



The Family Place Parent Child Center

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What Parents Don't Know About Their Children

“What Grown-Ups Understand About Child Development: A National Benchmark Survey”, measured the child development knowledge of 3,000 adults and parents. Secondly it examined what the general public thinks about selected policies that impact children and families. The results raise questions about what Americans know about raising emotionally, intellectually and socially healthy children.

“This lack of accurate child development information among adults has very real implications for American society,” said Dr. Kyle Pruett, M.D., clinical professor of psychiatry at the Yale University Child Study Center, and president of ZERO TO THREE. “We’re potentially raising overly aggressive children who react to situations with intimidation and bullying, instead of cooperation and understanding; children who won’t be able to tolerate frustration, wait their turn or respect the needs of others”. The survey results show that adults need more information about discipline, spoiling, and expectations of young children. (survey sponsored by CIVITAS, ZERO TO THREE, and BRIO)



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form of punishment, they also understand that this can lead to children acting more aggressively, and that it will not lead to better self-control”.

The child development research reminds us that the goal of discipline is to help children build their own self-control, not to have them blindly obey adult commands. Furthermore, an important distinction is made between discipline and punishment. Children are disciplined when they are shown positive alternatives rather than just told no; they see how their actions affect others; good behavior is rewarded; and adults establish fair, simple rules and enforce them consistently. On the other hand, children are punished when their behavior is controlled through fear; their feelings are not respected; they behave to avoid a penalty or get a bribe; the adult tells the child only what not to do.

Children who are disciplined...learn to share and cooperate; are better able to handle their own anger; are more self-disciplined; and feel successful and in control of themselves. Children who are punished...feel humiliated; hide their mistakes; tend to be angry and aggressive; fail to develop control of themselves.

Most Parents Condone Spanking; Child Development Research Doesn't

The effects of spanking are also confusing to most parents. According to the survey results:

- 61% of parents of young children condone spanking as a “regular form of punishment” for young children, while research indicates it’s detrimental to a child’s development.
- 37% think spanking is appropriate for children under two years of age.

“These findings are surprising”, said Ron Lally, Ed.D., co-director of the Center for Child and Family Study at West Ed, “given that many parents condone spanking as a regular

Parents Expectations Aren't Always Appropriate

Most American adults, according to the survey, are confused about what should be realistically expected from young children at different ages.

- 51 percent of parents of young children expect a 15-month-old to share her toys, and 26 percent of all adults expect a three-year-old to sit quietly for one hour at a time - both unrealistic expectations, according to experts.
- 26% of all adults, and 23 percent of parents of young children believe that a child as young as six-months will not suffer any long-term effects from witnessing violence. Child development research shows it can

have long-lasting, detrimental effects on a child's social and emotional development and his developing brain.

- 61 % of all adults, and 55 percent of parents with young children, do not know when young babies begin to sense and are affected by the moods of others. This is crucial because child development research shows that if a caregiver is particularly anxious or depressed, it can have a damaging effect on a baby's development.
- 40 % of parents of young children incorrectly believe a 12-month-old who turns the TV on and off repeatedly while her parents are trying to watch it, believe she is "angry and trying to get back at them."
- 72% of parents of young children were unaware that children as young as four months of age, can experience real depression; 51 percent believe children cannot experience depression until they are at

least three years of age. -*This information is from "Zero to Three" and "National Association for the Education of Young Children"*

There is no magic formula for or one-size-fits-all solution to discipline, but it helps to remember that children's behaviors do not occur in a vacuum. Instead, there are five basic questions to ask that may help explain a child's actions. Understanding these and being a reflective rather than reactive parent or caregiver will result in more positive outcomes for both the caregiver and the child, creating an atmosphere that supports and nurtures the child.

Is this a developmental stage?

Many problems that occur in infancy and early childhood appear at the onset of a new developmental stage. Each new phase of development brings challenges for the child and the child's caregivers. For example, body independence in the child's second year and an emerging sense of self elicit a period of negativism.

Feeding and sleeping problems also may occur during developmental transitions, and it helps if caregivers are extra patient and loving in their responses. It's best to give a child choices, use humor, and be firm but supportive. Parents will find this period good practice for the teenage years when many of the same issues of independence emerge again on a more complex scale.

Is this an individual or temperament difference?

Not all children of a certain age act the same way. These individual differences may be rooted in a variety of causes. Biological factors such as visual impairments, tactile sensitivities, auditory and speech disorders, or motor disabilities

may affect a child's behavior.

Temperament qualities such as shyness, adaptability, moodiness, or inflexibility also may account for many of the differences in children's (and adults') behaviors. Adults who learn more about their own temperament traits are better able to recognize those situations that result from conflict of two different attitudes toward or approaches to the same behavioral problem.

Is the environment causing the behavior?

Sometimes the setting provokes a behavior that may seem inappropriate. An overcrowded child care setting or the lack of an appropriate number or types of toys can increase aggression or spark jealousy. Look around your home or program setting and evaluate it in light of your child's behaviors. We need to get down on our knees and see the environment from a child's viewpoint. continued inside, page 2

Has the child not learned a skill needed for a new situation?

Perhaps this is the first time a three-year-old without siblings has been asked to share a toy or treasured object. Developmentally he has not had the experience of sharing, so it is up to you to calmly explain to the child how the other children will react. Patience and repeating the message over and over again are necessary. Children rarely learn or master a desired response on the first try.

Does the child have an unmet emotional need?

Emotional needs that are unmet are the most difficult cause of behavior to interpret. In these situations, the child's behavior has a particularly driven quality about it and occurs with regular frequency in all settings.

The child who continually harms himself or other children should be stopped and may need an assessment by a trained professional. Careful observation, thoughtful reflection, and communication between parents and teachers who respond with quiet firmness and patience can be critical to the future emotional health of children with emotional needs.

If a child needs, for example, extra love and attention, we don't want to withhold that from her but rather find ways for validating and acknowledging the child during the school day, encouraging participation in circle activities, and acknowledging empathetic behavior toward others.- *This release was adapted from an article by Judy Reinsbergentitled "Understanding Young Children's Behavior" that appeared in the July 1999 issue of Young Children. The author is an instructor at California's Diablo Valley College in Pleasant Hill and Solano Community College in Suisun City.-My KidSource 02/01*

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