Raising Happy Achieving Children in the New Millennium

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Raising happy achieving children is a tall order. The recipe is complicated. The ingredients are awesomely many! Some of the ingredients involve educators and the training of high quality caregivers and teachers. Some of the recipe requirements involve political advocacy for the poor. Some ingredients are challenging—such as how to provide sexual information and information about unwanted pregnancies and AIDS and how to provide internship opportunities for practicing excellent caregiving within a school model childcare—for teens who need clear and helpful knowledge and skills. These recipe requirements mean changes in offering school courses in junior high and senior high school. Required courses in positive communication techniques and required courses in family life education are as urgent as studying the invasions of Ghenghis Khan or the history of the Norman invasion in England and its effect on enriching the vocabulary of the English language.

Changes in the way education is offered for medical, nursing, and legal professionals to include more knowledge about children's interests and needs must also be part of the complex societal recipe to support children's flourishing. Thus, part of the recipe lies in enhancing the training of obstetricians and nurses caring for pregnant first time parents. Sensitivity training and knowledge, in dealing with birthing situations for single parents and high-risk teens, are important for professionals involved with childbirth. They will be more likely then to provide nurturance to promote early bonding with the newborn and to support breast feeding for those who may be physically able to nurse but have no clue as to how or why.

Another political ingredient in this recipe will mean much wider monetary support for home visitation personnel who work with at-risk pregnant women PRIOR to the birth of the baby. Honig and Morin's (2000) research has shown that if high-risk teens who dropped out of an intensive home visitation program had about 7 home visits, then they still had much lower rates of confirmed neglect/abuse several years later. These rates were actually comparable to rates for high risk teen moms who stayed in program for 18 to 24 months regardless of whether program teens' entry was prebirth or postbirth. High risk teens who started program after the birth of the baby and then dropped out had markedly higher confirmed abuse/neglect rates.

LOVING, KNOWLEDGEABLE, SKILLED CAREGIVERS: THE PRICELESS INGREDIENT

The priceless ingredient in the recipe for a happy achieving child is a strong and loving family foundation and highly competent caregivers in group care. Parents are young children's most precious resource. No other caregiver and no material resources can take the place of parents who genuinely treasure their children and are deeply
committed to nourish their children’s growth and optimal development. The dream of every family is a child who is able to grow up independent yet lovingly related to family and achieving work success and satisfaction in life. We still cannot improve on this formula of the old master, Sigmund Freud!

After their needs for food and comforting, for protection from distress and from danger are taken care of, young children most need a special person whom they know in their deepest self is their loving protector, teacher, and friend. This fundamental security base, this unpaid worker who puts in countless overtime hours without pay and often without much recognition from society, is a PARENT. Thus, this presentation will focus particularly on positive parental ingredients for raising happy achieving children.

Many excellent enrichment programs such as Head Start, Even Start, HIPPY, and Parent Child Development Centers actively work to enlist parental help in young children’s learning. Yet sometimes programs that attempt to work with low-income, low education parents, or very young parents or upper class dual career busy parents, report frustrations they were not prepared to cope with. Often the program staff goal is to assist new parents in positive ways to deepen the love relationship with a child, become primary educators of their preschoolers and to encourage parents to work actively in partnership with child care providers. Yet staff report low turnout for meetings, missed appointments for home visits, and lack of parent attention to program messages.

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What are the sources of difficulties? Part of the problem lies in the stressful lives of parents with limited time and often with aggravating lack of means of transportation to program sites. Some families may not have learned in their own families of origin the ability to empathize with child neediness. Struggling to cope with their own adult problems, some parents are not even aware of how important early consistent tender nurturing is in order to promote early child emotional attachment to parents. Chaos, drug abuse, spousal or partner abuse, depression and current lack of family supports account for some of the frustrations for families and for program staff. The deep reverberations of what Fraiberg (1980) calls “ghosts in the nursery”—angers, jealousies, resentments over being rejected or unloved or terrorized in own’s own childhood—

intrude in dangerous ways into the parent’s current relationship with a young child. Some staff frustrations stem from lack of access to technical skills, such a specific therapeutic techniques, book reading techniques, anger management skills, etc. on the part of staff. Sometimes staff is strong on wishing to do good but not trained thoroughly enough in sensitivity to client needs nor community mores. This can lead, for example, to family outreach workers becoming discouraged with parents and gradually working more and more directly with the child even though the program goals were to empower parents to become their children’s most special enrichment person.

Part of the problem also results when service providers lack materials for parents with low literacy skills or for immigrant parents from different culture groups. Programs need to be proactive and create lending libraries that contain both videos (on infant massage and well-baby care, for example) and materials written in easy to read words or in a family’s native language. Many publications available for encouraging optimal parenting are geared toward families with more resources, higher literacy, and fewer stresses.

Family support and information programs for parents need to brainstorm creatively to find ways to engage parents with their children. For example, a home visiting program can provide a weekly xeroxed “How to play the game” sheet with suggestions for varying an interactive learning game if a child needs more help OR, if a child needs more challenge (Honig, 1982b). And of course, staff needs to affirm steadily for parents how priceless is their role in supporting their children’s emotional and intellectual learning.

PARENTS AND TEACHERS BUILD CHILD SELF ESTEEM

A caring adult committed to children’s secure well-being is a person every society should honor or cherish. There could not be enough “awards” or medals for such special persons! Responsive caregivers permit hope that the fabric of society will not be rent with violence, alienation, school dropouts, suicides, drug abuse, and other tragic attempts by youngsters attempting to deaden their personal pain or to carve out a feeling of power. Watch the news films about kids in high school, for example. So many “in” youngsters in school cliques behave in ruthless ridiculing ways. Girls who aren’t considered “sexy” or “beautiful” are called unkind names and treated with contempt socially. Boys who are shy or intellectual are labelled “nerds”. Teachers need specialized training in working on cutting out bullying in classrooms, corridors, rest rooms and playing fields! In Norway, thanks to the work of Olweus on the noxious effects of school bullying, teachers are trained to address this issue and are responsible for proactive han-
dling of bullying. Teaching as a profession needs more respect from society, and more in-depth training on how to enhance emotional intelligence as well as intellectual intelligence and knowledge! Teaching staff in childcare has very high turnover each year. Many caregivers earning minimum wage also have minimum training. We need to enhance the respect for quality caregiving. We need to support campaigns for worth wages! An even more intriguing question is how to help parents to see how important a quality child care provider in each child’s life—not as paid servant but as a concerned, talented, hardworking extra “parenting” person in that young child’s life.

Children need parents who provide for them as the parents in the fairy tale of the Three Bears, where the porridge was not too hot and not too cold, but just right!

Because of the hazards of changing providers and inconsistent care, we must still emphasize that quality parenting is the secret indispensable ingredient to provide the inner core of self-love and self-esteem that sustains each growing child. As Erik Erikson taught us long ago, this consistent core of cherishing permits that child in turn to grow up to care for others in ways that sustain family and community. As a young one is given unto, so does that little one grow up learning how to become a giver. Such caring gives inner courage to cope with problems so that the child can both lead a productive personal life as well as contribute to society (Honig, 1982a). Parents are the mirror wherein young children find their inner true selves reflected as either essentially lovable or sadly unworthy (Briggs, 1975).

