

## Activity

These early years are the time that the child lives most strongly in her physical being, in her body. Many parents experience their young children as being constantly on the go, hardly stopping at all from morning to night! We can work with the child's need for activity by ensuring that she has plenty of time for movement and for being involved in meaningful activities around the house. By using rhythm, by finding a balance between active and quiet times, we help form the child's need for activity and ensure that it is healthy, not out of control.

## Developing the Senses

Related to the need for active engagement in her surroundings is the fact that the young child is entirely engaged with her senses as she explores the world. Steiner describes the young child as being "wholly a sense organ" and encourages us to ensure that, therefore, what she experiences is nurturing and healthy, thereby developing her senses in the right way. Like a sponge, the young child soaks up everything around her, whether it is beautiful, ugly, cruel, kind, nurturing or overstimulating. Waldorf kindergartens are carefully decorated and the child surrounded by aesthetically pleasing natural materials and soft colors to gently awaken the senses, not to jar and shock them with ugly cartoons, garish colors and synthetic materials.

## Oneness with Surroundings

Little children have no sense of right or wrong and little sense of where they end and where others begin. Such vital lessons are learned slowly over many years and it is important that a child is not rushed out of his sense of oneness with the world. This sense of oneness is the natural religious state of the young child which Steiner frequently refers to. Awe and wonder, when carefully cherished and honored, become a feeling of reverence for life and for the world. If a child is to grow up with an open and enquiring approach to life, then no single thing is more important than that he be allowed to cultivate this sense of reverence, this assurance that life is good and worthy of respect. Cynicism and apathy, the dual curses of modern childhood, are heart-shrinking and sclerotic conditions of the soul which are anathema to a healthy feeling of wonder and enquiry, the basis of a child's ability to grow into the beauty of life.

## Imitation

Young children imitate everything around them, whether it is a superhero they see on TV or the way one rolls one's eyes when a certain relative phones or how one sweeps the floor. They do not discern and this is another reason why we must take care with what images and behaviors they see. The kindergarten-aged child's power of imitation is a given: it is up to us to decide to what purpose it is employed. By showing, doing and, above all, *being* that which is worthy of imitation, we help our child store up, as it were, worthwhile ways of being in the world.