to a proper breakfast.

In the morning there's no time! Everything is such a rush...

The habit of consuming a regular breakfast guarantees wellbeing at all ages. Around 20-25% of the calorie intake for a child attending a day nursery should come from his breakfast and mid-morning snack.

Breakfast should guarantee a balance of food, which may change but should provide a good nutritional intake: full-fat milk or other dairy products, bread, jam, fresh fruit in pieces and homemade cakes.

My son is 2 years old and eats everything, in fact too much of everything!

The use of fruit, vegetables and unprocessed cereals helps to maintain a healthy weight. At the day nursery the menus offer food providing the correct nutritional intake.

A link between excess protein in the first years of life and the development of obesity after the age of eight has indeed been demonstrated.

So it is better to promote good habits from the beginning!

Yes, in the morning have a good breakfast together and don't leave the child alone in front of a bowl. Get rid of bottles! Milk and fruit juice consumed in this way lead to a high calorie consumption in a short time and may also result in caries from excessive use of the bottle.

When the child comes home, if he hasn't had a snack yet, it is a good idea to offer him pieces of fruit, sometimes yogurt or simple desserts with fruit. In the evening, the menu should be similar for everyone, albeit with foods suitable for his chewing ability. Naturally you should bear in mind what he had for lunch.



Separation and reunification

Let's ask the psychologist

I have to go back to work, so soon... will my child suffer?

It depends on the age of the child, but above all on how the situation is dealt with by the mother and thus presented to the child. When possible, it is preferable to delay separation until the child reaches the age of one. However, if appropriately managed, earlier separations do not cause suffering, indeed they may represent an opportunity for growth, both for the child and for the parents.

It is fundamental for the parents to find a reassuring solution allowing a gradual separation from their child. It is important that they find a person (nursery nurse, grandmother, baby-sitter etc.) with whom they can construct a relationship of trust and to whom they can openly communicate their worries and feelings.

What may it be helpful to do?

Initially it is important for both the parent and the child to be present at the day nursery. It is necessary to get to know each other, in order to maintain a continuity of patterns and habits in order to gradually deal with the feelings linked to separation. Furthermore, the time that parents spend with their child after work and the way they spend it together is also important.

How can I explain to him that I have to leave him with other people?

If the child is very young it is not easy to justify your absence as a parent, but that does not mean you should avoid doing so. You should communicate with him using different signals, accompanying the departure and return with affectionate gestures and a few words of explanation. Initially the child will only pick up on the tone of the words, but he will be able to grasp the sense of the message.

In practice, what can I do?

You can identify some straightforward routines to be followed with the child, both before leaving home (for example a simple

game), and immediately after his return (for example preparing his afternoon snack). Gradually the child will associate the first routine with the second, linking the departure of the parent with his reassuring return.

In what way?

It may be reassuring, for example, to let the child take an object from home that he loves with him to the day nursery and which he can leave and find in the same place every day. The child can thus experience the dynamics of departing and returning, leaving and rediscovering.

Will they pay attention to these things at the day nursery?

In the initial period of welcoming and integration at the day nursery, the child will find the same figure of reference daily, along with his things. If parents leave children with a smile on their faces, entrusting them confidently to the nursery nurse, the separation will be a positive experience; if on the other hand they leave them with suffering, feeling guilty because they have to go to work, the child will also see the moment in a negative way.

So does the child play off the emotions of the adult?

If the parent feels and communicates that the experience of separation is neither dangerous nor tragic, the child will also be able to see it as positive, improving his social and relational skills and gaining autonomy. If on the other hand there are difficulties in dealing with the separation, children may manifest problems in sleeping-waking patterns or eating, or they may cry frequently.

He finds it difficult to detach himself from me, why is that?

It is entirely natural for separation to be difficult. The first separation of the child from his parents represents a critical psychological process. Each child has his own timescale for dealing with this separation: some seem to have no initial difficulties, but this may not be the most desirable reaction, because sooner or later the crisis will come, and the later it happens the less easy it is to recognise for nursery nurses and parents.

The child should be helped to gradually detach himself, with a certain flexibility in terms of times and methods. However, the parent also needs to find the force to separate themselves from their son or daughter and entrust him or her to other figures of reference, constructing a relationship of trust and support with them.

My son just does not want to let me go!

If the child shows an extreme attachment to the parent sometimes he is communicating in this way the difficulties of the parent in dealing with the separation. In this case it is necessary to respond to the needs of adults, reassuring them about the idea they have of themselves as parents.

My son is very shy. Strangers and new environments frighten him. Why is that?