In a women’s dress store, a toddler wandered among the clothes. As she walked around, babbling “Da” and touching clothing, the mother called out over and over either “No! No! Don’t touch!” Mostly she kept saying “I don’t want you. I don’t want you!” The toddler looked bewildered and started to cry. “It must feel frustrating to be among all these clothes racks while the grown ups are busy shopping” I remarked sympathetically to the mother. “Yeah, I’ve been frustrated with her every minute since she’s born!” replied the mother as she reluctantly picked up the tiny tot and continued down the store aisle.

Just giving birth to a child is not the same as parenting! Bettelheim (1987) and Winnicott (1987), wise psychia-

trists, remind us, however, the young children do not need perfect parents to thrive. They will do very well with a “good enough parent”. There is no “How-to” book that works for every child in every life situation.

Parents with profound good will for their children remember that cherishing does not mean smothering or intrusiveness.

A teen mother was waiting in the well-baby clinic for the pediatrician to see her child. The toddler, playing with a ring stack set (provided with other toys by a caring nursing staff in a play corner in the waiting room) put the rings on haphazardly. “That’s not how you do it”, the mom remarked with contempt. She snatched the ring stack from her child and put the rings on in graduated sizes. “There, that’s the right way”, she announced triumphantly as she handed back the toy to her child. The toddler took the ring stack, and turned it upside down as she let all the rings tumble in disarray to the floor. She gave her mother an angry look and walked silently away from her.

Insightful adults understand developmental stages. They understand that wanting a child to do well cannot be forced but must be supported. They let children have the leisure to try toys on their own. They don’t constantly intrude with trying to force the child’s attention. They lure kids to new experiences. But they do not dominate the play situation. Rather they are responsive to children’s cues, to children’s curiosity, to children’s explorations when the child seems calm and engrossed in play. If a toy seems too frustrating, they may move in quietly to provide a bit of unobtrusive support (such as steadying the elbow of a child trying to stack boxes), a quiet suggestion, a turning of a puzzle piece so that the child can better notice where it goes. TEMPO is an important skill in childrearing and in lovemaking! We need to talk more about tempo just as we need to address power issues more in society, with respect to marriages and childrearing as well as in business and politics!

Keeping the see-saw of daily life from bumping down too hard for some children is a major challenge!

Havighurst, a half-century ago, wrote about the developmental tasks of childhood. As a theorist he may be out of fashion nowadays. But he observed wisely that many adults need to become more aware emotionally that a
young child first needs to be allowed to be dependent and kept safe in order to grow up brave enough to become independent and separate from the parents. Youth who feel they must belong to a gang, must cut classes and smoke and drink to be “cool” and grownup, who must act violent with a sex partner are NOT independent persons. They are acting out ancient wounds and scenarios. Their immature and scary actions show how much they lack skills for being independent, contributing helpful adults in society. As one adult remarked quietly to me about her teen years:

I cut out emotionally. My parents were both quarreling a lot. They were so busy with their careers. They did not seem to have time really to talk with me or to see that their intellectual interest were not the same as my interests in music and sports. So I gave up caring about their world. I turned to peers and to drugs so my friends became my “family” support. It took me years to become my own person.

Parents and teachers together need to notice how special and individual each child is in a family. Children do not have the same temperament or wishes or abilities as a parent or as another youngster. A child who is very shy may be quite unlike a gregarious younger sibling. Children need parents who provide for them as the parents in the fairy tale of the Three Bears, where the porridge was not too hot and not too cold, but just right!

Too Much Enmeshment or Too Much Isolation Emotionally Withers The Souls of Young Children

What a strange job parenting is! We cherish and protect, worry over sniffles, blow noses, tie shoelaces, read stories, help with homework, patiently teach moral values and courtesies toward others (Lickona, 1983). Yet we do the job of parenting so that children can grow up to make their own choices and be able to live calmly and effectively on their own without parental help. If the job of parenting is done well, it is done so that parents work themselves OUT of a job!

Flexibility and Adaptability Help Caregivers and Parents Survive

Caregiving requirements change with children’s ages and stages. Caregivers who are perceptive will note when to drop the baby talk that so delighted the 10-month-old and truly encouraged her to try words. Now they will use clearly pronounced adult words like “water” rather than “wa-wa” with their toddler whose vocabulary is growing by leaps and bounds. Adults will note that a toddler expresses fierce independence about what he wants, how much he wants and how he wants it right away. They cannot let that child run in the street or go out without clothes on a winter morning! But, they will also note that a No-saying defiant toddler who tries adult patience in the household still needs his thumb or pacifier and definitely needs the reassurance of his parent’s lap when tired, crabby, or coming down with a cold. Parents who are perceptive will note that the five-year-old can feed and dress herself rather well now and can even be allowed to choose clothes to lay out the night before going to kindergarten.

The mystery of growth and development is not steady or predictable. Perceptive caregivers balance firmness with sensible tuning in to a child’s stages and needs. They work hard to figure out where each child is at in each domain in his or her learning career. Some children love tinkering with tools and are good at helping Mom or granddad with a repair job. But they may have many frustrations with reading and math in school work. Ridicule and nagging only increase a child’s smoldering resentment or stubborn refusal to cooperate at home or school. Finding a warm caring tutor and also exploring the community for an excellent vocational high school may open the path to real job satisfaction later in life for this youngster. Adults need to be good noticers and good balancers in order to promote each child’s well being. Keeping the see-saw of daily life from bumping down too hard for some children is a major challenge!

PARENTS AS TEACHERS: TEACHERS AS PARENT SUPPORTERS

Parents and caregivers must both be the emotional teachers of young children. They can teach empathy (sensitivity to feelings—of one’s own and of other persons) and trustfulness; or they can teach mistrust and anger, insensitivity and uncaring.

On the toddler playground, Donny pushed at another boy and snatched his shiny toy auto. Mama came over, kneeled down, held his hands and firmly reminded him of the social rules: “Donny, no pushing or hitting.” The toddler nodded and added tearfully “And no biting and kicking!” Self-control is so hard to learn. But with the help of his mother’s clear and patient teachings, Donny was learning.

Authoritative parents (as opposed to permissive parents or to authoritarian “Do as I say because I say so!” parents) bring up children who are easiest to live with at home and teachers report that they are a pleasure to have in the classroom (Baumrind, 1977). Such parents show genuine interest in their children. They provide firm clear rules and reasons for rules. And they need, of course, to be flexible about rules. A feverish school child may be ex-
cused from family chores. A child just starting a new day-care placement needs more lap time and more tolerance for his crankiness until he feels more secure in the new environment. A teenager who comes home with a really difficult and long set of homework problems feels grateful when a concerned parent offers to take on the teenager’s chore of loading the dishwasher to free up some extra study time that evening. Teach generosity by being generous. Teach kindness by showing kindness.

Thus, every child needs caring adults who will promote emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995). How to be assertive as differentiated from angry and hostile is a challenging emotional task. Children and parents need to focus on how to reframe daily hassles as opportunities to strengthen positive emotional skills, such as giving a peer a chance to explain, being able to articulate well your point of view and trying to see another’s point of view as well; searching for win-win reasonable solutions to social hassles; asking for help in ways that affirm the role of the helper, whether teacher or parents. Some folks believe that the job of teacher and the job of parent are totally different. Those of you who have cared for infants and toddlers know so well that diaper changing, holding a frightened tiny person, feeding, and soothing are intimate ministrations. The roles are indeed blurred when we care for the youngest little persons. Maybe a high school teacher can be sarcastic and put down a student in front of the class. Maybe that student will not feel resentment and anger. Maybe. Sometimes an adolescent with strong family supports achieves ego serenity and resilience and can handle such classroom stresses fairly well. The provider of care for your children is working with a small person whose ego is gradually building. Be sure that all the builders are cooperating, caring and knowledgeable or the structure being built will have troublesome flaws!

