

Introduction

Feelings add spark to life.
They can be both satisfying and upsetting.
Feelings try to tell us something, usually about what we need to feel content.

Your toddler will tell you what is going on by expressing strong feelings. She will shriek for joy, or scream in anger. Your toddler has an uncontrollable desire to find out about herself and the world she lives in. She looks for protection and closeness from you, the most important person in her life. At the same time, she clearly tells you: "I am *not* you. I can do things all by myself!"

As a parent, you also have strong feelings: joy, frustration, rage and anger. Underneath these feelings you may be looking for information about parenting and support from others. You absolutely have to know your child is safe. You want to protect him and give him all your love.

You may find it difficult at times to remain calm when your two-year old is "throwing a fit". You become embarrassed or remember difficult childhood scenes.

You may be feeling the pain of harsh comments for not raising your child "the right way". When you notice your own feelings and talk about your own needs, you become better at helping your toddler get through those "terrible moments".

As you read this book, remember there is no single solution.
Sometimes you hold on, sometimes you let go.

This book is dedicated
to Honor
you, the proud parent of a toddler,
to Celebrate
your strength in everyday situations, and
to Respect
all your feelings and those of your precious child.



The Land of Food

How is mealtime at your house? Enjoyable? Frustrating? Do you wonder why your toddler eats well one day, and the next, hardly anything at all. Do you wonder why your child cries when the peas touch the potatoes? Or the cup is the wrong color? Last week, she loved carrots. This week carrots are “yucky”. Will she survive? Will you?

YOUR CHILD FEELS

Your child needs to know she has some influence on her world. She loves to copy what you do: using a spoon, a fork. She feels confident when she can learn everything about mealtime. Squishing the food with her fingers, eating all by herself. She becomes frustrated when she cannot play a part in taking care of herself.

YOU FEEL

You also feel frustrated. Do you remember how nice and satisfying it was when your baby used to eat everything? You worry when she does not eat enough. You are embarrassed when she makes a mess. Do you remember learning table manners as a child? Or when you had to sit at the table until you ate all the broccoli? You look forward to the day when meals can be relaxing, an enjoyable family event.

SO...

Think about how you can both get what you need. Offer two nutritious choices. Make meal time relaxing, and leave the rest up to her. When a child feels like she is making some decisions, she will come to eat as much as she needs.

She may not eat well at some meals, but will be hungrier at the next one. She will appreciate that you are providing good food and trusting her to know when and how much to eat. She'll say: “Look at me, I'm strong and can do things for myself”.



"NO"



The World Of “No”

*“Come back here, Sally!” “No! No!, she says,
her favorite word nowadays.
What do you feel when your child loudly screams: “No!
No yellow shirt. No holding hands.”*

YOUR CHILD FEELS

Your child feels glorious and joyful when she can say very definitely “No”. She feels confident when she sees she can get into everything. She loves to explore.

In fact, she can't stop herself from finding out about everything. She also feels puzzled. She wants to please you, and she is beginning to realize that you do not like all her desires.

YOU FEEL

You feel scared because you need to feel your child is safe. You may feel annoyed because you need your child's cooperation. You may even feel sad because you miss those treasured days when your baby was so easy-going.

