



YOU CAN'T HELP ME UNTIL YOU KNOW WHAT

I CAN'T DO!

by Dan Hodgins

To the young child, all the world seems to focus on "me". He/she does not doubt that even the wild forces of nature are somehow centered around him/her. To enhance a child's total growth, we must begin to look "inside" to see things as he/she sees them and know what they are ready for.

### WHAT I CAN'T DO!

I CAN'T SHARE. Possession is one device the young child uses to hammer out autonomy. Just as babbling comes before talking, so owning comes before sharing. To fully share, a person must first fully possess.

I CAN'T EMPATHIZE WITH ANOTHER'S FEELINGS. Because most young children are at, what Piaget calls Egocentric stage, they are unable to put themselves in the place of the actor, to empathize with another's feelings. Saying "sorry" and meaning it, is truly impossible.

I CAN'T COLLECT INFORMATION. Most children only remember what is important to them. The statement, "I just told you to walk in this room", in most cases the child does not remember that you did just tell him/her. "I have told you a hundred times to pick your dirty clothes up and put them in the clothes basket". This statement is another example of an adult wish for children to be like adults forgetting they are just children.

I CAN'T CENTER ON MORE THAN ONE ASPECT AT A TIME. "Pick your toys up, put on your shoes, and wash your face, we are going out to eat." This statement has four aspects. 1. Pick your toys up; 2. put your shoes on; 3. wash your face; 4. we are going out to eat. Most young children, if they can remember it at all, will remember the first aspect or the one that is most important to them, but with so many other aspects will forget because of the confusion.

I CAN'T REVERSE WHAT HAS BEEN DONE. If a child reaches to put his/her finger in an electric wall outlet and you say "Don't", the child is confused because he/she doesn't know how to reverse the situation. "Pull your hand back, that is dangerous" reverses the situation by putting in words what you want the child to do.

As adults, we would like children to pick up all the toys they got out. Because of the stage of development they are at, many times unable to reverse the situation by putting them back without help from an adult who can model the reversing.

I CAN'T CONSERVE. When you want a child to pour a glass of milk and he/she is handed the milk pitcher that is full, expect the child to pour all the milk into the glass even if it pours all over the floor or table. Because they can't conserve, they have no idea that all that milk won't fit in that small glass.

I CAN'T TELL YOU THE TRUTH WHEN YOU SET ME UP. If you have seen a child do something that you dislike, if you ask him/her if they have done it, they will probably say "No". Wouldn't you if you knew what the consequences might be? Don't ask the child if you know what has happened. That only sets up misbehavior and lying.



I CAN'T HELP IT WHEN I HAVE ACCIDENTS. Remember just because you feel your child is "potty trained" does not mean there will not be accidents. Especially if there are changes in his/her environment. For example, a new child in the family, moving, stress, going to a new school, etc.

I CAN'T SIT DOWN FOR VERY LONG. The preschool child is often in a quandary because his teacher is telling him/her to sit still while the muscles he/she has are telling him to wriggle. When the large muscles in a preschooler's arms and legs are growing rapidly, they cry out for exercise. As a result, the preschool child likes to move.

I CAN'T PLAY WITH ANOTHER CHILD UNTIL I AM READY. It is not unusual to see two preschool children playing side by side, but not playing together. This is called parallel play. Children go through different stages of play and if allowed to grow and change at their own pace, will begin to interact with other children when they are at that stage of development.

I CAN'T TELL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN REAL AND FANTASY. When a child has a dream, it is very real to him/her. Telling them not to be a "baby" and go to sleep is very difficult. Sometimes if the dream or experience is very frightening, it takes a long time to overcome.

I CAN'T EXPRESS MY FEELINGS IN WORDS VERY WELL. Children resort to physical means of communicating (a swift kick) because they don't have words to express their frustration. You can help by giving the children words.

I CAN'T TAKE TURNS. Try not to put young children in situations where they have to take turns. If you do, it is best to work with a small group, so that each child's turn comes up often.

I CAN'T HAVE PERSPECTIVE. The only real difference between children and adults in emotional development is experience. Adults have been around a lot longer, most children have to face their own problems and deal with the world as they see it. When you are only four, you feel things more.

I CAN'T THINK IN TERMS OF RIGHT AND WRONG. Many young children can't even think in terms of cause and effect, even when applied directly to them. The little boy runs up to the curb and stops. He might not go in the street because he remembers what mom or dad said about danger, but he also might go in the street not knowing what the effect will be. Play it SAFE.

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