

*Simply Charlotte Mason Presents*

# The Early Years

A Charlotte Mason Preschool Handbook



*by Sonya Shafer and Karen Smith*

## *The Early Years: A Charlotte Mason Preschool Handbook*

- **Practical**

Details Charlotte's counsel to give our little ones a full six years of developing good habits, getting acquainted with nature, exploring with the five senses, growing in their spiritual lives, and playing outdoors.

- **Easy-to-Use**

Here, gathered into one easy-to-read volume, are Charlotte's timeless words to mothers of preschoolers, presented in bite-size chunks with modern examples, inspiring quotes, and practical tips.

- **Encouraging**

Charlotte's ideas will help you focus on what is really important for preschool and increase your confidence as a parent.

- **Gentle and Natural**

The concepts presented in this book will teach you to nourish your child's natural love for learning.

Give your child time to explore, time to discover, time to grow—  
the Early Years.

Thank you for your interest in *The Early Years*. This document contains the Table of Contents and a full four chapters of the book. Please feel free to duplicate and share this file with your friends.

**We hope you will enjoy this sample.**

**Visit [www.SimplyCharlotteMason.com](http://www.SimplyCharlotteMason.com) to order the complete *The Early Years: A Charlotte Mason Preschool Handbook* today!**

*The Early Years*  
A Charlotte Mason Preschool Handbook

by  
Karen Smith and Sonya Shafer

The Early Years: A Charlotte Mason Preschool Handbook  
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# *The Early Years*

“To form in his child right habits of thinking and behaving is a parent’s chief duty, . . . To nourish a child daily with loving, right, and noble ideas we believe to be the parent’s next duty” (Vol. 2, p. 228).





# *Introduction*

Being a mother of a preschooler (or several preschoolers) can be a challenge. Probably no other season of life is so demanding. It's no wonder that a young mother is often worn-out, exhausted, and bewildered. Believe us, we know. We've been there eight times.

Voices come at you from all sides, telling you what you should be doing with those little children. Just when you think you're doing a pretty good job, someone criticizes the path you have chosen and adds "new and improved" information that makes you feel like a bad mommy. Pressure mounts as "experts" and relatives shake their heads and unroll a list of expectations before your weary eyes.

Relax. Take a deep breath. The counsel you will find in these pages is unlike those others. The early years are not years for high pressure or organized activities with a tight schedule. Nor are they years for stuffing your child's head full of facts. You don't even have to buy craft supplies!

Charlotte Mason's counsel to mothers of preschoolers is clearly sensible, easily doable, and utterly refreshing. Charlotte's comments will give you permission to step off the whirling merry-go-round of activities, academics, and stress, and step into a peaceful world of simplicity, good old-fashioned fun, and sanity again.

Enjoy the early years!

Excerpts from Charlotte Mason's books are surrounded by quotation marks and accompanied by a reference to which book in the series the excerpt came from.

Vol. 1: Home Education

Vol. 2: Parents and Children

Vol. 3: School Education

Vol. 4: Ourselves

Vol. 5: Formation of Character

Vol. 6: A Philosophy of Education

Comments or suggestions that have been added by the authors of this book are not in quotation marks and have no reference.



*Part 1*

# The Chief Duty of Parents



# Chapter 1

## *A Parent's Chief Duty*

Charlotte believed that parents have two duties to focus on as they raise and educate their children. Those two duties are to form in your child right habits of thinking and behaving, and to nourish your child's mind with loving, right, and noble ideas. Here are some of her practical reminders about those two duties. In the rest of this book, we'll look at specific activities you can use to form good habits and provide right ideas.

### **Charlotte's Thoughts on A Parent's Chief Duty**

#### *1. Understand that bringing up and educating your child is the most important job in society.*

"Now, that work which is of most importance to society is the bringing-up and instruction of the children—in the school, certainly, but far more in the home, because it is more than anything else the home influences brought to bear upon the child that determine the character and career of the future man or woman" (Vol. 1, p. 1).

#### *2. Form in your child right habits of thinking and behaving.*

"To form in his child right habits of thinking and behaving is a parent's chief duty" (Vol. 2, p. 228).

"By '*education is a discipline*,' we mean the discipline of habits, formed definitely and thoughtfully, whether habits of mind or body" (Vol. 6, Preface).

#### *3. Nourish your child's mind with loving, right, and noble ideas.*

"To nourish a child daily with loving, right, and noble ideas we believe to be the parent's next duty" (Vol. 2, p. 228).

"Now that life, which we call education, receives only one kind of sustenance; it grows upon *ideas*." (Vol. 2, p. 33).

"The duty of parents is to sustain a child's inner life with ideas as they sustain his body with food" (Vol. 2, p. 39).

"The child has affinities with evil as well as with good; therefore, hedge him about from any chance lodgment of evil ideas" (Vol. 2, p. 39).

"In saying that '*education is a life*,' the need of intellectual and moral as well as of physical sustenance is implied. The mind feeds on ideas, and therefore children should have a generous curriculum" (Vol. 6, Preface).

### *Notes*

*Keep in mind that to "educate" means to help form a child's mind, character, or physical ability. Education encompasses all that you do to cultivate, nourish, and train your child as a person.*

**"To form in his child right habits of thinking and behaving is a parent's chief duty."**

## Notes

“In the early days of a child’s life it makes little apparent difference whether we educate with a notion of filling a receptacle, inscribing a tablet, moulding plastic matter, or nourishing a life, but as a child grows we shall perceive that only those *ideas* which have fed his life, are taken into his being; all the rest is cast away or is, like sawdust in the system, an impediment and an injury” (Vol. 6, pp. 108, 109).

### ***4. Make sure everything you give your child is wholesome and nourishing, including the atmosphere in which he grows.***

“The parents’ chief care is, that that which they supply shall be wholesome and nourishing, whether in the way of picture-books, lessons, playmates, bread and milk, or mother’s love” (Vol. 1, p. 5).

“Every look of gentleness and tone of reverence, every word of kindness and act of help, passes into the thought-environment, the very atmosphere which the child breathes; he does not think of these things, may never think of them, but all his life long they excite that ‘vague appetency towards something’ out of which most of his actions spring. Oh, wonderful and dreadful presence of the little child in the midst!

“That he should take direction and inspiration from all the casual life about him, should make our poor words and ways the starting-point from which, and in the direction of which, he develops—this is a thought which makes the best of us hold our breath. There is no way of escape for parents; they must needs be as ‘inspirers’ to their children, because about them hangs, as its atmosphere about a planet, the thought-environment of the child, from which he derives those enduring ideas which express themselves as a life-long ‘appetency’ towards things sordid or things lovely, things earthly or divine” (Vol. 2, pp. 36, 37).

### ***5. Trust your personal insights into your child, but also continue to educate yourself as a parent.***

“Allow me to say once more, that I venture to write upon subjects bearing on home education with the greatest deference to mothers; believing, that in virtue of their peculiar insight into the dispositions of their own children, they are blest with both knowledge and power in the management of them which lookers-on can only admire from afar. At the same time, there is such a thing as a *science* of education, that does not come by intuition, in the knowledge of which it is possible to bring up a child entirely according to natural law, which is also Divine law, in the keeping of which there is great reward” (Vol. 1, p. 135).

### ***6. Remember that educating your child as a whole person requires flexibility as you deal with each unique individual.***

“The central thought, or rather body of thought, upon which I found, is the somewhat obvious fact that the child is a *person* with all the possibilities and powers included in personality” (Vol. 1, Preface).

“Parents are very jealous over the individuality of their children; they mistrust the tendency to develop all on the same plan; and this instinctive jealousy is right; for, supposing that education really did consist in systematised efforts to draw out every power that is in us, why, we should all develop on the same lines, be as like as ‘two peas,’ and (should we not?) die of weariness of one another!” (Vol. 2, p. 31).

“To nourish a child daily with loving, right, and noble ideas we believe to be the parent’s next duty.”

## Notes

"We believe that children are human beings at their best and sweetest, but also at their weakest and least wise. We are careful not to dilute life for them, but to present such portions to them in such quantities as they can readily receive" (Vol. 2, p. 232).

### ***7. Give your child a natural home atmosphere in which to learn, rather than in a contrived "child environment."***

"When we say that '*education is an atmosphere*,' we do not mean that a child should be isolated in what may be called a 'child-environment' especially adapted and prepared, but that we should take into account the educational value of his natural home atmosphere, both as regards persons and things, and should let him live freely among his proper conditions. It stultifies a child to bring down his world to the 'child's' level" (Vol. 6, Preface).

"It is not an environment that these want, a set of artificial relations carefully constructed, but an *atmosphere* which nobody has been at pains to constitute. It is there, about the child, his natural element, precisely as the atmosphere of the earth is about us. It is thrown off, as it were, from persons and things, stirred by events, sweetened by love, ventilated, kept in motion, by the regulated action of common sense. We all know the natural conditions under which a child should live; how he shares household ways with his mother, romps with his father, is teased by his brothers and petted by his sisters; is taught by his tumbles; learns self-denial by the baby's needs, the delightfulness of furniture by playing at battle and siege with sofa and table; learns veneration for the old by the visits of his great-grandmother; how to live with his equals by the chums he gathers round him; learns intimacy with animals from his dog and cat; delight in the fields where the buttercups grow and greater delight in the blackberry hedges. And, what tempered 'fusion of classes' is so effective as a child's intimacy with his betters, and also with cook and housemaid, blacksmith and joiner, with everybody who comes in his way? Children have a genius for this sort of general intimacy, a valuable part of their education; care and guidance are needed, of course, lest admiring friends should make fools of them, but no compounded 'environment' could make up for this fresh air, this wholesome wind blowing now from one point, now from another" (Vol. 6, pp. 96, 97).

### ***8. Consider postponing formal school lessons until your child is six.***

"We (of the P.N.E.U.) begin the definite 'school' education of children when they are six; they are no doubt capable of beginning a year or two earlier but the fact is that nature and circumstances have provided such a wide field of education for young children that it seems better to abstain from requiring *direct* intellectual efforts until they have arrived at that age" (Vol. 6, p. 159).

### ***9. Remember that your child is learning by leaps and bounds during his early years, simply from observing and interacting with everything around him.***

"Does the child eat or drink, does he come, or go, or play—all the time he is being educated, though he is as little aware of it as he is of the act of breathing" (Vol. 1, p. 8).

"Let us consider, in the first two years of life they manage to get through more

*Read Charlotte's thoughts on Kindergarten on pages 121–129.*

*P.N.E.U. stands for Parents' National Education Union, an organization that Charlotte founded based on her methods and philosophy.*

"Does the child eat or drink, does he come, or go, or play—all the time he is being educated."

## Notes

*An Early Years Guide that reinforces the concepts in this book is provided free at <http://SimplyCharlotteMason.com/planning/eyguide/>*

**"He is engaged in self-education, taking his lessons from everything he sees and hears."**

intellectual effort than any following two years can show. Supposing that much-discussed Martian were at last able to make his way to our planet, think of how much he must learn before he could accommodate himself to our conditions! Our notions of hard and soft, wet and dry, hot and cold, stable and unstable, far and near, would be as foreign to him as they are to an infant who holds out his pinafore for the moon. We do not know what the Martian means of locomotion are but we can realise that to run and jump and climb stairs, even to sit and stand at will must require fully as much reasoned endeavour as it takes in after years to accomplish skating, dancing, ski-ing, fencing, whatever athletic exercises people spend years in perfecting; and all these the infant accomplishes in his first two years. He learns the properties of matter, knows colours and has first notions of size, solid, liquid; has learned in his third year to articulate with surprising clearness. What is more, he has learned a language, two languages, if he has had the opportunity, and the writer has known of three languages being mastered by a child of three, and one of them was Arabic; mastered, that is, so far that a child can say all that he needs to say in any one of the three—the sort of mastery most of us wish for when we are travelling in foreign countries" (Vol. 6, p. 35).

"He is engaged in self-education, taking his lessons from everything he sees and hears, and strengthening his powers by everything he does" (Vol. 6, pp. 37, 38).