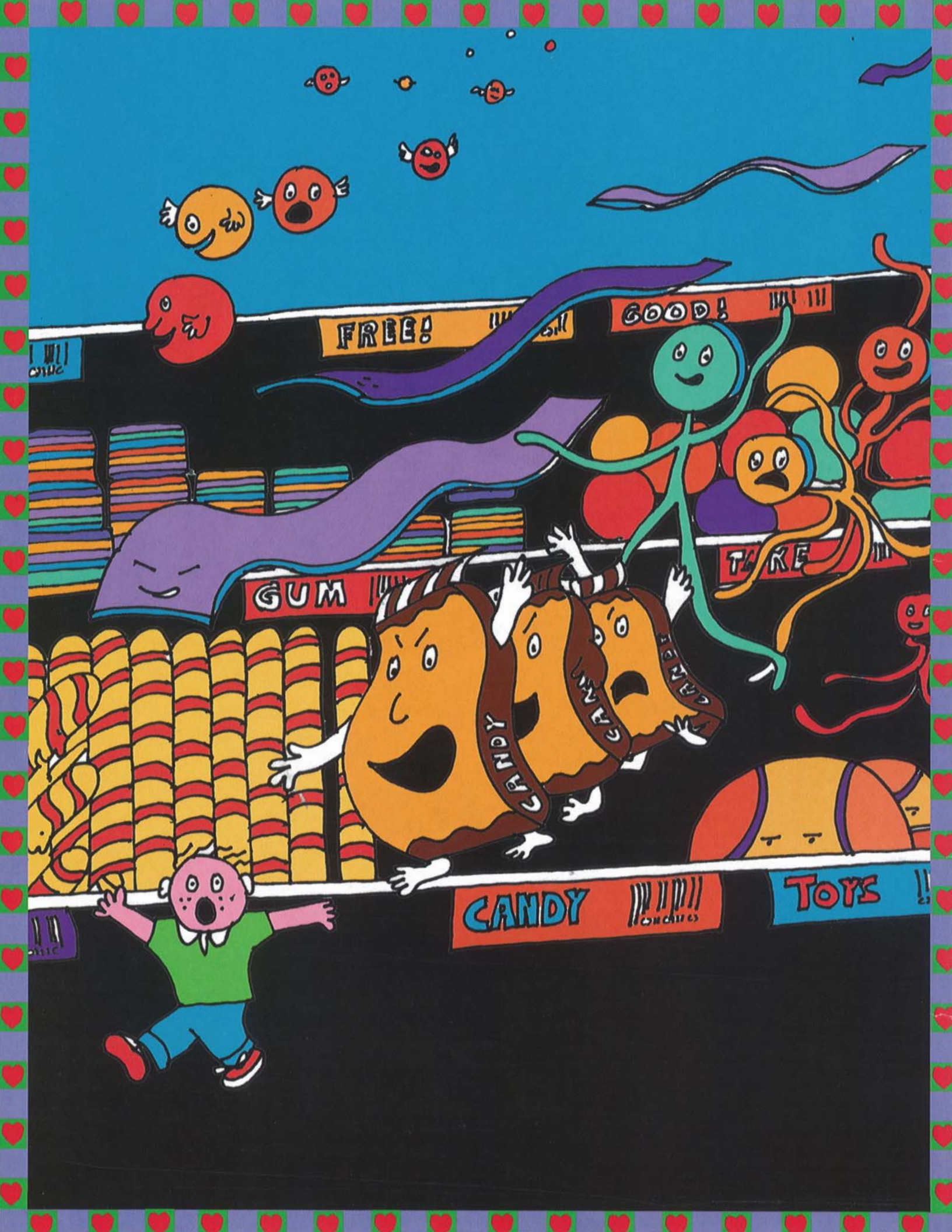
SO...

When your 2 year old shrieks “No”, this can be okay because she is learning to become herself. She is learning about the limits in the world. Tell her gently and firmly:

“We are going to hold hands crossing the street. When we get to the park, you can run free”.

You are learning a lot about the love between a parent and child. You are wise and strong in providing a balance between letting go and setting limits.





Falling Apart

Sometimes a trip to the grocery store with your toddler is fun.

Sometimes it is not.

Your child sees something that he wants, like candy. You don't want him to have any. He insists. You say "No". He cries, kicks and screams. You get angry. People in the store look around. You scold your child. He screams harder. What is really going on here?

YOUR CHILD FEELS

Your child is angry because he wants the candy, but he actually feels scared when he is out of control, screaming, kicking, flailing. He becomes terrified when he cannot stop the rage inside. He is really saying "Help!: I'm falling apart". He is afraid of these powerful feelings and he is afraid to lose your love.

