

Behaviour development and guidance for infants and toddlers

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Margaret Carter works in a private practice as a behaviour change specialist based in Brisbane, Queensland. As a Behaviour Change Specialist she works with individuals and groups to help break patterns of dysfunctional behaviour, or to encourage patterns of behaviour which will help those groups or individuals to function more effectively.

She works as a consultant, program designer, coach, mentor, teacher, developer and presenter of professional development material on a regular basis. She regularly conducts custom made professional development training programs for schools, kindergartens, outside school hours care, family day care, long day care and emergency in home care.

Every twelve months Margaret develops a public professional development training calendar. Topics covered during the twelve months include self care, behaviour development and management, conflict resolution for children, emotion management for children and for adults, bullying behaviours, change and change management, parenting for today's child, and grief and loss in childhood.

Caring for Infants and Toddlers

More than any other time of life, the quality of care children receive as infants and toddlers can make a profound and long-lasting difference to the child. High quality care enhances children's learning and promotes healthy development.

HINT: Provide responsive and supportive care.

How Young Children Learn

We need to have a sound grasp of how young children learn. They learn through:

- observation
- real-life experiences
- social interaction
- play.

Infants and toddlers learn through their own experiences, trial and error, repetition, imitation, and identification. Adults guide and encourage this learning and development by ensuring the environment is safe and emotionally supportive. Interaction with the environment is vital for whole brain development.

Young children's learning experiences need to include pleasure, enjoyment, freedom, active engagement and arousal without stress. Babies and toddlers are especially vulnerable to adversity because they are less able to cope actively with

stress and discomfort. Brain Research indicates that prolonged high stress is destructive to learning in the child's first ten years.

HINT: Early experiences impact on the brain and affect the way the brain is wired.

According to Vygotsky, play is extremely important in children's development. He advocates that:

- Play creates the child's zone of proximal development. In a play context, a child can control behaviour such as time on task before being able to control that behaviour in another setting.
- Play facilitates the separation of thought from actions and objects. In play, children can pretend that a block is a tree; this separation of object from meaning is critical to the development of abstract thinking.
- Play facilitates the development of self-regulation. In developing self-regulation, children in play are required to match behaviour with role, a role they have accepted.

The more a child generates ideas in play and informal settings the more fluent s/he will be in generating solutions to the real and important problems of life (Fisher 1990 pp. 44-45).

HINT: Play stimulates the development of complex brain networks.



Feature Articles

Infants and toddlers generally behave according to how they see themselves. How they see themselves is significantly influenced by their growing knowledge of how to be acceptable to us. Infants and toddlers need to be accepted by the important people in their lives.

A baby whose signals are responded to promptly and appropriately builds up a sense of competence – a confidence that he can go through his own activity, control what happens to him – and this confidence carries over to his transactions with his physical environment (Ainsworth and Bell 1974).

HINT: A baby's sense of self and of her ability to make things happen grows daily in the context of loving relationships with a few caring adults.

The 12-18 month period is a time when toddlers continue developing their capabilities as they learn self control. Part of this learning focuses on learning about controlling their impulse behaviour if this behaviour is not okay to the social context.

Erikson's Eight Stages of Development (1956);
Mildred Parten's Stages of Play (1933)

- Teach the toddler strategies to use in frustrating situations — language in the form of words, gestures, asking for help, etc.
- Be a social coach. For example, 'You may not take the disc from Bob, but you may tell him, "I want my turn now." ' or 'Ted, you can't hit Max, but you can tell him that you don't like it when he takes your toy.'
- Observe environmental factors to anticipate when a particular child is having (or about to have) a social conflict.
- Emphasize that you still like or love the toddler even though you do not like the way she is choosing to behave.

HINT: Babies and toddlers are social beings. They benefit from positive, developmentally supportive behaviour guidance.

Around 18 months of age, toddlers begin displaying signs that they are developing an awareness of self. Claiming possession of toys and other objects is a way for toddlers to express their growing independence, competence and autonomy. Once toddlers have developed a sense

of security in knowing what is and is not theirs, they begin to develop a willingness to consider sharing with others.

Self control continues to develop with time and brain maturation and, in particular, development of the frontal lobes of the brain. To promote and nurture this stage of the child's development the adult needs to:

- Know at what stage — socially and emotionally — of development the child is at.
- Adjust environment according to social emotional development stages
- Know at what stage of play the child is at: unoccupied play, onlooker play, solitary play, parallel play, associative play or cooperative play.
- Provide ongoing scaffolding, coaching and guidance in living peacefully and safely together.
- Initiate games of sharing and turn taking
- Have equipment and materials available in greater quantities.
- Model and teach appropriate behaviours across contexts.
- Be attentive to play and social interactions. Intervene if and where appropriate.
- Have a private place for cherished toys that can be used without fear of others taking them.
- Promote language and thinking.

HINT: Provide learning activities that address social and emotional development in a balanced, integrated manner.

Two-year-olds continue to be highly involved with their emerging sense of self, and defining themselves over and over with the word 'Mine!' They are still most interested in pleasing themselves and do not yet fully comprehend another child's perspective. It is not unusual for toddlers of this age to be verbally and physically aggressive in their play with objects and peers.