"But we forget that the child has inborn cravings after all we have given him. Just as the healthy child must have his dinner and his bed, so too does he crave for knowledge, perfection, beauty, power, society; and all he wants is opportunity. Give him opportunities of loving and learning, and he will love and learn, for 'tis his nature to.' Whoever has taken note of the sweet reasonableness, the quick intelligence, the bright imaginings of a child, will think the fuss we make about the right studies for developing these is like asking, How shall we get a hungry man to eat his dinner?" (Vol. 2, p. 70).

## Questions to Ask about A Parent's Chief Duty

- Do I truly believe that my job as a parent is important?
- Am I seeking to instill in my child right habits of thinking and behaving?
- Am I trying to nourish my child's mind with loving, right, and noble ideas?
- Am I being careful to give my child only what is wholesome and nourishing?
- Am I continuing to educate myself in order to grow as a parent?
- Am I treating each child as a unique individual and staying flexible?
- Am I allowing my child to grow up in a natural home environment?
- Am I comfortable with postponing formal academic lessons until my child is six?
- Do I believe that my child is growing in many ways simply by observing and interacting with his surroundings?



## **More Quotes on A Parent's Chief Duty**

"No man should bring children into the world who is unwilling to persevere to the end in their nature and education."—Plato

"To educate a man in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society."—Theodore Roosevelt

"A mind once stretched by a new idea never regains its original dimension."—Oliver Wendell Holmes

## *Notes*

"Give him opportunities of loving and learning, and he will love and learn."



## *Part 2*

# Form Right Habits of Thinking and Behaving



## Chapter 2

# Proper Physical Care

“Sometimes I feel like all I do is change diapers, cook food, and clean up messes,” sighed Ann.

Glenda smiled. “I remember those days well,” she replied. “It is a hard season of life, but I want you to think about how important those tasks are, dear.”

“Oh, I don’t know about that,” said Ann. “They certainly don’t feel important. Now, reading a book together or teaching Troy a new word—those feel important.”

“Do you remember when Tim and I went on that trip last summer?” Glenda asked, “I’ll never forget the sight of those children in that orphanage. There were so many of them, and so few helpers, that those basic necessary tasks didn’t get done. There was no one to change their messy diapers, no one to feed them when they were hungry, and no one to clean. Dirt was everywhere.” Glenda looked into Ann’s eyes. “You are ministering to your children, Ann. You are nourishing their spirits just as much as you are caring for their physical bodies. I know it doesn’t feel important sometimes, but let me assure you that it is one of the most important areas of ministry that you will ever have. Thank you for being faithful to take care of your children’s needs.”

Little Troy appeared in the doorway, rubbing the afternoon sleep from his eyes. “I’m hungry, Mommy. And Sammy has a stinky diaper.”

Ann smiled as she opened her arms wide for an after-nap hug.

### Charlotte’s Thoughts on Proper Physical Care

#### 1. *Don’t hinder his physical well-being.*

“She [the mother] may cast a stumbling-block in the way of physical life by giving him unwholesome food, letting him sleep and live in ill-ventilated rooms, by disregarding any or every of the simple laws of health, ignorance of which is hardly to be excused in the face of the pains taken by scientific men to bring this necessary knowledge within the reach of every one” (Vol. 1, p. 16).

“Neither is it lawful for parents to impose any unnecessary rigours upon their children; this was the error of the eighteenth century and of the early decades of our own age, when hunger, cold, and denial, which was by no means self-denial, were supposed wholesome for children” (Vol. 3, pp. 103, 104).

#### 2. *Have a physical, as well as character, ideal in mind.*

“The child is born with certain natural tendencies, and, according to his bringing-up, each such tendency may run into a blemish of person or character, or into a cognate grace. Therefore, it is worth while to have even a *physical* ideal for one’s child; not, for instance, to be run away with by the notion that a fat child is necessarily a fine child. The fat child can easily be produced: but the bright eyes, the open regard, the springing step; the tones, clear as a bell; the agile, graceful

“The agile, graceful movements that characterise the well-brought-up child, are the result, not of bodily well-being only, but of ‘mind and soul according well,’ of a quick, trained intelligence, and of a moral nature habituated to the ‘joy of self control.’”

## Notes

movements that characterise the well-brought-up child, are the result, not of bodily well-being only, but of 'mind and soul according well,' of a quick, trained intelligence, and of a moral nature habituated to the 'joy of self control' " (Vol. 1, p. 95).

### *3. Keep in mind that physical health can have a direct influence on intellectual, moral, and even spiritual growth.*

"I fear the reader may be inclined to think that I am inviting his attention for the most part to a few physiological matters—the lowest round of the educational ladder. The lowest round it may be, but yet it *is* the lowest round, the necessary step to all the rest. For it is not too much to say that, in our present state of being, intellectual, moral, even spiritual life and progress depend greatly upon physical conditions. That is to say, not that he who has a fine physique is necessarily a good and clever man; but that the good and clever man requires much animal substance to make up for the expenditure of tissue brought about in the exercise of his virtue and his intellect. For example, is it easier to be amiable, kindly, candid, with or without a headache or an attack of neuralgia?" (Vol. 1, p. 37).

## Meals

### *1. Good nutrition can affect your child's brain as well as body.*

"The brain cannot do its work well unless it be abundantly and suitably nourished; somebody has made a calculation of how many ounces of brain went to the production of such a work—say *Paradise Lost*—how many to such another, and so on. Without going into mental arithmetic of this nature, we may say with safety that every sort of intellectual activity wastes the tissues of the brain; a network of vessels supplies an enormous quantity of blood to the organ, to make up for this waste of material; and the vigour and health of the brain depend upon the quality and quantity of this blood-supply.

"Now, the quality of the blood is affected by three or four causes. In the first place, the blood is elaborated from the food; the more nutritious and easy of digestion the food, the more *vital* will be the properties of the blood" (Vol. 1, pp. 24, 25).

### *2. Give your child a variety of healthful foods to help nourish his brain and replenish his body cells.*

"The food must be varied, too, a mixed diet, because various ingredients are required to make up for the various waste in the tissues. The children are shocking spendthrifts; their endless goings and comings, their restlessness, their energy, the very wagging of their tongues, all mean expenditure of substance: the loss is not appreciable, but they lose something by every sudden sally, out of doors or within. No doubt the gain of power which results from exercise is more than compensation for the loss of substance; but, all the same, this loss must be promptly made good. And not only is the body of the child more active, proportionably, than that of the man: the child's brain as compared with a man's is in a perpetual flutter of endeavour. It is calculated that though the brain of a man weighs no more than a fortieth part of his body, yet a fifth or sixth of his whole complement of blood

"Even for tea and breakfast the wise mother does not say, 'I always give my children' so and so."

## Notes

goes to nourish this delicate and intensely active organ; but, in the child's case, a considerably larger proportion of the blood that is in him is spent on the sustenance of his brain. And all the time, with these excessive demands upon him, the child has to grow! not merely to make up for waste, but to produce new substance in brain and body" (Vol. 1, p. 25).

"But, given pleasant surroundings and excellent food, and even then the requirements of these exacting little people are not fully met: plain as their food should be, they must have variety. A leg of mutton every Tuesday, the same cold on Wednesday, and hashed on Thursday, may be very good food; but the child who has this diet week after week is inadequately nourished, simply because he is tired of it. The mother should contrive a rotation for her children that will last at least a fortnight, without the same dinner recurring twice. Fish, especially if the children dine off it without meat to follow, is excellent as a change, the more so as it is rich in phosphorus—a valuable brain food. The children's puddings deserve a good deal of consideration, because they do not commonly care for fatty foods, but prefer to derive the warmth of their bodies from the starch and sugar of their puddings. But give them a variety; do not let it be 'everlasting tapioca.' Even for tea and breakfast the wise mother does not say, 'I always give my children' so and so. They should not have anything 'always'; every meal should have some little surprise. But is this the way, to make them think overmuch of what they shall eat and drink? On the contrary, it is the underfed children who are greedy, and unfit to be trusted with any unusual delicacy" (Vol. 1, pp. 27, 28).

### ***3. Give your child enough food to help him grow and flourish both physically and mentally.***

"The child must be well fed. Half the people of low vitality we come across are the victims of low-feeding during their childhood; and that more often because their parents were not alive to their duty in this respect, then because they were not in a position to afford their children the diet necessary to their full physical and mental development" (Vol. 1, pp. 25, 26).

### ***4. Eat regular meals at usual intervals throughout the day.***

"Regular meals at, usually, *unbroken* intervals—dinner, never more than five hours after breakfast; luncheon, unnecessary; animal food, once certainly, in some lighter form, twice a day—are the suggestions of common sense followed out in most well-regulated households" (Vol. 1, p. 26).

### ***5. Limit rich or fried foods and make sure your child drinks enough water.***

"But it is not the food which is *eaten*, but the food which is *digested*, that nourishes body and brain. And here so many considerations press, that we can only glance at two or three of the most obvious. Everybody knows that children should not eat pastry, or pork, or fried meats, or cheese, or rich, highly-flavoured food of any description; that pepper, mustard, and vinegar, sauces and spices, should be forbidden, with new bread, rich cakes, and jams, like plum or gooseberry, in which the leathery coat of the fruit is preserved; that milk, or milk and water, and that not too warm, or cocoa, is the best drink for children, and that they should be trained not to drink until they have finished eating; that fresh fruit at breakfast is

*Though some details may have changed since Charlotte lived, the principles of healthy eating remain.*

**"Regular meals at, usually, *unbroken* intervals."**

## Notes

“No pains should be spared to make the hours of meeting round the family table the brightest hours of the day.”

invaluable; that, as serving the same end, oatmeal porridge and treacle, and the fat of toasted bacon, are valuable breakfast foods; and that a glass of water, also, taken the last thing at night and the first thing in the morning, is useful in promoting those regular habits on which much of the comfort of life depends” (Vol. 1, p. 26).

### *6. Keep meal times pleasant.*

“Again let me say, it is *digested* food that nourishes the system, and people are apt to forget how far mental and moral conditions affect the processes of digestion. The fact is, that the gastric juices which act as solvents to the viands are only secreted freely when the mind is in a cheerful and contented frame. If the child dislike his dinner, he swallows it, but the digestion of that distasteful meal is a laborious, much-impered process: if the meal be eaten in silence, unrelieved by pleasant chat, the child loses much of the ‘good’ of his dinner. Hence it is not a matter of pampering them at all, but a matter of health, of due nutrition, that the children should enjoy their food, and that their meals should be eaten in gladness; though, by the way, joyful *excitement* is as mischievous as its opposite in destroying that even, cheerful tenor of mind favourable to the processes of digestion. No pains should be spared to make the hours of meeting round the family table the brightest hours of the day. This is supposing that the children are allowed to sit at the same table with their parents; and, if it is possible to let them do so at every meal excepting a late dinner, the advantage to the little people is incalculable” (Vol. 1, pp. 26, 27).

### *7. Use meal times to practice good manners and reinforce good habits.*

“Here is the parents’ opportunity to train them in manners and morals, to cement family love, and to accustom the children to habits, such as that of thorough mastication, for instance, as important on the score of health as on that of propriety” (Vol. 1, p. 27).

## Appropriate Clothing & Hygiene

### *1. Remember that perspiration is a natural and helpful function of the body.*

“If the brain is to be duly nourished, it is important to keep the whole surface of the skin in a condition to throw off freely the excretions of the blood [perspiration]” (Vol. 1, p. 36).

### *2. Regular baths help remove dead cells and dirt from the skin’s surface.*

“Two considerations follow: of the first, the necessity for the daily bath, followed by vigorous rubbing of the skin, it is needless to say a word here” (Vol. 1, p. 36).

### *3. Make sure your child wears clothing that is porous enough to allow free perspiration.*

“But possibly it is not so well understood that children should be clothed in porous garments which admit of the instant passing off of the exhalations of the skin. Why did delicate women faint, or, at any rate, ‘feel faint,’ when it was the custom to go to church in sealskin coats? Why do people who sleep under down,



or even under silk or cotton quilts, frequently rise unrefreshed? From the one cause: their coverings have impeded the passage of the insensible [not felt with the senses] perspiration, and so have hindered the skin in its function of relieving the blood of impurities. It is surprising what a constant loss of vitality many people experience from no other cause than the unsuitable character of their clothing” (Vol. 1, p. 36).

