

Asha Pradhan (1995) Why it's important for you and you liked
Fables Folio, London 2

Two to Five

When I bring you coloured toys, my child, I understand why there is such a play of colours on clouds, on water, and why flowers are painted in tints - when I give coloured toys to you, my child.

When I sing to make you dance, I truly know why there is music in leaves, and why waves send their chorus of voices to the heart of the listening earth - when I sing to make you dance.

When I bring sweet things to your greedy hands, I know why there is honey in the cup of the flower, and why fruits are secretly filled with sweet juice - when I bring sweet things to your greedy hands.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE, 'When and Why'

The Magic Kingdom

A young child who believes there is a lion under his bed or that the toilet will swallow him up is not mad. He is an ordinary toddler. In his world, the difference between fantasy and reality is blurred. The child will wonder: do dragons really exist, are there such things as witches, are thoughts powerful, can you make things happen by thinking them? Young children are passionate and see and experience the world in extremes, very black and white, the shades are not muted or mixed.

All cultures have fables and folk tales which match this view of the world. Usually the good and evil characters are exaggerated and typically one-dimensional. The hero is all good, the villain all bad. Families have a beautiful daughter and an ugly one. The mother is perfect, the stepmother wicked. One brother is intelligent but unkind, the other stupid but gentle, and so on. Children love to hear these tales, over and over again, anticipating frightening or exciting moments, joining in, getting scared, being reassured, identifying with the hero and triumphantly cheering at the happy ending. We all connect with these pleasures, whatever our age, as the stories deal with essential human longings, hopes

TWO TO FIVE

and anxieties. The search for true love which conquers all, as in *Beauty and the Beast*, the victory of kindness over tyranny in *Cinderella* - these morals encourage us to strive for positive goals, and reassure us that siding with our better nature will be rewarded.

Bruno Bettelheim wrote a fascinating book called *The Uses of Enchantment* which looks at the importance of fairy tales. He believes they help children to work through their fears and concerns. I am sure we have all witnessed a child, or remember ourselves, being fascinated by the scary parts of fairy tales and needing to go over them again and again. The moral of the tale is always reassuringly clear, although my father relates the joke of the little girl telling her mummy how frightening the story of *Snow White* is. The mother asks her which part was particularly alarming and the little girl replies, 'At the end, when that stranger comes and takes her away from the dwarves' house.' We choose to hear the story as we wish it to be. We do not listen to it with reality in mind, but with our imagination, and focus on how it touches upon our wishes and dreams. We would not find it alarming that the prince should instantly fall in love with someone he has never met or that Snow White, on waking, should give up all that is familiar to leave with this stranger. That is not the model we think we are giving our children in recounting the tale. We are telling the story that one person's love can save you from the attacks of others and rescue you no matter how dire the circumstances.

And so children grow up believing that parents are like the magicians and faeries who can make everything fine. However, they are still frightened, no matter how loving the home. The monsters, ogres and witches still lurk. Many families who try to keep everything gentle do not buy violent toys for their children, and then are shocked to see them enact great battles or be petrified of their soft fluffy bunny.

One aspect of children living in a world of magic is that they feel anything is possible. They are very literal and take words concretely and as they sound. Little Harry would fuss terribly when walking past a particular room in his house. Finally, he confessed

to his mother that he was petrified of the terrible griffin she had said was coming through the door. She was most puzzled until she worked out that she had complained about the draft. This is why it is important to be clear and simple when talking to young children. Threats like, 'Don't make that silly face. If the wind changes, you'll be struck with it,' are quite real to small children. One of the reasons they may believe fantastic things is that their inner world, the world of their thoughts and feelings, can be very passionate. When they hear someone say, 'I was so angry with him, I could have killed him,' this is quite credible, because the child may often feel murderous towards those who thwart him.

It is easy to see why at this age the fantasy world and reality can be so intertwined. The fear of parents who are angry, the ease with which they are turned into monsters, can make a small conflict into a major event.

Jack reacts to his father saying no to him as if he were a giant out to kill him, just like in the story of *Jack and the Beanstalk*. Mr B is a gentle man who finds it hard to say no to Jack. When he does, Jack reacts with such passion, Mr B feels his son sees him as wicked. He tries to reason with Jack, who only gets more inflamed and acts as if Mr B would hit him, which he has never done. Mr B then gets quite angry inside himself with Jack for the image of himself he sees reflected in Jack's eyes, that of a nasty, brutish father. What starts off as setting a simple limit turns into a big argument and upset for both of them.

Jack is reacting to his own interpretation of what a 'no' means, rather than to what his father is actually like. His world is of fairies and witches, wizards and ogres. When Dad says no, he is being transformed by Jack into someone powerful who is against him. Jack himself probably wishes he could be a giant and stand up to his dad. By his behaviour, though, Jack turns his father, in his mind, into something he is not in reality. His father is then understandably upset and paradoxically may become much nastier. He may think, 'How dare Jack treat me as if I am bad or would hit him?' At that point it is likely that, rather than Dad reassuring

Jack, anger will prevail and Dad does then become like the giant, voice booming as he tells his little son off. So Jack's fantasy finds an echo in reality, and the two become blurred.

Setting Limits

It is the parents' challenge to nurture their child's passion and involvement in the world, as well as teaching him to fit in with society's rules. The issue of saying no becomes particularly prominent during the toddler stage. The child is mobile, into everything and many hazards are in his way, so the question of discipline comes into the open. In the ordinary life of a household with a toddler, 'no' could well be the most frequently used word!

It is difficult to be on the receiving end of a no, and we deal with it in a variety of ways. One child may use the word himself, as if wielding a weapon, shouting 'no' powerfully when asked to do anything. Another may use the word to identify with the adults. When my daughter Sushila was two, she found it quite difficult to be told 'no' to all sorts of things. She was on the whole very well behaved and did not really protest. However, when in the company of her fourteen-year-old cousin, she would respond to whatever he said by speaking in a rather patronizing, adult tone: 'No, Tesli, no,' as if he were really an unreasonable boy. I imagine that her way of coping with being faced by many noes was to take on the adult role as she experienced it, and make him feel as she did: silly and little.

Toddlers are usually impulsive, active, demanding and curious. All these attributes can be seen as qualities or faults depending on your point of view. A toddler pulling out pans on to the kitchen floor and banging on them with spoons can be seen as a budding drummer with a fantastic sense of rhythm, a scientist exploring the characteristics of objects coming together, a noisy little brat, a noisy boy with no sense of what objects are for, and so on. Your picture of him will depend on many factors, too. As we saw in Chapter 1, so much goes to forming who we are and how we see

the world. And then there is what has happened on that particular occasion. Our reaction at the end of an exhausting day will be very different to our response in the morning, after a good night's sleep. Another very important determinant is how we feel about the life we live and how the child fits into it. A mother with many forms of support will be more likely to see the humour of an event than one who is stretched to the limits of her capacity to cope. Whatever our reasons for behaving as we do, our reaction to the young child is a communication.

A mother and her two-year-old are at the supermarket. Johnny smiles at people around him and chatters pleasantly to his mother. Soon he becomes restless and his mother gives him a sweet to keep him happy. As she carries on shopping, he demands more sweets and she gets irritated, stating that this is bad for him. He starts to whinge and demand more, she gets cross and says he's had enough for today. He cries, other shoppers stare, his mother feels angry with them and with her son for embarrassing her. She gives in. He now wants other things, is squirming in the trolley and crying to go home. His mother offers more sweets but he is crying so much he does not want the sweets any more and throws them to the floor. His mother is furious and shouts at him.

Here, as with the babies, we can see a mismatch. Although at first little Johnny is happy to shop, soon his tolerance is stretched. The rignarole with the sweets becomes a battle rather than a treat; the sweets are therefore no longer comforting; they have lost their original meaning of making him feel better. They become a bribe or something he has extorted. The exchange is fraught and exacerbated by other people's disapproval. His mother finds it hard to stick to the limits she has set and resents this.

In all such interactions there is more than one story. This may sound obvious, but frequently, in trying to help a family, only one version is heard, usually the mother's. First of all, it is important to listen. This is true not just for those of us who help families but especially at the time, for those involved in the situation. If a child

is reacting with difficult behaviour - whinging or crying - this is a communication; in this instance it probably means that the shopping is lasting too long. Realizing this, Johnny's mother has various options: she can carry on regardless; she can stop; try to make the time more pleasant; get irritated that her plans may have to change; organize the next time taking into account her son's capacity to cope with this activity...

If we investigate, we often find that there are other reasons for how she reacts. Mum is stressed, she may know Johnny hates shopping but has no choice about taking him; she may feel unsupported; she may feel cruel for repeatedly putting him through something she knows he hates; she may think he's spoilt and should just put up with it; she may feel guilty about giving sweets which she knows are bad for him... This makes it harder for her to stick to the boundaries she has decided on. She is unable to tell Johnny the shopping has to be done and he will have to put up with it; she is also unable to find a way of getting him to join in, perhaps helping her to pick out items. It seems his crying paralyzes her thinking and she gets into a battle with herself and with him.

To be firm, you have to believe that what you are doing is right or you carry little conviction and the child gets a mixed message. He may then believe that if he fusses enough, you will give in. We so often see this picture of parent and child whinging on at each other, caught up in a tangle of misery in each other's company.

THE PROBLEM OF CONSISTENCY

On the whole, adults have a greater capacity and understanding than children, and children look to their parents, particularly, to make sense of the world around them. In Chapter 1 we saw how this begins in infancy, with babies needing their parents to put a shape and a meaning to their feelings. As the child gets older the parents give him a picture not only of who he and they are, but also of the world at large. The healthy child will refer to his parent when meeting new people to see if they are safe to interact with; he

will also use a parent as a base to explore and to get feedback about his activity.