Generally, all children in the first year of life go through a phase when they tend to be fearful of unfamiliar people. The child's contact with unknown environments and people should be accompanied and assisted by the parent, so the child does not feel he has been thrown into the fray.

If he has established a reassuring relationship with his parent, he can gradually use the parent's presence and support as a secure base from which to begin exploration of the world.

My daughter on the other hand will go with anyone, she doesn't listen to my warnings!

There are some children who are very open to strangers, who tend to seek contact with them and do not keep their distance. By expressing this early autonomy, the child may actually be expressing her need for affection. It is thus necessary to understand whether the indiscriminate approach to strangers represents a form of reactive behaviour, namely the need for a solid emotional bond which is not satisfied in the relationship with the parents and hence sought elsewhere.



Playing and learning about the world

Let's ask the psychologist

Do young children know how to play together?

Playing together with peers is very important for development because it encourages the ability to interact, measure one's force and ability and abide by the rules in order to play together. At the same time, there are moments in which the child, either due to his phase of development or because he lives in a particular environment, needs to be alone, to concentrate on himself and have his own space, without the intrusion of others. During play the child learns, finds out about things, experiments, creates, invents and releases his urges, anger and fears.

My little girl often plays alone: should I worry about this?

If a child always plays alone and rejects games with others there may be different reasons: it is possible that solitary play comes from difficulty in being with others, or alternatively it may be a sign of the special concentration and commitment which she dedicates to certain specific activities. It is also necessary to ask oneself if the game is appropriate for her stage of development, whether it involves pleasure and creativity or whether on the other hand it is repetitive, mechanical and not particularly expressive. So while in one case there is no need to worry, on the other it is necessary to take action to involve the child in games with others, also with adults, trying to extend the level of activities and to allow him or her to experience an emotion linked to pleasure.

Isn't it a bit strange for a boy to play with dolls?

The existence of toys for boys or girls is essentially a social phenomenon: from an early age we push boys to do certain activities and girls to do others: advertising also provides powerful conditioning in this sense. In actual fact toys have a specific value, linked to their role and real meaning, so a sword is used for fighting and a doll is used to experience caring for someone else. It is only social convention which defines what is *male* and what is *female*. It is extremely natural for boys who

see their female friends playing with dolls to also want to try out the experience, expressing a need to care which is both male and female. In the same way a little girl may want to play with a sword in order to assert herself and to measure her force and power.

Is it better to allow children to sort out their own arguments or to intervene?

Arguments and fights between brothers and sisters or between children often disturb and worry adults: they may fear that their child is violent or unable to control themselves. This often leads to a need to intervene immediately, to stop the argument and to shut everyone up. For children arguing is a way of growing up. It is an opportunity to learn how to be with others and at the same time to assert themselves.

So when should one intervene?

An adult should come into the argument perhaps after the event, to help children reflect on the reasons that led them to get into the fight, to help them understand the conflict and permit them to express their feelings.

Does a young child understand punishments?

Children understand the rules imposed by parents and nursery nurses very early on, but some may not understand the *sense* of the punishment. I do not believe that it is always necessary to make recourse to punishment. Children understand the emotional climate and the tone of the adult, rather than the significance of a punishment. For this reason it is extremely important that parents are able to establish limits with decisiveness, firmly but without anger, and that they are able to ensure they are respected.

After a tantrum I can't cope any longer and I end up giving in...

There should never be too many limits because it would be impossible to ensure they are all respected, so too many would not be useful. However the limits which are given must necessarily be enforced, because in this way the child acquires an awareness of the force of his parents and his role as a child, protected by strong parents. With clear limits the child learns to understand what he can do and what he cannot do.

What if they won't obey me?

It is really important that rules are respected, and parents must agree, whenever possible, to establish shared limitations. If the mother says she is not going to buy sweets she must be very determined not to do so, because if she gives in out of exhaustion, after the child has cried and thrown himself on the floor, it is all over. The child will get the idea that he is stronger than his parent: he need only cry a lot and have a big temper tantrum in order to obtain things.

Sometimes when I arrive to pick him up he doesn't want to come. Why is that?

Sometimes a child may ask his mother, who has come to pick him up at the day nursery, if he can stay and play a little longer, but the mother says no immediately. Often the child then continues playing and doesn't answer when she tells him to stop and to go and get dressed. On many occasions it would be better to allow the child to stay a little longer, also because it responds to a genuine need to see his mother in the place where he spends many hours. However, when she then says it's time to go she should mean it, and not leave after 15 minutes.

