Center for Evidence-Based Practice:
Young Children
with Challenging Behavior

www.challengingbehavior.org

Recommended Practices

Linking Social Development and Behavior to School Readiness
Barbara J. Smith, Ph.D. — University of Colorado-Denver and Health Sciences Center

"From the last two decades of research, it is unequivocally clear that children's emotional and behavioral adjustment is important for their chances of early school success." (Raver, 2002)

There is mounting evidence showing that young children with challenging behavior are more likely to experience early and persistent peer rejection, mostly punitive contacts with teachers, family interaction patterns that are unpleasant for all participants, and school failure (Center for Evidence-Based Practice: Young Children with Challenging Behavior, 2003). Conversely, children who are emotionally well-adjusted have a greater chance of early school success (Raver, 2002). Social and behavioral competence in young children predicts their academic performance in the first grade over and above their cognitive skills and family backgrounds (Raver & Knitzer, 2002).

Science has established a compelling link between social/emotional development and behavior and school success (Raver, 2002; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2004). Indeed, longitudinal studies suggest that the link may be causal….academic achievement in the first few years of schooling appears to be built on a foundation of children's emotional and social skills (Raver, 2002). Young children cannot learn to read if they have problems that distract them from educational activities, problems following directions, problems getting along with others and controlling negative emotions, and problems that interfere with relationships with peers, teachers, and parents. "Learning is a social process" (Zins et al., 2004).

The National Education Goals Panel (1996) recognized that a young child must be ready to learn, e.g., possess the pre-requisite skills for learning in order to meet the vision and accountability mandates of academic achievement and school success. Academic readiness includes the prosocial skills that are essential to school success. Research has demonstrated the link between social competence and positive intellectual outcomes as well as the link between antisocial conduct and poor academic performance (Zins et al., 2004). Programs that have a focus on social skills have been shown to have improved outcomes related to drop out and attendance, grade retention, and special education referrals. They also have improved grades, test scores, and reading, math, and writing skills (Zins etal., 2004).

Social skills that have been identified as essential for academic success include:

- getting along with others (parents, teachers, and peers),
- following directions,
- identifying and regulating one's emotions and behavior,
- thinking of appropriate solutions to conflict,
- persisting on task,

IDEAs that Work

References

Center for Evidence-Based Practice: Young Children with Challenging Behavior (2003). Facts about young children with challenging behaviors. www.challengingbehavior.org

Division for Early Childhood (DEC) Position statement on interventions for challenging behavior. www.dec-sped.org

Fox, L., Dunlap, G., Hemmeter, M.L., Joseph, G., & Strain, P. (2003). The teaching pyramid: A model for supporting social competence and preventing challenging behavior in young children. Young Children, 58(4), 48-52.

National Education Goals Panel (1996). The national education goals report: Building a nation of learners. Washington DC: US Government Printing Office.

Raver, C., & Knitzer, J. (2002). Ready to enter: What research tells policymakers about strategies to promote social and emotional school readiness among three- and four-year old children. New York, NY: National Center for Children in Poverty. nccp@columbia.edu

Raver, C. (2002). Emotions matter: Making the case for the role of young children's emotional development for early school readiness. Social Policy Report of the Society for Research in Child Development, 16(3), 1-20.

Smith, B., & Fox, L. (2002). Systems of service delivery: A synthesis of evidence relevant to young children at risk for or who have challenging behavior. Center for Evidence-Based Practice: Young Children with Challenging Behavior. www.challengingbehavior.org

ZERO TO THREE (2003). Assuring school readiness by promoting healthy social and emotional development. Washington, DC: ZERO TO THREE Policy Center.

Zins, J., Bloodworth, M., Weissberg, R., & Walberg, H. (2004). The scientific base linking social and emotional learning to school success. In J. Zins, R. Weissberg, M. Wang, & H. J. Walberg (Eds.), Building academic success on social and emotional learning: What does the research say? (pp. 1-22). New York: Teachers Press, Columbia University.
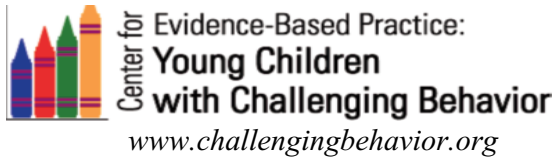
On the web

www.challengingbehavior.org
Center for Evidence-Based Practice: Young Children with Challenging Behavior

www.csefel.uiuc.edu
Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning

www.zerotothree.org
ZERO TO THREE

- engaging in social conversation and cooperative play,
- correctly interpreting other's behavior and emotions,
- feeling good about oneself and others.

