Preface

Constructive Guidance and Discipline: Birth to Age Eight provides early childhood professionals (and parents) with the best of approaches to help young children become happy, responsible, and productive people. We present guidance and discipline concepts within a framework of child development, developmentally appropriate practices, and constructivist education. Thus, only discipline approaches that are consistent with all three aspects of this framework are recommended here. We take a stand about what is best for young children, rather than merely presenting an impartial overview of various approaches. We are convinced that adults cannot effectively assist children’s moral development through the coercive approaches of punishment or behavior modification.

Although this edition addresses the entire scope of early childhood, ages 0 through 8, we emphasize guidance for children ages 3 through 8. Appropriate guidance and discipline must be tied to developmental levels, and we want to acknowledge that infant and toddler development is uniquely different from that of children in the preoperational years of 3 through 8. Many of the principles for older children apply to younger children, but some approaches presented in this text require more emotional, social, and cognitive maturation than that attained by toddlers.

NEW TO THIS EDITION

This sixth edition is enhanced by the fresh voice of new co-author Patty Meritt, who made valuable contributions to the book based on her many years of using previous editions in her college teaching. We continue our efforts to offer the reader a coherent analysis of relevant research and to provide guidelines for teacher decisions about appropriate guidance and discipline.

Content Changes

The big change for this edition is the addition of infant and toddler guidelines and examples as they are relevant to the message of this book, expanding the coverage to the full range of the early childhood years, ages 0 through 8. Many infants and toddlers are in group care for large parts of their first years. Due to requests from their caregivers, we include some discussion and examples for this age group. Readers will find new examples of childcare environments and practices that support the positive
behaviors of very young children. The addition of detailed guidelines for successful nap and rest times address a common problem time.

In addition to updating the research, we added some new features that make this text more useful.

- Embedded video links are integrated in the new Pearson eText version of this book. Look for the play button in the margins to link directly from your Pearson eText to video that exemplifies, models, or expands upon chapter concepts and strategies.
- Expected Learning Outcomes are added to the beginning of each chapter, focusing on the big ideas presented.
- Periodic Reflections questions are placed throughout each chapter to help students think more deeply about the implications of what they are reading.
- We incorporate an updated list of professional development standards from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC); this helps faculty as well as students in relating reading to national ECE teacher accreditation standards.
- We include many tables and figures because students report that these help them synthesize and remember key points in the text.
- There are many picture captions to emphasize key points.

This edition continues and strengthens the approach of previous editions. We continue to work at making the message of the book clear and understandable. Since behavior modification is so pervasive in our society, the recommendations in this book require most readers to alter their thinking radically. Assisting students in a major paradigm shift requires that principles be carefully documented and clearly explained. We find that the examples of classroom practice are most effective in helping students understand the concepts; therefore, we carefully reviewed the classroom vignettes, adding more and better examples. This edition works to balance the preschool and primary-grade-level examples, while adding those with infants and toddlers.

**MAJOR THEORETICAL INFLUENCES**

The information and ideas presented in this text come from a number of respected sources. We see four theorists as having major influences on child guidance concepts in this century: Alfred Adler, Carl Rogers, B. F. Skinner, and Jean Piaget. Rudolf Dreikurs’ recommendations of logical and natural consequences extended Adler’s concepts; Thomas Gordon popularized Rogers’ ideas through his Parent Effective-ness Training work; Skinner’s work founded the widespread behavior modification techniques; and Piagetian scholars such as Constance Kamii and Rheta DeVries have spread the word about Piaget’s views on the development of morality. Although we reject Skinner’s approach for the reasons explained in Chapter 9, we believe that
the other three theorists have compatible views. Adler, Rogers, and Piaget all perceive the child as actively seeking understanding. This perspective contrasts the Skinnerian view, which sees education as something that happens to a child from outside sources. Adler and Rogers, as well as Piaget, respect the child’s personal rate and style of developing social understanding. All three perceive the proper adult role as facilitating rather than controlling the child’s gradual development into a constructive member of society. Piaget’s theoretical framework is much broader than that of Rogers or Adler, including comprehensive moral as well as intellectual development. Thus, Adlerian and Rogerian concepts can be included as part of a Piagetian perspective, although the reverse is not true.

The research and writing of Jean Piaget and constructivist scholars regarding intellectual and moral autonomy are central to the message in this book. We also adapt Thomas Gordon’s recommendations for effective communication and interpret Rudolf Dreikurs’ concept of logical and natural consequences into our discussion of a constructivist approach to discipline. In addition, we draw on Erik Erikson’s emotional development studies, refer to guidelines from the National Association for the Education of Young Children, and often quote Rheta DeVries and Constance Kamii. Many other sources used in this book are listed in the references.