Is character a genetic factor or does it depend on education?

The child's character depends in general on his personality, or disposition, which will then be modified depending on the relationships and the physical and educational environment in which he grows up. So a strong-minded stubborn child will certainly tend to be that way naturally, but the educational environment and the type of relationship he has established with his parents can reinforce or alleviate this aspect of his personality.

At the moment my son says "no" to everything. Why?

Around the age of two, there is a period characterised by a strong tendency to oppose everything, when *no* becomes the main word in the child's vocabulary. He answers *no* to every question and this is the first moment in his development in which he (or she) realises that he is different from his parents and may want to do something other than what has been decided by his mother or father.

He therefore finds pleasure in asserting his wishes. Preventing this is certainly damaging: a child must learn to say *no* and assert himself, but it is equally necessary for there to be limits. So he can say *no* and choose when there are things which are not damaging for him, whereas he will be denied when there are things which he needs to be protected from.

My little girl is particularly difficult about clothes...

If a child doesn't want to wear the top her mother has chosen and instead wants to wear one which doesn't go with her trousers, it doesn't matter. Allow her to choose her clothing and to try out what she likes. On the other hand, if in the middle of winter she wants to go out without a jacket, then we need to insist. In these cases it is not necessary to say much, children often cannot follow long explanations, so it is best to make her understand that she needs to do something because her mother says so. The child will protest, and this is natural and healthy, but the parent will continue to say firmly and without getting angry that it is necessary to do what he (or she) says.

I am expecting another child, when should I start talking to my son about it?

The child must be prepared gradually. You should tell him as soon as you are certain, when the pregnancy is not yet evident, and allow him to touch your tummy as it grows.

The child should gradually become familiar with the idea that a baby is on its way, while he is still inside; he can talk to him, tell him about the world and imagine what the world inside the tummy is like. Allowing him to participate in the event is certainly the best way to prepare him for the birth of a baby brother or sister.

His grandfather has just died and I don't know what to say.

Coming into contact with death is a delicate and important moment in the child's life, and the first loss of a loved one is very painful. When someone he is fond of dies it is always difficult to tell him; the best thing to do is to talk to him clearly, simply and sincerely. So you can say that his grandfather has gone, that he has died and that you will always remember him. Depending on the religious views of the family, you can then say that he is in heaven or paradise or that his life is different

from the one we know. The explanations depend greatly on the family's values, but what counts is not lying to the child and being serene and decisive when you are giving these explanations.

It is possible to make use of stories and anecdotes and it is good to allow the child to keep the memory of the person alive, by talking about what they did together or things he has left behind.



Being and explaining oneself

Let's ask the neuropsychiatrist

I ask myself if they are born with a certain character...

Each parent soon sees how certain aspects of the personality are very personal, but on other occasions there may be changes, also of a radical nature. We often recognise aspects of our own personality in our children and in some cases it is our own 'defects' that we find least easy to tolerate in them.

So to what extent can someone's character be changed?

The parent's task is to try and understand his child increasingly better and to respect him, even as regards aspects of his character which the parent does not particularly appreciate. The situation is different if an aspect of the child's personality becomes an obstacle and negatively influences relationships; for example, if he is so shy that he is unable to play with others, it is best to get to the root of the problem and to try and find ways of helping him, also by speaking to nursery staff.

How can I understand if there are delays in his development?

The overall development of the child is a very complex process in which many skills are acquired.

Children do not all reach the same point at the same time. For example, as regards motor development there are children who already walk alone at 10 months and others who do so at 15 months, and this should not worry parents. Some children crawl for several months, while others do not crawl at all, and again this is normal. If however a child is not yet walking at 18 months it is important to look into the matter. So when a parent fears that his child is behind in terms of development, he should speak to his paediatrician or to the nursery nurses at the day nursery, in order to have the opinion of other people dealing with the child.

He is almost 3 and I still can't understand what he says...

Language development is a very complex process and we can observe many differences between one child and another.

There are however some “universal” stages which are valid for any language and show how development is proceeding: at around the age of 12 months children begin to use their first words, between 18 and 24 months the first phrases appear and their linguistic ability “explodes”, so to speak, expanding very rapidly. At the age of around 3 almost all children produce phrases in their own language and at the age of 4 they have obtained complete mastery of the sounds.

When my daughter was 2 she was very articulate, but her brother is not!

At around the age of 2 around 70% of what a child says is comprehensible from a phonological point of view. For this reason if a child of 3 still does not speak clearly or if he uses few words and phrases, it is important to talk to the paediatrician and if necessary consult a specialist, who will assess his overall language skills in the context of his general development.