**Learning Values**

Parents are also on the frontiers of a child’s learning values in the family. If parents deal their own problems by screaming and lashing out, or being sharply jeering and critical of weaknesses or mistakes made by a family member, then children will model their folks and learn those ways to cope with frustrations. If parents struggle to keep a family organized and functioning, then even though financial resources are limited, if they cherish children through hard times and good, their children will learn courage and caring (Honig, 1982a).

Children’s empathy flows from experiencing their own parent’s empathic response to their early fears and emotional upsets. Research by Yarrow and Zahn-Waxler reveals that during the first two years of life, the parent who shows empathy by soothing a child’s hurt after a scare or a kneebruising fall, and who, in addition, clearly does not allow a child to hurts others as a way of solving social disagreements, will have a socially empathic child who is more likely to tune into and try to help other children who are hurt or scared (Pines, 1979).

If families provide models for punitive and vengeful actions, they need to realize that their children may flaunt over the misfortune of others or else be indifferent to others’ pain. Parents need to become aware of the emotional response that the old master, Sigmund Freud, called “Identification with the aggressor”.

In a rigidly organized household with innumerable rules posted on the refrigerator, the ten-year-old was being punished. She had tried to add her cuddly teddy bear, her comfort object for years, to her school backpack. The parents were angry. The toy animal could have been lost at school or taken by another child. They “punished” the child by having her sit for several hours at an empty dining room table without moving. The five-year-old in the family declared that her older sister “deserved” her punishment and announced that she “did not care” if her sister felt sad.

**Parents Prime the Pump of Learning**

How does a parent become the first, best teacher who ensures the child’s early learning success? Varied are the programs that have been developed to teach parents how best to help their children learn. Some involve parents in groups together. Some programs invite parents as aides into classrooms. Some programs provide Home Visitation in order to promote parenting skills (see Honig, 1979 for an in-depth description of types of parent involvement programs).

Respect for the child is the foundation of good teaching. As parents notice early skills just emerging, they scaffold, support, and lure the child to a slightly more difficult accomplishment, to a slightly more subtle level of understanding, to a somewhat higher and more mature level of skill. I have called this technique “Dancing developmental ladders of learning” (Honig, 1982b). In each area of learning, the parent takes CUES from the child: Is the baby making new babbling sounds? Talk delightedly with a cooing baby. Express genuine interest in what baby seems to be trying to communicate. Turn-taking-talk primes language learning (Honig, 1985a). Does the baby smile when he sees animals? Snuggle together and point to pictures of animals during picture book story time with your little one and be sure to label objects baby points to.

Is your year-old child trying to feed herself? Provide Cheerios on the high chair tray to facilitate thumb and forefinger precise pincer prehension. Is your five-year-old asking questions about where babies come from? Be an askable parent and provide simple, short calm explanations easy for that young child to understand (Gordon,
Is your six-year-old determined to learn to ride a two-wheeler? Be sure that she is skillful with her tricycle; then advance to training wheels.

Facilitate learning by creating easy “steps” upward toward skill mastery. Figure out the prerequisites for success in any area of learning. If a parent provides more footholds on the ladders of learning, children are more likely to succeed as they push upward in their growth toward achievements.

Preparations ahead of time boost the effectiveness of parent efforts to prime new learning, to scaffold opportunities for learning. Provide lots of discarded paper and crayons for children to draw. Keep assorted “beautiful junk” in a special place; empty egg cartons, pine cones collected on a walk, bubble paper from packaging, old greeting cards, and paper towel rolls plus some paste, blunt scissors, and Magic Markers are good ingredients for rainy day art activities.

Every parent needs a large repertoire of [discipline] techniques to use at different ages and stages of a child’s growing up. Not all techniques work all the time with all youngsters!

Take children on small outdoor walks and to parks often. Give them opportunities to learn to swing, climb, balance, and coordinate their bodies with ease and grace. Also, teach them the names of weeds and flowers (dandelions and daisies are great!) growing by the roadside. Encourage children to notice and feel with their fingers the contrasting roughness and smoothness of the bark of different trees, such as a maple and a beech. Delight in the way clouds and sunshine light the land, the way cool air rustles and sways a flower stem, the way the earth smells fresh after a rain.

Express joy! Your own joy in the glories of the natural world sparks in your young child a deep pleasure, awareness, and appreciation for the world’s beauty.

Creativity Turns Living Experiences into Learning Opportunities

Caregivers with limited financial resources need to scout their living space to use every opportunity to turn a household chore or routine into a learning experience. Store-bought toys may be too expensive; but adult creativity transforms every homey experience into a learning adventure (Honig, 1982b; Honig & Brophy, 1996). Laundry time can be used to teach colors, shapes, comparative sizes (of socks and of washcloths and towels), and the names for different materials and garments. Kids will love to feel important as they measure out laundry detergent up to the one-cup line and pour it into a wash tub or machine.

Cooking and baking times are a wonderful opportunity to increase hand dexterity skills in rolling, kneading, shaping, and measuring. And the tastes afterward are an extra reward for the helping youngest.

Grocery shopping is a superb perceptual and language learning experience for young children. Meat, dairy and fruit/vegetable departments give children opportunities to form conceptual categories. Why are peppers and celery and broccoli all in bins near one another? Where would hamburger be found? What items will need refrigeration? Which cartons or cans are heavier than others?

Encourage numerical estimations. As children grow and learn about numbers and letters, many take pride in being able to find a nutritious cereal box by the special letter on the box. They like to help stuff a plastic bag with string beans for supper. Many children by early school age can do estimates; they add up a dollar for this item (rounded off) and three dollars for that item, and so forth, and then come up with a fairly close estimate of how much the groceries will add up to. How proud your child feels. And how much practice in addition such estimates give her!

Teach children about money. People work to earn money. When money is in short supply, a child learns early that food and rent come first. Money, whether in pounds or dollars, for extras such as toys or snacks must be carefully budgeted.

Learning categories and learning gradations (such as little, big, bigger, biggest) are important cognitive tasks of the early years. The real world of shopping, cooking, clean-up times, and yard work provides rich opportunities for learning about number, shape, color, weight, bulk, categories of object, and other cognitive concepts. Re-frame ordinary household experiences. Transform them into potential lesson times.

POSITIVE DISCIPLINE IDEAS: A GIFT FOR EVERY CAREGIVER AND PARENT

All parents, not just parents with limited resources, need help in acquiring discipline techniques beyond the dreary “hit” and “scold” and “go to your room” many folks learned in their families of origin. Every parent needs a large repertoire of techniques to use at different ages and stages of a child’s growing up. Not all techniques work all the time with all youngsters!
Most of the time, a young child is just acting like a child, not thinking in logical sequences, acting in-the-present time rather than planning ahead.

Parents who were raised by being belted or whipped in turn sometimes show powerful urges to use physical punishment. They hated the type of discipline they received but often believe it was justified. They need support to learn more appropriate child management skills. Sometimes young children’s boisterous or overly intrusive games spark a feeling of rage in an adult. Grim and hostile parents are reflecting the anger they felt from adults far back in their own childhoods, when family members, furious with some of their behaviors, punished them harshly and branded them as “bad!”

