

# Caring for the Little Ones

by Karen Miller



Photograph by Ludwig Studio

## End of the Day Doldrums

A common problem is that time in the late afternoon just before the parents start to arrive, when all the children seem to break down and cry, or at least get cranky. Here are some ideas gathered from experienced teachers to make this time easier on everyone.

### A late afternoon juice snack

Some of the crankiness exhibited in the late afternoon may be caused by an energy ebb and dehydration. When children are dehydrated or hungry, they automatically think of Mommy, the traditional *fountain* of relief. Giving them a carbohydrate rich snack of fruit juice and perhaps a graham cracker an hour or two after your regular afternoon snack can do wonders to improve everyone's mood, including the caregivers'!

### Here are some other things to try:

- ▶ Activities that focus on the sense of touch are often soothing to children feeling stress. Play dough, sand, and water play are good choices. If you prefer something *cleaner* because you have bussed up the room, you might put two colors of thick tempera paint in zip lock bags and let children push the paint around to make new colors. Or squirt some shaving cream and food coloring into a zip close bag and let children squeeze it.
- ▶ Make the environment different. Bring out something new. Add something, take something away. It allows children to refocus. If you had the cornmeal table out in the morning, cover that up and maybe bring out a laundry basket full of stocking balls — or some other thing that's okay to throw.
- ▶ Older toddlers and two year olds enjoy parachute activities. If you don't have a parachute, you could use a large bed sheet. Let them hold the edge and make the colorful canopy go up and down. It creates a soft breeze and a soft sound. It also causes them to breathe deeply as their arms go up and down. Even very little ones can enjoy sitting under a colorful parachute as others make it go up and down.

### "Dump the Doldrums" Box

Create a special box to use for those end of day doldrums. (You could also use this for bad weather days and bring it out only when you would normally be outside.) Put special materials inside that are worth looking forward to. Vary what you have in the box from week to week.

Possibilities:

- Special manipulatives.
- Unusual art materials like crayons with sparkles in them.
- Stickers.
- Special books not left out on the bookshelf.
- Scarves to dance with.
- Younger toddlers love containers of different shapes and sizes with lids and some handles, or a covered shoe box with some treasures inside like colored clothespins, paper to tear, or material to feel. Look for plastic containers with screw lids.
- Kitchen utensils and plastic bowls are fun to add.
- Flashlights!

## Have You Tried This?

Glue suction cup type soap holders to the bottom of sandals or old shoes. Let kids walk around on them. It makes a great sound on hard flooring.

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- Try some large group gross motor activities like jumping up and down to music, or tearing a large piece of butcher paper into tiny pieces.
- Lining up chairs to make a train seems to be a popular late afternoon activity. Invite dolls and stuffed animals along on an imaginary ride, complete with sound effects.
- Drape some blankets and large sheets over tables to create caves to crawl into — another change in their environment.
- Bring out a scrapbook with pictures of the children's families on each page. The children can help you name family members. Rather than make them miss their parent even more, this tends to reassure children.
- Try lengthening the time you spend outside in the afternoon. When children have had a chance to run and fill their lungs with fresh air, it elevates their mood.
- Encourage parents to be as consistent as possible about the time when they pick up their children. If the parent is erratic about when she picks up the child, the child may be edgy all afternoon.
- One seasoned caregiver says, "Sometimes I just sit down on the floor and cry with them. I say, 'Let's

all cry together.' We might all go over to the pillow area and put our arms around each other and just 'boo-hoo.' That releases tension and sometimes actually turns to laughter. I am careful not to do this in a teasing way but rather in a way that shows understanding and empathy for them."

Karen Miller is the author of *Ages and Stages*, *Things to Do with Toddlers and Twos*, *More Things to Do with Toddlers and Twos*, *The Outside Play and Learning Book*, and her newest book, *The Crisis Manual for Early Childhood Teachers* (Gryphon House, 1996).

Send comments, questions, feedback, giggles, good ideas, as well as any photos you'd like to share with other readers to: Karen Miller, PO Box 97, Cowdrey, CO 80434-0097.