Is it true that there is a difference between boys and girls in terms of language skills?

Many think so, but studies of language development have not highlighted any significant differences. It is however true that more boys have delayed language development or problems, but we do not know the reason for this. It should be recalled that certain forms of language development delays may go in families and can be present in several members of the same family.

My little boy stammers a bit and no longer says words he already knew...

Children between the ages of 3 and 5 may sometimes go through periods when they stammer. This sometimes happens during stressful events and the stammering may be “cyclical”, with periods of improvement and periods when it gets worse, However in most cases the problem tends to disappear around the age of 6. It is important not to create excessive anxiety in the child, to allow him to finish his phrase and not to finish his phrases for him if we have already understood what he wants to say. If the problem persists it may be useful to talk to your paediatrician.

What about bilingualism? It's a good thing, isn't it?

The number of bilingual children is increasing in Italy. This is usually a form of bilingualism sometimes known as "one language/one environment", as children generally speak the native tongue of their parents at home and the language of the country where they live in educational environments.

All the language studies carried out with multilingual children agree that this situation does not hinder their development. Indeed, it has been demonstrated that parents are much better at parenting when they communicate in their own mother tongue. Foreign parents who feel obliged to speak in Italian risk impoverishing their relationship with the child.

In my opinion my little boy is too lively...

Children are by nature lively and always active. This allows them to get to know the world, while the vivacity of children can also be a stimulus for adults dealing with them. However, children who are "too lively" have the problem of being unable to pay attention to what surrounds them as they explore the world. Attention, like other skills, is a process which needs to mature and develop progressively and this depends not only on maturity but also on the type of experience that the child has.

I scold him continuously, but he doesn't listen...

The risk is indeed of being scolded constantly, leading to his restlessness increasing even more. He should instead be helped to take pleasure in things, with brief but satisfying activities. Sometimes excessively lively children need to attract the adult's attention, so it is important to try and understand what may lie behind this type of behaviour.

So should I help my son to recognise and express his emotions?

Children learn to recognise their emotions very early on, thanks to the fact that their parents are the first to recognise them in the child. A newborn baby does not yet know that he is crying because he is hungry, but his mother interprets his cries and feeds the child. This allows him to differentiate his perceptions and to recognise his state of mind.

As children gradually grow, it is a good idea to talk to them about their feelings, nominating them when they happen (e.g. "I see that you are angry", "this is not making you very

happy!") and to encourage the child to express all his emotions, whether these are positive or negative, as in the case of fear or anger.

When he gets angry he has major tantrums, which frighten me!

When a child completely overreacts, it is important not to be frightened and give in just because of the excessiveness of the behaviour or out of a sense of guilt, but rather to help the child to understand what is happening and to develop his ability to tolerate frustration.

Around the age of two, there is often a period in which the child's behaviour tends to be more challenging, coinciding with the discovery of his independence.

When will he understand that rules are necessary?

In the early years of life children initially "submit" to rules or prohibitions as impositions which are not clearly understood. Only subsequently will they understand that a prohibition may have a protective scope, for example to avoid danger. Children learn many rules through their parents' example, so we can help our children considerably by being clear and coherent. A little at a time the rules are absorbed and appreciated. For some it is easier and for others more difficult, but it is the parents who should define the rules and not the children!

How and at what age should I explain the sexual differences between males and females?

Children discover the difference between the sexes even before they learn to talk. In the early years sexuality should be understood as a physiological curiosity about this difference. It often begins with a curiosity about physical differences and it is important that the child can express his curiosity freely without this causing too much surprise or anxiety.

It is important to explain that we are different and that this difference is the basis of life, using suitable words and in a serene way.

How should we choose stories for young children?

The stories told to children are a particularly useful opportunity for encouraging the development of language and we know that they help emotional development and increase knowledge.

They represent an opportunity for children to share their feelings and state of mind with their parents, as they can also learn to recognise and manage negative feelings through the characters.

In the early years of life above all it is a good idea to choose short stories which are easy to understand, with clear illustrations: brief stories of everyday life, in which the pictures are more important than the words, to then gradually move on to stories containing more facts. Children love repetition because it is reassuring, allowing them to understand increasingly better and permitting them to anticipate what they are about to hear.

On the other hand wanting lots of stories before going to bed may be a way of putting off the inevitable moment of separation at night; so it is best to agree in advance: one story and then a goodnight kiss.

Is it wrong to let them watch television?

