

# What Children Can't Do. . . Yet

By Dan Hodgins

When working with children keep in mind what they are ready for and what they are not; what they can do and what they are unable to do...yet.

## **I can't share**

Children use possession of objects as a device to understand autonomy. Just as babbling comes before talking, so owning comes before sharing. To share fully, a child must first fully possess.

## **I can't say "I'm sorry," and mean it.**

Saying "I'm sorry" has little meaning to the young child. To say "I'm sorry" and understand what you are saying, you must be able to understand how the other person feels.

## **I can't remember what you told me.**

Most children remember only what is important to them. A child may not remember that you just told them to walk, and not run, while indoors. Adults often forget that children have trouble remembering.

## **I can't focus on more than one task at a time.**

"Pick up your toys, put on your shoes, and wash your face; we are going out to play." This command has three more tasks than a young child is able to focus on. Most young children will remember the last task or the task most important to them. With the above command, all the child may focus on is that he or she is going out to play.

## **I can't understand negative commands.**

If a child reaches to put his or her finger in an electric wall outlet and you say "don't", the child is

confused because he or she doesn't know how to reverse their action. Saying, "Pull your hand back, that's dangerous" gives the child a positive action to take.

## **I can't measure.**

When you want a child to pour a glass of milk or juice and you hand him or her a full pitcher, expect the child to pour all the milk into the glass, even if it pours all over the floor or table. Young children do not understand that all of the milk will not fit into the glass and so keep pouring until it's too late.

## **I can't tell you the truth when you set me up.**

If you see a child do something inappropriate, and you ask if he or she has done it, the child will probably deny it. Don't ask the child if you know what happened. That only sets him/her up for failure.

## **I can't sit still for a very long time.**

Young children are often told to sit still, while their bodies are telling them to move. When the large muscles in a preschooler's arms and legs are growing rapidly, they cry out for exercise. As a result, preschoolers feel a need to move about.

## **I can't play with other children until I'm ready.**

Children go through different stages of social interaction. If allowed to grow at their own pace, they will begin to interact with other children when they are ready.

## **I can't tell the difference between reality and fantasy.**

When a child has a bad dream, it is very real to him or her. Telling a child not to be a "baby" does not help. Playing fantasy is real for the child and very important for control and development.

## **I can't express myself in words very well.**

Children resort to physical means of communication because they often don't have the verbal skills to express frustration and other feelings. You can help by giving the child words to use.

## **I can't wait.**

Try not to put children in situations where they have to wait for long periods of time. Waiting often makes taking turns difficult.

## **I don't understand right and wrong.**

Because young children don't understand cause and effect relationships, they can't fully understand right and wrong. A young child does not understand intentional versus unintentional actions, can only see issues from his or her own perspective, and views issues as black and white.

## **I can't be ready until I'm ready.**

Children all grow and develop at different rates. Don't compare children or force them to do things before they are ready.

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