YOU FEEL

You feel mad. Your child is causing a scene and you need to finish your shopping. You are embarrassed because everyone is looking. Do they think you are a bad parent? Sometimes these uncomfortable situations may remind you of a bad time in your own childhood.

SO...

At times like this, your scared child needs your understanding of how he is feeling. He needs someone to say calmly, firmly: "I know how much you want the candy. I understand how you feel. We are not getting candy today".

Will this stop the raging storm inside him? Probably not.

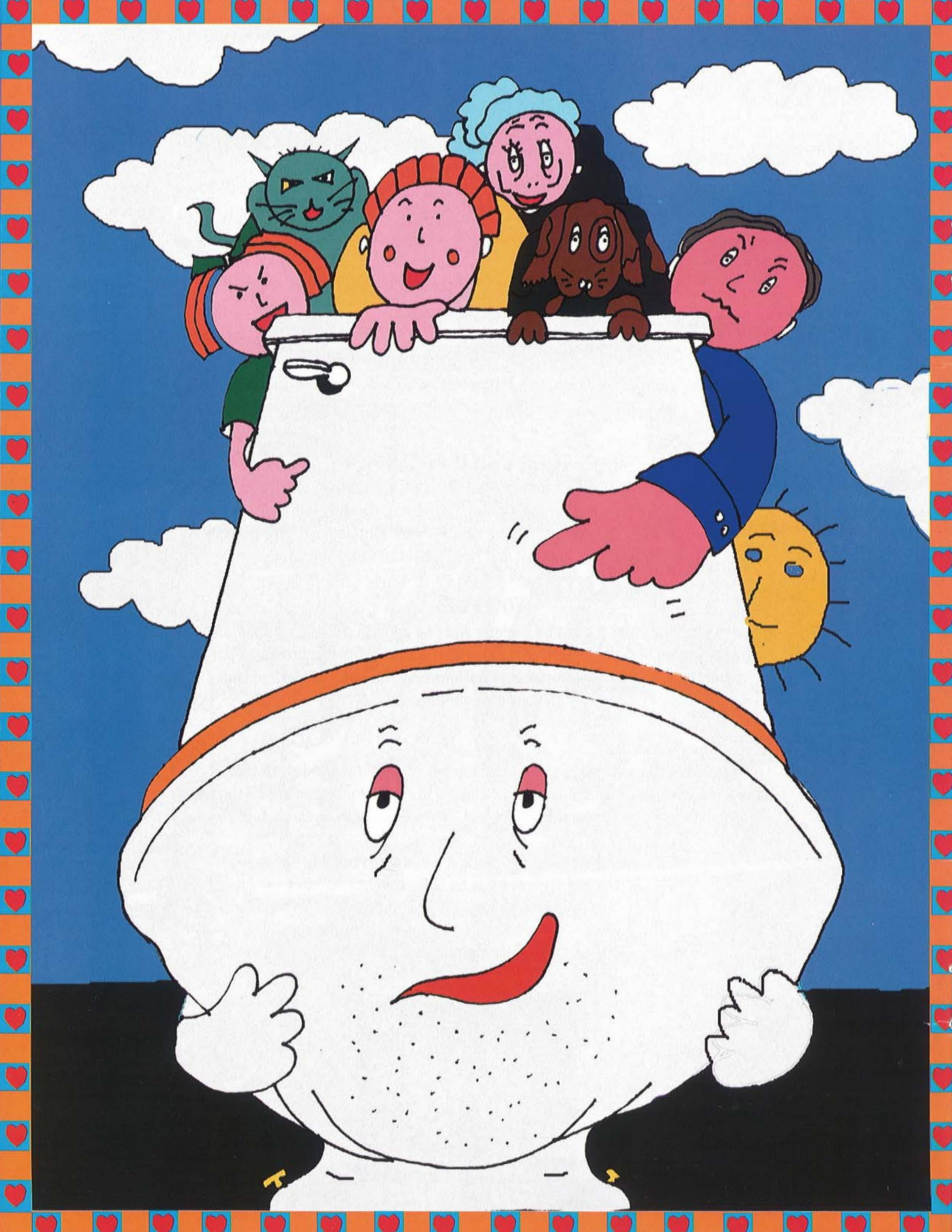
But look at what he is learning:

Love: even though he is so angry;

Respect: someone is listening, understanding;

Protection: someone is helping him manage this awful rage.