Television is an important information media and should not be demonized, even if it is generally believed that it could do its job better. As far as children are concerned, there's no hurry to begin! Then it is the parents' task to select both the programmes and the time in front of the TV, recalling that the message of television is "one-way" and the public is passive. It is fundamental that parents always know what programmes their children are watching and it is preferable to watch them together, so that children can ask questions and obtain answers to the thoughts that come to them.



Fears and certainties

Let's ask the psychologist

How should I deal with sleeping problems?

Babies are all different in terms of regulating the pattern of waking-sleeping-feeding-crying, activities which follow one another regularly over the course of the day. From the very beginning of life, sleeping is undoubtedly the most strongly personal aspect of our habits. There are babies who naturally alternate these phases in an easier and more spontaneous manner and others who require more intense external regulation by adults, in order to gradually find their own form of organisation.

Is he perhaps afraid of going to sleep?

Yes. He begins to understand that going to sleep means losing contact – visual, communicative and perceptive – with the people and things that he is used to seeing during the day. Sleeping is like an experience of separation from everything which represents a source of gratification and excitement, demanding a suspension of vigilance over the external situation and representing a sort of separation.

What can one do to reassure them?

Children need to be reassured about continuity before and after sleeping: they want to be sure that while they are sleeping there will be no significant changes, they want to know what they will find when they wake up. This is why bedtime is marked by rituals that each child demands from the adults he deals with, both at home and at the day nursery: the usual story, the same sequence of actions, the same actions, the same patterns.

So repetitive routines...

Sometimes this infantile fixation with rigid habits seems inconceivable to parents, whereas it is precisely this apparent immutability which represents the foundation of emotional certainties. From this situation, children progressively acquire the certainty that they can manage on their own and can slowly

experience a sense of their own autonomy, also by regulating their basic biological needs.

So when they are with other children, it will be more difficult...

It has been scientifically demonstrated that in the first months of life children are strongly motivated to get to know other people: not just adults but also their peers. The child's arrival at the day nursery means that he finds himself in the midst of lots of his peers, with behaviour very different to what he was used to. However the social interest and empathy developing early on as regards one's own kind represent a very powerful drive. Over the course of the first three years the child's companions gradually become an irreplaceable centre of attraction and communication. The first friendships develop at the day nursery, along with the first confrontation between peers and the first conflict. All this allows them to experience emotions and to regulate communal life.

It seems to me that certain moments, such as nappy changing, are particularly delicate...

Certainly, because the child's whole existence focuses on his body. At the beginning, the quality of his relationship with his figures of reference depends almost entirely on care for his primary needs, linked to bodily functions. At the day nursery changing time is an important moment in the daily routine, precisely because of the fundamental significance given to care of the body in terms of mental and emotional development.

However eating is also a special time!

Food is one of the fundamental pleasures at all ages and eating with others is a symbol of wellbeing and social belonging in all cultures and traditions (albeit with their own peculiarities). Learning to eat on one's own is one of the most enthusiastic achievements: it means no longer depending on others. When children learn to eat on their own, the particularly intimate relationship with the adults who fed them terminates. At the day nursery, mealtimes represent an important training ground for learning skills which allow children to feel grown-up and autonomous in relation to food.



Another intense moment is the passage from home to the day nursery. A personal object can help, can't it?

The transfer from home to the day nursery can be experienced by the child as a form of separation from his reassuring habits and the relative family environment. This is true above all in the first year of life, when he does not yet fully understand that the people and objects that are dear to him continue to exist even when he can no longer see or touch them.

Changes of environment are not negative in themselves, but it is important for children, when they face a new experience, to be able to have certain favourite objects (a soft toy, mummy's scarf etc.) as a sort of "bridge", which allows them to keep something rich in the emotional values linked to family life.

Does the child perceive the differences between the rules at home and those at the day nursery?

Group environments, such as day nurseries, undoubtedly encourage adaptation to social rules, as imitation of one's of companions' behaviour plays a fundamental role, along with the professionalism of the staff. From the first few months imitation represents a formidable skill which assists with the development of mental, emotional and social skills.

Sometimes I think that it is less easy for us parents to impose obedience...

At home it may be more difficult for a series of reasons: because the parents are tired, because management of the family involves various tasks, so it is not possible to dedicate one's attention exclusively to the child, and because of the expectations/reciprocal demands characterising the relationship of every mother/father with their child.

For children, acquiring the ability to regulate themselves means learning rules initially proposed by adults, while respecting them is a source of inner satisfaction, because it leads to an awareness that one is learning and acquiring self-control.