Research has shown that severe physical punishment (SPP) was the major discipline method of parents whose youngsters ended up convicted of juvenile crimes. And, the worst crimes (as judged by independent professionals) were committed by the youths who had received the most SPP! (Welsh, 1976).

Let us cull from clinicians and researchers useful ideas about positive discipline that parents CAN use in order to raise responsible and cooperative children without instilling fear and deep anger against parental power (Briggs, 1975; Crary, 1990; Gordon, 1975; Honig, 1985b, 1996; Lickona, 1983). For example, the redirection technique helps a parent avoid willful battles with a toddler intent on messing up his big brother’s model airplane. The parent invests a different, appropriate activity, such as wooden train tracks or a puzzle, or a jack-in-the-box, with interest so that the toddler turns toward the new and safer game.

Below are some further ideas to help adults re-think what discipline is about and how to use effective teaching techniques and avoid a punishment perspective.

Positive Attributions

Build up self esteem by generous use of positive attributions (Honig, 1996). Tell children what you admire about their behaviors and interactions.

Anger Management Techniques

Anger management techniques (such as counting to ten, or using words instead of fists) help children achieve self-control (Eastman & Rozen, 1984).

Teach Sharing

During a play group time, if two toddlers are struggling for a toy, supply an additional toy so each can play with a truck or have a supply of blocks. Talk about taking turns as a reasonable way to share a toy. Tell each child you will help with the taking turns by reminding each child in turn when the toy has been played with for an agreed upon number of minutes. Use a back rub and caress to soothe that child who has snatched a toy from another and as well the aggrieved child who is crying. Thus, you teach both the children that gentleness and kindness are necessary and important for each child.

Time Out as “Teach In”

Use time-out sparingly, and as a “teach-in” technique so that children can re-evaluate their inappropriate interactions and choose other ways to get their needs met (Honig, 1996).

Reframe a Problem in Terms of a Developmental Perspective

Adults can take a giant step toward devising new coping skills when they look at certain behaviors in terms of the stage a child is at or the curiosity a child has, or the need the child has to keep moving and exploring. Then certain behaviors, sometimes regarded as “bad” begin to seem just developmentally ordinary, such as a toddler’s joy in jumping off a couch (find him someplace else that is appropriate and safe to jump off) or an infant’s squeezing a banana through her fingers while watching in wonder.

How can a caregiver steer a child into more appropriate ways to experience vigorous body motions or to experience textures and squishy clay?

Be Mindful of the Importance of Practising New Skills

Remember that children have to learn the initial steps for every new learning (and then practice that new skill). This helps an adult be tolerant even of toileting accidents or clumsy spills while a toddler pours juice. Perhaps a two-year-old cannot sit still but needs to run about a lot. He may not have the words for “poop” and “pee” yet. He may get intensely absorbed in his play and forget totally any signals coming from bladder or bowel. Punishing a two-year-old for a toileting accident when that particular child may not be ready to give up diapers for another year shows a lack of awareness of developmental norms for sphincter control. Toilet learning takes several years for some children to master. Male children have higher rates of enuresis. Little boys need particular understanding from parents who want compliance with their toilet training efforts (Honig, 1993).
Develop Realistic Expectations

More realistic expectations of young children’s development supports a better understanding of how and when to discipline, and best of all, how to prevent discipline problems from arising. Expecting a newly cruising-about baby not to touch breakables or garbage in a bag left on a floor is more than the young one is capable of managing (Honig & Wittmer, 1990). Baby proofing a room full of interesting breakable art objects is a wise idea when curiosity is in full bloom. A toddler has little understanding of the difference between a shiny toy OK to play with and a shiny porcelain vase. Quite possibly, parental yelling if a toddler touches a treasured and fragile knick-knack on a coffee table will surely endow that particular item with increasing fascination and interest as a potential play toy.

Remind yourself that no baby, no school child, no parent, no spouse can ever be “perfect”.

After hearing me at a morning public lecture talk about what children need from their folks, a beautiful young teen mom with a nine-month-old child came to me with tears in her eyes. “Dr. Honig, you seem to know so much about little children. Teach me how to make my baby perfect so I won’t have to hit her so much?”

Avoid Hostile Blame

Another danger sign among adults is when they assume that a child is doing unwanted or disapproved actions “on purpose” to displease or act mean to the adult. Babies soak their diapers. Preschoolers love to get all muddy and splash in puddles. They do not “mean” to cause more laundry work for a parent. Beware the dangers of Projecting Evil (a Freudian defense mechanism) onto young children. Parental rage is too often fueled in abuse cases by the adult’s feeling that a small child deliberately set out to “hurt” or “defy” the adult. If we expect that young children have the same thinking skills as adults we will be very mad at some of their actions and “blame” them—for being children! Most of the time, a young child is just acting like a child, not thinking in logical sequences, acting in-the-present time rather than planning ahead. This focused-on-own-needs small person is sometimes messy, sometimes in short supply of inner controls, sometimes needing to dawdle or say “No”. A year-old baby cannot comply perfectly with “No-no”. A young preschooler finds it very hard to sit still comfortably for hours without a toy or books or playmates in a dentist’s waiting room or at a religious ceremony.

Professionals must help parents gain more realistic expectations and understandings of young children’s growth needs. Projecting evil onto children is a danger that regrettably leads to violence and inappropriate punishments rather than behavior guidance to help a youngster gain more mature behaviors.

IMPORTANCE OF THE NEW BRAIN RESEARCH

Apply Insights From the New Brain Research Findings

New brain research reveals that toddlers by 24 months have twice as many brain synapses as adults. Somewhere during the early school years, and by 10 years of age, nature starts to prune away brain connections that have not been wired well by frequent teaching and learning experiences. The motto for rich neural connections is “Use it or lose it”.

It is interesting that in England, compared with the United States, far fewer children are labelled “ADHD” (Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder) and British teachers are more likely to use behavior modification techniques rather than advocate the use of drugs.

Many families do not realize how early they CAN teach their little ones many kinds of lessons. By three weeks, if a baby has been talked to regularly, and a caregiver has waited with loving calmness for baby to respond with cooing throaty vowels, a baby can keep on cooing back in response to the caregivers’ slow delighted talk with the baby held in “en face” position about one foot from the adult’s face. The latest brain research reveals that Parentese (talk with babies using long drawn out vowels, short phrases, and a high pitched voice) is great for wiring in many rich neuron connections in the brain. This news means that to become good “teachers of the brain”, caregivers need to have rich conversations with kids, read picture books frequently, sing songs, and offer their children experiences and adventures such as trips to the zoo, the public library, the supermarket, and local museums.

Figure Out Who Owns A Problem

Decide who owns a particular discipline problem. A teenager who dawdles in the mornings so long that she misses the school bus owns her problem. If a baby tears
plant leaves from a favorite plant left on a low ledge, the parent owns the problem. If a parent expects a child with learning disabilities to do as well in school as an older brother who got high grades, the parent owns the problem. A parent’s strong disapproval rather than support may contribute to possible school failure, and low child self esteem.

Some problems, of course, are owned by both parent and child. Have family meetings where each person can say what is bothering him about a rule, or an interaction, or a discipline in the family. When such meetings let each person have a say honestly about the week’s positives and negatives, then such problems can be identified and hashed out with good will and a desire for reasonable compromise (Gordon, 1975).