Two-three-year-olds continue to learn about developing their emotions, recognizing their emotions, connecting emotions to their behaviour

Toddlers must be taught to express themselves verbally, to learn how to express their feelings and respond to them. Adults can assist in this process by:



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- Knowing at what stage — socially and emotionally—of development the child is at.
- Adjusting the environment according to social emotional development stages.
- Knowing at what stage of play the child is operating at: unoccupied play, onlooker play, solitary play, parallel play, associative play or cooperative play.
- Being a trained observer.
- Supporting toddlers identify their feelings and name them with words such as angry, upset, happy, and sad.
- Helping toddlers connect their feelings with their actions, for example, 'Meg, it is not okay to hit Ruby. I see you are mad. It is okay to be mad, but it is not okay to hit.'
- Being a social bridge, 'When Sam is finished, you can have it.' Then turn to Sam and say, 'It will be David's turn next.'
- Teaching toddlers 'what to do when' strategies.
- Coaching toddlers as they re-join the social setting
- Promoting language and flexible thinking. .

Erikson's Eight Stages of Development (1956);
Mildred Parten's Stages of Play (1933)

HINT: Toddlers need opportunities to and assistance with resolving conflicts.

Environments for Infants

- Warm affective relationship with child
- Sensitivity, responsiveness and imitation
- Attentiveness and responsiveness
- Reassurances
- Praise
- Approval
- Love
- Patience and understanding
- Availability
- Acceptance and cooperation with infant
- Feelings of high regard for child
- Engagement with and attentiveness to child
- Physical contact – touching, cuddling
- Smiling
- Talking – short simple sentences or phrases
- Talking during routine care about objects, positions, or actions that are immediately observable

- Wait for a physical response to key phrases for babies who don't talk yet
- Slow down or discontinue interactions if the infant looks away for a few seconds or cries
- Eye contact
- Following children's leads
- Equipment that encourages infants to explore the environment
- Predictability and consistency of adult.

Adults who are responsive and sensitive — that is, who respond consistently and appropriately to the child's social bids and initiate interactions geared to the child's capacities, intentions, moods, goals, and developmental level — are most likely to nurture secure children (Belsky, Rovine, and Taylor, 1984).

Environments for Toddlers

- Child focuses activities providing a variety of interesting and challenging tasks.
- Enough adult support so that children have time in and away from group settings.
- Consistent staffing for relationship building.
- Behaviour specific feedback.
- Repeat and expand toddler utterances.
- Different play spaces to enable play alone and shared play spaces.
- Uncluttered space to move around.
- Private and comfortable play and rest spaces.
- Time for different types of play.
- Equipment that can and cannot be used with cooperation.
- Duplicate play equipment.
- Opportunities to learn to appreciate each other's ideas.
- Appreciation of nature and beauty is cultivated.
- Adults who work as feeling detectives.
- Relaxation strategies.
- Emotional literacy focus.

Environments for Preschoolers

- Outdoor and indoor play spaces that invite curiosity.
- Challenging and stimulating programs that meet the needs of individual children.
- Culturally inclusive contexts
- Sensitive adult facilitators who coach and encourage children to 'have a go', try new



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things, persist, get along with others, plan their time.

- Equipment that invites group play and sharing.
- Opportunities for carrying out and completing tasks independently and interdependently.
- Dramatic play experiences.
- Ample time – schedules need to be flexible enough to enable children to pursue and complete their self-directed adventures.
- Opportunities to learn to appreciate each other.
- Social problem solving opportunities.
- Legitimate opportunities to express and learn more about own and others emotions.
- Relaxation techniques.
- Opportunities for children to continue learning to know and accept themselves.

HINT: Children learn through active involvement within their environments. Adults creating these environments need to be informed by knowledge of child development.

Role of Adult

The adult's role in behaviour development and guidance with children birth – three years is as follows:

- Demonstrate warmth, respect, acceptance, authenticity and empathy.
- Understand the stages of development.
- Be culturally aware.
- Take into account the temperament and experiences of all the children.
- Make every child the object of daily focused attention.
- Observe children's nonverbal behaviour and respond appropriately.
- Consider children's needs.
- Keep pace with the changing needs of children as they mature.
- Teach behaviours expected.
- Be consistent with these expectations.
- Teach children responsibility for behaviour choices.
- Be a social coach.
- Provide feedback specific to behaviour.
- Interfere as little as possible.

- Avoid make alike activities.
- Use lots of self-expressive materials.
- Foster an appreciation of beauty.
- Promote curiosity, thinking and the use of imagination.
- Focus on the process not the product.
- Allow plenty of time and opportunity for child to use materials.
- Provide enough of whatever the children are using.
- Provide variety in material.
- Provide open-ended resources.
- Be responsive to needs, situations and circumstances.
- Establish positive verbal environments.
- Create meaningful and relevant environments.
- Demonstrate meaning through practical applications.
- Keep safety in mind when supervising.
- Ensure tasks are inclusive – attainable by all children.
- Limit the frequency and duration of adult-adult conversations.
- Build relaxation breaks into the environment.
- Teach children specific relaxation techniques.
- Cater for children's preferred learning style (e.g. Howard Gardner proposes there are at least eight different learning styles: verbal, logical, kinesthetic, spatial, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalistic).
- Document children's learning and experiences (e.g. photo sequences, transcripts, learning stories).
- Plan with children.

HINT: Adults need to develop flexible, responsive programs of learning that intentionally engage children's curiosity, evolving competencies and capabilities.

References

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