And yet, many children are entering kindergarten and first grade without the social, emotional, and behavioral skills that are necessary for learning and success in school. One survey of over 3000 kindergarten teachers found that 30% claimed at least half of the children in their classes lacked academic skills, had difficulty following directions and working as part of a group; and 20% reported that at least half of the class had problems in social skills (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000).

Research indicates that children who display disruptive behavior in school receive less positive feedback from teachers, spend less time on tasks, and receive less instruction. They lose opportunities to learn from their classmates in group-learning activities and receive less encouragement from their peers. Finally, children who are disliked by their teachers and peers grow to dislike school and eventually have lower school attendance (Raver, 2002).

What can we do to increase school readiness in young children?

- Policy – Federal and state policies need to reflect the importance of these foundational skills by removing barriers and providing incentives and resources to communities and programs: (1) to improve the overall quality of early care settings; (2) to support families so that they are able to promote positive relationships and social competence in their infants and young children; (3) to prevent problem behavior by addressing social and educational factors that put children at risk for challenging behavior; and (4) to provide effective services and interventions to address social/emotional problems and challenging behavior when they occur.

- Public Awareness – Federal, state, and local governments and community agencies need to raise the visibility of importance of social competence in school success.

- Knowledge and Skills – Early care and education professionals need training and on-site technical assistance in evidence-based practices for: (1) promoting social skills (e.g., identifying and regulating emotions, playing cooperatively, following directions, getting along with others, persisting with tasks, problem solving, etc.); (2) preventing problem behavior (through classroom arrangements, individualizing to childrens' interests and abilities, etc.); and (3) providing effective intervention strategies when needed (e.g. positive behavior support, peer mediated strategies, etc.) (Fox et al., 2003). Early childhood education professionals need to know how to integrate social/emotional learning with literacy, language, and other curricular areas. Professionals need to know how to provide parents with information and support around parenting practices that prevent problems and effectively address challenging behavior.

- Research – Studies are needed on specific promotion, prevention, and intervention strategies to establish their efficacy for specific groups of children in particular settings. Research is also needed on policy and programmatic features that result in more effective services for children and families related to social development.

"The emotional, social, and behavioral competence of young children is a strong predictor of academic performance in early elementary school." (Zero to Three, 2003)

The reproduction of this document is encouraged.

Center for Evidence-Based Practice:
**Young Children
with Challenging Behavior**
www.challengingbehavior.org

IDEAs
that Work

Facts About Young Children with Challenging Behaviors

What is the SIGNFICANCE of the issue?

- These children have a tremendous risk of school failure and adult lives characterized by violence, abuse, loneliness, and anxiety (McCord, 1978; Olweus, 1991).
- The developmental course is predictably negative for those who are "non-treated" or "poorly-treated" (Lipsey & Derzon, 1998; Patterson & Fleishman, 1979; Wahler & Dumas, 1986).
- Early appearing behavior problems in a child's preschool career are the single best predictor of delinquency in adolescence, gang membership, and adult incarceration (Dishion, French, & Patterson, 1995; Reid, 1993).
- If challenging behaviors are not altered by the end of the third grade, it appears that they should be treated as a chronic condition, hopefully kept somewhat in check by *continuing and ever more costly intervention* (Dodge, 1993).
- The absence of one comprehensive service delivery system dictates the need for systems of care – weaving together multiple existing services or programs into a cohesive, collaborative system. Evidence exists to show that interlocking and interconnected systems of care have been effective with older children and adults (Smith & Fox, 2003).
- The database on service utilization is sparse making it difficult to compare and contrast different approaches to identification, screening, referral and access to service (Fixsen, Powell & Dunlap, 2003).

What are the COSTS of failing to address these challenging behaviors?

- Children who grow into adolescence with challenging behaviors are likely to drop out of school, be arrested, abuse drugs and alcohol, have marginalized adult lives, and die young (Lipsey & Derzon, 1998; Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995).
- There is evidence to show that young children with challenging behavior are more likely to experience:
- early and persistent peer rejection (Coie & Dodge, 1998);
- mostly punitive contacts with teachers (Strain et al., 1983);
- family interaction patterns that are unpleasant for *all* participants (Patterson & Fleishman, 1979);
- school failure (Tremblay, 2000; Kazdin, 1993), and;
- high risk of fatal accidents, substance abuse, divorce, unemployment, psychiatric illness, and early death (Coie & Dodge, 1998; Kazdin, 1985).