Offer Choices

Toddlers who are contrary will often settle more easily into cooperation if offered a choice: “Do you want apple juice or orange juice? Do you want to sleep with your head at this end of the crib or the other end?” (when a tot has trouble setting into nap time). “You go choose two story books that you want me to read to you tonight”. Offering choices often heads off a potential problem of crankiness or non-cooperation.

Think Through Household and Classroom Rules

How clear are your rules? Some children are scared that they will do something “wrong” inevitably because of the long lists of strict rules their folks insist on. Have few and clear house rules and be sure there are good reasons for the rules. Drinking milk is not a “must”. A child can get calcium and Vitamin A from yellow cheese and from yoghurt. But not hurting a sibling IS a must in a family. Make sure young children really understand your rules. Ask a child who is not following a rule of the family to repeat to you what the household rule was. If the child is confused, he may not be aware of his “misbehavior.”

Children have to learn about equity as well as fairness. Equity means taking into account special needs at special times for each person.

Adults get weary but need dogged persistence in explaining rules and the reasons for them over and over, especially for toddlers just learning to share, or children just learning how to balance homework responsibilities with their desire to rush out to play after school. “Don’t need to wash my hands for supper ‘cause they are clean” may mean that the preschooler needs to learn more about germs and the importance of keeping safe from sickness.

Do Not Ignore When Children Harm Others

Ignoring misbehavior only works for minor infractions. For example, if two children are verbally fussing or arguing, they may well be able to settle by themselves who gets to pull the wagon with blocks first. Aggression that is ignored will often escalate; it will not go away. If a child hits or kicks another, and the adult ignores this, the undesirable actions will not decrease but continue. Children then assume that the adult thinks hurting another child is allowed. Be firm about not allowing children to hurt others; but express that firmness without modeling physical hurt yourself. Talk so your child will listen; and be sure to listen so your child will open up to you (Faber & Mazlish, 1980).

Respect Each Child As A Person

Every person, big or little has a viewpoint and feelings of his or her own. A child is not personal property like furniture! Don’t make comparisons between kids that make one child feel unloved, unpretty, or untalented compared with another. Screaming at or cursing a child, telling him he is rotten—these behaviors reflect parental anger and anguish, but in no way show that the adult remembers that this little child is a person and deserves to be treated with courtesy even when being disciplined.

Teach To Each Child’s Temperament Style

Respect also means that the adult needs to tune into a child’s personality style and cluster of temperature traits. Children differ in their threshold of tolerance for distress. They differ in whether they approach or avoid the NEW—whether babysitters or foods or an unknown visiting relative.

Children may be impulsive or quietly reflective. Some are very active, always on the go. Others are quieter. Perceptive parents do not lump all children together. They notice the small differences in mood, in shyness or worrying, in adaptability or rigidity among their children and they are generous in tailoring their demands for more mature behaviors to the temperaments and abilities of each UNIQUE child. It is interesting that in England, compared with the United States, far fewer children are labelled “ADHD” (Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder) and British teachers are more likely to use be-
havior modification techniques rather than advocate the use of drugs.

Is a child shy and slow to warm up to new events, people and experiences? Is a child triggery and intense in responding to frustrations? Is a child’s mood mostly upbeat and does the child bounce back fairly quickly from upsets? Tuning into temperament helps you head off potential tantrums and gives you better clues to guide your child into more peaceful ways of interacting with others (Honig, 1997).

Break Up Tasks Into Manageable Parts

Nobody likes being dictated to. When we give a vague order such as “Go clean up your messy room” a child may have no clear idea how and where to begin. But he sure feels that he cannot succeed and he may grumble and show morose resentment of his folks. Suggest smaller parts of this big task so that the child realizes what has to be done specifically. If you break the task down into manageable bits (put clothes in the hamper, stack books on the shelves, put away toy trucks and cars into the toybox) then a child feels more hopeful about being able to carry out small portions of a task that seemed initially so huge and vague.

Find Out How A Child Reasons When He Or She Misbehaves

When children seem unreasonable in their requests, try to require reasons. Sometimes young children give amusing reasons, such as “I should get four cookies because I am four.” “I should go first because I am bigger.” As children grow, let them know that you expect them to think about their actions and to think through reasons for how they are choosing to act.

Children’s acting out gives a strong message that they have “empty” insides and deep needs for adult acceptance and caring.

Adults have to help young children actively learn how to reason and to think causally and sequentially. By asking children for reasons without putting them down, we encourage them to think more clearly: “Can you think of a different idea to get Bobby to let you hold his pet puppy?” “Can you think why Grandpa asked you to hold his hand before crossing this wide avenue?” “Can I get dinner ready and read to you at the same time? I can find time to read to you after I have all the food cooking on the stove?” Children learn “polar opposites”, such as “before” and “after” “same” and “different” more easily when they are actively utilized in real life discipline situations.

Offer Appropriate Incentives

If your school-age child wants you to take him to the park to play with some friends later in the day, think out loud together (Camp & Bash, 1985). He can finish his homework first and read his little brother a picture book story while you get dinner ready early so that you can then take the time off to go to the park with the children. “After you clean up your room we can play a game of checkers.” “If you can take turns with Tanisha playing with the new dump truck or if you can figure out a way to play together, then you can have more play dates with her.” This technique is sometimes called “Grandma’s Rule.” That is, a low preferred activity, such as cleaning up, is followed by a highly preferred activity, such as a privilege or a treat. This timing pattern is more likely to result in an increase in the low-preferred activity. Unfortunately, many parents switch the timing. “Honey, be sure to do your homework after you come back from playing soccer!” is far less likely to result in completed homework.

Teach Ideas of Fairness

Introduce the language of fairness into your talks with children in their play with peers or siblings: “Each child needs to get a turn. Every child in the game needs to play by the same rules. Games will end up in fighting and they will not be fun if children do not follow the rules.” Still, fairness may not always work. If one child has disabilities or is ill, then that child may need special attention and care. Children have to learn about equity as well as fairness. Equity means taking into account special needs at special times for each person.

Fantasy and Truth are Fuzzy Ideas For Preschoolers

Children have such strong longings and they often believe sincerely and strongly in the reality of fantasy characters, such as Ninja Turtles or He-Man. They sometimes have trouble distinguishing reality from their own wishes. A six-year old reported enthusiastically that she was a terrific swimmer, when she could barely take a few strokes in the water. In Menotti’s Christmas opera about the three Wise Men, “Amahl and the night visitors”, the boy Amahl tells his mother excitedly that he has seen a star with a tail as long as the sky. Parents may need to ask their children: “Is that a true-true story or a true-false
one?” Do not be quick to brand a child as a “liar” when she makes up a fanciful tale or declares her imaginary playmate is sitting on the couch just where visiting Uncle Jim is about to seat himself. Remember how vivid children's imaginations are. Many young children are scared of “monsters” under the bed or in the closet. Many still blend fantasy and reality in ways adults find difficult to imagine!

Some make-believe tall tales of children represent deep longings. If your child pretends to others that she has a fabulously rich uncle who has promised her a pony, you may want to spend more real time doing loving activities together to help your youngster feel more at peace with the real world.

