



Orange Soup



In the toddler room, the two-year olds are busy feeding themselves. Everyone is concentrating, fishing out cheerios and carefully bringing them to their mouths. The quiet of the room attests to the seriousness of the business. But Max has dropped his orange in his milk. “Making orange soup, Max?” asks the teacher. His face lights up with a smile and he churns. He has seen Mommy making soup; he knows how. He is such a big boy. But the churning gets out of hand and the bowl tips over. A second ago he was king of the soup makers. Now he is a messy baby. He is falling apart and his frustration is loud and clear. “It’s okay, Max. Let’s get a napkin and wipe it up.” With the help of his teacher, Max stops crying and becomes a cleaner. The mess is fixed, his spirits restored. Uncrushed, Max moves onto the conquest of the sand box.

At two or so, Max started the lifelong task of working through being “neither lord of the universe nor a lowly worm” (Lisa Miller, *Understanding Your Two-Year Old*,). Without the intervention of his teacher, neither scolding nor indulging, Max might have remained upset a longer time. I think of my patients, who for lack of a good voice in their mind, find the struggle to secure a resting place between the two excruciating. How some protect themselves with a lifelessness, which ensures that they are never in either place. How others cling to grandiosity, which they are unconsciously convinced will exorcise their unbearable feeling of smallness. How others feel stuck in their smallness and live in shame. And I think of the lifelong challenge we all face adjusting to the reality of our ordinariness-- an insurmountable task without a kind helper telling us: “It’s okay, Max.”

By Isabelle Babcock, PhD
Member, The Washington Center for Psychoanalysis

Jubilee JumpStart

“Max” is a composite based on observations of two year olds at Jubilee JumpStart, a pre-school program for infants through four year olds in Washington, DC. Analysts and psychotherapists from The Washington Center for Psychoanalysis collaborate with Jubilee JumpStart teachers observing in the classroom and discussing child development issues in work groups.