The children respect the day nursery's rules more!

Setting limits, above all starting from the second year of life, can sometimes be tiring for parents. When the child was very young they were mostly concerned with trying to respond to his needs by seeking to satisfy his every demand.

However, growing up, both emotionally and mentally, also

means learning to regulate one's internal instincts and accepting the rules established by the different social environments in which one finds oneself.

At the day nursery he seems more willing to listen to adults...

In the passage from home to the day nursery, once the initial phase of settling in has taken place, children are entirely capable of grasping the specific characteristics of each environment and its organisation. Thus parents may sometimes find it difficult to believe that in a different environment their child is capable of behaving in way which is almost unknown to them. However this is exactly what happens, because the immense plasticity and flexibility of the human mind lies in the ability to recognise and adapt to different contexts, starting from the first few months of life.



What it's like at day nursery

Let's ask the nursery nurse

The environment at the day nursery is attractive and well-maintained, but other things count more for children...

It's true, for children the first contact with the environment is his figure of reference. For this reason the smile of the nursery nurse is the first "place" he stops. If you pay attention, you can see that at the beginning the child's gaze moves from face of one adult to the other as if asking for confirmation of who he can trust; however the trust he is willing to give depends on the security transmitted by his parents.

A bright place with lots of things to do, and yet peaceful, it must have been carefully designed.

The environment has indeed been carefully designed to respect children's needs and development. Gentle lights and colours are used to create a pleasant sense of calm; there are small cosy areas and places to be with friends, the objects being stored where they can be reached, or out of reach, depending on requirements.

Cleaning is very thorough, isn't it?

Certainly. There are very strict rules regarding hygiene and cleaning, an important factor in a community, also in order to promote health. For example there are the blue overshoes that adults wear when they go into the various rooms, to avoid bringing in dirt from the road.

Why are there photographs on display?

There are photographs on show and albums to be looked through. The photos on the walls create a sense of belonging: "I was here too", whereas the albums make it possible to see the details, to be shared with a friend. It is satisfying for children to see themselves doing activities, to say the names of their companions and things they have come across.

The photos on display also present the day nursery and the staff and illustrate the experiences underway in that period.

Parents can comment on them with their children, who will be pleased to join in. There is often a photo of Mum and Dad in a special personal book, because it is good for the child to be able to see his family, pointing out the members to the nursery nurse and telling her something about them.

With so many rooms, couldn't he get confused?

The rooms have been designed in such a way that the activities taking place in each of them can be easily recognised.

Each space is designed for children and each detail has been studied to help him define different moments and enjoy them. All the activities are designed to be pleasant, in terms of their duration and type.

How, in practice?

Each child spends much of the day with his group in a specific room, organised into different "corners", with spaces for moving, reading, playing house, construction etc.

There is always a soft corner made up of pillows, large cushions and small mattresses where he can lie down, relax and be cuddled.

At this age are they capable of playing together with so many others?

Each child becomes a part of a group of younger or older children, on the basis of age; the groups are generally made up of 6 children up to the age of 18 months and 9 children in the case of those between 18 months 3 years old.

The adult/child ratio gives all the children the possibility of feeling that the adult is "theirs". Initially the children play in pairs, then in threes, learning how to do things together and overcoming natural minor problems, like wanting to do the same thing at the same time.

What is the ratio between nursery nurses and children?

We are so used to the idea of female staff that we forget that there are also male nursery nurses. They are not common, but the male figure is appreciated at day nurseries, also because he reflects the reality of the two parents.

At all events, each group has a nursery nurse acting as a figure of reference, who is their main point of contact, being present at the most important times of the day and who is responsible

for consolidating the group. So she (or he) is the person who will welcome you at the first meeting, to whom you will present your child and his habits and who will then inform you of his progress. The nursery nurse is part of a working group which also includes an internal coordinator, who knows all the children at the day nursery and their parents and who is always available for any information or specific requirements.

As children have different needs they will also have different schedules...

The section for younger children is quieter. The children can crawl around freely; some take a few steps with the assistance of the nursery nurse, while others try to stand by "pulling themselves up" using the "baby walker unit", and others may be sleeping quietly on a rug....Certainly, children cry now and again, but in the arms of an adult it is soon over.

The section for older children is more lively, the children move around confidently in search of their favourite toys, they sit down to listen to a story or sing a song. The areas are more structured and characterised by centres of interest, to make them more stimulating and encourage children to experiment and do things.

Who deals with preparing meals?

In every day nursery there is a cook who prepares the food for all the children.

