

Module 5: Child Guidance

Section A: Factors and Influences that Affect Children's Behavior

Introduction

There are many factors that can impact a child's behavior. The sections on child development and recent brain research provided initial information on factors that can affect children's behavior. In this section you will learn how hereditary and environmental factors impact children's behavior. Understanding young children's developmental levels and characteristics helps early childhood teachers respond to children's behaviors as teachable moments that provide learning opportunities.

Learning Objectives

After you complete this section you will be able to:

- Describe 3 hereditary factors that impact a young child's behavior.
- Describe 3 environmental factors that impact a young child's behavior.
- Explain how teachers can provide a supportive environment for young children that influence the development of pro-social behavior.

Guiding Your Learning

As you work through this section: Reflect on your reactions to different children you have known. Record some of the behaviors that please you, annoy you or cause frustration. Think about how your reactions to children may impact your relationships with them.

NOTE: The information contained in these sections are partial summaries of the DHS Child Care Licensing Regulations, are not intended to replace or provide an official interpretation of the Arizona Administrative Code and Arizona Revised Statutes for Child Care Facilities.

Summary of Key Arizona Child Care Licensing Regulations

Article 3 Facility Administration

R9-5-302 Statement of Child Care Services

7. A statement of child care services is given to parents and contains information on age-appropriate discipline guidelines and methods.

R9-5-510 Discipline and Guidance

A. Child care staff are required to use consistent and reasonable guidance methods that positively influence a young child's behavior. Child care staff are expected to model and encourage disciplined behavior, personal control, and age-appropriate behaviors.

Factors that Affect Young Children's Behavior

Each child is a unique individual. Children's individual development and behavior is shaped by a combination of hereditary and environmental factors. Working with young children requires an understanding of the factors that may affect a child's behavior. Hereditary or biological factors are the child's genetic inheritance that includes anything that impacts a child from conception to birth. Environmental factors include anything that impacts the child after birth.

Hereditary or biological factors that may affect a child's behavior include:

Complications of pregnancy and birth - Recent research has found that pregnant mothers who experience high stress during pregnancy are more likely to experience complications that may create language and intellectual difficulties that are associated with behavioral issues.

Malnutrition before birth and the child's first two years may cause the inability to focus or handle stress.

Substance abuse during pregnancy including alcohol, nicotine, and various drugs can cause damage to the unborn child's nervous system.

Temperament: Researchers found that children are born with a distinct set of temperamental characteristics that will remain with them through life. Temperament can be defined as a particular behavior or emotional style that influences an individual's way of doing things and interacting within their environment. Goodness of fit refers to how parents and teachers modify their interactions with the child to meet the needs of their individual temperament. Teachers who value each child's personality will modify the environment and interactions to balance and match the child's temperament. This will make the child feel valued, accepted and successful. 65% of children fall into one of three temperament types listed below. The children who do not fit into a specific temperament have a combination of the characteristics.

Cautious (15% of children): The slow to warm children do not respond well to change and take a while to get used to things. Children with this temperament are not as active, are more reflective and have a tendency to withdraw or react negatively to anything new; however, their reactions become more positive when they become familiar with an experience.

Flexible (40% of Children): Flexible children are happy, calm, and adaptable. They have predictable eating, sleeping, and toileting habits. They have a positive outlook and adapt well to changes and new experiences.

Feisty (10% of children): Feisty children have intense reactions and are easily upset. They resist and may be fearful of new people or experiences. Their patterns of sleeping and eating are irregular.

Problems with brain function can cause language, memory and attention problems. Children who exhibit challenging behaviors may have a brain problem with their executive functions that influence the child's ability to complete goal directed behaviors. Executive functions include:

- a. Planning and organizing behavior
- b. Anticipating problems and strategies to handle them
- c. Maintaining attention and concentration
- d. Flexible attitudes that allow changing from one mind-set to another
- e. Self-Monitoring
- f. Considering or taking the perspective of another person

Environmental factors that impact children's behavior include:

