

Family School Liaison Program

Horizon School Division No.67
Newsletter - December 2010

Relationships and the Developing Child

The world has come to know that the development of children is affected by many different things. Therefore it is important to be aware of multiple factors to be able to have a say in helping a child develop in healthy ways. Healthy relationships are the first and most important factor for our children to have a solid foundation for healthy development and outcomes later on.



The Basic Idea

Healthy development depends on the quality and reliability of a young child's relationships with the important people in his or her life, both within and outside the family. Even the development of a child's brain architecture depends

on these relationships. The world of a young child is experienced as a set or environment of relationships which affect the intellectual, social, emotional, physical, behavioral, and moral aspects of their development. The quality of early relationships lead the way for a wide range of later outcomes for the child such as self-confidence, mental health, motivation to learn, achievement in school, ability to control aggressiveness, knowing the difference between right and wrong, and being able to sustain friendships as well as intimate relationships and eventually be a successful parent.

The Science

Quality relationships with caring adults from birth are essential to healthy human development. These early attachments contribute greatly to love of learning, positive social skills, understanding of emotions, commitment, morality, and others. Let's begin with infants. With reciprocal smiles, gestures, and animated social play, mothers and babies do a dance which build and strengthen the brains architecture. Children with healthy relationships with their mothers are more likely to develop the ability to understand others feelings, needs and thoughts. This develops a foundation for cooperative interactions with others. Responsive and sensitive parent-child relationships are also

connected with stronger cognitive (thinking) skills in young children and better social abilities and work habits later in school. These kinds of relationships with fathers only enhance these qualities. This shows the connection between



social/emotional development and intellectual growth.

Young children also benefit from relationships with each other. We know they learn to share, take turns, and understand others needs and manage personal impulses but it is not enough to just be around other children. They must have friendships which help them learn and play more competently.

Important abilities in children are also influenced by the levels of warmth and support of the

caregivers in the child care setting. Some of these abilities would include greater social competence, less behavior problems, and higher thinking and reasoning skills. This comes not only from the caring nature of the relationship but also from the provision of mind stimulating activities and the support of positive relationships with other children. On the flip side studies indicate that too much time out of the home during infancy may be associated with greater disobedience and aggression when entering school.

Once school is in the picture, research indicates that children with more positive and warm relationships with their kindergarten teachers are more excited about learning, coming to school and are more confident. At the same time children experiencing greater peer acceptance at this age perform better in the classroom.

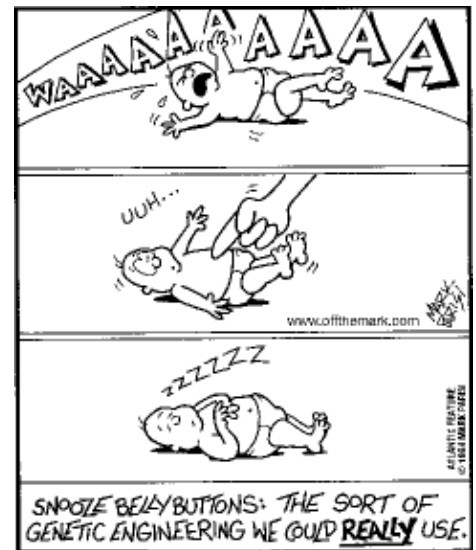
Every child has his or her own personality and characteristics. It is important that these are all considered because all are normal. But it is necessary that we differentiate among the various reasons a child may have limited or difficult interactions with others because making and sustaining friends is not easy and limited peer involvement over time puts a child at significant risk for negative developmental consequences.

There are many more areas that can be discussed but the important question now is, "What can we do about all of this?" The answer to that is outlined within the information already shared. But to be frank and to the point, parents must spend time to ensure that their home

environment is one of nurturing, love and interaction. Parents should also support and foster secure and nurturing relationships with reliable adults outside the immediate family. Promote relationships with aunts or uncles, youth group leaders, coaches, family friends, etc. The evidence shows that this does not hinder or take away from the primary relationships of the parents therefore parents should not feel threatened by additional connections their children have with other adults.

Parents can also look into accessing play groups for their young children to help develop those long lasting skills of empathy, sharing, and friend making. Then look for preschool programs that foster reciprocal learning interactions, which try to cater as much as possible to individual differences and interests of each child. Parents should engage in individual play and quiet time with their children which will aid in solidifying secure and healthy attachments. Model healthy ways of addressing conflict when it arises. Avoid heated arguments in front of or within earshot of your children. Show them that differences can be discussed in calm and helpful, proactive ways.

If you are feeling like there has already been too much disharmony in your home or relationships with your children and that it may be too late, you are wrong. Evidence shows that efforts made at any age of the child can be beneficial. There are many parenting courses, counselors, public and private agencies and self-help resources available that are often free or modest fees. Some of these would include Barons-Eureka-Warner/



FCSS, Mental Health, Children's Services, and even the counseling program within the Horizon School Division. It is always a good time to make a positive difference and necessary changes and it is always a good time to be preventative and prepare for these things from the beginning. Our children and families are worth it.

For more information on this topic and other areas of the developing child you can go online to <http://developingchild.harvard.edu/>.