## Fresh Air & Exercise

### *1. Remember that fresh air is as important as healthful food to nourish the brain.*

“The quality of the blood depends almost as much on the air we breathe as on the food we eat; in the course of every two or three minutes, all the blood in the body passes through the endless ramifications of the lungs, for no other purpose than that, during the instant of its passage, it should be acted upon by the oxygen contained in the air which is drawn into the lungs in the act of breathing. But what can happen to the blood in the course of an exposure of so short duration? Just this—the whole character, the very colour, of the blood is changed: it enters the lungs spoiled, no longer capable of sustaining life; it leaves them, a pure and vital fluid. Now, observe, the blood is only fully oxygenated when the air contains its full proportion of oxygen, and every breathing and burning object withdraws some oxygen from the atmosphere. Hence the importance of giving the children daily airings and abundant exercise of limb and lung in unvitiated, unimpoverished air” (Vol. 1, pp. 28, 29).

### *2. A daily “constitutional” walk is not the best solution, though it is better than nothing.*

“The children walk every day; they are never out less than an hour when the weather is suitable.’ That is better than nothing; so is this:—An East London school-mistress notices the pale looks of one of her best girls. ‘Have you had any dinner, Nellie’ ‘Ye-es’ (with hesitation). ‘What have you had?’ ‘Mother gave Jessie and me a halfpenny to buy our dinners, and we bought a haporth of aniseed drops—they go further than bread’—with an appeal in her eyes against possible censure for extravagance. Children do not develop at their best upon aniseed drops for dinner, nor upon an hour’s ‘constitutional’ daily” (Vol. 1, p. 29).

### *3. Keep the house well ventilated to replenish the supply of oxygen-rich air.*

“We know all about it; what we forget, perhaps, is, that even oxygen has its limitation: nothing can act but where it is, and, waste attends work, hold true for this vital gas as for other matters. Fire and lamp and breathing beings are all consumers of the oxygen which sustains them. What follows? Why, that this element, which is present in the ration of twenty-three parts to the hundred in pure air, is subject to an enormous drain within the four walls of a house, where the air is more or less stationary” (Vol. 1, pp. 30, 31).

“About out-of-door airings we shall have occasion to speak more fully; but indoor airings are truly as important, because, if the tissues be nourished upon impure blood for all the hours the child spends in the house, the mischief will not

## Notes

*Charlotte favored wool for this porous clothing. “The children cannot be better dressed throughout than in loosely woven woollen garments, flannels and serges, of varying thicknesses for summer and winter wear. Woollens have other advantages over cotton and linen materials besides that of being porous. Wool is a bad conductor, and therefore does not allow of the too free escape of the animal heat; and it is absorbent, and therefore relieves the skin of the clammy sensations which follow sensible [felt by the senses] perspiration. We should be the better for it if we could make up our minds to sleep in wool, discarding linen or cotton in favour of sheets made of some lightly woven woollen material” (Vol. 1, pp. 36, 37).*

“Children do not develop at their best upon aniseed drops for dinner, nor upon an hour’s ‘constitutional’ daily.”

## Notes

See also chapter 5, *Outdoor Life*.

*Regular moderate exposure to sunshine helps the body manufacture vitamin D.*

“In proportion as we cease to make our houses ‘comfortable,’ as we regard them merely as necessary shelters when we cannot be out of doors, shall we enjoy to the full the vigorous vitality possible to us.”

be mended in the shorter intervals spent out of doors. Put two or three breathing bodies, as well as fire and gas, into a room, and it is incredible how soon the air becomes vitiated unless it be constantly renewed; that is, unless the room be well ventilated. We know what is to come in out of the fresh air and complain that a room feels stuffy; but sit in the room a few minutes, and you get accustomed to its stuffiness; the senses are no longer a safe guide.

“Therefore, regular provision must be made for the ventilation of rooms regardless of the feelings of their inmates; *at least* an inch of window open at the top, day and night, renders a room tolerably safe, because it allows the escape of the vitiated air, which, being light, ascends, leaving room for the influx of colder, fresher air by cracks and crannies in doors and floors. An open chimney is a useful, though not a sufficient, ventilator; it is needless to say that the stopping-up of chimneys in sleeping-rooms is suicidal. It is particularly important to accustom children to sleep with an inch or two, or more, of open window all through the year—as much more as you like in the summer” (Vol. 1, pp. 33, 34).

“When the children are out of a room which they commonly occupy, day nursery or breakfast room, then is the opportunity to air it thoroughly by throwing windows and doors wide open and producing a thorough draught” (Vol. 1, p. 34).

#### *4. Spend time outside in the fresh air as much as possible.*

“True, we must needs have houses for shelter from the weather by day and for rest at night; but in proportion as we cease to make our houses ‘comfortable,’ as we regard them merely as necessary shelters when we cannot be out of doors, shall we enjoy to the full the vigorous vitality possible to us” (Vol. 1, p. 31).

#### *5. Allow your child to enjoy the sunshine, both indoors and out.*

“Now, it is observed that people who live much in the sunshine are of a ruddy countenance—that is, a great many of these red corpuscles are present in their blood; while the poor souls who live in cellars and sunless alleys have skins the colour of whity-brown paper. Therefore, it is concluded that light and sunshine are favourable to the production of red corpuscles in the blood; and, *therefore*—to this next ‘therefore’ is but a step for the mother—the children’s rooms should be on the sunny side of the house, with a south aspect if possible. Indeed, the whole house should be kept light and bright for their sakes; trees and outbuildings that obstruct the sunshine and make the children’s rooms dull should be removed without hesitation” (Vol. 1, pp. 34, 35).

“They want light, solar light, as well as air. Country people are ruddier than town folk; miners are sallow, so are the dwellers in cellars and in sunless valleys. The reason is, that, to secure the ruddy glow of perfect health, certain changes must take place in the blood—the nature of which it would take too long to explain here—and that these changes in the blood, marked by the free production of red corpuscles, appear to take place most favourably under the influence of abundant solar light” (Vol. 1, p. 94).

**6. Daily physical exercise can benefit your child both physically and mentally.**

“To give the child pleasure in light and easy motion—the sort of delight in the management of his own body that a good rider finds in managing his horse—dancing, drill, calisthenics, some sort of judicious physical exercise, should make part of every day’s routine. Swedish drill is especially valuable, and many of the exercises are quite suitable for the nursery. Certain moral qualities come into play in alert movements, eye-to-eye attention, prompt and intelligent replies; but it often happens that good children fail in these points for want of physical training” (Vol. 1, p. 132).

### Questions to Ask about Proper Physical Care

- Am I being careful not to hinder my child’s physical well-being?
- Do I have a healthy and realistic physical ideal in mind for my child, as well as a character ideal?
- Do I understand how my child’s physical well-being can have an impact on his intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth?
- Do I understand how good nutrition can affect my child’s brain as well as his body?
- Am I trying to give my child a variety of healthful foods?
- Am I seeking to give my child enough food to help him grow and flourish physically and mentally?
- Do we normally eat regular meals at usual intervals throughout the day?
- Do I try to limit rich or fried foods, and do I try to make sure my child drinks plenty of water?
- Am I doing what I can to keep meal times pleasant?
- Am I trying to use meal times to practice good manners and reinforce good habits?
- Do I understand that perspiration is natural and helpful?
- Do I give my child regular baths?
- Am I careful to dress my child in comfortable, porous clothing that will allow him to play and perspire?
- Do I understand that fresh air is as important to the brain as nutritious food?
- Am I satisfied with a daily “constitutional” walk, or could I do more to help my child breathe fresh air?
- Am I trying to keep the house well ventilated?
- Am I trying to spend lots of time outside in the fresh air?
- Do I encourage my child to enjoy the sunshine?
- Am I seeking to give my child daily physical exercise?

### More Quotes about Proper Physical Care

“Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.”—Proverbs 15:17

### Notes

*Swedish Drill was similar to an advanced sort of Simon Says. You can download a free book about Swedish Drill at <http://SimplyCharlotteMason.com/books/swedish-drill-teacher/>*

“Dancing, drill, calisthenics, some sort of judicious physical exercise, should make part of every day’s routine.”

*Notes*

“Water, air, and cleanness are the chief articles in my pharmacy.”—Napoleon Bonaparte

“If we could give every individual the right amount of nourishment and exercise, not too little and not too much, we would have found the safest way to health.”—Hippocrates

“There was never a child so lovely but his mother was glad to get him asleep.”—Ralph Waldo Emerson

“Sit down and feed, and welcome to our table.”—William Shakespeare

“Is it easier to be amiable, kindly, candid, with or without a headache or an attack of neuralgia?”

## Chapter 3

# Habit Training

## Notes

Shelly had finally gotten the children in bed. With popcorn in hand and fuzzy slippers on her feet, she settled onto the couch with a sigh and pushed the Play button on the remote. She was hoping this DVD on habit training would give her a little motivation.

“The past couple of weeks we’ve been doing a little deep cleaning around our house,” the speaker began. “Well, okay, not a little—a lot. At least it seems like a lot. Cleaning can be hard work! By the time we have the furniture moved, the closet emptied, the light fixtures disassembled, and the curtain rods dismantled, I’m tired. And only one thing keeps me going: that picture in my mind of how nice the room will look when we’re done.

“We moms will work hard if we know that the goal is worth it. And what goal is more worthwhile than smooth and easy days? Isn’t that what we all want in our homes?”

“Charlotte Mason held that cultivating good habits in our children will bring those smooth and easy days. She said, ‘We are not unwilling to make efforts in the beginning with the assurance that by-and-by things will go smoothly; and this is just what habit is, in an extraordinary degree, pledged to effect. The mother who takes pains to endow her children with good habits secures for herself smooth and easy days; while she who lets their habits take care of themselves has a weary life of endless friction with the children’ (Vol. 1, p. 136).”

Shelly nodded from the couch. She could testify to that statement!

The speaker continued. “I want you to notice two important points in Charlotte’s statement. First, we must ‘take pains.’ This habit-forming is going to require some work. But, oh, it will be worth it! Who doesn’t want smooth and easy days? Smooth and easy days are worth a little effort. Smooth and easy days are worth a *lot* of effort!

“Second, the habits that we are cultivating within our children are an endowment—an investment that will bring them future benefit. Smooth and easy days now are a great goal, but this project is even bigger than that. Good habits instilled now will equip our children well for their futures.

“Think of all the habits you wish you already had ingrained in your life right now. How would they make your life easier as an adult? You have the opportunity to endow and equip your child with those habits now, and they will be in place to serve him as he grows.

“That’s a goal worth hanging on the galleries of our minds. Can you picture the rewarding scenes? Then let’s dedicate ourselves to working toward those smooth and easy days.”

### Charlotte’s Thoughts on Habit Training

#### 1. *Realize that your child will not simply grow out of his faults.*

“One of many ways in which parents are apt to have too low an opinion of their children is in the matter of their faults. A little child shows some ugly trait—he

*This chapter gives some basic principles and practical tips to help you get started in this important duty of habit training. The subject of habits and habit training is examined more in-depth in Laying Down the Rails: A Charlotte Mason Habits Handbook and the workshop by the same name, available from [SimplyCharlotteMason.com](http://SimplyCharlotteMason.com).*

“The mother who takes pains to endow her children with good habits secures for herself smooth and easy days.”

## Notes

“To laugh at ugly tempers and let them pass because the child is small, is to sow the wind.”

is greedy, and gobbles up his sister's share of the goodies as well as his own; he is vindictive, ready to bite or fight the hand that offends him; he tells a lie;—no, he did not touch the sugar-bowl or the jam-pot. The mother puts off the evil day: she knows she must sometime reckon with the child for those offences, but in the meantime she says, ‘Oh, it does not matter this time; he is very little, and will know better by-and-by.’ To put the thing on no higher grounds, what happy days for herself and her children would the mother secure if she would keep watch at the place of the letting out of waters! If the mother settle it in her own mind that the child never does wrong without being aware of his wrong-doing, she will see that he is not too young to have his fault corrected or prevented. Deal with a child on his *first* offence, and a grieved look is enough to convict the little transgressor; but let him go on until a habit of wrong-doing is formed, and the cure is a slow one; then the mother has no chance until she has formed in him a contrary habit of well-doing. To laugh at ugly tempers and let them pass because the child is small, is to sow the wind” (Vol. 1, p. 19).