We look at guidance and discipline as teaching activities; therefore, the principles of effective early childhood education apply as much to guidance and discipline as to academics. In addition, we discuss the ways in which effective early childhood education practices prevent or alleviate many common discipline problems.

Like any other aspect of teaching, guidance must acknowledge diversity among children. In our recommendations, we consider individual differences due to innate temperament or individual physical and intellectual capabilities. We also discuss the implications of culture, gender, class, and family problems.

We recognize that teachers must often deal with kids in crisis, creating major new challenges in guidance and discipline. Chapters 2 and 3 are devoted to providing background and support to teachers whose classrooms include kids with special needs or learning difficulties as well as those who have experienced difficult life situations that may make them more vulnerable to social or emotional difficulties.

**ORGANIZATION OF THE TEXT**

Chapters 1 through 3 constitute the foundations section, Part 1. Chapter 1 defines discipline as teaching autonomy and self-discipline while promoting self-esteem. Concepts introduced in Chapter 1 are more fully addressed throughout the book. Chapters 2 and 3 consider stages in children’s physical, emotional, intellectual, and social development as they relate to discipline problems and solutions. We build on this information throughout the rest of the book. We consider a clear definition of discipline and its goals, plus knowledge of child development, to be the basic understandings for a discussion of discipline.

Part 2, Chapters 4 through 10, presents various approaches to discipline in descending order, from most positive to negative. This sequence can also be considered
as an ascending order, from least intrusive to most intrusive. Chapter 4 discusses how to prevent behavior problems by creating an emotional and physical environment most supportive of children’s healthy development. Chapter 5 explains the role of developmentally appropriate programs in preventing discipline problems. Chapters 6 and 7 emphasize both the prevention of problems and intervention when problems do occur. Chapter 6 explains how the examples shown by adults influence child behavior, and shows how to help children use those examples during conflict situations. Chapter 7 presents effective ways to communicate with children, both to prevent conflict and to address problems that arise and how to negotiate solutions to existing problems. Chapter 8 explains how early childhood professionals can help children change unproductive behaviors by using related consequences to show children why certain behaviors are unacceptable. Chapter 9 analyzes behavior modification approaches, and explains why rewards and even praise are counterproductive to the goals of self-discipline. The dangers of punishment are presented in Chapter 10.

Chapters 11 through 15 constitute Part 3, which builds on Parts 1 and 2. Child development knowledge from Part 1 is used to determine the cause of behavior problems. Then knowledge about guidance approaches from Part 2 is used to select an appropriate response. Part 3 analyzes typical causes of discipline problems and relates them to the approaches relevant to each. These chapters emphasize the necessity of dealing with the cause of problems rather than just the symptoms. Chapter 11 discusses the relationship between maturational level and acceptable behavior, and Chapter 12 looks at how unmet needs cause problem behavior. Chapters 13 and 14 explore serious problems with causes outside of the classroom and offer helpful suggestions for the teacher or caregiver. Chapter 15 presents an overview of possible causes of discipline problems and identifies which causes pertain to a particular situation, and also provides a guide for matching the causes with the discipline approaches that are most likely to be effective for each.

**PROVIDING EXAMPLES**

Because we want to balance theoretical explanations with real-life examples, we use typical scenarios to illustrate ways to facilitate self-discipline and moral autonomy through positive approaches to discipline. This method is congruent with our message that teachers must not respond just to the behavior, but must consider the many factors that might relate to the cause of the behavior. These “stories” have proved extremely useful to college students trying to visualize the practical applications of text material, but who struggle with abstract concepts.