So we will see and hear parents introducing friends, asking Johnny to smile at Aunt Mim, to go and fetch the toy, look at this wonderful book . . . He will be praised when he achieves something his parents are proud of, scolded when he does something that worries them. Through all this talk and play, Johnny gets a sense of the world and what he can and cannot do in it. If the responses to his behaviour are consistent, he gets a more solid and clear view, he gets a good idea of what is allowed and what is banned, what is safe or dangerous, what is frightening or not. No parent or adult is completely consistent, but a general picture does emerge for the child.

It is common knowledge that consistency is desirable, especially in setting limits, so let us look at what interferes with it.

The simplest reason for two parents being inconsistent is that they have differing points of view.

Little Laura, aged three, is a charming, engaging child. She spends the day with her mother, who, on the whole, enjoys being with her. She is active, friendly and welcomes other children's company. At night time, she is reluctant to go to bed without her mother or father lying next to her and staying till she falls asleep. Mrs M feels she needs her own time in the evenings and resents having to stay with Laura, whom she has been with all day. She is firm and tells Laura she will have to get to sleep on her own. Mr M doesn't really mind, it gives him a chance to be with Laura and to unwind from his day at work. It is not a demanding time, he does not have to play with or entertain Laura. It suits the two of them and he stays with her.

It does cause friction between Mr and Mrs M, though. They are missing out on time together as a couple, they argue about whether Laura needs this routine to help her sleep. Mrs M feels irritated that Mr M is setting up a pattern which she is then stuck with if he is away. Their different approaches cause difficulties between them. When they discuss why they each believe their point of view is right, they are faced

with not understanding the other, and get irritated with each other. At that point if Laura cries for her father, he is far more likely to want to be with her than stay and argue with his wife.

We can see that what then happens between them and how they manage their differences has an effect on Laura. They cannot be consistent for her because they cannot agree. She gets a mixed picture about what it means to go to sleep. Initially, it is regularity and consistency which will give her an idea of what bedtimes are like. As she gets older she may learn that bedtime is different according to who is at home. In this example, there is tension around the whole issue and bedtimes become more insecure, thus exacerbating her reluctance to go to sleep by herself.

Mohamed, aged two, spends weekdays at his grandparents' home while his parents work. They pick him up every evening. On the whole the arrangement works well, but there are disagreements over certain details. His mother is trying hard to wean him off his dummy, which he has got used to sucking whenever he wishes. His mother and father agree he should not have it so freely available and want to restrict its use to bedtimes. They worry about it deforming his teeth, questions of hygiene, as he drops and picks it up all the time, as well as it becoming a habit. The grandparents, on the other hand, see no harm in it, they feel he misses his mother and needs the comfort. It also allows them more peace if he is contented. They cannot agree and Mohamed has a different limit set depending on who he is with.

Both sides have legitimate arguments based on their concern for the child. It may well be that Mohamed does not need the dummy so much or so often now, and his parents may want him to develop other means of coping. They are thinking of the part of Mohamed which is growing up. The grandparents' point of view puts the parents in touch with the needy and baby side of Mohamed. This will exacerbate their guilt at leaving him, reminding them that he misses them. There may be times when Mohamed can do very well without the dummy and others when he needs it. The polarization of

his carers makes it hard to observe Mohamed's reactions and to act according to his need rather than following their own views about what he should need. He is caught in the crossfire of their determination to stick to their belief and their view of him. Mohamed gets a mixed picture when he asks for the dummy, and this confuses him too. Is he a little boy who is growing up, who hardly needs the dummy? Is he a small child who needs the dummy in order to hold himself together or comfort him because he is feeling bad? What is lacking is a thinking space for him to be a bit of both. He is not being helped in his struggle to separate from his parents, and from his dummy, in a way that is sensitive to his pace.

Mixed messages like these can have varied effects. An older and secure child learns over time that Mum and Dad can be very different from Granny and Grandpa. He will accept different rules in different homes. However, if he is not too secure or if there is a real struggle between the needy baby and the more grown-up parts of himself, he may feel more confused and insecure, never knowing if his request will be granted or not. In his mind, it would be as if he were always being told 'maybe'. He might feel very tantalized and become cranky and anxious, anticipating the withdrawal of the dummy even when it is given to him, and so asking for it and clinging to it more than he would if the adult rules were clearer. In Mohamed's case, he is still very much in between, crying for the dummy and getting upset with his parents when they refuse him, but slowly getting accustomed to coping without.

Such conflicts are likely to occur between two parents, between parents and those caring for their children, such as relatives, nannies, child-minders or au-pairs. However, different feelings exist not just between people who disagree or have dissimilar approaches and beliefs, but also within ourselves. So, to return to the supermarket example, we may feel mixed about whether or not to allow sweets; at times we may feel there is nothing wrong with the occasional treat but at others we think it is bad for the health. Other examples might include playing with food, being cheeky, going to bed at a particular time.

Let us imagine a situation similar to Laura's:

Tom, aged three, also wanted someone to stay with him while he fell asleep. His mother thought this was a bad habit and tried hard to be consistent and firm about it. However, at times, she remembered how she used to feel as a little girl, how big and cold her bed seemed and how lonely she felt at night. She would then have an internal argument about what she should do: she should be firm or he would never learn to sleep by himself; what harm would a little cuddle do?; he was becoming spoiled; why should children have to grow up so soon?; she had felt lonely but was fine now, wasn't she?; why shouldn't she spare him the pains she had gone through? On different occasions the argument was won by different voices.

Tom never knew if his protests would get his mother to stay or not. So he always asked, and fussed, and inevitably felt disappointed if she did not stay. The inconsistency makes for a more fraught moment, not knowing if your hopes will be dashed or fulfilled. The victory will also be less sweet because the prospect of the next such moment looms. Children are more comfortable with predictable outcomes, even if they are not what they wished for, than with the roller coaster of hope and disappointment.

In this kind of scenario, the first helpful step is to be in touch with what the child's protest triggers in us - in Tom's case, his mother's memories of disliking being alone. Once she recognizes this as her difficulty rather than his, she probably does not want him to grow up with the same reluctance to be alone as she had. She can then see Tom more clearly and find the means to deal more consistently with his requests. This could take the form of a plan which she explains to him - she might agree to spend half an hour every night with him, in his bed, reading him a story, before leaving him on his own to fall asleep. This would satisfy the need for closeness and comfort for both of them, as well as giving him the idea of a limited time after which he has to devise his own way of getting to sleep. Tom's mother can reinforce this by offering a soft toy, blanket or a piece of cloth which belongs to her

and suggesting he can cuddle this instead once she has gone. She is helping him to make a transition from herself to other comforters. It will be easier for her to be consistent in her limit-setting once she is secure that she is offering Tom tools with which to cope.

Whether we react consistently to demands, what stand we take or how we deal with conflict is highly affected by our own make-up and our history.

Mrs F had grown up in a strict family with a rather tyrannical father who always pulled her up about her posture, her manners and everything she did. She could see this characteristic in herself, in that she was always extra sensitive to her four-year-old daughter's faults and would often repeat with her the experience she had had — she would find herself behaving as her father did towards her. However, she was aware of this and felt guilty about it. Still, when she got into conflict with her daughter, the memory of her past arguments and feelings about her father were revived. It was as if she was reliving a disagreement with him rather than her daughter. Her own childish feelings became more prominent than her adult ones. This frequently filtered through to her behaviour, which also became childlike. It became difficult for her to see her daughter's actual reaction instead of remembering her own. They then got into battles of will like two toddlers rather than as an adult and a child. The relationship became distorted and old feelings were more active than attention to the present.

Mr R had a very deprived childhood, both materially and emotionally, although now he is wealthy and happily settled. Saying no to his children and seeing their objections stir up his own overwhelming feeling of neediness as a child; he therefore showers them with gifts and treats, which they take for granted and do not really appreciate. Instead of having the desired effect of making them happy and contented, as he had not been, they seem dissatisfied and demanding. This makes him angry, because he feels they have so much more than him, and he then sees them as greedy and spoil.

Again an unhelpful cycle is established. This is somewhat akin to someone who has been starved overfeeding his child: you can understand the reason for his reaction, but this is not relevant to the child's experience at the time.

These examples reflect how the past impinges on the present. As we saw in Chapter 1, it is as if figures or experiences from one's history come between you and your child. Sometimes these may be real figures you remember: your parents, siblings, other family members, teachers. They may also be your own self at different ages — you remember your experience of being the age your child now is, for instance. This means you are not reacting to the present with your actual child, but reliving something of your own. We have internal dialogues, arguments, with these figures from our inner world. If we are distressed we may call upon a helpful voice which reassures us and tells us that everything will be all right. When we make a mistake, we may feel chastised by a strict aspect of ourselves. This inner world is part of what makes us multi-dimensional and enriches us. It also causes the discomfort of ambivalence, of feeling confused, and of often acting in ways we would really rather not.

SANCTIONS

Sanctions are important when you are trying to enforce your no, but I do not think there is a recipe that works for everyone, so I have not made sanctions a focus of this book. If you have conviction about your stand, if you can be in tune with your child, generally an under-five will respect your word. Of course you will need to back this up at times. There are many strategies you can use, whether it is to reduce TV watching, send your child to his room for some time out, confiscate a favourite game, hold him physically when he is having a wobbly, refuse to take him out to the park if he misbehaves, or whatever. You are best placed to know what will have meaning for your family. It is not the sanction itself that will matter but what is communicated through your behaviour. You do not need a sledgehammer to crack a nut. Heavy-handedness usually backfires, as

does losing your own temper, humiliating the child and getting into a battle of wills. I do not think it is ever helpful to lose your temper; behaviour which is out of control is frightening for parent and child. However if at times, as happens with all parents, you do or say something which you regret, it is not the end of the world. It can let the child know you too are human, not a robot or an angel. This may let him see himself and his passionate feelings in a kinder light. If you do go over the top, an apology can also be very positive. You are giving the child the model that you can consider what you have done, realize it may have been wrong, admit to it and ask for forgiveness. That opens up these possibilities for him, too.