The Potty

Most people put too much energy and emphasis on teaching a toddler how to use the potty. The fact is almost everyone learns how to use the potty from 2 to 4 years of age.

YOUR CHILD FEELS

Your child sometimes feels anxious and confused when you insist she use the potty because she is a big girl now. She may also feel ashamed or embarrassed because you are disappointed or upset that she had an accident. She does not understand your feelings or what an “accident” is.

YOU FEEL

You may worry or feel embarrassed because it is taking so long for your 2 year old to learn something so necessary. Sometimes you may get irritated because it looks like your toddler is acting stubborn by refusing to use the potty.

SO...

When your child seems uninterested or uncomfortable in using the potty or giving up her diapers...Stop for a moment. Think about what your child is going through.

Her muscles are not quite ready to control this common physical urge. Be patient.

This diaper phase won't last forever .

When you help your child use the potty by herself, she learns confidence. She knows you understand her need to do things by herself, just like she learned to crawl, walk, and feed herself.

She likes it when you see how capable she is.





“Bye-bye”

Picking up your child at the baby sitter's or at child care can be a wonderful feeling. Especially when your child gets all excited, smiles and runs into your arms. But it doesn't always work that way. Why is this?

YOUR CHILD FEELS

Your child is very sad when you leave him for the whole day or even a few hours. He cries because he does not understand why you are leaving. He is anxious and afraid you will not come back. When you pick him up he clings and whines because he needs your warmth and closeness.

YOU FEEL

You are expecting your child to smile and hug you after a long day. You need to reconnect with him. You feel disappointed, confused when he does not smile or run to you. You may wonder if he is “getting back at you” because you left him.

SO...

When your toddler whines and clings, try to spend a few minutes of special time together. Play a game of hide and seek, rock him in his special chair, read his favorite book. Your child is learning how hard it is to not be together.

With time your child will feel more comfortable and safe when you leave, because he is learning to trust you. He knows you are coming back with warm understanding hugs. What a great time! Your relationship is growing deeper.





New Brothers & Sisters

Your household is growing. Another baby has arrived and everyone is excited and happy...Except your toddler.

She is acting like she hates her new baby brother.

You love both your children, and you wonder why your older child is acting this way.

YOUR CHILD FEELS

Your toddler is starting to become scared.

The new baby is getting all the attention and all your time. She thinks you love the new baby more than her. She is lonely, jealous. She feels helpless, even guilty because she wants the new baby to go away. She wants to be “the only baby” again.

YOU FEEL

You are joyful about another baby in the household.

But it's a big adjustment for the family and you need harmony. How is your toddler letting you know that she is jealous? Is she hurting the baby? Is she wetting herself again, wanting to drink out of a baby bottle? You want to understand her, to show her that you love her as much as the new baby.

SO...

When your toddler shows these “not so nice” feelings towards the new baby...*Listen carefully.*

Let her get out all those awful, terrible thoughts.

She needs your gentle understanding. Take some special time together: wash the dishes together, go for a short walk, let her take care of her own stuffed baby animal.

When you do this, she will feel special and understood.

This is a deep need for all of us.





TV & Toddlers

Your toddler likes to watch TV.

Sometimes you like it when he is sitting quietly watching his favorite programs. It gives you an opportunity to get things done.

But, have you heard that watching TV can be harmful for your toddler's healthy development?

YOUR CHILD FEELS

Sometimes your child seems to be calm when he is watching TV. Actually, your toddler's feelings go into neutral while sitting in front of the television. He may become cranky, bored or demanding after watching TV. Your child needs to move around, discover and make things happen. The TV cannot respond to your child's face, his feelings. Only you can.