Meet the cast of characters: The staff at the Midway Children’s Center: The director, Susan; preschool teachers—Dennis, Gabriel, Sheri, and Nancy—and infant/toddler teachers Keisha and Gabriella all provide examples of discipline with very young children. Kindergarten teacher Mrs. Sanchez, first-grade teacher Mrs. Jensen, second-grade teacher Mr. Davis and his student teacher Beth, and third-grade teacher Mrs. Garcia demonstrate the same concepts with primary-grade children. You also briefly encounter after-school-care teacher Ann and Alaska village teacher
Mrs. Akaran, Mrs. Sanchez, Mrs. Jensen, and Mr. Davis represent all the caring and effective public school teachers we have known. Because contrasting desirable with undesirable practices often helps us define the desirable, we have also provided examples of common practices that we do not recommend. For this purpose, we created two fictitious characters, preschool teacher Joanne and first-grade teacher Miss Wheeler, and described them in some very real situations. Miss Wheeler is presented as teaching at the same elementary school as Mrs. Jensen. Joanne teaches at the same children’s center as Dennis, but she is in charge during the afternoon and Dennis is the lead teacher during the morning preschool session. Having Dennis and Joanne share the same students and support staff provides examples of how different approaches affect the same children. All teachers are fictional, but the good and bad situations described are real. We use first names for the childcare staff and last names for public school staff, not to imply more respect for the latter, but only as a reflection of common practice.

Examples from readers’ own experience are the most instructive. We believe that spending significant time with children, preferably enough to establish authentic relationships with them, is necessary for internalizing theories about guidance and discipline. We also believe that personal observation and experience are crucial to learning, whether in preschool or adulthood.

We use the term teacher throughout the book to refer to caregivers as well as other teachers. Any adults who guide children through their day are teaching them. We firmly believe that adults working with children in child care must be as knowledgeable about child development as any other teachers. Because children are so profoundly influenced by the adults in their lives, it is essential that all teachers have a solid understanding of how to influence children in positive directions.

Expanded Instructor’s Manual, PowerPoint® Slides, and Test Bank

An expanded Instructor’s Manual for this edition is located on the Pearson web site (www.pearsonhighered.com). Some of the instructor resources are from other college faculty who use this book to teach about guidance and discipline. This site also includes updated PowerPoint® slides emphasizing the most important concepts in each chapter, and a revised test bank. The test bank has been expanded to include a variety of question types and problem-solving situations. These are not test items requiring mere rote memory; they simulate actual classroom situations where problem solving is required for effective discipline. Even the multiple-choice questions require higher-level thinking. This approach to testing is congruent with a constructivist approach to education, allowing the college teacher to model the principles recommended.
PART 1

Discipline Foundations

The first three chapters of this book provide the basic information necessary to study the topic of discipline. In Chapter 1, we describe discipline as discussed in this text, comparing the concept of constructivist discipline with authoritarian and permissive discipline. As part of this definition, we examine discipline in terms of the goals or outcomes desired. Chapter 1 also introduces the two basic premises of the book: working toward long-term discipline goals rather than only immediate concerns, and matching the discipline approach to the cause of the problem behavior.

Chapters 2 and 3 focus on child development issues that directly affect discipline in preschools and primary grades. Understanding how children grow, learn, and think helps adults live more harmoniously with youngsters. This understanding not only creates more tolerance for normal childish behaviors, but also reduces inappropriate adult expectations. Adults who lack this understanding often unknowingly create discipline problems by putting children in situations where they are sure to have trouble. Adults who understand child development are able to use that knowledge to determine what skills are appropriate to expect of and teach children at various ages. We believe that effective discipline approaches must be based on knowledge of children’s physical, emotional, intellectual, and social development, as well as on the individual characteristics of each child.

As you read this first section, it might help you to know what comes next in the book, so you have a context for what you are reading. Part 2 presents various approaches to guidance and discipline; Part 3 looks at causes of behavior problems and helps you match guidance approaches to those causes. The information presented in Chapters 2 through 6 is especially crucial to determining the causes for undesirable behavior. Chapters 11 and 12 examine various situations, demonstrating the process of finding the cause and matching it to an appropriate response. Chapters 13 and 14 explore causes outside the realm of the classroom, such as special needs and factors that put children at risk. Chapter 15 helps you put it all together.
Chapter 1

Thinking About Guidance and Discipline
Discipline: the biggest concern of most teachers. No matter what you are trying to teach, you need to have the attention and cooperation of your students. Not an easy task. We hope this book will give you insights that make your work with children more pleasant, rewarding, and productive.

Some books tell you they have the perfect formula to solve all your discipline problems; this one doesn’t. This book says there is no one approach to discipline that works for all problems, let alone for all children. Child guidance and discipline are incredibly complex, confusing, and frustrating. The many books and programs that offer simple solutions to discipline problems ignore the reality of individual differences, emotion-laden situations, and overburdened caregivers.

In this book, we do not offer any simple solutions, but instead acknowledge that effective child discipline is multifaceted, requiring a sophisticated set of understandings and skills. We try to provide the basics of the necessary understandings and skills, but, ultimately, what you get out of reading this book is determined by what you put into it.