“Here is an end to the easy philosophy of, ‘It doesn't matter,’ ‘Oh, he'll grow out of it,’ ‘He'll know better by-and-by,’ ‘He's so young, what can we expect?’ and so on. Every day, every hour, the parents are either passively or actively forming those habits in their children upon which, more than upon anything else, future character and conduct depend” (Vol. 1, p. 118).

“What you would have the man become, that you must train the child to be” (Vol. 2, p. 15).

“We found that it rests with the parents of the child to settle for the future man his ways of thinking, behaving, feeling, acting; his disposition, his particular talent; the manner of things upon which his thoughts shall run. Who shall fix limitations to the power of parents? The destiny of the child is ruled by his parents, because they have the virgin soil all to themselves. The first sowing must be at their hands, or at the hands of such as they choose to depute” (Vol. 2, p. 29).

“Get rid of the weeds and foster the flowers. It is hardly too much to say that most of the failures in life or character made by man or woman are due to the happy-go-lucky philosophy of the parents. They say, ‘The child is so young; he does not know any better; but all that will come right as he grows up.’ Now, a fault of character left to itself can do no other than strengthen” (Vol. 2, p. 87).

### ***2. Your child can learn many good habits by being surrounded with them in your home.***

“The whole group of habitudes, half physical and half moral, on which the propriety and comfort of everyday life depend, are received passively by the child; that is, he does very little to form these habits himself, but his brain receives impressions from what he sees about him; and these impressions take form as his own very strongest and most lasting habits.

“Cleanliness, order, neatness, regularity, punctuality, are all ‘branches’ of *infant* education. They should be about the child like the air he breathes, and he will take them in as unconsciously” (Vol. 1, pp. 124, 125).



## Notes

“The child’s most fixed and dominant habits are those which the mother takes no pains about, but which the child picks up for himself through his close observation of all that is said and done, felt and thought, in his home.

“We have already considered a group of half-physical habits—order, regularity, neatness—which the child imbibes, so to speak, in this way. But this is not all: habits of gentleness, courtesy, kindness, candour, respect for other people, or—habits quite other than these, are inspired by the child as the very atmosphere of his home, the air he lives in and must grow by” (Vol. 1, pp. 136, 137).

“While the wide-eyed babe stretches his little person with aimless kickings on his rug, he is receiving unconsciously those first impressions which form his earliest memories; and we can order those memories for him: we can see that the earliest sights he sees are sights of order, neatness, beauty; that the sounds his ear drinks in are musical and soft, tender and joyous; that the baby’s nostrils sniff only delicate purity and sweetness. These memories remain through life, engraved on the unthinking brain. As we shall see later, memories have a certain power of accretion—where there are some, others of a like kind gather, and all the life is ordered on the lines of these first pure and tender memories” (Vol. 2, pp. 26, 27).

“Thus we see how the destiny of a life is shaped in the nursery, by the reverent naming of the Divine Name; by the light scoff at holy things; by the thought of duty the little child gets who is made to finish conscientiously his little task; by the hardness of heart that comes to the child who hears the faults or sorrows of others spoken of lightly” (Vol. 2, pp. 39, 40).

### ***3. Good habits will give you smooth and easy days now and equip your child well for the future.***

“The mother who takes pains to endow her children with good habits secures for herself smooth and easy days; while she who lets their habits take care of themselves has a weary life of endless friction with the children. All day she is crying out, ‘Do this!’ and they do it not; ‘Do that!’ and they do the other” (Vol. 1, p. 136).

“The education of habit is successful in so far as it enables the mother to *let her children alone*, not teasing them with perpetual commands and directions—a running fire of *Do* and *Don’t*; but letting them go their own way and *grow*, having first secured that they will go the right way, and grow to fruitful purpose. The gardener, it is true, ‘digs about and dungs,’ prunes and trains, his peach tree; but that occupies a small fraction of the tree’s life: all the rest of the time the sweet airs and sunshine, the rains and dews, play about it and breathe upon it, get into its substance, and the result is—peaches. But let the gardener neglect *his* part, and the peaches will be no better than sloes” (Vol. 1, p. 134).

### ***4. Determine which habits you want to instill in your child.***

“Parents should take pains to have their own thoughts clear as to the manner of virtues they want their children to develop. Candour, fortitude, temperance, patience, meekness, courage, generosity, indeed the whole role of the virtues, would be stimulating subjects for thought and teaching, offering ample illustrations” (Vol. 3, p. 136).

*A sloe is the small, bitter, wild fruit of the blackthorn.*

“What you would have the man become, that you must train the child to be.”

## Notes

“It follows that this business of laying down lines towards the unexplored country of the child’s future is a very serious and responsible one for the parent. It rests with him to consider well the tracks over which the child should travel with profit and pleasure; and, along these tracks, to lay down lines so invitingly smooth and easy that the little traveller is going upon them at full speed without stopping to consider whether or no he chooses to go that way” (Vol. 1, p. 109).

### *5. Intentionally teach and train your child in each good character trait that you want to become a habit, using good examples, Scripture verses, and reinforcement.*

“*Kindness*, for instance, is, let us say, the subject of instruction this week. There is one of the talks with their mother that the children love—a short talk is best—about kindness. Kindness is love, showing itself in act and word, look and manner. A well of love, shut up and hidden in a little boy’s heart, does not do anybody much good; the love must bubble up as a spring, flow out in a stream, and then it is *kindness*. Then will follow short daily talks about kind ways, to brothers and sisters, to playmates, to parents, to grown-up friends, to servants, to people in pain and trouble, to dumb creatures, to people we do not see but yet can think about—all in distress, the heathen. Give the children one thought at a time, and every time some lovely example of loving-kindness that will fire their hearts with the desire to do likewise.

“Take our Lord’s parable of the ‘Good Samaritan’ for a model of instruction in morals. Let tale and talk make the children emulous of virtue, and then give them the ‘Go and do likewise,’ the law. Having presented to them the idea of *kindness* in many aspects, end with the law: Be kind, or, ‘Be kindly affectioned one to another.’ Let them know that this is the law of God for children and for grown-up people. Now, conscience is instructed, the feelings are enlisted on the side of duty, and if the child is brought up, it is for breaking the law of kindness, a law that he knows of, that his conscience convicts him in the breaking” (Vol. 1, pp. 339, 340).

### *6. Identify any bad habit in your child and determine to set up the opposite good habit in its place.*

“A child has an odious custom, so constant, that it is his quality, will be his *character*, if you let him alone; he is spiteful, he is sly, he is sullen. No one is to blame for it; it was born in him. What are you to do with such inveterate habit of nature? Just this; treat it as a bad *habit*, and set up the opposite good habit. Henry is more than mischievous; he is a malicious little boy. There are always tears in the nursery, because, with ‘pinches, nips, and bobs,’ he is making some child wretched. Even his pets are not safe; he has done his canary to death by poking at it with a stick through the bars of its cage; howls from his dog, screeches from his cat, betray him in some vicious trick. He makes fearful faces at his timid little sister; sets traps with string for the housemaid with her water-cans to fall over; there is no end to the malicious tricks, beyond the mere savagery of untrained boyhood, which come to his mother’s ear. What is to be done? ‘Oh, he will grow out of it!’ say the more hopeful who pin their faith to time. But many an experienced mother will say, ‘You can’t cure him; what is in will out, and he will be a pest to society all his life.’ Yet the child may be cured in a month if the mother will set herself to the task with both

See Romans 12:10.

“Treat it as a bad habit, and set up the opposite good habit.”



## Notes

hands and of set purpose; at any rate, the cure may be well begun, and that is half done” (Vol. 2, pp. 85, 86).

**7. See that your child does the new good habit as much as possible for at least a month.**

“Let the month of treatment be a deliciously happy month to him, he living all the time in the sunshine of his mother’s smile. Let him not be left to himself to meditate or carry out ugly pranks. Let him feel himself always under a watchful, loving, and *approving* eye. Keep him happily occupied, well amused. All this, to break the old custom which is assuredly broken when a certain length of time goes by without its repetition. But one habit drives out another. Lay new lines in the old place. Open avenues of kindness for him. Let him enjoy, daily, hourly, the pleasure of pleasing. Get him into the way of making little plots for the pleasure of the rest—a plaything of his contriving, a dish of strawberries of his gathering, shadow rabbits to amuse the baby; take him on kind errands to poor neighbours, carrying and giving of his own. For a whole month the child’s whole heart is flowing out in deeds and schemes and thoughts of lovingkindness, and the ingenuity which spent itself in malicious tricks becomes an acquisition to his family when his devices are benevolent” (Vol. 2, pp. 86, 87).

**8. Devote yourself to the correction of a bad habit as you would to nursing a sick child.**

“Yes; but where is his mother to get time in these encroaching days to put Henry under special treatment? She has other children and other duties, and simply cannot give herself up for a month or a week to one child. If the boy were ill, in danger, would she find time for him then? Would not other duties go to the wall, and leave her little son, for the time, her chief object in life?

“Now here is a point all parents are not enough awake to—that serious mental and moral ailments require prompt, purposeful, curative treatment, to which the parents must devote themselves for a short time, just as they would to a sick child” (Vol. 2, p. 87).

**9. Keep a diary to help you oversee your child’s progress in character and good habits.**

“Every mother, especially, should keep a diary in which to note the successive phases of her child’s physical, mental, and moral growth, with particular attention to the moral; so that parents may be enabled to make a timely forecast of their children’s character, to foster in them every germ of good, and by prompt precautions to suppress, or at least restrain, what is bad” (Vol. 2, pp. 105, 106).

**10. Depend on the Lord’s help and pray for your child during habit training.**

“Here, indeed, more than anywhere, ‘Except the Lord build the house, they labour but in vain that build it’; but surely intelligent co-operation in this divine work is our bounden duty and service. The training of the will, the instruction of the conscience, and, so far as it lies with us, the development of the divine life in the child, are carried on simultaneously with this training in the habits of a good life; and these last will carry the child safely over the season of infirm will, immature conscience, until he is able to take, under direction from above, the conduct of his

*A handy checklist is included in Laying Down the Rails, along with practical tips for the sixty habits Charlotte recommended we cultivate in our children.*

**“It is well to clear our thoughts and know definitely what we desire for our children.”**

## Notes

Mauvaise honte is a false sense of embarrassment.

*Character is the result of habits. A person who is known for being truthful, for example, habitually tells the truth; he doesn't tell the truth only once in a while. Telling the truth is a habit ingrained in his life.*

**"The child of two should be taught to get and to replace his playthings."**

life, the moulding of his character, into his own hands" (Vol. 2, p. 90).

"This kind cometh forth only by prayer, but it is well to clear our thoughts and know definitely what we desire for our children, because only so can we work intelligently towards the fulfilment of our desire. It is sad to pray, and frustrate the answer by our own action; but this is, alas, too possible" (Vol. 2, p. 289).

### ***11. One good habit you might want to instill would be to teach your two-year-old to put away his toys.***

"The child of two should be taught to get and to replace his playthings. Begin early. Let it be a pleasure to him, part of his play, to open his cupboard, and put back the doll or the horse each in its own place. Let him *always* put away his things as a matter of course, and it is surprising how soon a habit of order is formed, which will make it pleasant to the child to put away his toys, and irritating to him to see things in the wrong place. If parents would only see the morality of order, that order in the nursery becomes scrupulousness in after life, and that the training necessary to form the habit is no more, comparatively, than the occasional winding of a clock, which ticks away then of its own accord and without trouble to itself, more pains would be taken to cultivate this important habit" (Vol. 1, p. 130).

### ***12. You can also practice good manners by role-playing with your child.***

"Just let them go through the drill of good manners: let them rehearse little scenes in play—Mary, the lady asking the way to the market; Harry, the boy who directs her, and so on. Let them go through a position drill—eyes right, hands still, heads up. They will invent a hundred situations, and the behaviour proper to each, and will treasure hints thrown in for their guidance; but this sort of drill should be attempted while children are young, before the tyranny of *mauvaise honte* sets in" (Vol. 1, pp. 132, 133).

### ***13. Train your child to be habitually truthful.***

"The child who appears to be perfectly truthful is so because he has been carefully trained to truthfulness, however indirectly and unconsciously. It is more important to cultivate the habit of truth than to deal with the accident of lying" (Vol. 2, p. 213).