What is of value is to hold on to your role as an adult: to feel for your child and the state he is in, as well as being able to think about what is best for the two of you. You need to retain your own self-respect and convey to him that your 'no' has a reason. You do not have to explain every reason to him; it is sufficient that you know what you are doing. In this context I believe that the very occasional, small smack to stop an escalation of feeling and conflict may be preferable to a long tirade about the child's poor behaviour. Many a parent of this generation can burden the child with lectures and defensive explanations.

The point about sanctions is that they should help the child to learn. Cruelty only teaches a child to be nasty. Your sanction should be aimed at helping him be more thoughtful. You are likely to find out what works best for you by trial and error. As long as you have regard for yourself and your child, just the fact of trying to make things better helps. Children are deeply appreciative of people who struggle on their behalf. They know that it is often easier to give in than to strive for a better solution.

Never Saying No

One of the striking characteristics of toddlers is their gusto in approaching new tasks. They will often clamour to 'do it myself', much to parents' pride but also exasperation. So you will have

Alexandra insisting on doing up her own buttons, Jagdish wanting to tie his laces, Kai climbing on chairs to reach a toy, and Panayota pushing the baby's pram which is clearly too heavy for her. It is a time when parents may need to curb their urge always to do things for their child. Children need the practice, to master their growing physical skills, fine motor control, manual dexterity. They can be determined and resolute in their attempts to do things for themselves. It is crucial at this stage not to restrain their enthusiasm nor to crush their aspirations. This can be seen in a typical mother's comment to her little son, Bob, who is helping her carry in the shopping: 'What a little man, thank you, I could not have brought it in without you.' This makes him feel valued, strong like Daddy, someone Mother needs.

However, it is also important for children to have a realistic view of what they can and cannot do. So it might be good for Bob to try to carry a heavier bag which he cannot manage; he will still be valued for what he can do, as well as in touch with a limit. This would also spare him the sense of responsibility of *having* to be mother's little helper. In a family with a single mother, particularly with a son, fostering an unrealistic sense of power may be a burden on the child.

The child's own character and how you help him deal with the frustrations of not being able to do certain things will lead to how well he struggles with not getting things right straight away. Of course, he needs to try in the first place, in order to find out where his limitations lie, where he might need assistance. The child who believes he can do everything by and for himself will not be able to accept help, whether this be for physical things or with learning. Denying any dependence leads to being rather bossy and at worst a bully. Bullies are usually scared that someone might be stronger than them and that they might be on the receiving end of what they mete out. In a world of magic this is even more frightening.

The dramatic story of Paul, whom I worked with in a Young Family Centre for deprived families run by a Social Services Department, illustrates what can happen when dependence is

avoided and limits are fought. I believe general lessons can be drawn from such extreme circumstances.

Paul was an unwanted child, the youngest of three boys. The atmosphere at home was explosive, passionate, violent and chaotic. All the boys regularly spent time in care. By the age of two, Paul seemed a hopeless case. He gave people the impression he was from another planet, eyes wild, never looking at you straight in the eyes. He was very over-active and agile, jumping off great heights in a dangerous way. He was given to sudden violent outbursts. He totally lacked concentration, was hardly verbal and very difficult to stay with.

In working with Paul, it was apparent that just being caring, kind and thoughtful with him was not enough. He exasperated even the most patient of staff members. He appeared to believe he could do anything and seemed not to care one bit if people were angry or punished him. I was in charge of his care at the centre but also offered him three individual sessions a week. This is a typical extract from one of our early sessions, after he had been away sick. He was four years old.

He hurled the phone into the bin and shouted, 'Fuck off!' He ran to the poster and pulled it off the wall. I said he was very angry with the room and me since he had missed so many sessions. He ripped and tore the poster before I could get to him. He flung a lamp down from the shelf. It did not break. I told him he might hurt himself and explained how dangerous it was to play with glass. He ran over to me, kicked me and shouted, 'Shut up!'

Paul gave the impression of being untouched by others' opinions or feelings. He acted as if he were omnipotent. The way he jumped, screamed and physically assaulted me made it very difficult to function as an attentive mother would – an experience he had never had. Sometimes I needed to hold him physically to stop him damaging himself or me; at other times talking about his feelings allowed him to control himself. It was a constant challenge to try to give his feelings and actions a shape through my recognition

of them. Paul's entire behaviour seemed geared to denying any need, for anything or anybody. One of his favourite sentences was, 'Me do it.' In Paul's vision of the world, a mother could not be seen as a person who holds, feeds and helps him to grow. A father was an idealized brutal figure who hated babies and whom Paul identified with. This view spread to all adults. He had never felt safe enough to be a baby. It was a big risk for him to feel vulnerable because he might get hit or mocked. Much better for him to imagine himself as a rough and tough supeman.

It was a very long time before Paul could allow himself to feel appropriately vulnerable for his age and before he could conceive that somebody might be interested in looking after him. He used hardness and callousness as a protective shell to stop him feeling open to attack. However this defence, like a carapace, also stopped good things getting in. Underneath, he was like a very fragile, frightened and unprotected baby. The only alternatives that seemed open to him were to be a harsh bully or a totally vulnerable infant. Being allowed to act so out of control and feeling adults could not stop his whirlwind behaviour supported the view that he was invincible. The baby aspects of him were then out of reach, not allowed to surface and he helped to develop.

With a child like Paul, it was important that an adult should insist that he was not invincible. Without puncturing his sense of himself, he needed to be reminded he was little, and he needed to feel someone's willingness to look after him. He also needed an adult to give him the confidence that he would grow strong, a hope that would counterbalance his feelings of fragility. As the sessions continued and boundaries became clearer, Paul started to feel more secure, to explore what it meant to be a baby who was held and thought about, remembered and cared for. It seemed possible for the first time in his life to allow himself to be vulnerable. We had a very moving session in which he picked up a doll and pointed to her eyes, nose, mouth and so on, saying, 'Look, and, 'What that?' He finally put the doll down and said 'Boy' confidently. I felt he had been asking me about himself, what all the

features were, what was a child, who was Paul. Just as a very young baby learns parts of himself with his mother (here's my nose, there's your nose), Paul had finally had the experience of being able to think about who he was and had come to the conclusion that it was OK to be a boy.

A more ordinary example of behaviour which leads to feelings of omnipotence can be seen with Charlie, aged three:

Charlie is a very demanding child who screams if he doesn't get his way. His parents are at the end of their tether because they feel they have no control over his behaviour. They tell me that he 'insists' Mother cooks pasta every day. He 'has to have' a story read before bedtime. He 'refuses' to let anyone but Mum put him to bed. The list of his demands is endless and the parents fit in with each and every one of them.

What is striking is that Charlie's parents feel they have no say in how he behaves, no recourse. They take his wishes for needs and comply. Charlie is a little despot in their home. This makes for unhappy relationships all around. He has no practice at dealing with frustration, and when confronted with a difficulty, he finds it increasingly hard to get over it. He has a bossy kind of identity. This allows no space for his more infantile side to be expressed and to grow. As his parents never say no, he does not have a taste of feeling furious, or that he will collapse, and then the experience of recovering. His development is stunted. He is also faced, like Paul, with the fear of retribution and the anxiety that if adults cannot stand up to him, he is left unprotected against someone stronger than he is.

At the other end of the scale you may have the child who is too good. The child who cannot bear to be little and copes by being over-identified in an imitative way with adults also avoids the necessary developmental pains of being little.

Anjeli, five years old, is a traditionally 'good' little girl: she is obedient, polite and quiet. She is quite forward in her learning and does well at extra activities, such as ballet. She has no tantrums and hardly

misbehaves. However, there is a flatness to her. When she is at school, she follows instructions very well but is rarely seen to initiate a game of her own. It is as if she has put on an adult guise and is dominated by a wish to please those around her. She is seen as a bit of a goody-two-shoes by her peers and is not too popular.

As Paul adopted a Superman persona, Anjeli adopts a pseudo-adult identity. It is hard to recognize the child in her. She is spared parents' and other adults' crossness but misses out on some of the enjoyment of being a child. She by-passes the experience of being told 'no' by anticipating it and controlling herself rather rigidly.

There may be many reasons for Anjeli's behaviour. It could be that her mother has just had a baby and Anjeli feels pressured to grow up quickly, to spare her mother trouble. It could be that she picks up conflict between her parents and wishes to pacify the atmosphere. It could be that she enjoys the rewards of being her parents' good little girl and dares not risk creating a fuss. It could also be that she is more comfortable being quiet and out of touch with strong emotions. There are myriad reasons why we adopt the coping mechanisms and strategies we do. Each person's way has to be observed and thought about individually. For healthy development, though, we cannot by-pass some of the struggles of uncomfortable feelings. Martha Harris, an influential child psychotherapist, writes:

The child cannot learn to control his undesirable, aggressive emotions unless he has had a chance to experience them, to know them at first-hand. This is the only way he can gauge their strength, the only way he can find resources within himself to harness them and, if possible, to utilize them to good purpose.

Feeling bad about saying no and being firm can lead to great problems, which I would like to illustrate with a rather extreme example of a little boy and his mother.

