



The Early Years: Developmental Overview

For babies and toddlers, parents are the center of the world. The trust that children build with their parents encourages them to learn many new skills. Self-esteem grows when children experience challenges and frustration on the way to success. Young children learn ways to cope with conflict and frustration from their families. Of course, they also learn to assert their will and test the rules.

When you encourage, respect, and support your young child's explorations while setting reasonable limits, you help build your child's capacity for self-confidence and self-control. As parents, you exert an especially strong influence over healthy development in the following areas:

- *Brain development and infant attachment.* Providing appropriate foods so that your child will grow and flourish is an important part of parenting. Loving and caring for your child so that he or she learns to love and care for other family members contributes to your child's brain development and to healthy relationships with others later in life.
- *Impulse control.* Parents help children learn impulse control at home. Teaching your child to wait patiently and to control anger, screaming, or biting is part of teaching impulse control.
- *Prosocial skills.* Children begin to understand how to behave toward friends when they see their parents model kind, respectful, and helpful relationships with others. Helping your child develop friendships with other young children is particularly important in the early years.
- *Violence on television and other media.* TV, computer games, popular music, and videos may suggest to young children that violence is OK. Limiting the amount of time your children spend in media-related activities can help prevent aggressive play and behaviors.
- *Toys that promote violent play.* Some toys encourage children to imitate the violent behavior they see on TV. Too much aggressive play is confusing for young children. Providing a variety of non-threatening toys will encourage your child's cooperative play and help enhance his or her creativity.
- *Early child care experiences.* Choosing *qualified* early child care providers who teach respectful behavior and use nonviolent discipline can help young children develop prosocial skills.
- *Managing family conflict.* When parents set an example by resolving disagreements without aggressive or disrespectful behavior, children begin to learn how to resolve conflicts peaceably with their own friends.

The information contained in this summary is taken from the Early Years chapter of the Violence Prevention Resource Guide for Parents by Peggy Patten and Anne S. Robertson (Champaign, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, 2001).

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