### ***14. Teach your child to unselfishly give, share, and serve. This habit will deter a mind-set of "It's not fair" later in life.***

"A child who is taught from the first the delights of giving and sharing, of loving and bearing, will always spend himself freely on others, will love and serve, seeking for nothing again; but the child who recognises that he is the object of constant attention, consideration, love and service, becomes self-regardful, self-seeking, selfish, almost without his fault, so strongly is he influenced by the direction his thoughts receive from those about him. So, too, of that other fountain, of justice, with which every child is born. There, again, the stream may flow forth in either, but not in both, of the channels, the egoistic or the altruistic. The child's demand for justice may be all for himself, or, from the very first, the rights of others may be kept before his eyes.

"He may be taught to occupy himself with *his own rights and other people's*

*duties*, and, if he is, his state of mind is easily discernible by the catchwords often on his lips, 'It's a shame!' 'It's not fair!' or he may, on the other hand, be so filled with the notion of *his own duties and other people's rights*, that the claims of self slip quietly into the background" (Vol. 2, pp. 288, 289).

## Questions to Ask about Habit Training

- Do I fully realize that my child will not just grow out of his faults?
- Do I believe that my child can learn many good habits by being surrounded with them in my home?
- Have I caught the vision that habit training now will provide smooth and easy days plus equip my child well for the future?
- Have I determined which habits I want to instill in my child?
- Am I intentionally teaching and training my child in each good character trait that I want to become a habit, using good examples, Scripture verses, and reinforcement?
- Am I carefully identifying any bad habit in my child and working to set up the opposite good habit in its place?
- Am I trying to see that my child does the new good habit as much as possible for at least a month?
- Am I willing to devote myself to the correction of a bad habit as I would to nursing a sick child?
- Do I keep a diary to help me oversee my child's progress in character and good habits?
- Am I depending on the Lord's help and praying for my child during habit training?
- Am I trying to teach my two-year-old to put away his toys?
- Am I training my child in good manners by practicing and role-playing?
- Am I seeking to train my child to be habitually truthful?
- Am I teaching my child to unselfishly give, share, and serve?

## More Quotes on Habit Training

"It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."—Frederick Douglass

"A nail is driven out by another nail, habit is overcome by habit."—Desiderius Gerhard Erasmus

"Cultivate only the habits that you are willing should master you."—Elbert Hubbard

"The child is father of the man."—William Wordsworth

"The child who appears to be perfectly truthful is so because he has been carefully trained to truthfulness."

## Notes

*Of all Charlotte's writings on habits, she wrote the most about Attention, Obedience, and Truthfulness.*

*"First, we put the habit of Attention."*

## The Habit of Attention

*(Charlotte wrote a conversation between a mother and the long-time family doctor that presents some key elements of training a child in the habit of attention. Here is the conversation, taken from Volume 5, pages 94 and 95.)*

"Pray, ma'am, what would you like me to say next?"

"To 'habit,' doctor, to 'habit'; and don't talk nonsense while the precious time is going. We'll suppose that Fred is just twelve months old to-day. Now, if you please, tell me how I'm to make him *begin* to pay attention. And, by the way, why in the world didn't you talk to me about it when the child really was young?"

"I don't remember that you asked me; and who would be pert enough to think of schooling a young mother? Not I, at any rate. Don't I know that every mother of a first child is infallible, and knows more about children than all the old doctors in creation? But, supposing you had asked me, I should have said—Get him each day to occupy himself a little longer with one plaything than he did the day before. He plucks a daisy, gurgles over it with glee, and then in an instant it drops from the nerveless grasp. Then you take it up, and with the sweet coaxings you mothers know how to employ, get him to examine it, in his infant fashion, for a minute, two minutes, three whole minutes at a time."

"I see; fix his thoughts on one thing at a time, and for as long as you can, whether on what he sees or what he hears. You think if you go on with that sort of thing with a child from his infancy he gets accustomed to pay attention?"

"Not a doubt of it; and you may rely on it that what is called *ability*—a different thing from genius, mind you, or even talent—ability is simply the power of fixing the attention steadily on the matter in hand, and success in life turns upon this cultivated power far more than on any natural faculty. Lay a case before a successful barrister, an able man of business, notice how he absorbs all you say; tell your tale as ill as you like, he keeps the thread, straightens the tangle, and by the time you have finished, has the whole matter spread out in order under his mind's eye. Now comes in talent, or genius, or what you will, to deal with the facts he has taken in. But attention is the attribute of the trained intellect, without which genius makes shots in the dark."

"But, don't you think attention itself is a natural faculty, or talent, or whatever we should call it?"

"Not a bit of it; it is entirely the result of training. A man may be born with some faculty or talent for figures, or drawing, or music, but attention is a different matter; it is simply the power of bending such powers as one has to the work in hand; it is a key to success within the reach of every one, but the skill to turn it comes of training. Circumstances may compel a man to train himself, but he does so at the cost of great effort, and the chances are ten to one against his making the effort. For the child, on the other hand, who has been trained by his parents to fix his thoughts, all is plain sailing. He will succeed, not a doubt of it."

### Charlotte's Thoughts on the Habit of Attention

#### 1. *The habit of attention should be a top priority.*

"First, we put the *habit of Attention*, because the highest intellectual gifts depend

for their value upon the measure in which their owner has cultivated the habit of attention” (Vol. 1, p. 137).

“Whatever the natural gifts of the child, it is only so far as the habit of attention is cultivated in him that he is able to make use of them” (Vol. 1, p. 146).

**2. Recognize that it is hard for a young child to force himself to stop making mental associations, which is what leads to inattention.**

“You talk to a child about glass—you wish to provoke a proper curiosity as to how glass is made, and what are its uses. Not a bit of it; he wanders off to Cinderella’s glass slipper; then he tells you about *his* godmother who gave him a boat; then about the ship in which Uncle Harry went to America; then he wonders why you do not wear spectacles, leaving you to guess that Uncle Harry does so. But the child’s ramblings are not whimsical; they follow a law, the law of association of ideas, by which any idea presented to the mind recalls some other idea which has been at any time associated with it—as glass, and Cinderella’s slipper; and that, again some idea associated with it. Now this law of association of ideas is a good servant and a bad master. To have this aid in recalling the events of the past, the engagements of the present, is an infinite boon; but to be at the mercy of associations, to have no power to think of what we choose when we choose, but only as something ‘puts it in our head,’ is to be no better than an imbecile.

“A vigorous effort of will should enable us at any time to fix our thoughts. Yes; but a vigorous self-compelling will is the flower of a developed character; and while the child has no character to speak of, but only natural disposition, who is to keep humming-tops out of a geography lesson, or a doll’s sofa out of a French verb?” (Vol. 1, pp. 138, 139).

**3. Encourage your infant or young child to strengthen and expand his attention span little by little.**

“The help, then, is not the will of the child but in the *habit of attention*, a habit to be cultivated even in the infant. A baby, notwithstanding his wonderful powers of observation, has no power of attention; in a minute, the coveted plaything drops from listless little fingers, and the wandering glance lights upon some new joy. But even at this stage the habit of attention may be trained: the discarded plaything is picked up, and, with ‘Pretty!’ and dumb [silent] show, the mother keeps the infant’s eyes fixed for fully a couple of minutes—and this is his first lesson in attention. Later, as we have seen, the child is eager to see and handle every object that comes in his way. But watch him at his investigations: he flits from thing to thing with less purpose than a butterfly amongst the flowers, staying at nothing long enough to get the good out of it. It is the mother’s part to supplement the child’s quick observing faculty with the habit of attention. She must see to it that he does not flit from this to that, but looks long enough at one thing to get a real acquaintance with it.

“Is little Margaret fixing round eyes on a daisy she has plucked? In a second, the daisy will be thrown away, and a pebble or a buttercup will charm the little maid. But the mother seizes the happy moment. She makes Margaret see that the daisy is a bright yellow eye with *white* eyelashes round it; that all the day long it lies there in the grass and looks up at the great sun, never blinking as Margaret would do, but keeping its eyes wide open. And that is why it is called daisy, ‘day’s eye,’ because

“The mother will contrive ways to invest every object in the child’s world with interest and delight.”

## Notes

*For more on the habit of attention, see Laying Down the Rails: A Charlotte Mason Habits Handbook.*

**“What you regard with full attention, if only for a minute, you know, and remember always.”**

its eye is always looking at the sun which makes the day. And what does Margaret think it does at night, when there is no sun? It does what little boys and girls do; it just shuts up its eye with its white lashes tipped with pink, and goes to sleep till the sun comes again in the morning. By this time the daisy has become interesting to Margaret; she looks at it with big eyes after her mother has finished speaking, and then, very likely, cuddles it up to her breast or gives it a soft little kiss. Thus the mother will contrive ways to invest every object in the child’s world with interest and delight” (Vol. 1, pp. 139, 140).

### ***4. Laying a foundation of the habit of attention during the early years will make the school years much smoother.***

“Attention is the power and habit of concentrating every faculty on the thing in hand. Now this habit of attention, parents, mothers especially, are taught to encourage and cultivate in their children from early infancy. What you regard with full attention, if only for a minute, you know, and remember always. Think of the few scenes and conversations we, each, have so vividly fixed that we cannot possibly forget them. Why? Because at the moment our attention was powerfully excited. You reap some benefit from this early training directly the boy goes to school” (Vol. 5, pp. 164, 165).

## **Questions to Ask about the Habit of Attention**

- Am I doing what I can to make the habit of attention top priority?
- Do I recognize that it’s hard for my child to control mental associations that lead to inattention?
- Am I encouraging my infant or young child to strengthen and expand his attention span little by little?
- Do I realize that instilling the habit of attention now will make future school years much smoother?

## **More Quotes on the Habit of Attention**

“The true art of memory is the art of attention.”—Samuel Johnson

“If I have ever made any valuable discoveries, it has been owing more to patient attention, than to any other talent.”—Isaac Newton

## **The Habit of Obedience**

“What am I doing wrong, Mom?” wailed Evette into the telephone. “Every time I’m on the phone, Joey thinks he can get away with anything. He doesn’t obey me until I’ve repeated myself at least ten times and raised my voice. I don’t know what to do!”

“Well, first, dear,” replied Mrs. Common, “stop whining and lower your voice. I’m sure Joey can hear what you’re saying.”



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“He’s outside in the sandbox, Mom,” Evette explained. “It’s okay.” But she did take a deep breath and tried to relax her shoulders.

Mrs. Common continued, “I have three pieces of advice for you. Number One, stay off the phone until you have developed in Joey the habit of prompt obedience. Let the answering machine do its job.”

“But Mom,” Evette objected, “the phone is how I stay connected to my friends. I love to chat with Susie and Rachel.”

“I know, honey, but you have a crisis on your hands right now,” Mrs. Common said. “If you want things to change, you will need to give this your undivided attention. And that includes time on the Internet too.”

“This is going to be hard, but I’ve got to do something,” agreed Evette.

“Number Two, decide right now who is going to be in charge at your house.”

“Some days it feels like Joey is running the show, I’ll admit.”

“Then you need to settle it in your mind that God has placed you in authority, Evette,” said Mrs. Common. “That mind-set can make all the difference, and it will show in the way you interact with Joey. You should expect prompt obedience. There is no need to bribe, threaten, or yell.”

“But what do I do when he doesn’t obey until the tenth time I say something?” Evette asked.

“Let me ask you this: Why does he obey that tenth time?”

“Because he knows he will receive a consequence if he doesn’t,” replied Evette.

“Exactly. So Number Three, apply the consequence sooner. If you want Joey to obey after you raise your voice, then wait and apply the consequence after you raise your voice,” explained Mrs. Common. “If you want Joey to obey after a single telling, then apply the consequence after that single telling.”

“Makes sense,” said Evette.

“But it will work only if you give it your full attention for at least a month,” Mrs. Common cautioned. “By then, if you are consistent, Joey will have developed the habit of prompt obedience, and your days will be much smoother and easier.”

“Okay, Mom, I’ll give it a try,” Evette said. “Thanks for your help.”

“You’re welcome,” Mrs. Common replied. “And Evette?”

“Yes?”