1. **Parenting and care giving styles** : How adults interact with children directly influences their behaviors. The most effective style is warm and responsive. This provides children the love and support needed to be successful. A firm and flexible approach with clear expectations fosters responsibility, cooperation, and self-regulation.
2. **Attachment**: "Attachment is a sense of connection between two people that forms the foundation for a relationship" (Preusse). The development of an attachment relationship between the parent and the child is a critical factor in the child's development and behavior. A secure attachment between the child and parent is essential in creating a foundation for the child's social/emotional development. Attachment relationships influence the child's ability to self-regulate, express feelings, cope with stress, and feel accepted.
3. **Poverty** has an impact on children's lives, development, and behavior. Low-income families may experience higher levels of stress. Stress has been found to negatively impact children's development and behavior.
4. **Violence**: Children encounter violence in their daily lives through television news, cartoons, sports, and games. Many children encounter violence in their family or neighborhoods. According to Kaiser and Rasminsky (2007) when children are directly exposed to violence their perspective of the world and their values may change. The presence of violence in children's lives can affect their ability to learn, establish relationships with others, and cope with stress (Kaiser & Rasminsky, 2007, p. 35).
5. **Child Care**: High quality child care programs make a difference in a child's long term academic and social-emotional development. Research has found that preschool children who experience high quality child care experiences scored higher on academic and cognitive achievement and were less likely to report acting-out behaviors than children who were enrolled in lower-quality child care programs. One of the strongest indicators of a quality program is a responsive relationship between the teacher and children.

Developing Social Behavior

High Quality early learning and care programs may influence the child's academic and social-emotional capacities throughout their lives. Parents and early childhood professionals share the common goal of providing experiences and support to shape children's long term success. Early learning experiences in cognitive, language, physical and social/emotional development will form the foundation for children's lives. The quality of the program will determine the strength of that foundation.

Researchers have identified common positive developmental characteristics that contribute to children becoming successful adults. Children as young as two years of age exemplify the personal characteristics of positive behavior. The following areas of development have been identified as essential in developing successful interpersonal relationships and productive activities:

1. **Social:** the ability to develop and maintain interpersonal relationships
2. **Cognitive and language:** the ability to think and communicate one's thoughts.
3. **Behavior:** the ability to follow the rules and expectations of society.

The following personal characteristics associated with positive social behavior can be observed and developed in young children:

- **Social competence.** The ability to interact successfully and in a cooperative manner with other adults and peers.
- **Empathy.** The ability to understand another person's point of view. Children who demonstrate empathy exhibit less challenging behavior. A child who exhibits empathy may be observed as young as 2 years of age comforting another child by offering toys.
- **Communication skills.** Children use language to describe feelings, ideas, understanding issues, asking for assistance and problem solving.
- **Self-regulation.** Includes the ability to comfort one self and maintain a positive outlook when encountering problems.
- **Following rules.** The ability to conform to society's rules.
- **Ability to control environment.** Young children control their environment through self-selected play and making choices. Opportunities to make choices create a sense of control and competence that validates the children's efforts to have an effect on the world.

How do early childhood teachers develop positive social behaviors?

Social behaviors are crucial to children's well-being and life success. Young children develop social behaviors in child care programs as they interact with teachers and other children. Early childhood teachers can influence the development of positive social skills by creating a classroom environment, activities that foster interactions between teachers and also interactions between children.

1. Social skills include sharing, helping others, cooperation, giving, showing sympathy, showing positive verbal and physical contact, showing concern, and taking the perspective of another person.
2. Play between children creates opportunities to develop and enhance social skills. Specific skills that are developed include: working toward a common goal, initiating and keeping a

conversation going, cooperating with peers, developing attachments and friendships with other children, and caring or comforting others.

3. Children develop social behaviors by:
 - a) Working and playing with others
 - b) Making choices and encountering the consequences of those choices
 - c) Figuring out how to enter play situations with others
 - d) Negotiating social conflicts with language
 - e) Developing other skills characterized by socially competent children
4. Teachers facilitate positive play interactions and social behaviors by:
 - a) Emphasizing cooperation rather than competition
 - b) Teaching games that emphasize cooperation and conflict resolution
 - c) Creating classroom settings that facilitate cooperative play
 - d) Using stories and books that focus on developing empathy and caring
 - e) Encouraging social interactions between children of different abilities
 - f) Labeling emotions and feelings that children express through play
 - g) Helping children make choices and work through consequences of their decisions
 - h) Planning activities that help children think through a problem
 - i) Encouraging children to join other children in play
 - j) Helping children develop skills to resolve conflict with other children
 - k) Assisting children in developing self-control

Applying Your Knowledge

How does the information in this section affect your work with young children?

Understanding the reasons for children's behavior helps you to determine how to interact with individual children.

Developing your understanding of social development provides you with methods to foster social skills.

Check Your Understanding

- ✓ Name three hereditary factors that may affect children's behavior.
- ✓ Name three environmental factors that may affect children's behavior.
- ✓ List three ways you can influence the development of social behavior.

Resources

Resource

Education.com – Environmental Influences on Young Children’s Behavior by T.J. Zirpoli – Pearson
<http://www.education.com/reference/article/environmental-influence-children-behavior/>

References

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Module 5-Section A Worksheet

Name three hereditary factors that may affect children's behavior.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Name three environmental factors that may affect children's behavior.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

List three ways you can influence the development of social behaviors.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____