Be A Good Gatekeeper with TV

Be careful and judicious in the use of television. Some programs are prosocial. They give messages about how to handle impulsiveness or mean or mad feelings. Other television programs aimed at youngsters are incubators for teaching violent means of solving social problems. The cartoons are colorful. The animation is awesome. But the messages are pernicious. Sending kids to the television as a babysitter constantly is like using a narcotic to keep a child still. Enjoy activities, even peeling green peas or baking bread, or stripping the bed—together! Caring adults are good gatekeepers for choosing nourishing foods instead of junk food for children. Adults also need to be good gatekeepers for choosing programs that support self-reflectivity, positive solutions to social problems, and mistrust of easy or violent solutions. For example, in the United States there have recently been all too many violent solutions to ostracism and feelings of social rejection in schools with children shooting other children. Television programs with the Aardvark Arthur, the Teletubbies characters, Mr. Roger’s Neighborhood neighbors, and the dragons in Dragon Tales all promote positive messages in solving social problems or personal issues. Be sure you are a good gatekeeper for television. Don’t nag. Do arrange viewing situations, whether programs or videos or for positive learning.

Try To Figure Out What Is Worrying or Angering A Child

Anger, jealousy, resentment, and fear lead to acting out and misbehavior. Understanding your child’s negative emotions may help you figure out how to approach and help your child.

Be careful about deciding what “causes” angry actions or misbehavior. Some families think a child should know right from wrong long before a child’s thinking skills are well developed. Some children who were drug addicted in the womb show unmotivated and sudden aggressive actions, such as coming up behind an adult and biting the leg hard. Some children struggle with subtle thinking or perceptual deficits, a legacy from alcohol or drug addiction before they were born.

Blaming the Other Parent is Not a Useful Discipline Technique

Some folks blame the other parent. They say “The child gets his bad temper from his father. It’s in his genes.” Blaming the other parent for a child’s troubling behaviors is guaranteed not to bring peace and good feelings in a family.

Use Victim-Centered Discipline Talk

Help children understand how others feel if they are attacked or hurt. Describe in vivid short sentences how a punch, a nasty word, a bite, a sneering remark hurts another’s body and feelings. Galvanize your child to feel how it would be if the hurt had been done to him or her. Be firm in not accepting hurting as a means for your child to solve social conflicts. We do not shame children. They are not bad because they have a toileting accident sometimes or clumsily spill juice when they are toddlers. But if a child hurts another deliberately during the preschool years, we need to summon Ericksonian guilt. A child who understands how she would feel if someone hurt her or how he would feel if someone was mean to him is ready for you to lay your discipline talk on thick! Combine loving kindness with victim-centered discipline talk so that gradually the child comes to understand how kind ways help ease social difficulties far more than hurting ways. With your help, children learn inner self-control.

Use Empathic Listening

“Reflective Listening”, sometimes called “Active listening” to the child’s emotional message of aggravation, is a powerful tool that communicates an important message to your child: “My parent cares about me. My feelings are important to my folks. My parents want to help me figure out how to resolve my troubles rather than preaching at me or just getting angry.” Simple “door-openers” help children open up and pour out their troubles. Try: “Looks like you had a rough day today, honey” (Gordon, 1975).

As you listen to a child’s aggravations and woes with a peer or a parent or a teacher, try to reflect back to the child as best you can the genuine feelings you catch when he acts troubled or upset. Ridicule, put-downs, impatience—these are the swords that drive deep into children’s hearts to make them feel that adults do not truly care about their feelings. Listen to your child’s miseries. Listen and try to express your empathy with the child’s upset feelings even when you do not agree with the scenario or think she or he is being childish.
Suppose Ricky is sad because his favorite friend now prefers a neighbor child as playmate and Ricky feels he has no one to play with. This problem seems as serious to a preschooler as adult problems seem to a parent. A teenage girl’s worries about her weight or her popularity seem overblown to a parent, but desperately important to that girl. Don’t suffer with her. Empathize and try to listen in a caring and supportive way.

**Show Genuine Interest in Each Child**

Be available and truly interested in talking with children in your care. Give them your full attention. Children hunger so deeply for personal attention. If adults are too involved in their own lives and needs, children express this emptiness in a variety of ways. They may turn away from parents and run with gangs of peers. They will sometimes steal coins out of parents’ pockets. Sometimes they fight terribly with siblings or classmates. Children’s acting out gives a strong message that they have “empty” insides and deep needs for adult acceptance and caring. Children have deep emotional hunger for focused adult attention and emotional acceptance. Unconditional acceptance of each person heals the soul. Can you think of a person in your own life who gave you that precious gift? Hopefully, a parent, a teacher, a spouse, a childcare provider, a religious leader in your faith community. And this gift makes a profound difference in healing past hurts.

**Help Children Consider the Consequences of Their Actions**

Many a youngster has never thought through exactly what will happen if he hits Johnny or tears up his big brother’s homework. It is really important for parents to probe and ask a lot: “What do think will happen next if you do that?” If Johnny fights with Billy over a toy, you may send Billy home and then Johnny will have nobody to play with the rest of the rainy weekend afternoon. Kids need encouragement to THINK, out loud, about what might happen if they act in a certain way. When children are challenged to think of the consequences they often themselves decide that their action or idea is not helpful for themselves (Shure, 1994).

**Challenge Children To Think Up Alternatives to Fighting**

Help children get used to making a plan before a social problem arises. Encourage children to think up other ways of handling their social conflicts besides “not playing” with another child, or “hitting him.” The more that teachers daily encouraged children to think up alternative solutions to their peer problems, the more likely they have been found to solve their social problems more appropri-

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**Find Community Resources, Books, and Programs That Support Families**

To cope with the complex stresses and forces in society today, families need a lot of skills, a lot of insights, a lot of supports. Job loss, divorce, a child born with disabilities, death and illness, all impact on the family. Teachers and social service personnel can reach out to offer supports and services to increase peaceable family functioning and enhance children’s lives.

**Encourage Excellence, Not Perfection**

Expect children to try hard. They know they can never be perfect and may deliberately fail or act clumsy if they feel very anxious that adults expect perfection. Praise good trying. Appreciate hard work and good efforts even when a child’s grades are not as high as you would wish or even when she is clumsy when she gets to bat in a ball game.

**Find Each Child’s Gifts: Play as a Wonderful Discovery Channel for Learning a Child’s Skills**

Sometimes a parent wants a child to be a terrific ball player because that was the parent’s secret desire as a child. Or parents are so anxious about a child doing well in science and math that they do not realize that this child is talented in art but not as gifted for science. Learn the gifts of each child. The child who draws and makes a lot in class may not be showing disrespect to the teacher. He may be showing a budding gift for cartooning or drawing. Children whose parents ignore their gifts and push other agendas on them (such as getting into a prestigious college 12 years later!) may start to lie and even to cheat on tests in school.

Some children do need help to develop their learning skills. Perhaps a child’s family has moved and changed classrooms often. That child may not be able to keep up with school work. Be aware of when a child needs tutoring in school. Other children have more stable schooling situations, but they may have dyslexia or difficulties with reading or math. For example, some school age children reverse letters. They have troubles with figure-ground relationships (of black print on a white page) and do not see words clearly against the background of the page. Other children have perceptual-motor difficulties that make using a pencil to write clearly a very arduous task. Search for professional help when you see a clear need.