“You’re a good mommy.”

## Charlotte’s Thoughts on the Habit of Obedience

### 1. *Realize that obedience is the whole duty of the child and is for his good.*

“First, and infinitely the most important, is the habit of *obedience*. Indeed, obedience is the whole duty of the child, and for this reason—every other duty of the child is fulfilled as a matter of obedience to his parents. Not only so: obedience is the whole duty of man; obedience to conscience, to law, to Divine direction” (Vol. 1, p. 161).

“What is the object of family discipline, of that obedience which has been described as ‘the whole duty of a child’? Is it not to ease the way of the child, while will is weak and conscience immature, by getting it on the habits of the good life where it is as easy to go right as for a locomotive to run on its lines?” (Vol. 2, p. 166).

“If we wish children to be able, when they grow up, to keep under their bodies and bring them into subjection, we must do this *for* them in their earlier years.”

## Notes

*For Charlotte's thoughts on parental authority, see Volume 2, pages 10–18.*

*"She must not let him break his sister's playthings, gorge himself with cake, spoil the pleasure of other people, because these things are not right."*

"If we wish children to be able, when they grow up, to keep under their bodies and bring them into subjection, we must do this *for* them in their earlier years" (Vol. 3, p. 19).

"It is an old story that the failures in life are not the people who lack good intentions; they are those whose physical nature has not acquired the habit of prompt and involuntary obedience. The man who can make himself do what he wills has the world before him, and it rests with parents to give their children this self-compelling power as a mere matter of habit" (Vol. 3, p. 20).

### ***2. Teach your young child the meaning of must.***

"Who has not met big girls and boys, the children of right-minded parents, who yet do not know what *must* means, who are not moved by *ought*, whose hearts feel no stir at the solemn name of *Duty*, who know no higher rule of life than 'I want,' and 'I don't want,' 'I like,' and 'I don't like'? Heaven help parents and children when it has come to that!" (Vol. 1, p. 14).

" 'I teach my children obedience by the time they are one year old,' the writer heard a very successful mother remark; and, indeed, that is the age at which to begin to give children the ease and comfort of the habit of obeying lawful authority" (Vol. 3, p. 18).

### ***3. Be careful of teaching your child that obedience doesn't matter by laughing at his disobedience.***

"But how has it been brought about that the babe, with an acute sense of right and wrong even when it can understand little of human speech, should grow into the boy or girl already proving 'the curse of lawless heart'? By slow degrees, here a little and there a little, as all that is good or bad in character comes to pass. 'Naughty!' says the mother, again, when a little hand is thrust into the sugar-bowl; and a pair of roguish eyes seeks hers furtively, to measure, as they do unerringly, how far the little pilferer may go. It is very amusing; the mother 'cannot help laughing'; and the little trespass is allowed to pass: and, what the poor mother has not thought of, an offence, a cause of stumbling, has been cast into the path of her two-year-old child. He has learned already that that which is 'naughty' may yet be done with impunity, and he goes on improving his knowledge" (Vol. 1, pp. 14, 15).

### ***4. Be pleasantly consistent. Once a child discovers that mother is inconsistent, he steps down the path to disobedience.***

"It is needless to continue; everybody knows the steps by which the mother's 'no' comes to be disregarded, her refusal teased into consent. The child has learned to believe that he has nothing to overcome but his mother's disinclination; if she *choose* to let him do this and that, there is no reason why she should not; he can make her choose to let him do the thing forbidden, and then he may do it. The next step in the argument is not too great for childish wits: if his mother does what she chooses, of course he will do what he chooses, *if he can*; and henceforward the child's life becomes an endless struggle to get his own way; a struggle in which a parent is pretty sure to be worsted, having many things to think of, while the child sticks persistently to the thing which has his fancy for the moment" (Vol. 1, p. 15).



**5. Remember that you are on assignment from God to teach your child to do right.**

“Where is the beginning of this tangle, spoiling the lives of parent and child alike? In this: that the mother began with no sufficient sense of duty; she thought herself free to allow and disallow, to say and unsay, at pleasure, as if the child were hers to do what she liked with. The child has never discovered a background of *must* behind his mother’s decisions; he does not know that she *must not* let him break his sister’s playthings, gorge himself with cake, spoil the pleasure of other people, because these things are not *right*. Let the child perceive that his parents are law-compelled as well as he, that they simply cannot allow him to do the things which have been forbidden, and he submits with the sweet meekness which belongs to his age” (Vol. 1, p. 15).

“It is well that a child should be taught to keep under his body and bring it into subjection, first, to the authority of his parents and, later, to the authority of his own will; and always, because no less than this is due, to the divine Authority in whom he has his being” (Vol. 3, p. 104).

“Now, if the parent realise that obedience is no mere accidental duty, the fulfilling of which is a matter that lies between himself and the child, but that he is the appointed agent to train the child up to the intelligent obedience of the self-compelling, law-abiding human being, he will see that he has no right to *forego* the obedience of his child, and that every act of disobedience in the child is a direct condemnation of the parent. Also, he will see that the motive of the child’s obedience is not the arbitrary one of, ‘Do this, or that, because I have said so,’ but the motive of the apostolic injunction, ‘Children, obey your parents in the Lord, *for this is right*’ ” (Vol. 1, p. 161).

**6. Understand that training in obedience “for this is right” and bullying a child to do what you want are two completely different things.**

“It is only in proportion as the will of the child is in the act of obedience, and he obeys because his sense of *right* makes him *desire* to obey in spite of temptations to disobedience—not of constraint, but willingly—that the habit has been formed which will, hereafter, enable the child to use the strength of his will against his inclinations when these prompt him to lawless courses. It is said that the children of parents who are most strict in exacting obedience often turn out ill; and that orphans and other poor waifs brought up under strict discipline only wait their opportunity to break out into license. Exactly so; because, in these cases, there is no gradual training of the child in the *habit* of obedience; no gradual enlisting of his *will* on the side of sweet service and a free-will offering of submission to the highest law: the poor children are simply bullied into submission to the *will*, that is, the *wilfulness*, of another; not at all, ‘for it is *right*’; only because it is convenient” (Vol. 1, pp. 161, 162).

**7. Expect obedience and communicate that expectation in your voice and demeanor.**

“The mother has no more sacred duty than that of training her infant to instant obedience. . . . There is no need to rate the child, or threaten him, or use any

“The mother has no more sacred duty than that of training her infant to instant obedience.”

## Notes

manner of violence, because the parent is *invested* with authority which the child intuitively recognises. It is enough to say, 'Do this,' in a quiet, authoritative tone, and *expect it to be done*. The mother often enough loses her hold over her children because they detect in the tone of her voice that she does not expect them to obey her behests; she does not think enough of her position; has not sufficient confidence in her own authority. The mother's great stronghold is in the *habit* of obedience. If she begin by requiring that her children always obey her, why, they will always do so as a matter of course; but let them once get the thin end of the wedge in, let them discover that they can do otherwise than obey, and a woful struggle begins, which commonly ends in the children doing that which is right in their own eyes" (Vol. 1, pp. 162, 163).

### *8. Reasoning with a young child is usually futile and unnecessary.*

"To give reasons to a child is usually out of place, and is a sacrifice of parental dignity; but he is quick enough to read the 'must' and 'ought' which rule her, in his mother's face and manner, and in the fact that she is not to be moved from a resolution on any question of right and wrong" (Vol. 1, pp. 15, 16).

### *9. Insist from the first on prompt, cheerful, lasting obedience every time.*

"This is the sort of thing which is fatal: The children are in the drawing-room, and a caller is announced. 'You must go upstairs now.' 'Oh, mother dear, *do* let us stay in the window-corner; we will be as quiet as mice!' The mother is rather proud of her children's pretty manners, and they stay. They are *not* quiet, of course; but that is the least of the evils; they have succeeded in doing as they chose and not as they were bid, and they will not put their necks under the yoke again without a struggle. It is in little matters that the mother is worsted. 'Bedtime, Willie!' 'Oh, mamma, *just* let me finish this'; and the mother yields, forgetting that the case in point is of no consequence; the thing that matters is that the child should be daily confirming a *habit* of obedience by the unbroken repetition of acts of obedience. It is astonishing how clever the child is in finding ways of evading the spirit while he observes the letter. 'Mary, come in.' 'Yes, mother'; but her mother calls four times before Mary comes. 'Put away your bricks'; and the bricks are put away with slow, reluctant fingers. 'You must *always* wash your hands when you hear the first bell.' The child obeys for that once, and no more.

"To avoid these displays of wilfulness, the mother will insist from the first on an obedience which is prompt, cheerful, and lasting—save for lapses of memory on the child's part. Tardy, unwilling, occasional obedience is hardly worth the having; and it is greatly easier to give the child the *habit* of perfect obedience by never allowing him in anything else, than it is to obtain this mere formal obedience by a constant exercise of authority" (Vol. 1, pp. 163, 164).

### *10. When the child is old enough, discuss the noble effort of making yourself obey.*

"By-and-by, when he is old enough, take the child into confidence; let him know what a noble thing it is to be able to make himself do, in a minute, and brightly, the very thing he would rather not do" (Vol. 1, p. 164).

"To give reasons to a child is usually out of place."

## Notes

**11. Never give a command that you do not intend to see fully carried out.**

“To secure this habit of obedience, the mother must exercise great self-restraint; she must never give a command which she does not intend to see carried out to the full” (Vol. 1, p. 164).

**12. Don't pester your child with incessant commands.**

“And she must not lay upon her children burdens, grievous to be borne, of command heaped upon command” (Vol. 1, p. 164).

**13. Take courage from the fact that once the habit of obedience is instilled, you and your child will enjoy a great deal of liberty.**

“The children who are trained to perfect obedience may be trusted with a good deal of liberty: they receive a few directions which they know they must not disobey; and for the rest, they are left to learn how to direct their own actions, even at the cost of some small mishaps; and are not pestered with a perpetual fire of ‘Do this,’ and ‘Don't do that!’ ” (Vol. 1, p. 164).

*For more on the habit of obedience, see Laying Down the Rails: A Charlotte Mason Habits Handbook.*

**Questions to Ask about the Habit of Obedience**

- Do I believe that obedience is my child's duty and is for his good?
- Am I working hard to teach my child the meaning of *must*?
- Am I being careful not to laugh at my child's disobedience?
- Am I trying to be pleasantly consistent?
- Do I understand that I am on assignment from God to teach my child to do right?
- Am I being careful to train my child in obedience but not bully him?
- Am I expecting my child to obey and communicating that expectation in my voice and demeanor?
- Am I comfortable in my position as the God-appointed authority, or do I feel the need to try to reason with my child?
- Am I trying to insist on prompt, cheerful, lasting obedience every time?
- Have I discussed with my older child the noble effort it takes to obey?
- Am I being careful never to give a command that I do not intend to see fully carried out?
- Am I trying not to pester my child with incessant commands?
- Am I keeping the future goal of liberty in mind as I train my child in the habit of obedience?

**More Quotes on the Habit of Obedience**

“Let the child's first lesson be obedience, and the second will be what thou wilt.”—Benjamin Franklin

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.”—Ephesians 6:1

“She must never give a command which she does not intend to see carried out to the full.”



## *Part 3*

# Nourish the Mind on Loving, Right, and Noble Ideas



## Chapter 4

# Using the Senses

## Notes

Brady was helping Mommy set the table.

“Be sure Daddy gets a big fork, honey,” said Mom.

Brady looked up from his job, uncertain.

Mommy picked two forks out of the silverware stacked on the table. She held up a big fork and a smaller fork, resting the ends of their handles on the table, so Brady could see them beside each other.

“See?” she explained. “One of these forks is bigger . . .” she wiggled the big fork, “and one is smaller. Let’s see if you can put the big fork at Dad’s place.”

She handed both forks to Brady with a smile. Brady held them up just like she had done, then placed the big fork beside Dad’s plate.

“Good job, sweetie,” Mom said. She handed him another big fork. “Mom gets a big fork too.”

Once again Brady compared the two forks and placed the big one correctly.

“That’s right,” said Mom. “And the smaller fork goes at your place.”