Darren was a three-year-old referred to a hospital paediatric department for chronic constipation. He was on heroic doses of laxatives which no longer worked. He had to be admitted to have the faeces removed under general anaesthetic and was likely to need further such interventions. In desperation, the family was referred to me. When I met him with his mother I was struck by how domineering he was and how cowed and shrinking she was. On talking with them, it quickly became apparent that Darren absolutely ruled her life. He would not stay with anyone but her, not even her husband or older children. He screamed when he did not get his way, and she always gave in to his demands. In their sessions with me he made it very clear that he hated sharing his mother's attention with me and shouted over our voices so that we could not have a conversation. Very soon he would want to go home and would scream at the top of his voice, pleading and begging to leave. His impact was so strong that, on one occasion, three different people on my corridor knocked to see if everything was OK. It was as if we were truly torturing this little boy.

My main task with his mother was to sit with her through this ordeal and to think about what was actually happening. We started untangling what was occurring in the room and comparing it with what she felt and what Darren was expressing. Was he really being tortured? Was it really unbearable to sit in the room and think about the problem? Was his mother really cruel to want to talk to somebody other than him? Was there no alternative? With time, and my insistence that we see the session through and not end early, he was able to calm down, to look at the toys and play a bit, and even to express how he felt about it all. He eventually played with the Plastiline and we were able to talk about how stuck he felt with the poohs, but also how he used them to get everyone else stuck, and how scary it then was for him when no one, not even Mum, could help him.

This was the more traditional aspect of our meetings – the interpretation of play which takes place in child psychotherapy. However, for this little boy I think the most helpful intervention was that I sat through his rage and fury with his mother and

helped her keep to the boundary of our time together and so demonstrate to both of them that it could be done, they would both survive, and that it was helpful. She began to be firmer with him because she could see that instead of it being cruel, it in fact helped him. Reassuringly, after seven meetings, over a period of six months, the constipation cleared up, and he was freed from this stuck place where nothing could shift and thankfully did not need further intrusive medical interventions.

For children like Darren who totally dominate their mother or their family, life is not much fun. Even though they may not be left alone, or they always get their own way, the quality of the contact they have, of their relationships, is tense. There is little mutual pleasure and much irritation. All members of the family feel trapped in an unpleasant cycle. This can lead to despair and rage. A child who gets his way by bullying never feels anything is satisfying because it is not freely given. There are no gifts, only extortion. He may feel powerful, but not valued or loved. This is true in small ways and not just in dramatic circumstances such as Darren's. It is why the child who always cries 'I want' and gets it rarely feels he has enough.

Mr and Mrs M had been trying for a baby for many years. They were both well established in professional careers but felt their life was empty without a child. Finally, after a course of fertility treatment, Mrs M conceived, and Caroline was born, a healthy, pretty baby. Both parents were over the moon and very indulgent of their child. They wished to spare her any distress and rarely told her off. Mrs M gave up her job and spent all day with Caroline. By the time Caroline was four, Mrs M was the envy of many parents – she never got irritated or shouted, she had endless patience. She was seen as the 'best Mummy' by Caroline's friends. She cooked every meal, baked her own bread with Caroline, was always prepared to play, to organize craft activities, to sew dressing-up clothes. Everything Caroline wanted, she got. She hardly had to make a fuss and she would be indulged. However, instead of growing into a contented, cheerful child, Caroline often seemed sullen. When one activity was over, she would ask for another straight

away. When her mother set up a game, she would change her mind and demand another. She seemed discontented. If she was unkind to another child, Mrs M would laugh it off, saying, 'Oh, Caroline, that wasn't very nice, I'm sure you didn't mean it.'

Caroline's friends got fed up with her, finding her spoilt, and she was not a popular child.

As Caroline always got what she wanted, by complaining or just demanding, she grew used to getting her own way. She had no practice at making compromises or waiting. When in the company of other children, she was at a loss. She did not know how to share nor how to play with them on an equal footing. Mrs M's wish to spare her any pain backfired. It left Caroline without the necessary skills to be with others who did not have just her needs as their priority.

Edward, two years old, is the only child of a single mother. He is very beautiful, with big brown eyes and a fetching smile. He thoroughly enjoys other children's company but gets easily over-excited, and grabs them and squeezes them, occasionally hurting and frequently frightening them. His mother gets embarrassed and apologizes for him but does not stop him from doing it again, or at least not in time. He is very much her precious baby and she is thrilled at his gregarious and outgoing nature. However, she appears to be blind to his aggression. Eventually he becomes quite unpopular at the mother-and-toddler group they attend, and other children are wary of him. Ms N is embarrassed and feels the others are unfair to her son. She is quick to defend him and to reprimand children she feels provoke him. Edward becomes more openly aggressive, even to Ms N.

This is a very common dynamic, often seen in groups of mothers and young children. Usually the situation is resolved by the mother slowly recognizing a side of her child that is less than perfect. On the whole parents can adapt to and accommodate naughtiness, jealousy and aggression. Unfortunately in Edward's case, there was so much invested in his being the dreamt-of child that his difficult behaviour was not sufficiently acknowledged. In

wanting to keep her image of him as her good little boy, Ms N could not perceive other aspects of his character. In that way Edward could not feel secure that he was loved for who he truly was. He tried to communicate his anger and rivalry with other children. Because his feelings were not understood, he did not get help in managing them.

Over the years, he became more and more difficult, at home and at secondary school. His relationship with his mother became fraught. Eventually, their contact became increasingly negative. Edward believed he was seen as uncontrollable, which increased his anger. In addition he felt guilty for not being what his mother wanted. Ms N felt very disappointed, angry and unhappy. What had been impossible in the early years was to see Edward as a mixed bag, positive and negative, from the start. Blindness to certain feelings meant that he had to struggle with them alone, which he could not do satisfactorily.

We can also see from Ms N's point of view that he may have represented an ideal child. To recognize his aggression fractured the image she carried of him. Being alone, she also did not have the support or even the perspective of a different view. She, too, was deprived of a helpful person who could tolerate disturbing feelings and bear them with her. The early pattern of not saying no to Edward hindered his development and stopped him from finding ways to deal with the more difficult side of his personality. Those aspects of him therefore remained immature and got him into trouble as he grew older.

The Benefits of Boundaries

FEELING SAFE

We have seen how a child who dominates adults is in a very frightening position. If at the age of three or four you feel you are more powerful than those who look after you, how on earth can they protect you if the need arises?

From the child's perspective, limits may be restrictions and they may be infuriating, but they are also like gates, keeping things safe. There are other good reasons for limits. There are, of course, the obvious ones of physical safety – not allowing a child to play with dangerous objects such as plugs, fires, knives. Things get a little more complex when negotiating whether a child is allowed to walk by your side or has to hold hands when crossing the road. Then there are the numerous occasions, every day, when you need to set some gentle but firm limits which are not directly linked to safety but which help the child develop a sense of security.

After a morning of being at a mother-and-toddler group, Anita wants to carry on playing through lunch. Her mother says, 'No, it is now time to eat.' Anita shouts and stamps about and says she will not eat.

If Anita is allowed to eat on the hop, carrying her food around with her, she may at first feel triumphant; she may also feel Mum was not able to stand up to her, as we saw earlier with the bullies. She may feel Mum can't be bothered, and then seek other ways of grabbing her mother's attention. Concessions made for an easier life rarely prove effective. If her mother manages to be firm and help Anita with her crossness and Anita is able to eat and enjoy her food, everyone will come out a winner. They will have a sense of togetherness and achievement at having recovered from their conflict.

This could apply to all sorts of other situations, such as a child having to wait for something he wants, having to play alone for a while. In Anita's case the boundaries also help her realize her crossness or refusal are seen within the context of her as a whole child. Mum may be saying, 'I know you are angry and want to do something else now, but I also know that this is lunchtime and it is better for you to eat quietly. I don't mind that you are furious and I will not give in to your rage, but I will make sure you have what is right for you.' These are obviously not the words the mother would use, but the gist of her communication to Anita. This does

not even need to be verbalized; it can just as easily be communicated by actions. Through her mother's stand, Anita gains a sense of feeling protected. She benefits from the reassurance that what is best for her is being served lunch despite her resistance. Feeling that somebody is prepared to put up with unpleasantness in your interest boosts security.

GROWING STRONG

The other important aspect of limits is that they help develop one's own resources. If somebody else does all the work, grants you your every whim, you become weaker and are increasingly unable to cope with frustration. The well-meaning parent who wishes to spare her child every pain could be preventing him from developing ways to deal with difficulties. Obviously here there is a judgement to make about what is bearable for the child and what is the difference between need and greed.

Children will integrate what they are learning about your limits, but at their own pace. You might well see a toddler purposefully spilling juice from his beaker on to the floor, saying, 'Naughty, no make mess.' At that point he is struggling with part of him that knows he is not meant to do this but at the same time cannot resist it! Learning to abide by rules takes time and is hard work, which must be appreciated.

Every boundary that is set is also an opportunity to develop. Having to eat when she wanted to play gives Anita a chance to resolve a conflict. If she succeeds, it begins a pattern of her believing she can get over difficulties. Mum insisting that different activities have a rhythm helps Anita know about structure, events having a beginning, a middle and an end. This will help her bear hard times and make use of that experience when she is enjoying something.

A child who wants attention, or a particular toy, or an activity, and has to wait or give it up is also learning to be flexible, to be patient, to think of alternatives, to be creative. These are all skills

which are helpful in life. A child who has to play by himself because mother is busy may explore his surroundings, find a box and start to play a game with it. He may make it into a castle or a bed or a space-ship. He will use imaginative play to create for himself the company he wished for. A younger child will bang it, turn it over, put it on his head; like a little scientist he will find out all about the properties of the box. It is in the moment of frustration that we are given the chance to reach inward for resources, providing the 'no' is realistic, so that the child is not pushed to despair.