What POSITIVE OUTCOMES can be expected from early intervention services that address these challenging behaviors?

- Decreased risk of withdrawal, aggression, non-compliance, and disruption (Strain & Timm, 2001).
- Treatment impact on fears, phobias, depression, anxiety, hyperactivity, conduct, and obsessive-compulsive disorders.
- Positive peer relationships including understanding of friendship, cooperation, and sharing (Denham & Burton, 1996).
- Increased self-control, self-monitoring, and self-correction and improved social-emotional health (Webster-Stratton, 1990).
- Academic success (Walker, et al., 1998).
- Reduced risk for teen pregnancy, juvenile delinquency, and special education placement (Strain & Timm, 2001).

Coie, J.K. & Dodge, K.A. (1998). Aggression and antisocial behavior. In W. Damon (Editor in Chief) and N. Eisenberg (Vol. Ed.), Handbook of child psychology, 5th edition. Volume 3. Social, emotional, and personality development. NY: John Wiley & Sons.

Dishion, T.J., French, D.C., & Patterson, G.R. (1995). The development and ecology of antisocial behavior. In D. Cicchetti & D.J. Cohen (Eds.), Developmental psychopathology, Vol. 2: Risk, disorder, and adaptation (pp. 421-471). New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Denham, S.A., & Burton, R. (1996). A social-emotional intervention for at-risk 4-year olds. Journal of School Psychology, 34(3), 225-245.

Dodge, K. (1993). The future of research on conduct disorder. Development and Psychopathology, 5, 311-320.

Fixsen, D., Powell, D., & Dunlap, G. (2003). Pathways to Service Utilization: A synthesis of Evidence Relevant to Young Children with Challenging Behavior. Center for Evidence-Based Practice: Young Children with Challenging Behavior. www.challengingbehavior.org.

Kazdin, A. (1993). Adolescent mental health: Prevention and treatment programs. American Psychologist, 48, 127-141.

Kazdin, A. (1985). Treatment of antisocial behavior in children and adolescents. Homewood, IL: Dorsey.

Lipsey, M.W. & Derzon, J.H. (1998). Predictors of violent or serious delinquency in adolescence and early adulthood: A synthesis of longitudinal research. In R. Loeber & D.P. Farrington (Eds.), Serious & violent juvenile offenders: Risk factors and successful interventions (pp. 86-105). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

McCord, J. (1978). A thirty year follow-up of treatment effects. American Psychologists, 33, 284-289.

Olweus, D. (1991). Bully/victim problems among school children: Basic facts and effects of a school-based intervention program. In D. Pepler & K Rubin (Eds.), The development and treatment of childhood aggression (pp. 411-446). London: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Patterson, G.R. & Fleishman, M. J. (1979). Maintenance of treatment effects: Some considerations concerning family systems and follow-up data. Behavior Therapy, 10, 168-185.

Reid, J.B. (1993). Prevention of conduct disorder before and after school entry: Relating interventions to developmental findings. Development and Psychopathology, 5, 243-262.

Smith, B. J., & Fox, L. (2002). Systems of Service Delivery: A Synthesis of Evidence Relevant to Young Children at Risk for or Who Have Challenging Behavior. www.challengingbehavior.org

Strain, P.S., Lambert, D., Kerr, M.M., Stragg, V., & Lenker, D. (1983). Naturalistic assessment of children's compliance to teacher's requests and consequences for compliance. Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 16, 243-249.

Strain, P.S. & Timm, M.A. (2001). Remediation and prevention of aggression: An evaluation of the RIP Program over a quarter century. Behavioral Disorders, 26(4), 297-313.

Tremblay, R.E. (2000). The development of aggressive behavior during childhood: What have we learned in the past century? International Journal of Behavioral Development, 24, 129-141.

Wahler, R. & Dumas, J.E. (1986). "A chip off the old block:" Some interpersonal characteristics of coercive children across generations. In P. Strain, M. Guralnick, & H.M. Walker (Eds.), Children's social behavior: Development, assessment, and modification (pp. 49-91). Orlando, FL: Academic Press.

Walker, H.M., Kavanaugh, K., Stiller, B., Golly, A., Severson, H.H., & Feil, E. (1998). First Step to Success: An early intervention approach for preventing school antisocial behavior. Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 6(2), 66-80.

Webster-Stratton, C. (1990). Long-term follow-up of families with young conduct-problem children: From preschool to grade school. Journal of Clinical Child Psychology, 19(2), 144-149.

November, 2004