### Charlotte’s Thoughts on Using the Senses

#### 1. *A young child uses his five senses to learn about everything around him.*

“In his early years the child is all eyes; he observes, or, more truly, he perceives, calling sight, touch, taste, smell, and hearing to his aid, that he may learn all that is discoverable by him about every new thing that comes under his notice. Everybody knows how a baby fumbles over with soft little fingers, and carries to his mouth, and bangs that it may produce what sound there is in it, the spoon or doll which supercilious grown-up people give him to ‘keep him quiet.’ The child is at his lessons, and is learning all about it at a rate utterly surprising to the physiologist, who considers how much is implied in the act of ‘seeing,’ for instance: that to the infant, as to the blind adult restored to sight, there is at first no difference between a flat picture and a solid body,—that the ideas of form and solidity are not obtained by sight at all, but are the judgments of experience” (Vol. 1, p. 65).

“My object is to show that the chief function of the child—his business in the world during the first six or seven years of his life—is to find out all he can, about whatever comes under his notice, by means of his five senses; that he has an insatiable appetite for knowledge got in this way; and that, therefore, the endeavour of his parents should be to put him in the way of making acquaintance freely with Nature and natural objects” (Vol. 1, p. 96).

“That the knowledge most valuable to the child is that which he gets with his own eyes and ears and fingers (under direction) in the open air” (Vol. 1, p. 177).

“His progress is amazing. At first he does not see any difference between a picture of a cow and the living animal; big and little, far and near, hard and soft,

“The chief function of the child—his business in the world during the first six or seven years of his life—is to find out all he can, about whatever comes under his notice, by means of his five senses.”

## Notes

hot and cold, are all alike to him; he wishes to hold the moon in his pinafore, to sit on the pond, to poke his finger into the candle, not because he is a foolish little person, but because he is profoundly ignorant of the nature of the contents of this unintelligible world. But how he works! he bangs his spoon to try if it produces sound; he sucks it to try its flavour; he fumbles it all over and no doubt finds out whether it is hard or soft, hot or cold, rough or smooth; he gazes at it with the long gaze of infancy, so that he may learn the look of it; it is an old friend and an object of desire when he sees it again, for he has found out that there is much joy in a spoon. This goes on with great diligence for a couple of years, at the end of which time baby has acquired enough knowledge of the world to conduct himself in a very dignified and rational way” (Vol. 2, p. 181).

### *2. A young child will proceed with his learning at the right pace for him.*

“Then, think of the vague passes in the air the little fist makes before it lays hold of the object of desire, and you see how he learns the whereabouts of things, having as yet no idea of direction. And why does he cry for the moon? Why does he crave equally, a horse or a house-fly as an appropriate plaything? Because far and near, large and small, are ideas he has yet to grasp. The child has truly a great deal to do before he is in a condition to ‘believe his own eyes’; but Nature teaches so gently, so gradually, so persistently, that he is never overdone, but goes on gathering little stores of knowledge about whatever comes before him” (Vol. 1, p. 66).

### *3. This learning through the senses is important because it lays the foundation for future understanding.*

“And this is the process the child should continue for the first few years of his life. Now is the storing time which should be spent in laying up images of things familiar. By-and-by he will have to *conceive* of things he has never seen: how can he do it except by comparison with things he has seen and knows? By-and-by he will be called upon to reflect, understand, reason; what material will he have, unless he has a magazine of facts to go upon? The child who has been made to observe how high in the heavens the sun is at noon on a summer’s day, how low at noon on a day in mid-winter, is able to *conceive* of the great heat of the tropics under a vertical sun, and to *understand* that the climate of a place depends greatly upon the mean height the sun reaches above the horizon” (Vol. 1, p. 66).

“There is no end to the store of common information, got in such a way that it will never be forgotten, with which an intelligent child may furnish himself before he begins his school career” (Vol. 1, p. 68).

“The intellectual education of the young child should lie in the free exercise of perceptive power, because the first stages of mental effort are marked by the extreme activity of this power” (Vol. 1, pp. 96, 97).

“Equally strong, equally natural, equally sure of awakening a responsive stir in the young soul, is the divinely implanted principle of curiosity. The child *wants to know*; wants to know incessantly, desperately; asks all manner of questions about everything he comes across, plagues his elders and betters, and is told not to bother, and to be a good boy and not ask questions. But this only sometimes. For the most

“The child *wants to know*; wants to know incessantly, desperately.”



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part we lay ourselves out to answer Tommy's questions so far as we are able, and are sadly ashamed that we are so soon flooded by his insatiable curiosity about natural objects and phenomena" (Vol. 2, p. 221).

"The most surprising educational feat accomplished amongst us is the amount of knowledge, about everything within his range, which Tommy has acquired by the end of his sixth year. 'Why, he knows as much as I do, about'—this, and that, and the other, says his astonished and admiring father. Take him to the seaside, and in a week he will tell you all about trawling and mackerel fishing, the ways of the fisherfolk, and all that his inquisitive mind can find out unaided. He would tell all about sand, and shells, and tides, and waves, only, poor little boy, he must have help towards this manner of knowledge, and there is no one to give it to him. However, he finds out all that he can about all that he sees and hears, and does amass a surprising amount of exact knowledge about things and their properties" (Vol. 2, p. 221).

*4. A young child can do a great amount of mental work without stress if it is the right kind of work: using his senses to examine new objects.*

"A great deal has been said lately about the danger of overpressure, of requiring too much mental work from a child of tender years. The danger exists; but lies, not in giving the child too much, but in giving him the wrong thing to do, the sort of work for which the present state of his mental development does not fit him. Who expects a boy in petticoats to lift half a hundredweight? But give the child work that Nature intended for him, and the quantity he can get through with ease is practically unlimited. Whoever saw a child tired of seeing, of examining in his own way, unfamiliar things? This is the sort of mental nourishment for which he has an unbounded appetite, because it is that food of the mind on which, for the present, he is meant to grow" (Vol. 1, pp. 66, 67).

"For the first five or six years of his life, everything, especially everything in action, is an object of intelligent curiosity to the child—the street or the field is a panorama of delight, the shepherd's dog, the baker's cart, the man with the barrow, are full of vivid interest. He has a thousand questions to ask, he wants to know about everything; he has, in fact, an inordinate appetite for knowledge. We soon cure all that: we occupy him with books instead of things; we evoke other desires in place of the desire to know; and we succeed in bringing up the unobservant man (and more unobservant woman) who discerns no difference between an elm, a poplar and a lime tree, and misses very much of the joy of living" (Vol. 2, pp. 181, 182).

*5. An observant child should be put in the way of things worth observing.*

"Now, consider what a culpable waste of intellectual energy it is to shut up a child, blessed with this inordinate capacity for seeing and knowing, within the four walls of a house, or the dreary streets of a town. Or suppose that he is let run loose in the country where there is plenty to see, it is nearly as bad to let this great faculty of the child's dissipate itself in random observations for want of method and direction" (Vol. 1, p. 68).

"Now, consider what a culpable waste of intellectual energy it is to shut up a child, blessed with this inordinate capacity for seeing and knowing, within the four walls of a house."

## Notes

*Object lessons are bringing various items from nature into the room and letting the child examine them as you tell about them.*

*In situ means "in the place" and refers to natural habitat or environment.*

**"Object-lessons should be incidental; and this is where the family enjoys so great an advantage over the school."**

"But what is the use of being a 'very observant child,' if you are not put in the way of things worth observing? And here is the difference between the streets of a town and the sights and sounds of the country. There is plenty to be seen in a town, and children accustomed to the ways of the streets become nimble-witted enough. But the scraps of information to be picked up in a town are isolated fragments; they do not hang on to anything else, nor come to anything more; the information may be convenient, but no one is the wiser for knowing which side of the street is Smith's, and which turning leads to Thompson's shop" (Vol. 1, pp. 69, 70).

"Two points call for our attention in the education of the senses; we must assist the child to educate himself on Nature's lines, and we must take care not to supplant and crowd out Nature and her methods with that which we call education" (Vol. 2, p. 182).

**6. Formal object lessons provide some opportunity for a young child to use his senses to learn, but they do not "spread a feast" for him.**

"Now, how far is this craving for natural sustenance met? In infant and kindergarten schools, by the object lesson, which is good so far as it goes, but is sometimes like that bean a day on which the Frenchman fed his horse. The child at home has more new things brought under his notice, if with less method. Neither at home nor at school is much effort made to set before the child the abundant 'feast of eyes' which his needs demand" (Vol. 1, p. 67).

"The purpose of so-called object-lessons is to assist a child, by careful examination of a given object, to find out all he can about it through the use of his several senses. General information about the object is thrown in, and lodges only because the child's senses have been exercised and his interest aroused. Object-lessons are a little in disfavour just now, for two reasons. In the first place, miserable fragments are presented to the children which have little of the character of the object *in situ*, and are apt to convey inadequate, if not wrong, ideas. In the next place, object-lessons are commonly used as a means to introduce children to hard words, such as opaque and translucent, which never become part of their living thought until they pick them up for themselves incidentally as they have need of them. But the abuse of this kind of teaching should not cause us to overlook its use. No child can grow up without daily object teaching, whether casual or of set purpose; and the more thorough this is, the more intelligent and observant will he become. It is singular how few people are capable of developing an intelligent curiosity about the most attractive objects, except as their interest is stimulated from without" (Vol. 2, pp. 180, 181).

**7. Family life offers an advantage in everyday, on-the-spot, natural object lessons.**

"Object-lessons should be incidental; and this is where the family enjoys so great an advantage over the school. It is almost impossible that the school should give any but set lessons; but this sort of teaching in the family falls in with the occurrence of the object. The child who finds that wonderful and beautiful object, a 'paper' wasp's nest, attached to a larch-twigg, has his object-lesson on the spot from father or mother. The grey colour, the round symmetrical shape, the sort of cup-

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and-ball arrangement, the papery texture, the comparative size, the comparative smoothness, the odour or lack of odour, the extreme lightness, the fact that it is not cold to the touch—these and fifty other particulars the child finds out unaided, or with no more than a word, here and there, to direct his observation. One does not find a wasp’s nest every day, but much can be got out of every common object, and the commoner the better, which falls naturally under the child’s observation, a piece of bread, a lump of coal, a sponge” (Vol. 2, pp. 182, 183).

“We should fill for children the storehouse of memory with many open-air images, capable of giving them reflected sensations of extreme delight. Our constant care must be to secure that they do look, and listen, touch, and smell; and the way to this is by sympathetic action on our part: what we look at they will look at; the odours we perceive, they, too, will get” (Vol. 2, pp. 192, 193).

**8. Don’t feel that you must do an exhaustive study of each object.**

“In the first place, it is unnecessary in the family to give an exhaustive examination to every object; one quality might be discussed in this, another quality in that” (Vol. 2, p. 183).

**9. Use objects to informally teach your child the concept and vocabulary of comparisons.**

“We eat our bread and milk, and notice that bread is absorbent; and we overhaul our experience to discover other things which we know to be absorbent also; and we do what we can to compare these things as to whether they are less absorbent or more absorbent than bread. This is exceedingly important: the unobservant person states that an object is light, and considers that he has stated an ultimate fact: the observant person makes the same statement, but has in his mind a relative scale, and his judgment is of the more value because he compares, silently, with a series of substances to which this is relatively light.

“It is important that children should learn to recognise that high, low, sweet, bitter, long, short, agreeable, etc., etc., are comparative terms; while square, round, black, white, are positive terms, the application of which is not affected by comparison with other objects” (Vol. 2, p. 183).

“Care in this matter makes for higher moral, as well as intellectual development: half the dissensions in the world arise from an indiscriminate use of epithets” (Vol. 2, p. 184).

**10. Use objects and everyday events to informally teach your child about weight.**

“‘Would you say your bread (at dinner) was light or heavy?’ The child would probably answer, ‘Rather light.’ ‘Yes, we can only say that a thing is light by comparing it with others; what is bread light compared with?’ ‘A stone, a piece of coal, of cheese, of butter of the same size.’ ‘But it is heavy compared with?’ ‘A piece of sponge cake, a piece of sponge, of cork, of pumice,’ and so on. ‘What do you think it weighs?’ ‘An ounce,’ ‘an ounce and a half.’ ‘We’ll try after dinner; you had better have another piece and save it,’ and the weighing after dinner is a delightful operation. The power of judging of weight is worth cultivating. We heard the other

*An epithet is a descriptive word or phrase.*

“What we look at they will look at.”