Fighting the Limits

We all know it is not easy to be the one told 'no'. If you say no to what the child wants, you have to be prepared to cope with the reaction.

TANTRUMS

The tantrum is a characteristic feature of toddlers' lives. They can get intense with rage and act as if they are truly falling apart, throwing themselves on the ground, limbs flying about. Our reaction tends to be of anger or anxiety that they will damage themselves. You may also be embarrassed by their lack of control. How it makes you feel is the main communication of a tantrum - you are meant to worry, to feel helpless, cruel, or whatever. This is how the child feels. The French talk of somebody being '*dans tous ses états*', that is, 'in all his states'. We speak of 'losing our temper', being 'beside ourselves', being 'all over the place', as if we really have lost something that belongs to us, a part of ourselves. Tantrums are a demonstration of losing a coherent sense of self and feeling fragmented.

These moments can be frightening to experience as well as to witness. When young children are upset, they tend to act rather than speak, their communication is through their behaviour. If an adult can count to ten and gather up the child and try to make him

feel more together, less in bits of fury, the chances are he will calm down. The work of the adult is to remain calm and not get so flooded by the child's feeling that she is taken over by it and proceeds to have her equivalent of a tantrum too. Tantrums are not to do with reason, and often when witnessing one or being the cause of one, a part of us which knows what it feels like to fall apart gets stirred up. We want to stop the experience quickly and can easily get drawn into the conflict, rather than keeping the necessary distance from the child's state which is needed if we are to help him. It becomes easier to get cross and say, 'Just stop this nonsense', than to see the child as distressed and in need of calming and holding.

When children are young, we are still able to hold them physically, to gather them together till the wave has passed and help them recover. Some children may need this physical holding, others may be held by your voice or your patience or your letting them finish in their own time with you just being present.

PARENTS AS MONSTERS

Some children may act as if you have turned into the Wicked Witch of the West, and you may doubt yourself, wonder whether what you are doing is really cruel. You may have to remind yourself, for instance, that saying no to yet another video is not nasty and probably quite a good idea. My daughter coped with her anger with me by crying and sobbing, while in my arms, 'I want my mummy!' as if to say, 'Not you, you horrible person, my real mummy, the nice one!' It appears to be very hard, when they are little, that they should feel so mixed about the same person. If you think about it, this is something which stays with us all our lives, in less obvious forms; we often find it difficult to understand how the person we love can make us so exasperated at times. This is a common way of dealing with ambivalent feelings - to split them up rigidly, to think of one person as good and the other, usually the limit-setter, as bad. This can cause all sorts of trouble between couples or between parents and nannies and other care-givers,

grandparents, teachers. As in fairy tales, splitting, in this sense, is a way of keeping things simple, of being justified in hating or loving with passion. Mixed feelings are much harder to deal with.

Understanding the process helps us think more clearly and avoid taking the criticism too personally; this in turn makes it easier to stay firm. If you can hold on to your image of yourself as doing the right thing for your child, you have more conviction. If you believe their view at the time, that you have become wicked or cruel, you may turn into the cruel person or feel paralysed by the image, as we saw with the example of Jack and his dad at the beginning of this chapter. When you feel a child turns you into a monster, this can be very upsetting. It makes it hard to think clearly. You need to take time to look at the situation objectively and examine what is really happening. Is their perception accurate? Sometimes it may be: you may recognize that you are being unduly harsh, and you can then modify your stance. At other times you may see that you are doing the right thing by being firm, even if they don't like it. You then have to be prepared to be unpopular.

ANGER

Limits often provoke anger, and we have to be able to face this. Anger is common to us all, yet we frequently attach guilt to it. However, it is normal and healthy to feel angry about certain things, and reassuring to children to know that parents feel it too. The difference is in what we do with the feeling. If parents can be angry and get over it, the child, too, will learn to manage his feelings in a positive way.

It is important that children are allowed to feel angry and to learn acceptable ways of expressing this. Young children vary enormously in what they will or won't make a stand about. In a nursery you may see a child who will protect a puzzle he is doing as if his life depended on it and another who will just wander off if somebody takes his pieces. Similarly, if hit by another, one child will scream and cause a major commotion, while a second will cry and go to find help, a third may hit back, and a fourth will just

quietly withdraw on his own. You would hope to foster in your child a sturdy sense of himself so that he can feel anger at being badly treated. How he expresses that anger will predict how he, in turn, is reacted to.

In the example above, you might help the first child to put the hitting in perspective: was it a major trauma or a simple confrontation? For the last child, you might wish to encourage him to stand up for himself and not allow others to hurt him. Everybody in life feels angry at times; all families and social situations have conflicts. A great skill we all need to learn is how to manage conflict and strong emotions.

I would like to turn to a very different example, where ordinary anger and fear can go unnoticed because they are not clearly expressed, with the story of Alan, whom I saw following the death of his baby sister.

Alan was four years old and some months previously the family had lost their new-born baby, a few weeks after birth. Alan was a very bright and articulate little boy, always well behaved and thoughtful. He had been very kind to his parents and tolerant of their absence during his sister's illness. He was referred to me because he had become increasingly frightened, obsessed about time, particularly when he was due to be collected by his parents, and very anxious about losing things. His parents and his nursery were worried about how he would settle at the new school he was soon due to start. Although wonderfully supportive of him and understanding of the effect of his sister's death on him, they were at a loss as to how to help him.

In his play Alan was totally preoccupied with emergencies – ambulances, looking for a good hospital, fires and firemen, policemen and robbers. Although at first he was always in the role of the rescuer, slowly the figures changed and policemen became bad, firemen set the fires, and so on.

Of course we discussed the obvious level of his play being related to wanting to rescue his sister, to find a good hospital which could have made her better, and his despair that none of the

rescuers had been able to keep her alive. This is the side of his feelings that everyone shared and recognized and was trying to help him (and themselves) with. However, I felt it was important to see and acknowledge that sometimes these good figures weren't so kind after all, and that sometimes in his play they were the trouble-makers. We were then able to talk about how he hadn't always felt kind about having a sister, and how these thoughts had left him feeling at some level responsible. This made him frightened, not just about what had happened but also about what might happen in the future – to his parents, for instance, if he was angry with them. It was hard for him to feel free to be upset or angry or to behave in anything other than a kind way.

Once this area was opened up, he became much more naturally mischievous, bossy and cheeky in his sessions with me and in his play with the toys. He behaved as any active boy his age would. I was able to talk about this with his parents and him. Although they had been grateful for his easy behaviour in the past, they were now able to help him to express his negative as well as his positive feelings. This also made it much easier for him to settle into the new group at school, with the hustle and bustle of boisterous children.

The expression of anger has to be tolerated by others in order for it not to feel unbearable or, at worst, deadly. Unless anger or rage can be voiced, it becomes difficult and at times nearly impossible to manage these extreme feelings. The child has no way of learning to control his aggressive emotions unless he is able to experience them himself. This is the only way he can know how strong they are. If he cannot speak out his fury and rage, or act out some degree of how he feels, he may imagine his powers of destruction to be far greater than they are. He may be in for a shock, for instance, when faced with a little bully at playgroup. Depending on his experience and what he's made of it, he may behave as the very good boy who never fights and then get clobbered; he may think he is invincible and be surprised to find the other boy is much stronger; he may be uncontrolled and really hit much harder than he thought he could.

There should be a legitimate space for feeling angry, thinking angry thoughts. The expression of anger and how acceptable it is varies enormously, culturally, even within different families. Slamming doors, shouting, breaking things, may be the norm in one household and considered absolutely extreme in another. The child has to have a taste of his own anger within his family and then compare this to what is allowed elsewhere.

AGGRESSION

One way children have of dealing with anger is to be aggressive. Aggression is often the flip side of fear. Young children, particularly, act very fast on their feelings: they need an adult to give them a model of thinking before acting. As we saw with Paul earlier, his aggression was born out of fear. He hardly dared have the feeling and usually acted before he even knew what he felt. Through Paul and other deprived children, I was made deeply aware of the need to talk and think about how such children feel and to try to put these feelings into words so that they can develop a way of making a gap, a distance, between the feeling and the action. Although Paul is an extreme example, all children may share some of his experience in a small way.

Children are often aggressive when they are frightened or feel under threat, whether because they have been told off, or because they cannot do what they are asked, or because they are in fact bullied by others, children or adults. One way of not being scared is to be like the scary ones, to become the aggressor. Being little can be frightening – everyone else seems to be able to do things better, to have more power, to be bigger and stronger.

A lovely book which illustrates this is Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*. It tells of a rather mischievous little boy, Max, who gets sent to bed without his supper for his naughtiness. As he sits in his room, it turns into a wild forest, and he then travels to the land where the wild things live.

I think the story illustrates so many aspects of the 'wild thing' in young children. Max's hurt at being told off makes him retreat into a fantastic place of scary figures, and parents *can* be frightening when angry. The journey takes ages, as time out does, when you have been isolated. Finally, he finds refuge with the wild things. How else to deal with them than to become the king of them all? But once the wildness and rebellion has been indulged, it is really a lonely place to be. Max then feels the monsters are the naughty ones and, as his mother did with him, he sends them off to bed without their supper. Luckily for Max, he also remembers and holds on to the image of his mother as 'good enough' and so 'from far away across the world he smelled good things to eat'. We can tell he is a much-loved child because, in the happy ending, he finds his way home to a warm supper – the idea of a mother who still loves him in spite of the wildness.

