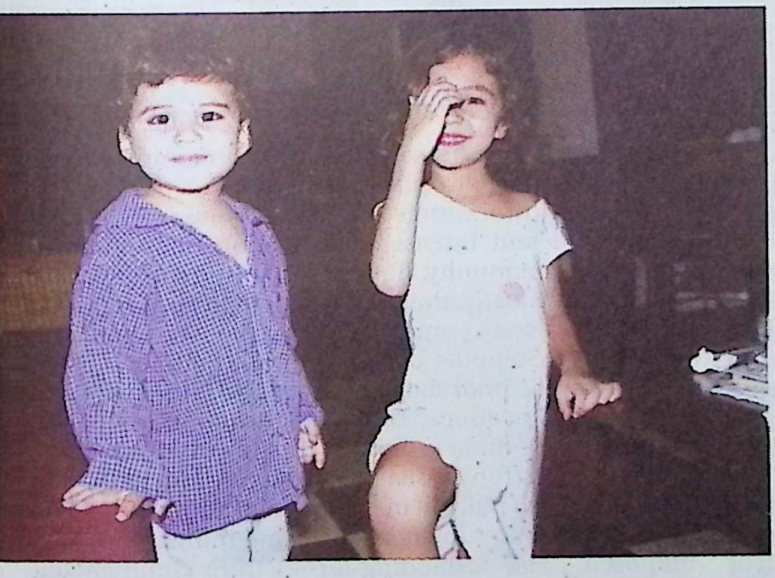
mother was less than amused to find one of her favourite carpets well-watered in recent times, and his older sister Laleh swears that even when he does have a nappy on, if he's angry Aamer will find a way to pee through his nappy...

Whatever the truth of this, Sara has found it hard to understand Aamer's negotiating position on the nappy issue. He is quick, in the morning, to assert that he wants "no nappy, no nappy". When she tried to get him to agree however, that if his nappy was left off he would inform his caregiver in time that he needed to use the toilet, Aamer gave her a hardy look and firmly said, "No!" So I guess the message is he's going to do what he's going to do, and it doesn't matter what anyone else thinks of it!

What anyone else thinks can however be a major issue when children are dealing with their peers. My friend Nadiya has a remarkably intelligent four-year-old daughter, Ilana. The latter has always been quite advanced in her language skills and clarity of articulation, so her mother was recently surprised – when she went to pick her up from school – to find Ilana beckoning two of the other children and saying, "Atho, atho, ekhaney botho" (Come here and "thit" with me). When Nadiya asked her why she was talking like that, Ilana gave her a glare of frustration and said "Talking like what, Ma? Thith ith how I alwayth thpeak!" I think the clear subtext there was "Don't expose me as a geek, Ma". There are clearly times when it's all too easy to understand exactly what children are thinking...



Of course, if you have any remaining doubts, your child may make it all too clear what they think of you. My friend Tina incurred the wrath of her four-year-old daughter Joya recently, because she had been patting the cheeks of Joya's baby cousin Aurora, and uttering a string of nonsense words partly drawn from one of Joya's story books. Her daughter's furious response was, "Ma, ota amar dhong, tumi ota keno korcho Aurorar shathey?" (Ma, that's my thing, why are you talking to Aurora like that?!)

But if it's sometimes easier for parents to understand their children, it's clearly not always easy for children to understand the bizarre behaviour of adults. A recent video I saw of a little girl who was preparing to do a dance routine for the camera in her ballerina tutu nearly ended in tears. After the camera had been trained on her, the little girl suddenly passed wind, to what was clearly her considerable embarrassment. The situation wasn't made any better by the fact that the adults around her collapsed in laughter, even as she quickly said, "Excuse me!" When the adult laughter did not immediately stop, she said in a highly rebuking tone "I already said excuse me". Her dignity only partly restored, she returned to her first pose and prepared to begin her dance, before being overcome by what was clearly a justified sense of outrage; looking straight into the camera, she said, "Ballerinas fart too, you know!"

And then there are the times when it's just delightful to hear some of the observations that kids can come up with. Like my friend Ravi, whose eldest son Arne explained to him quite seriously how much he liked pineapples because they are juicy. Looking pensive, Arne continued, "I suppose that sharks think humans are juicy too..." Less delighted was my friend Darshan, a single mother and highly successful business woman, who was summoned to her daughter Radhika's school by the teacher, who wanted to discuss a short essay that her child had written. Since Radhika spent a great deal of time with her ayah, who had been responsible of taking care of her since she was a small child, she clearly felt it was perfectly rational, when asked to write an essay about her mother, to begin by saying, "I have two mummies – Darshan-Ma and Shondha-Ma"!

Finally, parents may not always know just what their children are planning. Like my German friend Petra discovered with her four-year-old son Gary. He adores cats and is highly reluctant to accept the parental injunction that he cannot have a pet (not least because he has a parent who is allergic to such furballs). Gary, however, has found his own way of dealing with the situation, informing his parents that he will be getting a cat just as soon as they move out! Should someone be telling him that he's the one expected to move out at some point...?

Anyway, with all these complicated issues to deal with and interpret where childrearing is concerned, it's hardly strange that modern parents sometimes find themselves at a loss. And if there was ever any doubt that the grown-up world was complicated, the response of another little boy made that abundantly clear; when he was asked what he wants to be when he grows up, he replied (in a very worried tone) that he doesn't want to grow up! Who can blame him? ■