The dishes prepared are made freshly on a daily basis, while the food is chosen and controlled in order to create a menu which respects the rules of the provincial nutritional tables.

Other supporting staff work alongside the cook. One of these is always present in the kitchen, to help the cook and bring in the trolleys with the meals. Others deal with tidying up and cleaning the areas in the day nursery and the garden outside.

At mealtimes the children manage a little by themselves, don't they?

In turn, the oldest children act as "waiters", laying the table together with an adult. Lunchtime is carefully designed and organised. Children will frequently be happy to try out dishes that they don't know, encountering new tastes and educating their palate to accept new things, increasing the number of foods enjoyed as each day goes past.



There are those who eat everything and those who find it more difficult, so the nursery nurse serves different portions and allows the children to “manage on their own”, naturally checking on their progress; she invites them to taste what is on offer, but without forcing them.

For the youngest children, lunch takes place in a different way: the nursery nurse sits at the centre of a semicircular table, so that she can help everyone. Even those who need to be spoon fed are given a spoon anyway, in order to get them used to the idea and begin to encourage autonomy.

Lunch is also an opportunity for promoting social interaction and encouraging the first conversations between children, a time for sharing tastes and words in friendship.

How is play organised?

For the child play is the main activity, not just for pleasure but also for gaining knowledge and communicating. We could say that the children “play at growing up”. At the day nursery there are specific activities designed for different age groups, also different from those done at home: moving, touching, kneading and mixing, making a mess, getting dirty, dressing up, manual activities and so on.

Naturally it is necessary to tidy up at the day nursery too. This is a rule, but it can also be made into a game. The games and materials proposed follow an educational programme which takes account of children’s needs. This provides for experiences with natural materials and also with unusual and unknown objects, with the intention of stimulating children’s curiosity and their desire to explore.

Are there parties too?

Certainly, and they are great fun. Sometimes there are special events, such as parties with parents or a special lunch in the company of older children from the nursery school.

Sometimes enthusiastic groups of parents, helped by the staff, prepare theatrical sketches for the children. These are always a great success.

Certainly a good start to the day makes everything easier.

This is true for both children and adults! For this reason the moment of reception and separation is dealt with carefully.

The meeting with the nursery nurse always happens in the same place, so that the child feels secure. A brief exchange of information, glances and the agreement between adults will give the child the emotional confines necessary to allow the parent to depart peacefully.

Are there scheduled activities afterwards?

Around the middle of the morning there is a scheduled activity, which varies daily for each group and takes place in special areas or specific laboratories: movement, manual activities or painting... These are clearly defined moments for entertainment, creativity or the acquiring of rules and skills. In the painting laboratory, for example, there are all kinds of paints, to be used with fingers or variously sized brushes for painting on the walls or on the table, or to leave coloured imprints of hands or feet on the sheets of paper. In the psychomotor room there are mattresses, soft stair-shaped units and a tunnel, with a cylinder allowing children to try out jumping and somersaults, crawling in and out, balancing or falling etc.

Does the whole group participate?

It depends on the type of activity and the objectives established. Some are organised for the whole group, whereas others are for a few children at a time. At the day nursery there is always a garden and many activities take place outdoors, from games in the snow to those in small swimming pools, and sometimes it is even possible to eat in shaded patio areas.

They also learn how to prepare for things...

Before sitting down at table the nursery nurse takes the children to the bathroom to wash their hands and during the day there are some moments dedicated to changing and to bodily care. The nursery nurse nominates the actions she carries out and in this way allows the child to follow her actions and refer them to his body. Gradually his body also takes shape in his mind.

Is rest time the same for everyone?

Each child's timescale is respected and younger children can also sleep in the morning or whenever they want, at any time of day. After lunch each child gets ready to go to his own sleep

and rest area and his own bed. At the day nursery there are sleep and rest areas for younger and older children. There are low beds with side rails or platforms, where there is always a favourite object, a soft toy or special item brought from home, which helps the child to relax and go to sleep.

And on waking up?

On waking up the children go to the bathroom, where the nursery nurse changes nappies, helps them to get dressed, brush their hair and put cream on. Then the children go back to their room and while some launch themselves into dynamic games with enthusiasm there are those who prefer a few minutes' peace in the arms of the nursery nurse.

In the middle of the afternoon, before the arrival of some of the parents, everyone comes together for an afternoon snack.

Does the arrival of some parents make other children unhappy?

No, because attention is paid to everyone. Those staying can still have fun with the afternoon nursery nurse, who has other activities to offer them: nothing demanding or organised, but rather relaxing free play.