This first chapter is intended to help you understand everything else in this book and give you our definitions for the terminology used throughout subsequent chapters. Ideally, as you read this chapter, you will have many questions and will use the book to help you find answers.
DEFINING DISCIPLINE

Notice that the title of this book includes both guidance and discipline. The term guidance is usually associated with helping kids deal with problems (as in guidance counselor), and the term discipline is too often associated with punishing children for doing things adults don’t like. As you read, you will see that the term discipline is used broadly in this book, and that it includes what people generally think of as guidance, but it does not include punishment.

What do you think discipline is? Have you always thought of it as punishing a child for doing something wrong? Many people think that discipline is a smack on a child’s bottom. You may have heard a (sick) joke that refers to a paddle as the “board of education.” This book defines discipline differently: helping children learn personal responsibility for their behavior and the ability to judge between right and wrong for themselves. The emphasis is on teaching as we help kids learn responsible behaviors, rather than merely stopping unproductive actions. Instead of abandoning the term, we want to help people understand what the word discipline is supposed to mean. Did you know that the word discipline comes from the word disciple, which means “to lead and teach”? Teaching and leading are what adults should be doing when they discipline a child. With this view of discipline, undesirable behavior is an opportunity for instruction (Elkind, 2001).

Instead of just enforcing rules about what not to do, we want to help children learn to make wise choices about what they should do. Note that learning to make wise choices for themselves is very different from just doing whatever they want. We are not advocating a lack of behavior controls or permissive approaches. Instead, we are advocating approaches that help children understand why certain behaviors are better than others, and that help children choose to act in a desirable manner, whether or not an adult is there to “catch” them at it.

This book is about how to support children in becoming responsible, kind, and productive citizens; it is not about forcing or otherwise coercing children to behave in certain ways. We explain why we are convinced that external controls, such as reward and punishment, counteract the behavior and attitudes our society so desperately needs. We don’t just tell you not to reward or punish children; we also explain better ways of reaching behavior goals.

A key element in the process is determining the cause of undesirable behaviors and working to eliminate that cause. Our approach to discipline is like diagnostic teaching: individualized to the needs and abilities of each child. This type of guidance and discipline requires extensive knowledge of child development as well as of various guidance approaches. This book attempts to assist readers in obtaining the necessary knowledge in both areas; it then presents ways of using them together for child guidance.

This book defines discipline as helping children learn personal responsibility for their behavior and the ability to judge between right and wrong for themselves.
Because we view discipline as teaching, not merely controlling, we recommend that school discipline be planned at least as carefully as other aspects of the curriculum. Schools long ago gave up punishing students for not knowing how to read or do a math problem. Instead of punishing children for missing skills and understandings, teachers now teach what is missing. This is the same process we advocate for helping children with missing social skills and for teaching them understandings related to behavior.

**High Stakes**

Can we afford to spend school time teaching social skills and caring attitudes? Evidence shows that we can’t afford not to (Charney, 2002; Garrett, 2006). Although federal mandates have focused schools on academic testing, experienced teachers know that other areas of the curriculum won’t get covered if discipline is not taught appropriately. However, more important, observers of human nature and human development researchers (Damon, Lerner, & Eisenberg, 2006; Hanish, Barcelo, Martin, Fabes, Holmwall, & Palermo, 2007; Swick & Freeman, 2004) know that it doesn’t really matter what else people learn if they don’t learn to become caring, principled, and responsible; their lives will be lived in shambles. “Individuals do not develop into educated competent members of society by learning academic skills, absent of social skills” (Garrett, 2006, p. 154). In addition, it is becoming increasingly clear that schools must teach caring, communication, negotiation, and other violence-prevention lessons in an effort to make schools and neighborhoods safe.

Teachers report that classroom discipline is their biggest challenge. This challenge appears to be growing greater each year as increasingly more children arrive at school with unmet needs and insufficient social skills. Teachers struggle to create caring classroom communities with children who lack impulse control and have little ability to manage their frustration and anger (Brady, Forton, Porter, & Wood, 2003).

Teachers of young children must spend time on discipline not only in self-defense, but also because they have the children at the most opportune time. Brain research shows that the early years offer a critical window of opportunity for learning complex functions related to behavior, such as logical thinking and emotion regulation (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007). During the years from age 3 to age 10, the brain has more synapses creating connections to brain cells than at any other time. Brain imaging shows conclusively what early childhood teachers have said all along: The early years are the critical years for learning.