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Caeteris paribus means “other things being equal.”

“Our constant care must be to secure that they do look, and listen, touch, and smell.”

day of a gentleman who was required at a bazaar to guess the weight of a monster cake; he poised it and said it weighed eighteen pounds fourteen ounces, and it did exactly. *Caeteris paribus*, one has a greater respect for the man who made this accurate judgment than for the vague person, who suggested that the cake might weigh ten pounds.

“Letters, book parcels, an apple, an orange, a vegetable marrow, fifty things in the course of the day, give opportunities for this kind of object teaching; *i.e.* the practice of forming judgments as to the relative and absolute weight of objects by the irrisistance, that is their opposition to our muscular force, perceived by our sense of touch. By degrees the children are trained to observe that the relative weights of objects depend upon their relative density, and are introduced to the fact that we have a standard of weight” (Vol. 2, pp. 184, 185).

### *11. Use objects and everyday events to informally teach your child about size.*

“In the same way children should be taught to measure objects by the eye. How high is that candlestick? How long and broad that picture-frame? and so on—verifying their statements. What is the circumference of that bowl? of the clock-face? of that flower-bed? How tall is So-and-so, and So-and-so? How many hands high are the horses of their acquaintance? Divide a slip of wood, a sheet of paper into halves, thirds, quarters by the eye, lay a walking-stick at right angles with another; detect when a picture, curtain, etc., hangs out of the perpendicular. This sort of practice will secure for children what is called a correct, or true, eye” (Vol. 2, p. 185).

### *12. Use objects and everyday events to encourage your child to listen carefully.*

“A quick and true ear is another possession that does not come by Nature, or anyway, if it does, it is too often lost. How many sounds can you distinguish in a sudden silence out of doors? Let these be named in order from the less to the more acute. Let the notes of the birds be distinguished, both call-notes and song-notes; the four or five distinct sounds to be heard in the flow of a brook. Cultivate accuracy in distinguishing footfalls and voices; in discerning, with their eyes shut, the direction from which a sound proceeds, in which footsteps are moving. Distinguish passing vehicles by the sounds; as lorry, brougham, dog-cart” (Vol. 2, p. 185).

### *13. Use everyday objects and events to encourage your child to sharpen his sense of smell.*

“By the way, why is it that the baby does not exercise with purpose his organ of smell? He screws up a funny little nose when he is taught to sniff at a flower, but this is a mere trick; he does not naturally make experiments as to whether things are odorous, while each of his other senses affords him keen joy. No doubt the little nose is, involuntarily, very active; but can his inertness in this matter be a hereditary failing? It may be that we all allow ourselves to go about with obtuse nostrils. If so, this is a matter for the attention of mothers, who should bring up their children not only to receive, which is involuntary and vague, but to perceive odours from the first” (Vol. 2, p. 182).

“We do not attach enough importance to the discrimination of odours, whether

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as a safeguard to health or as a source of pleasure. Half the people one knows have nostrils which register no difference between the atmosphere of a large, and so-called 'airy,' room, whose windows are never opened, and that of a room in which a through current of air is arranged for at frequent intervals: and yet health depends largely on delicate perception as regards the purity of the atmosphere. The odours which result in diphtheria or typhoid are perceptible, however slight, and a nose trained to detect the faintest malodorous particles in food, clothing, or dwelling, is to the possessor a safeguard from disease" (Vol. 2, p. 186).

"Every new odour perceived is a source, if not of warning, of recurrent satisfaction or interest. We are acquainted with too few of the odours which the spring-time offers. Only this spring the present writer learned two peculiarly delightful odours quite new to her, that of young larch twigs, which have much the same kind and degree of fragrance as the flower of the syringa, and the pleasant musky aroma of a box-hedge. Children should be trained to shut their eyes, for example, when they come into the drawing-room, and discover by their nostrils what odorous flowers are present; should discriminate the garden odours let loose by a shower of rain" (Vol. 2, pp. 186, 187).

***14. Encourage your child to cultivate his sense of taste objectively rather than subjectively.***

"We all recognise that the training of the senses is an important part of education. One caution is necessary: from the very first a child's sensations should be treated as matters of objective and not of subjective interest. Marmalade, for example, is interesting, not because it is 'nice'—a fact not to be dwelt upon at all—but because one can discern in it different flavours and the modifying effect of the oil secreted in the rind of the orange" (Vol. 2, pp. 179, 180).

"Flavour, again, offers a wide range for delicate discrimination. At first sight it would appear difficult to cultivate the sense of flavour without making a child more or less of a gourmand; but the fact is, that the strong flavours which titillate the palate destroy the power of perception. The young child who lives upon milk-foods has, probably, more pleasure in flavour than the diner-out who is familiar with the confections of a *cordon bleu*. At the same time, one would prefer to make flavour a source of interest rather than of sensuous pleasure to children: it is better that they should try to discern a flavour with their eyes shut, than that they should be allowed to think or say that things are 'nice' or 'nasty.' This sort of fastidiousness should be cried down. It is not well to make a child eat what he does not like, as that would only make him dislike that particular dish always; but to let him feel that he shows a want of self-control and manliness, when he expresses distaste for wholesome food, is likely to have a lasting effect" (Vol. 2, pp. 187, 188).

***15. Sensory gymnastics, like those described above, will help your child cultivate good observation skills that will serve him well in the future.***

"We have barely touched on the sorts of object-lessons, appealing now to one sense and now to another, which should come incidentally every day in the family. We are apt to regard an American Indian as a quite uneducated person; he is, on the contrary, highly educated in so far as that he is able to discriminate sensory

*A gourmand is a person who appreciates good food.*

*A cordon bleu is a chef famous for his skill.*

"From the very first a child's sensations should be treated as matters of objective and not of subjective interest."



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See chapter 6 for more on making a personal acquaintance with nature.

impressions, and to take action upon these, in a way which is bewildering to the book-learned European. It would be well for parents to educate a child, for the first half-dozen years of his life, at any rate, on 'Red Indian' lines. Besides the few points we have mentioned, he should be able to discriminate colours and shades of colour; relative degrees of heat in woollen, wood, iron, marble, ice; should learn the use of the thermometer; should discriminate objects according to their degrees of hardness; should have a cultivated eye and touch for texture; should, in fact, be able to get as much information about an object from a few minutes' study as to its form, colour, texture, size, weight, qualities, parts, characteristics, as he could learn out of many pages of a printed book. We approach the subject by the avenue of the child's senses rather than by that of the objects to be studied, because just now we have in view the occasional test exercises, the purpose of which is to give thorough culture to the several senses. An acquaintance with Nature and natural objects is another thing, and is to be approached in a slightly different way. A boy who is observing a beetle does not consciously apply his several senses to the beetle, but lets the beetle take the initiative, which the boy reverently follows: but the boy who is in the habit of doing sensory daily gymnastics will learn a great deal more about the beetle than he who is not so trained" (Vol. 2, pp. 188, 189).

### *16. A combination of incidental sensory cultivation and intentional object lessons offers a good plan.*

"Definite object-lessons differ from these incidental exercises in that an object is in a manner exhausted by each of the senses in turn, and every atom of information it will yield got out of it. A good plan is to make this sort of a lesson a game. Pass your object round—a piece of bread, for example—and let each child tell some fact that he discovers by touch; another round, by smell; again, by taste; and again, by sight. Children are most ingenious in this kind of game, and it affords opportunities to give them new words, as friable, elastic, when they really ask to be helped to express in a word some discovery they have made. Children learn in this way to think with exactitude, to distinguish between friable and brittle; and any common information that is offered to them in the course of these exercises becomes a possession for ever. A good game in the nature of an object-lesson, suitable for a birthday party, is to have a hundred objects arranged on a table, unknown to the children; then lead the little party into the room, allow them three minutes to look round the table; afterwards, when they have left the room, let them write or tell in a corner, the names of all the objects they recollect. Some children will easily get fifty or sixty.

"No doubt the best and happiest exercise of the senses springs out of a loving familiarity with the world of nature, but the sorts of gymnastics we have indicated render the perceptions more acute, and are greatly enjoyed by children" (Vol. 2, pp. 189, 190).

### *17. A child's vocabulary will blossom as he seeks for words to name and describe what he is experiencing with his senses.*

"We older people, partly because of our maturer intellect, partly because of our defective education, get most of our knowledge through the medium of words. We set the child to learn in the same way, and find him dull and slow. Why? Because it is only with a few words in common use that he associates a definite meaning; all

"A good plan is to make this sort of a lesson a game."

the rest are no more to him than the vocables of a foreign tongue. But set him face to face with a *thing*, and he is twenty times as quick as you are in knowing all about it; knowledge of things flies to the mind of a child as steel filings to a magnet. And, *pari passu* with his knowledge of things, his vocabulary grows; for it is a law of the mind that what we know, we struggle to express. This fact accounts for many of the apparently aimless questions of children; they are in quest, not of knowledge, but of *words* to express the knowledge they have” (Vol. 1, pp. 67, 68).

***18. Every natural object is part of a whole network of more objects and scientific concepts, so one discovery will lead to more.***

“Now take up a natural object, it does not matter what, and you are studying one of a group, a member of a series; whatever knowledge you get about it is so much towards the *science* which includes all of its kind. Break off an elder twig in the spring; you notice a ring of wood round a centre of pith, and there you have at a glance a distinguishing character of a great division of the vegetable world. You pick up a pebble. Its edges are perfectly smooth and rounded: why? you ask. It is water-worn, weather-worn. And that little pebble brings you face to face with *disintegration*, the force to which, more than to any other, we owe the aspects of the world which we call *picturesque*—glen, ravine, valley, hill. It is not necessary that the child should be told anything about disintegration or dicotyledon, only that he should *observe* the wood and pith in the hazel twig, the pleasant roundness of the pebble; by-and-by he will learn the bearing of the facts with which he is already familiar—a very different thing from learning the reason why of facts which have never come under his notice” (Vol. 1, p. 70).

## Questions to Ask about Using the Senses

- Do I realize that my child uses his five senses to learn about everything around him?
- Am I convinced that my child will learn at the right pace for him?
- Do I consider learning by using the five senses important and foundational to future learning?
- Am I allowing my child to work hard, but with no stress, by using his senses to examine new objects?
- Am I trying to put things worth observing in the path of my observant child?
- Do I present planned object lessons sparingly?
- Am I learning to recognize opportunities for everyday, on-the-spot, natural object lessons?
- Am I pointing out only one or two aspects of a natural object lesson?
- Am I trying to informally teach my child the concept and vocabulary of comparison?
- Am I using everyday opportunities to teach my child about weight?
- Do I look for informal everyday opportunities to teach my child about size?
- Am I encouraging my child to listen carefully?
- Am I seeking to informally help my child sharpen his sense of smell?
- Am I trying to help my child cultivate his sense of taste objectively rather than subjectively?

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**Pari passu means “in an equal way.”**

“This fact accounts for many of the apparently aimless questions of children; they are in quest, not of knowledge, but of *words* to express the knowledge they have.”

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- Do I believe that sensory activities like these will cultivate good observation skills in my child that will serve him well in the future?
- Am I including a combination of incidental sensory cultivation and intentional object lessons?
- Am I helping my child's vocabulary to blossom as he seeks for words to name and describe what he is experiencing with his senses?
- Do I understand how one natural object is part of a whole network of more objects and scientific concepts, so one discovery will lead to more?

### More Quotes on Using the Senses

"Seeing, hearing and feeling are miracles, and each part and tag of me is a miracle."—Walt Whitman

"It is a golden maxim to cultivate the garden for the nose, and the eyes will take care of themselves."—Robert Louis Stevenson

"How good is man's life, the mere living! How fit to employ all the heart and the soul and the senses forever in joy!"—Robert Browning

"Of all the senses, sight must be the most delightful."—Helen Keller

"There are three schoolmasters for everybody that will employ them—the senses, intelligent companions, and books."—Henry Ward Beecher

"Smell is a potent wizard that transports you across thousands of miles and all the years you have lived."—Helen Keller

"We all recognise that the training of the senses is an important part of education."



# "What should I be doing during the preschool years for homeschooling?"

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