Unfortunately for Paul and many other children I have worked with, the way home is not always easy to find, and the wild things in the forest are often safer than those at home and their call to stay is very appealing. To many children the wild place becomes a permanent place rather than an occasional journey. There are alarming pieces of research showing that 'childhood trauma leads to violent behaviour not only in childhood and adolescence, but also in adult life'. In working with young children, we are in a good position to break the cycle and help them to have a different experience.

We must not forget that aggression can also be a positive force. It can be the emotional equivalent to muscle tone. It is often aggression which gives determination, a pull forwards. It is what we do with our aggression which turns it to constructive or destructive use.

HATE AND LOVE

With time we learn that a thought is not the same as an action. Also, with more thought before action, we can start to make a

choice about whether we want to act. My little Paul learned to say, 'I want to smash the window,' rather than doing it. The other big advantage of thinking before we act is that we learn about the consequences of our actions.

As parents, we have to be able to take the fury and the rage when we make a stand about things and say no to our children. We have to learn how to make rules about living with others in the hope of enabling the child to have consideration for others.

Jeremy, a delightful and articulate boy I saw between the ages of two-and-a-half and five, was referred to me because his behaviour was very wild. His rather quiet middle-class parents found it hard to control him and were overwhelmed by his excited, violent and volatile behaviour. The precipitating 'last straw' was his clouting his father on the head with a hammer, when Father was playing the piano and Jeremy wanted his attention. The following excerpt is from a session, after a holiday, when he was four:

Jeremy came storming in. He started off roaring, stomping around the room, threatening to 'eat you all up'. He could not settle and rushed around, cutting paper, scribbling, playing at making the water in the sink gush, and so on. He checked around the room and, in a booming voice reminiscent of Daddy Bear in the *Goldilocks* story, he said, 'Who's been here?' I talk about the holiday making him angry and how he is being like a giant checking everything out, and wondering who has been with me while he was not. He starts to pull the furniture out of the dolls' house roughly and says, 'It's dead, you can see it.' He pulls bits apart and starts to bite them. I say he is so angry, he feels like a lion roaring and biting bits off and eating them up and making things dead. He says very quietly that when he cries, he wants Mrs Phillips. I say he really found the holiday hard – we missed our time together. He says, 'If I eat you up, then you won't be there, will you?' I say that when you love people, like Mummy or me, you feel things very strongly and you are worried you will hurt them and lose them.

The point here is that it is irrelevant whether or not he could eat me all up; the truth emotionally is that he was so angry, he

wanted to do so. As we saw before, in fantasy anything is possible. Also, he may have had the idea that if you eat someone up, they are inside you and cannot ever go away again. In our time here, he was able to think beyond the fury to what followed – to the fact that he also loved me. It is in that ambivalent state that we start to see the other fully, with good bits and bad, and make a choice on balance as to how we feel about them, as a whole person. It is also through being able to stay with the fury and recognize it that thought can begin and with it a capacity to appreciate the other, the beginnings of gratitude. Jeremy and I had many opportunities to explore strong feelings and their impact. This was as true of passionate, positive feelings as of fury and hatred. I am sure I learnt as much from his honesty and straightforwardness as he did from me. No prizes for guessing how very fond of him I was!

Everyday Limits

I have tried to show that all behaviour has meaning, that it occurs within the context of relationships, and that there are therefore many sides to the same story. We have looked at the ideas of dealing with mixed inner feelings and at how our past experience can colour the present. We have seen some of the consequences of saying or not saying no, and at the reactions we are likely to encounter. I would now like to discuss setting limits for some of the more common difficulties and behaviour we come across with young children.

SEPARATION

A clear time when we say no to a child comes at the moment of separation. He wants to stay with you but has to be with others. One regular complaint from families is that their child will not separate easily, he clings and whines. The dilemma is not just the worry about how the child will get on with others, but that if you don't negotiate the separations well, more often than not your

contact and togetherness is not very pleasant. The child is clinging to you while you are trying to push him away. Here again, we should look at what the behaviour means to each person. It is important to listen and hear the story. Separation is always a two-way process.

One of the major early separations for young children is being left with a granny, au-pair, nanny, or going to nursery or to a child-minder. Anyone who visits a nursery will see at least one parent who is very concerned about letting the child go, although appearing to push him away. You may notice that when the child has said good-bye once and moved off, albeit a tad reluctantly, ten good-byes are said by the parent, indicating that one was not enough and that the process is painful for the parent too. By the end of the scene, the child may well be in tears, having picked up and expanded on the parent's feelings. This is the reason some nurseries do not allow parents beyond the front door. That, of course, does not solve the separation problem for parent or child, but it may make life easier for the staff on a short-term basis.

How time away from the parents is presented will determine how the child experiences the separation. Does the mother trust the person the child is left with? Are her own memories of being away from home good? Does she feel that the child is being left for his needs or hers, for instance if she is going to work? All these factors will have an effect on how she says good-bye. A good-bye said with confidence will give the child the prospect that the next few hours will be good.

There is also the crucial issue, so often raised, of whether you say good-bye or think you can disappear unnoticed. Many adults fool themselves that young children are unaware of their surroundings – out of sight is out of mind. Having worked with under-fives for many years, I can guarantee that this could not be further from the truth. What is true, however, is that if children are told of an impending departure, they have a chance to object and fuss. Parents need to recognize and accept these feelings while sticking to their plan to leave.

Another alternative which can cause difficult feelings is that the child may be happy to let them go! This can be very painful for the loving parent who is sensitive to how much she will miss her child.

What do you do with a child who screams, hangs on for dear life and looks as if he will die if you leave? As with the examples above, you need to think whether these feelings really reflect the situation. If you leave anyway, in a positive manner, with appropriate confidence that he is in good hands, you are reinforcing the idea that he will be OK without you, that there are other people in the world who can also look after him. If you do not leave, you are in effect agreeing that only you can look after him, that the world at large is not safe. Of course the leaving has to be done thoughtfully. The time he can manage without you also needs to be considered. It may have to be a slow process, but it has to be begun if your child is to taste other treats than those you offer.

SLEEP

Dilys Daws, a child psychotherapist, has written very clearly about the impact of parents' feelings about separation and how these are communicated to children. In her book *Through the Night*, she links sleeping difficulties to parents' ambivalent feelings about separation.

Many families of today require bigger and bigger beds to accommodate the children who creep in next to their parents. It is very much a difficulty of our time. There are conflicting ideas about the benefits or disadvantages of letting children into the parental bed. It must also be said that it is rare for an older child, adolescent or adult to sleep with his parents! On the whole, therefore, we can think about the issue mainly in relation to children between two and six or seven. Why do we find it hard to be firm about our children going to bed in the first place and then to say no to them getting into bed with us? What interferes? As always, the answer is not simple. It could be many things.

In chapter 1 we discussed the fear of separation. Feelings of loss are often stirred up by sleeping; in an extreme form there is a fear of death. Tennyson wrote of sleep as 'Death's twin brother', and most parents, before going to bed, will go to check their child is all right, still breathing.

In letting yourself drift into sleep, you are also entering a time or space you do not have much control over. There is a sense of isolation in sleep – for some it is a restful haven, of privacy, calm and nice dreams. For others it is a tempestuous world of nightmares. For most it is a mixture. But we do not know in advance what our sleep will be like. Common language makes it sound like a journey: we wish each other good-night, pleasant dreams, we say, 'See you in the morning' – all markers of leaving and returning.

The parent's view of sleep will have an impact on what the child anticipates in that twilight zone between wakefulness and sleep. A parent who starts off the night leaving a light on, in case the child is alarmed by the dark, is already anticipating that darkness is worrying rather than restful. The same goes for open versus closed doors, quiet versus noise. How sleep is viewed and catered for communicates an image of what it is. There is a beautiful children's story *The Owl who was Afraid of the Dark*, which illustrates how a little owl gets over his fear of the dark by speaking to creatures who love the dark. If you feel an empty bed is a treat, you are more likely to be firm with your child that he should sleep alone. If, however, you feel it is lonely, you will imagine that is why he wants to be with you and will allow him in. In fact, he may have a totally different reason for coming into your bed or not wanting to go to sleep. You will need to listen to him rather than assume he is like you.

There are many other explanations for why parents allow children to stay up very late or to sleep in their bed. A mother or father who is at work all day may feel the only time with their child is in the evening. They have a feeling of closeness smuggled up to him at night, it makes them feel in touch. The occasional night all

together may be very satisfying all round. It is important, though, to know whose needs or worries are being met. A single mother I worked with would often have her little girl in bed with her because she herself was frightened at night. Although she clearly knew her two-year-old could not protect her, she felt safer with her in bed.

Other causes can be due to marital problems. A child in the bed, ostensibly so that both parents can see to his wishes, may hide a distance they wish to put between them. In an unhappy couple, the child in the middle can help both parents avoid their sense of loneliness while acting as a barrier between them. This sort of situation is not helpful to the child. He would sense the parents' need for him and find it hard to protect his own space. Some children may worry about the hostility between their parents and want to be there to ensure nothing bad happens. The parents, too, might be grateful for the safety net he provides. Other children may feel the rift and want to fill the gap, to be close to one parent and push the other one away. All these questions and more may have to be considered if you find that your child is always in your bed.