YOU FEEL

You feel relieved when your child is sitting quietly in front of the TV. You need a break. Some days, you feel guilty because he is watching too much TV. You are worried because you notice he is acting like some of the TV characters.

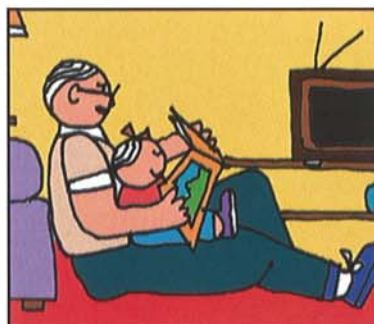
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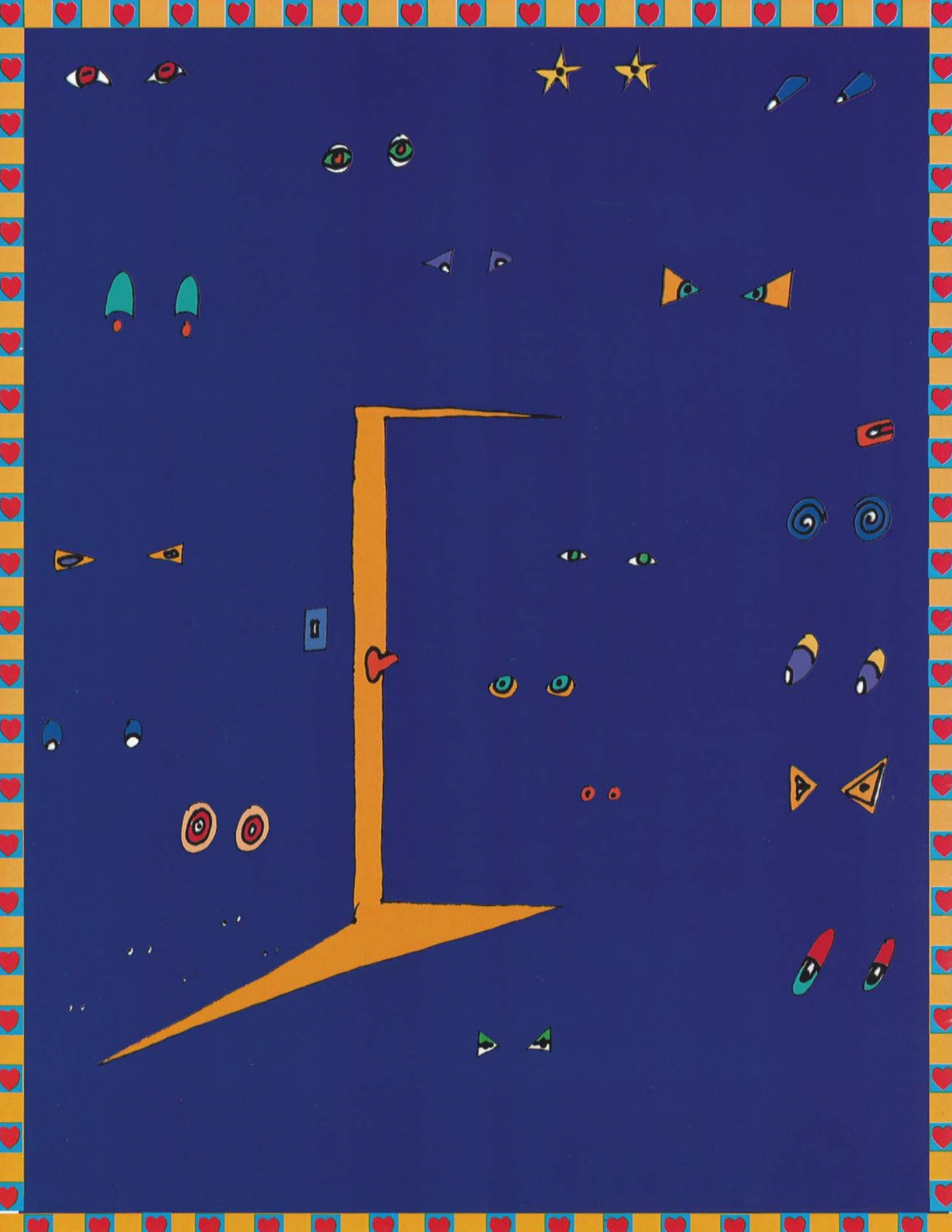
What can you do?