What if he is "angry" with me because I left him?

The moment of reunification is a delicate passage laden with expectations, both for the child and the parent. Sometimes the child does not want to leave the game or his companions, but the nursery nurse will know how to resolve the situation using the best words.



Day nurseries in Trentino

Structure and organisation

What types of day care are there in Trentino?

The Province of Trento has promoted a "system of socio-educational services for early childhood" which includes different types of care: day nurseries, workplace crèches, family care or childminder services and play and childcare centres. The scope is to guarantee families a range of socio-educational opportunities and to support them in their educational role, in addition to developing a culture respecting caring for children in society.

The day nursery is the most well-established form of child care

Welcome to the day nursery presents the day nursery, a key element in the system of services dedicated to children between the ages of 0 and 3. Day nurseries are the most widespread and well-established form of childcare and have existed for more than 40 years. The first public day nurseries were indeed set up in the middle of the 1970s, initially in larger towns and then also spreading to the valleys.

In Italy nurseries are regulated by a 1971 law

The State issued the first and only law, no. 1044 of 1971, containing general guidelines, which was followed by specific regional laws. In Trentino, Law no. 13 was approved in 1978, followed by Law no. 4 of 2002, with subsequent amendments. Today there are 85 day nurseries in the province, with a total of 3,131 places (data for January 2012).

Below we give some of the key concepts contained in the law:

A pedagogical service which contributes to education

"The day nursery is an education and social service for children aged between 3 months and 3 years. Together with families, it contributes towards the development and education of children, respecting their individual, cultural and religious identity and guaranteeing all children education, care and opportunities for socialising, with a view to their psychological and physical wellbeing and development of their cognitive and emotional potential."

System of services

The system of services is the combination of all services present in the area and has the scope of guaranteeing high and homogeneous quality throughout the province. Belonging to the system is a guarantee, because it reassures users that all the social and educational services offer the same guarantees.

These include, for example, the right to access on the basis of an established age, the inclusion and integration of disabled or socially and culturally disadvantaged children, the homogeneity of educational qualifications for staff and the training provided and continuity with nursery school services.

Management

Day nurseries in Trentino are public and managed by the Municipalities, which guarantee the service for all children resident in their area.

The Municipalities can choose from 2 management methods:

- *direct*, namely using their own staff;
- *indirect*, i.e. by entrusting management to social cooperatives. In this case these see to the hiring of staff and operation of the nursery, while the Municipality remains responsible for the service, guaranteeing it functions properly and acting as the point of reference for residents.

Organisation

The municipalities also deal with the organisation of services. This includes various phases going from programming of the development plan for services to be implemented, to the preparation of projects for carrying out initiatives and the management of nurseries. There is also an operational phase which provides for forms of coordination and collaboration between different departments, the participation of families in educational choices, proposals to the relevant body and training activities for staff.

Financial contribution

It is the Municipalities' task to define the criteria for the financial contribution of users, respecting the socioeconomic conditions and financial situation of families.

Jurisdiction

Along with the Municipalities, the Province also participates in the development of services for young children, with planning of activities at provincial level and various types of initiatives:

- *structural and organisational*: it defines the requisites and minimum standards for services, the minimum and maximum number of facilities and the ratio between staff and children;
- *promotional and cultural*: with initiatives for the dissemination of a child-friendly culture, with research activities and documentation to increase knowledge and promote attention for children;
- *qualitative and pedagogical*: with activities linked to coordination, access and staff training.

Training:

The training of education staff is one of the indicators of the quality of educational services and particular attention is paid to this.

Two training programmes are implemented annually. One takes place at general level, supervised by the Province, which draws up a programme for all education staff working at the facilities belonging to the system, as it has primary jurisdiction in this field. This plan is drawn up on the basis of proposals agreed with the managing bodies and includes organisational aspects, operation, monitoring and verification. The second is promoted autonomously by the individual managing bodies for the staff of the day nurseries managed by them.

Educational coordination:

Two types of educational coordination are involved in day nurseries:

- *systematic coordination*, headed by the Province, to guarantee the quality and coherence of services present in the province, through systematic intervention and contact with managing bodies;
- *coordination of individual facilities*, which depends on the individual managing bodies and regards internal management, the running of working groups and the drawing up of educational projects.

The reality of a widespread system

The system of services, with its day nurseries, play and childcare centres and family day care nurseries, has increased considerably in the last few years. The January 2012 data highlights the presence of:

85 day nurseries, 2 play and childcare centres, 3 workplace crèches and around 80 family day care nurseries.





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