Allowing a child to be with you all night, every night, is not helpful to him. It stops him developing a sense of himself on his own. A child who is afraid at night and who is then taken into bed regularly does not develop strategies to cope. He is thus always vulnerable. Night after night, he will be afraid and call for you, rather than learning to hide his head under the cover, or sing to himself, or listen to a tape. If he believes there are crocodiles under the bed or goblins in the cupboard and you remove him from the room, even if your words deny their existence, your actions suggest he is better off out of the room. He does not have the experience that if he stays, he will find out there are no beasts in the bedroom. On the other hand, if he has to try out methods of dealing with his fear, over time and with the help of various strategies, the fear dissipates and is conquered. The child grows in strength and confidence in himself and in his resilience. In his science-fiction

epic novel *Dune*, Frank Herbert creates a 'Litany against Fear' which I think describes well how we successfully conquer it:

I must not fear. Fear is the mind-killer. Fear is the little-death that brings total obliteration. I will face my fear. I will permit it to pass over me and through me. And when it has gone past I will turn the inner eye to see its path. Where the fear has gone there will be nothing. Only I will remain.

With experiences like fear, for a young child all the reassurance and talking in the world will not convince him as much as feeling it, surviving the emotion and coming out of it.

A child may only remember his fear at the time of going to bed, but the parent can think about it during the day. This offers an opportunity to talk to the child about his fear and think together of ways to tackle it before it has turned to panic. Then when the time comes, the child and parent may have found ways to help him deal with it - plans and strategies for him to call on. This could involve having a special toy with him, hiding under the sheets, listening to music or a story, leaving a night-light on or any number of solutions.

FOOD

Many young children get into terrible battles with their parents at mealtimes. Whether it is a question of what, where and how they eat, it is often a rough ride. A mother, particularly, can be sensitive to reactions to the food she provides. She may experience her child's refusal to eat as a rejection of her all together. Sometimes there is so much emotion stirred up by meals that it may put the child off. He may find the atmosphere indigestible, rather than the food. We have all experienced a knot in our stomachs when we are in a stressful situation. Young children, especially before they have a firm control over language, are very sensitive to emotional climate. So a child who rejects chicken soup may just not like it, but if he is treated as if this means he hates his mother, he will find it

hard to eat anything. Many Jewish jokes are based on this interaction, common among mothers and children. Alternatively he may comply and stop discriminating for himself between what he likes and dislikes; he will fit in, for the sake of peace.

On the other hand a child who refuses to try anything new or acts as if all food is bad may need a mother who can translate this reluctance for him. As we have seen all along, how we react helps to give the child an idea of the world around him. A mother who allows the child to be extremely picky is, in effect, agreeing with his view that there is not much that is good to eat. A mother who cannot say no to her child's demands for the same meal every day, or allows him to refuse to eat most things, can end up tyrannized into accepting the child's orders. Once she starts changing all her usual ways and catering to his every whim, she becomes over-preoccupied with what he will or won't eat. She becomes tentative, which in turn makes him suspicious about what is on offer. She may also feel guilty that he is not having a healthy diet. Food becomes a source of displeasure. What a loss all round! She could make certain rules: that he has to try something, or that he can choose a limited number of foods he doesn't want to eat. For instance, they might reach a compromise where spinach, beans and cabbage are off the menu, but she will expect him to eat other vegetables. Such rules respect the fact that he has his own taste, while allowing the mother to maintain her position that many things in life are delicious. As we have seen throughout this chapter, it is important for the mother to feel confident that what she is offering is good; she will then present this image to the child, who more often than not will enjoy his meals.

WAITING

Young children, as we know, live intensely in the here and now. They have a very subjective sense of time. Waiting is difficult for them; they want instant gratification. Some of this is quite physical

- we have all seen a hungry child being fussy, irritable and irritating. The transformation after he has eaten seems almost miraculous: he is cheerful and friendly. Similarly the child who is going down with an illness may first show grumpy behaviour; it is only when the illness comes out that we realize that was what the grouchiness was about. (After experiencing this over and over again, I decided that poor behaviour is quite a good diagnostic tool of physical illness, almost a symptom!)

When a child has not got what he wants, his feeling that waiting hurts him is partly based in reality, in his experience. However, he also needs to know that waiting can be OK - that he will survive it and the feelings aroused in him. Often his reaction is such that the mother also believes he cannot bear to wait, she will stop whatever she is doing to see to him. It is a frequent complaint of friends that they cannot have a decent conversation with a mother because she will let the child interrupt constantly. The repeated experience of waiting for a time that is tolerable will give the child practice and confidence that he can manage on his own.

Mothers who feel cruel making a child wait may be so closely identified with him that it is their own infantile side they are indulging. If you find it quite painful, it is hard to give your child a different picture. Your struggle adds to theirs. Again, it is important to disentangle whose feelings are dominant.

Guilt also hinders our capacity to help children wait. Many a mother has felt guilty for strictly scolding her young child and then finding, a day later, that he has got the most awful cold. At worst we can feel our scolding made him ill. There is a sense that saying no, setting a limit, is dangerous. However, we have seen that not doing so is actually harmful. The child who cannot wait is at the mercy of his intense emotions and can feel very unhappy. Giving him a limit can help keep those feelings within bounds. Otherwise he may feel full of wildness which never gets tamed, just as we saw with the children who behave as if they are omnipotent.

DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOUR

Whatever the circumstances, it is important for the child to learn not to hurt others, and if he does, to learn to repair the damage done. Children who are allowed to be destructive become very alarmed, both about what they have done and about what you might do back to them. Paul, the violent little boy I discussed earlier, was once taken for an X-ray. As the machine came towards him to take the picture, he screamed and yelled, 'Don't shoot me!' clearly petrified that the hour of retribution had come. Children who break things repeatedly and smash up whatever frustrates them may grow up to feel guilty at first and eventually may despair that anything good will ever survive. They end up feeling the world is broken and hopelessly beyond repair. It is a relief when somebody stops you from hurting others; it means that they would also be prepared to protect you. When a child is in a whirlwind of fury, he may feel out of control. Here again, to be stopped firmly is a sign of care – a willingness to face their wrath with their welfare in mind.

We have seen reports in the news of young children brought up on the fringes of society where the impact of what they do seems to matter not one bit. No one is looking after them, making sure they are not being destructive and in trouble. These children do not feel what they do makes any difference. They adopt a 'who cares' attitude. Letting them behave in this way is allowing them to build themselves a bleak world.

MANNERS

One of the new tasks of children between two and five is to master the niceties of being in company. Whereas on the whole we do not expect much of babies in this area, the toddler and young child has demands put on him. To be exact, the baby has had a little taste of this – being asked to smile or to wave good-bye, to be friendly with people other than his parents, and so on. But at this later age, a child may be told off for not complying.

Here too we are faced with the task of helping the child fit in without crushing his sense of himself. The balancing act, between what we think is appropriate and what he can deliver, is ever present. It is crucial for children to learn to behave well in company for the simple reason that if they do not, nobody will want to be with them.

We may think of childhood as a wonderful time of freedom and be loath to restrict them. Alternatively, we may think children are just little adults, be exasperated when they do not behave as such, and bully them into conformity. Our philosophical stand, on the advantages of childhood and the necessities of being a part of society, will have a great impact on how we enforce our limits. Our own struggles to be individual and yet part of the group will enter the frame. We must therefore act with respect to the emerging personal style of the child, while giving him the tools to get on well in life. Mostly, a consistent and repetitive approach rather than a heavy-handed one works best.

It is important that we, as parents, value being treated well. A mother who allows her child to be very rude and inconsiderate is saying that this is a fair way to treat her. She is giving in to an abusive aspect of the child which, as we have seen, is not healthy for him. She is also setting an example: he will not have the force to stand up for himself if people behave badly towards him. For mothers who do not have a strong sense of self-esteem, or who base their view of themselves on always being available, it will be harder to stand firm. We must remember that what makes an impact on our children is not just how we behave towards them, but how we allow them to behave towards us. Manners and social conventions are not just superficial; they are originally and fundamentally about having relationships. Growing up involves a degree of being tamed. A very touching passage in the story of *The Little Prince*, by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, is the fox's request to be tamed. The little prince wants to play with a fox he has just met. The fox answers that he cannot play because he is not tame. The little prince is puzzled

and so the fox explains that 'tame' means 'to establish ties'. He goes on:

'If you tame me, it will be as if the sun came to shine on my life. I shall know the sound of a step that will be different from all the others. Other steps send me hurrying back underneath the ground. Yours will call me, like music, out of my burrow. And then look: you see the grain-fields down yonder? I do not eat bread. Wheat is of no use to me. The wheat fields have nothing to say to me. And that is sad. But you have hair that is the colour of gold. Think how wonderful that will be when you have tamed me! The grain, which is also golden, will bring me back the thought of you. And I shall love to listen to the wind in the wheat ...'

A mother who helps her child build relationships in this way will always be special to him. She will have earned and deserved his gratitude.

Our Place within the Family

A child may be born into a family with siblings or he may be an only child. Between the ages of two and five is frequently when a new baby is born, which raises the question of our place in the family. Changes may have to be faced and sharing is likely to be hard.

In order to share, the child has to start from a position of security; he has to know he is deeply cherished. The advent of a new baby may shake his faith in this and the parents must reaffirm their bond to him.

I return to the story of the Little Prince, who loves a particular rose and tells the other roses:

'You are beautiful, but you are empty ... One could not die for you. To be sure, an ordinary passer-by would think that my rose looked just like you - the rose that belongs to me. But in

herself alone she is more important than all the hundreds of you other roses: because it is she that I have watered; because it is she that I have put under the glass globe; because it is she that I have sheltered behind the screen; because it is for her that I have killed the caterpillars (except the two or three that we saved to become butterflies); because it is she that I have listened to, when she grumbled, or boasted, or even sometimes when she said nothing. Because she is *my* rose.'