**THE GOALS OF DISCIPLINE**

Discipline approaches must be determined by our goals. Start by asking yourself, “What is the purpose of discipline?” It may be tempting to look at discipline merely as a means to keep control so you can teach other things, but children and society need so much more.
Chapter 1

Long-Term Goals

Whenever you teach something, you need to start by clarifying your long-term educational goals. Teaching discipline or anything else without long-term goals is like trying to plan a trip route without knowing where you are headed. In order to examine long-term goals, you may find it useful to ask yourself what kind of people you value. Notice that the word is people, not children. Is there a difference? If you are thinking about children, you might be attracted to the goal obedient; however, you are not likely to choose that label for an adult characteristic. Keep in mind that early discipline influences character for a lifetime; therefore, it is essential to think about what kind of people function best in society rather than merely considering what kind of children are easiest to manage. What traits will make the best contribution to a democratic society?

Self-Concept and Self-Esteem

Many people list positive self-concept as a goal, but this seems to confuse the difference between self-concept and self-esteem. Self-concept is an understanding of who we are and what we can do; self-esteem is how we feel about that. A realistic self-concept is essential to mental health (Landy, 2009) and can provide the basis for developing good self-esteem.

There is general agreement that we want kids to grow up feeling good about themselves. Although almost everyone voices this goal, many still use discipline methods that damage self-esteem. Children often aren’t really listened to, and are routinely treated with much less respect than adults are—they are lectured, ignored, bullied, and bribed in ways no adult would ever put up with. Later chapters discuss how punishment and other coercive tactics—even praise and other rewards—can damage a person’s self-esteem.

Self-Discipline

Nearly everyone also agrees that self-discipline is a goal for children. Most approaches to discipline describe themselves as promoting self-discipline (Brooks & Goldstein, 2007; Nelson, 2006). Disagreements center on what leads to this goal. Some people believe that rewards for acceptable behavior and punishments for unacceptable behavior lead to self-discipline. Such viewpoints do not recognize that being manipulated by reward and punishment is vastly different from learning about what is right and how to make wise and caring decisions (Kohn, 2005; Turiel, 2006). In contrast, this book is based on the view that children can’t learn to regulate their own behavior as long as others are regulating it for them.

Moral Autonomy

A more sophisticated and little-known version of self-discipline is called moral autonomy, a concept presented in Jean Piaget’s classic book, The Moral Judgment of the
Thinking About Guidance and Discipline

Moral autonomy means having the ability to make decisions about right and wrong, regardless of any rewards or punishments, yet taking into consideration the rights and needs of all involved.

Child (1932/1965), and elaborated for modern audiences by Piagetian scholars DeVries (e.g., DeVries, Hildebrandt, & Zan, 2000) and Kamii (e.g., Kamii & Ewing, 1996). According to these sources, autonomy means being governed and guided by your own beliefs and understandings. It is much more than merely “internalizing” a set of conduct rules and making yourself follow them. The morally autonomous person is kind to others out of personal feelings of respect for other human beings. The opposite is heteronomy, which means being governed or ruled by someone else. The heteronomous person is kind to others only if that behavior is rewarded, or if there is the possibility that the absence of that behavior could be discovered and punishment could be imposed.

Some people misinterpret this concept and get worried when they hear about autonomy, thinking that being governed by yourself means doing whatever you want. However, Kamii points out in the foreword to this book that Piaget’s theory of autonomy doesn’t mean just the right to make decisions for yourself, but also the “ability to make decisions for oneself about right and wrong, independent of reward or punishment, by taking relevant factors into account.” If you think about the meaning of that statement, you see that a merely self-serving decision would be excluded, because it wouldn’t take into consideration the “relevant factors” of other people’s needs. It is important to note that being governed internally also means that children are not so susceptible to peer pressure; therefore, morally autonomous persons do not join in inappropriate group activities in order to be accepted by their peers.

Thus, it is a person without moral autonomy who is likely to act irresponsibly when there are no external controls (Turiel, 2006). In fact, that description fits some young
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college students away from home for the first time. College dormitory life testifies to
the fact that some well-meaning parents and teachers deny young people an adequate
opportunity to develop inner controls. Inexperienced at self-regulating their work, play,
and sleep, some first-year college students find themselves unable to achieve a workable
balance. Some, whose behavior has been controlled through rewards and punishment,
find themselves unable to make wise decisions when confronted with drugs and alcohol.