Be aware of how much and what your child is watching on TV.

Some parents do not allow their very young children to watch any TV. They are surprised to find out how creative their toddlers are, how many things they can do together. Let your child "help" while you do chores.

When your child is spending time with you, he learns plenty. His favorite childhood memory will be "doing things together" *NOT* a TV program or video.





Bedtime

One more thing your toddler challenges you with at the end of a long day: "I don't want to go to bed". You are exhausted and at your wit's end.

Why isn't your child as tired as you are?

YOUR CHILD FEELS

Your child may be afraid of the dark. He feels sad and anxious to be alone in his bed and not with you. He needs to be close and feel secure. He also needs 10 to 12 hours of sleep every night, in order to be healthy and grow well. He needs you to tell him: "It's time to go to bed. Let's get your favorite blanket or toy; let's read your favorite book, or sing your favorite song. Let's talk about the day before you fall asleep. We'll see each other in the morning."

YOU FEEL

You are tired. You feel frustrated and irritable when your child gets out of bed several times every night. Do you worry that he is not getting enough sleep? Do you feel guilty because you worked all day and want to spend more time with your child? Sometimes you may even feel like he is trying to "get back at you".

SO...

When your child has trouble going to sleep, try to set up a bedtime routine. Your child loves when things are the same. He feels comfort when he knows what will happen: first his bath, then his favorite story, time to talk about today and tomorrow, time to snuggle.

Tell him: "I am glad you are learning how to calm down at the end of the day". Tomorrow he will be wide-awake, good-humored and very ready to take on another adventurous day.





Need A Break?

Some days you feel so good about being a parent to your toddler. Then there are those days when you are exhausted, worried, frustrated because everything you tried is just Not working. Your energy is low and you wonder how you can take care of your child's needs.

You work so hard for your child to be safe and happy, to teach him how to get along with others, and stand up for himself. But where do you get the energy to take care of yourself, your own needs? Maybe you want someone to talk to, someone who will truly listen, without criticism. Maybe you are wanting to change how you parent?

What will you keep from your own childhood upbringing?

What will you not want to repeat?

Find someone who will give you what you have been giving to your child all day long.

Someone who will just listen, understand.

Someone who can appreciate your hard work.

Maybe give you a break from this demanding job.

Taking care of yourself in this way will give your child a strong, responsive parent, exactly what she needs to grow up healthy in all ways.



Staying Healthy

What we've discussed in this book are typical toddler behaviors. This information may make you feel better that nothing is seriously wrong with your child. But sometimes you may have a gut feeling that something is wrong with your child. At these times, and for certain important health screenings you will need to visit the doctor's office.

Visiting the Doctor

When you take your child to have a physical check-up, you can feel confident that you are doing all you can to take care of your child.

Remember

Your child needs to have immunizations shortly after birth.
Your child also needs regular dental visits, vision and hearing screenings.

About Your Child's Visit

Talk to your child before the visit about what will happen, and how the doctor will perform the exam, "the doctor will look into your mouth, ears, nose, and check your tummy. The doctor will help make you feel better."

Stay close to your child at the health clinic. Make a list of questions before you visit the doctor. You may want to have someone you trust go with you to the doctor's office. And be sure to get all your questions answered.

Call your doctor or health clinic when you have any concerns about your child.

More Information

For more information about your child's care call:
Family Health Bureau/Children's Medical Services at
1-877-890-4692.

For more information about health insurance, and how to pay for your child's medical care call New Mexikids at:
1-888-997-2583.

For additional information contact these web sites:

www.health.state.nm.us
www.newmexicokids.org

Written by
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with a little help from her friends.

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