But also learn to appreciate the gifts your children do have. Some young children carry a tune flawlessly (Honig, 1995). Some kids can run with fleet feet. Some can recognize the model of every car that passes on the road.
Some kids can tell you the baseball batting statistics of every player on their favorite team. Some kids can soothe a playmate’s upset by kind words. Be a not-so-secret admirer of your child and discover each gift with joy and gladness. If you watch your children at play with peers, you may catch their ingenuity at solving a social problem, such as trying to enter a peer group already playing house or pretending to be explorers on Mars.

Promote Children’s Play

Provide rich play experiences by arranging for play dates and for quality preschool experiences. And then become a tuned-in NOTICER of the world of play. Read Vivien Pally’s books, such as “The boy who would be a helicopter” or “You can’t say you can’t play” to get more insights into the power of the world of play to socialize children just as the family is powerful in socializing children. Never permit bullying! Never permit catty clique behaviors. Talk about kindness with others and practice it yourself.

Don’t Denigrate The Child’s Other Parent

More and more marriages end in divorce, and second marriages tend to end even more frequently in divorce. In separations and divorce, parental bitterness and resentment belong to the adult, but so often heavy negative emotions spill over onto the children. Parental anger should not be sent as an arrow through the soul of a child where there has been a separation or divorce. Professionals need to help parents work through rage and grief so that these sorrowful poisons do not afflict children unduly. Already, young children in divorce often feel that it was their fault. Parents who feel betrayed or abandoned sometimes try to influence a child to turn against and hate the other parent. When possible, children need to feel that they are still loved by the other parent and they have total permission to love each parent. Enrolling children embroiled in divorce/custody issues in the “Banana Splits” programs social workers run in many schools is a good idea. Try to provide books and other materials to answer children’s questions (Rofes, 1982). When mothers raise children alone, they may not realize that fathers are very precious to children (Biller & Meredith, 1975). Fathers are the preferred playmates of babies, and loss of affection from a divorced and absent father can cause long-lasting distress for children. Try to promote a climate of surety about each parent’s caring for the children even when the parents cannot manage to live with each other.

Use Bibliotherapy

When children feel scared of the dark or worried about starting in a new school, stories have a wonderful power to heal. With stories, you find a way to reassure children so they feel more secure. Children identify with the loyal elephant in Dr. Seuss’ “Horton hears a who”. They do not always have to act out their resentments or disappointments. They can also identify with kind characters in stories.

In addition, children love mischievous characters, such as Pippo the monkey. They grin at the “Cat in the Hat”. Everything gets fixed up just fine at the end of that Dr. Seuss story. Yet the Cat in the Hat surely acted naughty for a while!

Children sometimes misbehave when they want more attention. They act out with misbehavior in order to get attention, even when that attention is negative, such as yelling and spanking! A neighborhood library has good books about children’s troubles. If you are going through a troubled time in your family, search for books such as “The boy who could make his mother stop yelling”, for example.

Some children misbehave because they desperately want to feel powerful or exact revenge (for example, because they felt unwanted and unimportant when the new baby was born). Many problems hurt a child’s soul, such as loss of a grandparent, or living with an alcoholic parent who humiliates the child so that he is afraid ever to invite a friend over to the home. Some children feel abandoned when a parent remarries and the stepparent obviously does not want the child around and never offers any affection to the child. The local library has many books you can read to help your child identify with a story child who has lived through such a problem and has managed to cope despite sorrow and worries.

Read stories that resonate for a child over and over. One youngster loved me to read daily for weeks Dr. Seuss’ “The king’s stilts”. This is a story of a courageous little boy who digs up the king’s buried stilts and returns them to the monarch (who loves to play on them at the end of a work day) and thus returns the king’s joy and ability to govern well. That message, that a child could be scared of a mean and menacing adult (the king’s prime minister in the story) and still finally become brave enough to do the right thing, seemed to resonate so deeply for this child. Another child, much younger, loved me to read “The enormous turnip” over and over. Somehow, naming all the family members as helpers in getting that huge turnip out of the ground was so satisfying. And he loved to point out that even Petya, the tiny beetle really helped too.

Toddlers love the Sam books too. Sam and Lisa quarrel over a toy car. Each one wants it. Each one smacks the other. Mama comes with another car so that each has a car to play with and they play together. These books resonate for toddlers who are learning, struggling, with the idea of sharing and taking turns. Choose your books to help children wrestle with such issues at every level. Choose books with cadences and poetry so that preschoolers can learn the refrains as in the book “Something from nothing”. Preschoolers enthusiastically join in saying “Grandpa can fix it!” This is the positive refrain of the little boy Jacob every
time his mama wants him to throw out something old and torn.

Create Your Own Stories to Reassure Worried Children

If a child has terrors or fears, for example, about starting kindergarten, make up stories about a little child (who very much resembles your child) who had a similar problem and how a healing, reassuring, good ending happened in that situation (Brett, 1986).

When parents are separating and getting a divorce, children often feel torn in pieces. They are afraid that something they did caused the breakup. They worry that if one parent has left, they may also be abandoned by the other parent. Make up stories that have endings clearly showing how each parent loves the child and showing the child where she will be living and how she will be kept safe and secure.

Help Siblings Get Along More Peacefully

Jealousy, the green-eyed monster, is often alive and well in families. Tattling and reporting important news are different. Make a distinction to your children between 1) tattling to hurt a sibling to get even or as one way to show jealousy, and 2) the importance of telling information to parents if there is a really important trouble where an adult must get involved. Praise each time that the siblings try to talk courteously and not trade sneering put downs. Talk with your children about the far future when they are all grown up and will have each other as the only close family persons. Share a good book about jealous siblings and how they dealt with the green eyed monster. Try to find time alone for meeting the special needs of each child. Take one grocery shopping while a friend or relative watches the other children. Bring one down to the laundry room to work together while the others are busy doing homework.

Use relaxation and vivid imagination techniques to help children relax, especially where there is sibling jealousy and too much rush and tension in the children’s lives. Deep breathing exercises and conjuring peaceful scenes sometimes help bring down child tensions (Hendricks & Wills, 1975).

Assign Required and Admired Chores

Be sure that chores are not assigned just to get daily jobs done the parents don’t want to do! Chores should depend on the age and ability of each child. Children should not feel that they are their parents’ “slaves” but family helpers pitching in to make the household work easier. Give children a feeling that when they do their chores they are important, contributing members of the family so they feel proud to be useful and helpful. “I am a big helper. I

clear the table after dinner. My papa needs me to hold the nails and hand him a nail as he repairs the ripped porch screens.” Swan and Stavros’ work among poor inner-city families showed that children with required chores, whose parents praised their participation and gave them genuine admiration and appreciation felt very secure in the bosom of the family and performed with high achievement in the kindergarten and first grade classroom. “Me a big helper” is a proud and splendid boast from an older toddler!

Be a Good Matchmaker

Make the tasks you expect from each child be ones that the child can do. Encourage efforts and support early attempts to master new tasks in accordance with each child’s ability (Honig, 1982b).

In a research study in New Orleans, Swan and Stavros (1973) found that low-income parents who required helpfulness (not coerced, but required) had children who were successful as kindergarten learners and in their social relationships with peers. They noted that fathers were mostly present in these low-income families with self-motivated learners. Parents had neat clean living environments, read daily to their young children, ate meals and talked together at dinner time, and found their children genuinely interesting persons.