MAKING ROOM FOR SIBLINGS

Research has shown that first children of this age group react particularly strongly to the birth of a baby. They are typically hostile and rivalrous with the baby, furious with and possessive of the mother. Their behaviour becomes difficult, demanding and often more infantile. They may want a dummy, suck their thumb, wet the bed. As with angry feelings, they must be allowed to express all this. It is also crucial that they be reassured that they are loved, in spite of being full of negative feelings. This gives them confidence in their position with you, and it helps them accept their feelings and integrate contradictory emotions. It may be a shock to them that the baby is here to stay.

A family I worked with in a Special Care Baby Unit were amazed at how well their three-year-old, Suzy, got on with the new baby. She never fussed about visiting or made herself a nuisance on the ward. When her mother was discharged home, Suzy was keen to come with her to see the baby every day and curious to watch her mother feeding him and changing his nappy. When the baby was well enough to go home, she was very excited and thrilled. However, at the end of the first day she asked her mother when they were taking him back to the hospital. She had certainly not expected him to come and actually live with them!

Many a family has a similar story about the older child wanting to give the baby away or send it back to the shop, or whatever. To say no to their wish to get rid of the baby, to be firm that he is now

part of your life together, is not easy. Many mothers identify with their older child - they may remember feeling ousted by their little brother. If they were the young one themselves, they may feel guilty for having taken so much of their mother's attention, and over-compensate by paying extra attention to the older child, who represents their older sibling whom they feel they have deprived. Like the older child, they too may feel invaded by this new, demanding and time-consuming little creature. On the other hand, they may feel very close to the baby, as if they are one, and resent the demands of their older child. All these thoughts and feelings will impinge on how they react. Once more, it is important to observe the child, to try to see his point of view and help him with his struggles, not assume they are the same as yours. At this time, the help of your partner or your own mother, friends and other supportive people is essential. It is very hard and painful to deal with such raw and conflicting demands all by yourself, without feeling overwhelmed.

The ultimate aim in setting boundaries in this circumstance is to ensure everyone has a legitimate place in the family, to try to permit all the mixed emotions a voice, without them actually being acted out. It does not help anybody to be destructive. Helping the child make room for others in his life prepares him for sharing in other contexts, especially the next stage of starting school.

WHEN SAYING NO IS ESPECIALLY HARD

There are some children to whom parents find it particularly difficult to say no. Families in which there have been fertility problems, and adopted, fostered or handicapped children all pose specific dilemmas.

It may be very hard to be firm with a child you have waited years for. During the time of yearning and repeated disappointment, an image builds up of the wished-for child. This can cloud our vision of the real child we end up with. It can make us blind to the child's negative side or hyper-sensitive to it. Either way, our

reaction is likely to be slightly skewed. It is important to normalize the child's experience as far as possible. *He* has not waited years to be with you and is not part of the history that makes you see him as a special light.

With adopted and fostered children, you inherit an unknown past. Even if facts are available to you, there will always be a mystery about aspects of his personality. It is helpful to the child to feel he is entering a home which is clear about its rules. This gives a supportive structure to counterbalance possible past upheavals. Being firm about how you do things also gives the child a sense of belonging. It is reaffirming that now he is part of *your* family.

If you know the child has had a traumatic history, you need to hold on to the idea that this can be repaired. Children will expect to be treated as they have been in the past, and frequently make you feel as if you are like the figures they have been with. Deprived and abused children are notoriously difficult to look after. They behave to an exaggerated degree as little Jack did with his father at the beginning of the chapter. They may also be like Paul and push you to the limit. Separation will be a particularly poignant issue between you. When a child has suffered, our natural tendency is to spare them any further pain. It is important for such children to be cared for unconditionally, but it is also crucial to remember that caring is not indulgence. They are in desperate need of an adult who is prepared to put up with their resistance and their fury, and still stand firm. Saying no at appropriate times is very helpful to them.

If your child is handicapped in some way, you may have very mixed feelings about setting limits. It may seem cruel, too exacting and unmanageable. Here, as always, observing your child and seeing what he can handle is paramount. If you act as if he is too fragile to be told 'no', you are reinforcing the handicapped aspects of his personality. If you try to stretch him, you are giving him hope and a belief that he can manage. Of course this needs to be realistic and not lead him to despair. Especially in the early years, a way of finding out any child's abilities is by trial and error. One

should not jump to conclusions about handicap without giving things a go.

Four-year-old Sam was watching his friends trying to hop on one foot. He was sitting, jiggling up and down on his chair. His mother found it terribly painful watching him get excited by a movement he could not master. He indicated he wanted to join in. She was torn between letting him try yet anticipating his failure, and sparing him the pain she foresaw by distracting him with another activity. He seemed so keen she decided to take him down on to the floor and help him try to hop. With her help, he extended his legs, holding on to her hands and lifted his left foot up. He was thrilled with his achievement, as was his mother. He was satisfied that he had joined in and felt duly rewarded for his efforts.

Here we can see that the mother was prepared to face the sorrow that her son was not as able as the others in order to let him have an experience. From it came an insight that although Sam may not have been as agile as his peers, his determination and resilience were stronger than theirs.

A very understandable tendency with a handicapped child is to try to cram in as much as possible in the early years, because of the fear that development might suddenly be arrested. We know that high expectations can give a child hope and energy. But it is also important to see the whole child. You may need to say no to your wish to surmount the handicap at all costs. If you do everything in relation to the handicap, you lose sight of the individual. Sam has a handicap but he is not just a handicapped child. He is also Sam, with his own personality. We have seen that children get a picture of who they are by looking into our eyes, seeing themselves reflected. In our interaction with handicapped children, this is of paramount importance. The sorrow and pain will inevitably be there, the mourning at having lost the child we dreamt of. However it is our task also to make space for the child we have, to see him in the round, and not just his handicap. This will make it easier to apply all the principles discussed in this chapter with

regard to saying no and setting limits, and help the child to have an ordinary life.

HELP AND SUPPORT

As we have seen, under-fives are passionate, fiery beings. They tend to swing to extremes, in their behaviour and in their perceptions. This is hard to deal with single-handed. The main carer will need support, somebody to dilute the intensity and to help bear and think about what is going on. It is hard to resist a whirlwind on one's own. Toddlers often rope you into behaving just like them; it helps if somebody can remain on an adult level.

This is also an age when the child becomes aware of hierarchy in a family, of his place within the whole. Knowing that he is not a partner to his parent but a child is a relief and a comfort, even if he complains about it. The strength of the couple will give him a secure base. The couple need not be his two parents, although it is usually so; it could be any two adults who come together to think and care for him. At times the other half may even be someone employed to look after him. Being part of a triangle and no longer part of the intimate mother-baby couple is a first step in learning to go out into the world. He has to learn to negotiate more relationships and to understand the idea of relationships which are not centred on him. He will also be in touch with the possibility of future babies, be these real siblings, or projects, activities and conversations which engross his parents and do not include him. These are all small and essential parts of healthy development.

Summary

A feature of the years between two and five is that the world is experienced as magical. Fantasy and reality are not yet properly separated and defined. The child's circle is very much a microcosm, based around the family and small groups. The issues that arise for him and his parents are often about how to deal with

strong feelings, how to adapt to required behaviour, how to manage himself. Parents are still very close and, on the whole, act as an intermediary between the child and the outside world. This closeness helps them to understand him, but at times the differences between the child's perception and his parents' can become blurred. Some untangling needs to be done, observing the child's communications rather than assuming he is like you. Saying no, setting limits, will help the child have a model of how to cope when he feels overwhelmed, he will feel secure in his place in the family and begin to develop resources of his own.

Some of this development may be painful for parent and child but the rewards are great. In later years, the child forges ahead and at times is much on his own. What will serve him then is not the constant presence of his parents, but what he has been able to digest of his experience, what he keeps inside himself of what has been offered.

My final quote from The Little Prince:

So the little prince tamed the fox. And when the hour of his departure drew near -

'Ah,' said the fox, 'I shall cry.'

'It is your own fault,' said the little prince. 'I never wished

you any sort of harm; but you wanted me to tame you . . .'

'Yes, that is so,' said the fox.

'But now you are going to cry!' said the little prince.

'Yes, that is so,' said the fox.

'Then it has done you no good at all!'

'It has done me good,' said the fox, 'because of the colour of the wheat fields.'

The Primary School Years

Now this is the very first day of school (. . .) your headmistress is Miss Trunchbull. Let me for your own good tell you something about Miss Trunchbull. She insists upon strict discipline throughout the school, and if you take my advice you will do your very best to behave yourselves in her presence. Never argue with her. Never answer her back. Always do as she says. If you get on the wrong side of Miss Trunchbull she can liquidise you like a carrot in a kitchen blender.

ROALD DAHL, *Matilda*

A Whole New World

Around the age of five every child has to make the transition from home to school. Some may have attended playgroups, nurseries, or been in a smaller group at a child-minder's, and others may have remained at home with their mothers or fathers. Whatever their past experience, starting school will be new. More and different things are expected of them and they have to adapt to the rules which serve the majority and may not be so attuned to their individual needs. The focus shifts from acquiring mostly social skills to educational ones. Children, in this phase, have an enormous amount to master. Their response to rules, regulations and manners - all areas related to boundaries - is of paramount importance. How they react to 'no' will have a major impact on their capacity to settle, make friends and learn at school.

One of the main worries when a child starts 'proper' school is how he will cope with the teacher, in the group and with the demands put upon him. In Chapter 2 we looked at the problems which can arise with separation and these are likely to recur with the beginning of school. The child may feel daunted by the prospect of long days away from his parents, he may feel very lost in a crowd without the security of a mother or father as an intermediary to monitor his contacts. He may be unsure about his