Challenging Behaviors and the Role of Preschool Education

by Lisa A. McCabe and Ellen C. Frede
National Institute for Early Education Research
Preschool Policy Brief, December 2007, Issue 16
www.nieer.org

Some research suggests a rise in challenging behaviors among children in early care and education. Among the findings are a high rate of removal from preschool classrooms for behavior problems, a possible link between early non-maternal care and aggressive behaviors in preschool, and concerns from teachers that too many children arrive at school without the social skills required to learn. This begs the question of the role preschool education plays in regard to problem behaviors—whether under certain circumstances it is a contributing factor or whether it can in fact provide positive experiences that lead to a reduction of challenging behaviors.

What we know…

- A challenging behavior is any repeated pattern of behavior that interferes with learning or engagement in social interactions. This includes unresponsiveness to developmentally appropriate guidance and actions such as prolonged tantrums, physical and verbal aggression, disruptive vocal and motor behavior, property destruction, self injury, noncompliance, and withdrawal.

- Challenging behaviors during the preschool years constitute one of the strongest predictors of later, more serious problem behaviors including delinquency, aggression, antisocial behavior, and substance abuse.

- Participation in early care and education is sometimes linked to higher rates of challenging behaviors, especially in programs of lower quality that do not specifically address the social development needs of young children.

- High-quality preschool education that includes an emphasis on children’s social development can reduce rates of challenging behaviors and serve as a long-term protective factor for children at risk for developing challenging behaviors.

The issue is not whether preschool is “good” or “bad” when it comes to children’s challenging behaviors. Just as there is good and not-so-good parenting, there is good and not-so-good early childhood care and education. What is important is that the early childhood education experience be of high quality. In regard to challenging behaviors, high quality means paying special attention to the social-emotional needs of children spending long hours in the presence of a group of peers. Child care that does not adequately address the social-emotional needs of young children runs the risk of contributing to the development and expression of challenging behaviors. Any curriculum implemented in an early childhood education setting needs to include, along with a cognitive and academic focus, an emphasis on the development of social and emotional skills. Teachers, other professionals and parents must then
TV Interferes With Infants' Language Development

More time watching the tube means less time learning to speak, researchers say

Posted June 2, 2009

Thursday, June 4 (HealthDay News) -- Television reduces verbal interaction between parents and infants, which could delay children's language development, says a U.S. study that challenges claims that certain infant-targeted DVDs actually benefit youngsters.

The researchers studied 329 children, aged 2 months to 48 months, and found that for each additional hour of television exposure, there was a decrease of 770 words (7 percent) heard from an adult by the children. The study also found that the more hours spent watching television, the fewer vocalizations infants made when adults talked to them.

"Some of these reductions are likely due to children being left alone in front of the television screen, but others likely reflect situations in which adults, though present, are distracted by the screen and not interacting with their infant in a discernable manner," wrote Dr. Dimitri A. Christakis, of Seattle Children's Hospital, and colleagues.

"At first blush, these findings may seem entirely intuitive. However, these findings must be interpreted in light of the fact that purveyors of infant DVDs claim that their products are designed to give parents and children a chance to interact with one another, an assertion that lacks empirical evidence," they noted.

The researchers added that their results may help explain previous findings of a link between television viewing and delayed language development.

"Given the critical role that adult caregivers play in children's linguistic development, whether they talk to their child while the screen is on may be critical and explain the effects that are attributed to content or even amount of television watched," the team wrote. "That is, whether parents talk less (or not at all) during some types of programs or at some times of the day may be as important in this age group as what is being watched."

The study appears in the June issue of the Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine.

More information

The U.S. National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders outlines speech and language milestones.

Editor's comment:

Visual stimuli such as TV, videos, computers, etc. are passive entertainers requiring little to no interaction or cognitive effort. The child just receives messages. When we look for developmentally appropriate activities for young children, we seek active interactions.
involvement, interaction and cognitive effort. These are what promote growth, learning and development. The correlation with vocabulary is that vocabulary is learned through active involvement, interaction and cognitive effort - not passive entertainment.

Instead of visual stimuli, parents and teachers should use auditory stimuli such as stories, music, sounds, etc. Auditory stimulus builds vocabulary, awareness, concentration and curiosity just to name a few of the benefits.

### 2009 Dates to Remember

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Oct. 11 &amp; 12</td>
<td>Union-wide ECEC Director’s Workshop (Westlake Village, CA)</td>
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<td>Oct. 15</td>
<td>PUC ECEC <strong>Board</strong> (Westlake Village, CA)</td>
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<td>Nov. 18-21</td>
<td>NAEYC/ACCN Annual Conference (Washington, D.C.)</td>
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### Challenging Behaviors (cont.)

build on that strong curricular base by providing additional layers of the teaching pyramid that address specific needs of children who exhibit or are at risk for developing challenging behaviors. These may include intentional teaching of social problem solving and other pro-social skills and intervention by therapists, psychologists and other professionals. Only then will we be able to meet the comprehensive needs of preschoolers and prepare them to be lifelong learners and productive adults.


Operating a private, non-profit, sectarian preschool is a very difficult endeavor. The successful director has a myriad of responsibilities. The amount of knowledge and expertise necessary is astounding.

In October of 2009, the Pacific Union Conference Early Childhood Education and Care Division will be hosting a union-wide Director’s workshop – with shared funding from both the union office and local conference offices of education.

The workshop sessions will focus on the business side of ECEC centers, quality control and the supervision of personnel, including evaluation and certification processes. The workshops will focus specifically on how to develop and work with a board, how to create and manage a budget, maximize staffing options, keep track of daily census and ratio rates and market effectively.

We want to see each center director in October, so save the dates in your calendar and start planning now! You will meet directors from other Adventist centers, hear knowledgeable speakers on topics relevant to the business administration of an effective early childhood program, and receive professional development credit for attendance.

Each director may want to bring funds to purchase books from the Standard Publishing representative who will be providing a booth of religious books, games and toys for preschool age children.

See you in October in Westlake Village!

2009 ECEC Director’s Workshop

Dates: October 11 & 12, 2009

Time: Noon on Sunday, October 11 until 4:00 p.m. on Monday, October 12

Place: Pacific Union Office, West Building, 2686 Townsgate Road, Westlake Village, CA 91320

Costs: NONE to the local site director. The Union Office and local conference offices will be paying for travel, hotel, meals, and misc. expenses - including a substitute teacher if one is required for the director’s attendance!

The local conference office will be making flight, hotel and rental car arrangements for all attendees. We ask for flight arrangements to be made with such airlines as Southwest or ATA for cost and ease of itinerary change. Currently, Southwest Airlines is having a “summer sale” of which you might want to take advantage, so don’t procrastinate! Contact your local conference ECEC Liaison and start planning!