

Consider...

A five year old cares for her sister alone*

"Before she heads off to work in a distant field, Kosala Devi feeds her two girls, washes their hands and faces, and prepares to leave. She locks the house behind her, and leaves with her sickle and hoe. Five-year-old Lalitha is left in charge of her two-year-old sister, Saritha. The only adult in the vicinity is their sick grandfather next door, and the girls have no interaction with him all afternoon.

Lalitha lifts her sister onto her back, swings a carrying cloth adeptly over her, and ties her on. Then she runs off up to the road, where she joins her cousin, a boy about six. They spend the next hour digging with sticks, filling a small bottle with soil, then emptying it back into another container back by the house - ready for plastering. Saritha is on and off of Lalitha's back several times; at times they play together in the dirt, and at times they are 'mother' and 'baby'.

Two girls from the house down the road appear and pass by - there is a lot of calling back and forth between them and Lalitha - and soon it is picked up by another child from across the field. While Lalitha is involved in this game, Saritha plays on the horizontal supports of the cow barn where the bamboo wall has fallen away, hanging, climbing, swinging. Across the field there is trouble - a mother shouting and a child crying. Lalitha swings Saritha onto her back, and the two of them run off through the high maize, eager to see what's happened. An hour later they appear again, wandering hand in hand down the road, waiting for their mother to return home and make their dinner" (Arnold et al., 2000, p. 58).

*Excerpt, used with permission, from:

Arnold, C., Bartlett, S., Hill, J., Khatiwada, C., & Sapkota, P. (2000). *Bringing up children in a changing world: Who's right? Whose rights: Conversations with families in Nepal*. Save the Children/UNICEF.

https://www.childwatch.uio.no/publications/books/SC_UNICEF_Bringing_up_children%20in%20a%20changing%20world.pdf