Express Personal Pleasure With Each Child

Tell a child that you love him, that you love her. Hug that child frequently. Caress a child with warm (rather than cold or disapproving) voice tones. Shine your eyes at a child so that the sunshine of your smile and the pleasure in your tone of voice warm the deepest corners of your child’s self.

Talk About Peer Pressure With Children

Peer pressure is very powerful in coercing some youngsters to misbehave. Sometimes peer pressure to have special sneakers or clothes or possessions will lead to children’s stealing another’s prized clothing item to gain peer admiration. Peer pressure can lead a teenager to drink immoderately, try drugs, or engage in unsafe sex. Families must talk frankly about peer pressure and how their child feels about it. A youngster can accept and more likely live by family values and family circumstances. If the child feels a strong sense of rootedness and reassurance within the family rather than from the peer group.

Avoid the Use of Shame

Shame is an acid that corrodes the soul. Shame is often twinned with rage that fuels serious misbehavior. Do not shame your children or they may well feel that they need
to get revenge on you and the world. Perhaps a child acts defiant just to show that you cannot really make him eat a food he detests, you cannot make him fall asleep at a too-early bedtime for him. To get even, he will lie awake angry for hours. Power and revenge games are dangerous. They destroy a child’s feelings of security and trust in responsible adults.

Encourage Competence

Even very young children need to feel they “can do it”—put a peg into a pegboard, roll a ball, pick up a wiggly spaghetti strand to feed themselves, throw a used Kleenex in the wastebasket, or other simple skills. Let them try, even if they are not expert, to accomplish tasks they are capable of doing, such as putting on a coat, or setting a table or pouring out dog food into the bowl on the floor. Children who give up easily or feel that they can never do their homework, never learn to ride a bike, for example, are discouraged children. Try patiently to support their small accomplishments. Figure out ways to decrease their discouraged feelings.

Felicia asked for a wastebasket right by the table where she struggled nightly with homework math problems. She did not want all the papers with wrong answers and scribbles to pile up in front of her, almost accusing her of being “stupid”. But with the handy wastebasket nearby, she was willing to struggle anew with a fresh sheet to try her math homework.

Provide Positive Attributions

Give praise for specific actions. Cheerfully tossing off “You’re terrific!” or “That’s wonderful!” makes a child feel uncomfortable. She knows how much she still has to learn, and how many times she goofed up. Notice specific times when praise can really boost self-esteem and brighten a child’s day. For example, an adult could say: “You are a really good friend to Robbie. Did you notice how happy he was when you shared your markers with him. You know how to make another child feel comfortable and welcome here!”

Work Alongside A Young Child

By expecting too much, too fast, we sometimes force children to act incompetent to get out under the disapproval they feel will be inevitable if they aren’t superior (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1982). When a job seems overwhelming to a young child, make sure you work alongside. “Clean up your room” may send a child into a temper tantrum or into trying to avoid the job entirely. But if you tackle the task cheerfully together, the child will enjoy your company and feel pride as he works togetherness with you. When you break a task into smaller manageable bits, you scaffold the task for a youngster: “Which do you want to pick up first—the toys on the floor that go into your toy box or the clothes that go into the wash hamper?”

PROFESSIONALS AS PARTNERS WITH PARENTS

Professionals who work together with parents are not only teachers with a lot of information to share. They sometimes act as therapists. Sometimes they become caring friends of the family. Sometimes, as in Fraiberg’s kitchen therapy model of home visitation, they become caring surrogates. They re-parent new parents whose ghosts of anguish and violence from the past are strongly impacting on the children in the present. Teachers especially need to “partner” with parents to form a strong team to support a child’s early learning.

Sometimes, with very young mothers, professionals need to assist them in the process of reflectivity. The more that a new mother can reflect on her family of origin and how much during childhood she resented or was scared of harsh discipline, and decide that she does not want those feelings for her baby, the more affectionate and close will be her relationship with the new baby (Brophy & Honig, 1999).

In addition to support and knowledge, what other functions can personnel carry out to enhance positive family functioning?

Help Parents Find Ways To Give Themselves A Lift

Parents who feel happier with their own lives discipline more effectively and can share their happiness with children. Something as simple and inexpensive as a long bubble bath may relax an adult. Cleanup as a team after dinner with an adult partner helps any parent feel appreciated.

In a family with limited material resources, encourage parents to enlist imagination rather than material objects in order to bring special highlights into the family’s day and into life. When rainy days in a row have resulted in short tempers, a family can plan to serve supper as a picnic on the living room floor. The children help make sandwiches. They spread the tuna salad and peanut butter on bread slices and wrap each sandwich. The family places all the picnic fixings in a basket and pretends they are walking to the picnic grounds—an old green sheet spread on the floor. Pretend games can break into the crankiness or hassles of daily living where severe financial constraints do not permit entertainments that “cost money”.

Making collages out of bits of plastic egg cartons and other collected throw-aways can brighten an afternoon and provide art decorations to display on a refrigerator.
door so that children feel how proud you are of their talents.

Help Families to Network

Professionals need to introduce parents to others sometimes so they can form a support group when families feel isolated and alone. They could meet together at one another’s home to talk about child issues with professional help or they can choose parenting materials to discuss. Help families feel comfortable in the world of the free public library or in a “Please Touch” museum. Introduce families to a drop-in store front center that welcomes families with respite child care, opportunities to swap children’s used clothing and shopping coupons, as well as providing parenting classes and guitar lessons.

Find Respite Care For Overwhelmed Parents

Arrange for respite care when a parent is overwhelmed with caring for a disabled or emotionally disturbed child. Safe and secure respite care that a parent can count on and trust is one of the greatest gifts to give an exhausted parent. In a neighborhood, maybe parents can give each other coupons for helping out with childcare for each other. Such barter systems can provide needed respite without any money changing hands.

Assist Parents Trying to Join the Work Force

Help in finding job training and help in acquiring a high school diploma are other precious supports that families need as the bottom line in order to qualify for work positions to support their children. A resource room in a school or clinic can set out easy-to-read materials that focus on job training and on agencies that can help families in their search to become self sufficient.

Galvanize Specialist Help

When parents are behaving in seriously dysfunctional ways with children you need to act quickly and pinpoint the agencies and service to mobilize. Stresses can unnerve and make life difficult for parents. The five kinds of abuse that do occur in some families are: physical abuse, sexual abuse, physical neglect, emotional hostility, and emotional unavailability. Sometimes counseling and insight from child development experts and therapists can help. In urgent cases, when legal systems are threatening to remove a child from a home, then more strenuous professional help, such as Homebuilders provides (Kinney, Haapala & Booth, 1991), may be required. Homebuilders is an emergency service whereby a caseworker spends a great many hours for about six weeks in the home teaching the family members Gordon’s (1975) Active Listening and I-statement techniques so that they can manage their severe difficulties and get along more positively. Specialists in anger management can be enlisted to “tame the dragon of anger” in children and parents (Eastman & Rozen, 1994).

CONCLUSIONS

Enhancing parent involvement and training a highly skilled childcare provider workforce must become priority goals for nations if we are to improve children’s lives and learning careers. As we support parents, particularly parents whose lives include undue stress from limited resources and chaotic and inappropriate role models from the past, we will be ensuring a brighter future not only for the families and children served but for our entire society. And as we support teachers in schools and care providers in nurseries and preschools with money, prestige, training, and our deep appreciation, we will also be ensuring that our children grow up to be happy, responsible, achieving citizens.

References