Autonomy does not mean lack of control; rather, it refers to the source of con-
trol. Autonomous people carry those controls within themselves. They are never
without them, even when alone. Heteronomous persons, by contrast, experience
control only when someone else is present. They depend on an external judge to
reward or punish their behavior. When you help kids develop moral autonomy,
you affect how they behave, even when misbehavior isn’t likely to be caught
(Weinstock, Assor, & Broide, 2009). Autonomous people don’t need policing to
keep them on the right path.

Long-Term versus Quick-Fix Solutions

Are teachers responsible for keeping children safe and orderly and also for helping
them develop positive self-esteem, self-discipline, and moral autonomy? That’s a
tall order! Don’t forget that teachers have to teach, too. Can they really be blamed if
they have a hard time thinking about long-range discipline goals and are attracted to
control for the moment? After all, teachers usually have a student for just one year.

Parents, however, are generally aware that they will be dealing with this child
through the teen years and beyond. One mother reports that she was powerfully
motivated to help her son Michael learn self-discipline when she thought about his
getting a driver’s license in 10 years. While Michael was little, she could protect him
from harm by watching over him herself, but she doubted that she could ride along
to make sure he was driving safely when he was 16. She knew that inner controls
would stay with Michael long after she couldn’t. Therefore, she focused on discipline
approaches that fostered inner control rather than obedience. Nevertheless, even
parents are sometimes tired and stressed enough to ignore the future and concentrate
on making their lives easier for now.

Teachers may be under the added pressure to present a “well-disciplined” class,
in the old sense of appearing quiet and controlled. This can make a difference at
evaluation time with principals or directors who don’t understand how young chil-
dren learn best. As a result, discipline methods that boast quick, short-term results at
the expense of children’s self-esteem and autonomy remain popular. Some of these
methods are discussed in Chapter 9, when we discuss Behaviorism.

Fortunately, many teachers care too much about children to give in. They resist
quick-fix approaches and work on positive alternatives. They know that helping
children live together peacefully now and preparing them for the future can be com-
patible goals. Skillful teachers know how to work toward long-term discipline goals
while maintaining a peaceful and productive learning environment. They know
they don’t have to make a choice between protecting children’s self-esteem and
keeping order. With the guidance of these knowledgeable and dedicated teachers,
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children can learn from experience to make wise decisions. In the process, they can also develop the positive self-esteem and moral autonomy necessary for becoming competent, caring, loving, and lovable people (Noddings, 2005).

DISCIPLINE MODELS COMPARED

Common approaches to discipline vary from the extremely authoritarian, in which the adult makes all the rules and punishes any deviation, to the very permissive, in which the child makes all the decisions. Too many people think they must choose one or the other of those models. One teacher says she plays the “heavy” until she can’t stand herself; then she switches to the opposite until she can’t stand the kids. Too few adults (teachers as well as parents) are even aware of any other options. We do not recommend trying to combine permissive and authoritarian styles in an attempt at a middle ground, but there are alternatives that balance the power of adult and child. You don’t have to choose between either the adult or the child having all the power (Tzuo, 2007). A shared-power model best meets the needs of all. The needs and views of both the adult and the child can be accommodated when discipline is viewed as teaching.

Because we view discipline as teaching, we believe it makes sense to base guidance and discipline on learning theory. Therefore, we compare the guidance approaches according to which learning theory they most closely fit: Behaviorist, Maturationist, or Constructivist.

Constructivism is not a “middle ground” between behaviorism and maturationism; rather, it is a whole different view of learning and of guidance and discipline. It is not a “nicer” way to get obedience; instead, it strives for much more than obedience. Constructivism helps children learn from their experiences and from thinking about those experiences (DeVries, Zan, & Hildebrandt, 2002; Kamii & Ewing, 1996; Piaget, 1965). Through this process, the learner is assisted in gaining increasingly sophisticated levels of understanding. Thus, children gradually develop the ability to take many relevant factors into consideration when deciding what action is best for all concerned. The word gradually is important, because it indicates the developmental basis for Constructivist teaching. Constructivists recognize that teaching young children involves accepting immature thinking and requires working in conjunction with maturation to help children move to greater understanding.

Discipline Goals Compared

In essence, each discipline style is based on the same motive: love or concern for the child. However, each has very different goals (Figure 1–1). Obedience is the target behavior in the Authoritarian model, which prefers unquestioning and immediate obedience (Dobson, 2007; Leman, 2005). The Permissive model over-emphasizes individual freedom (Baumrind, 1967), although it can also be a result of neglect. The Constructivist model works toward moral autonomy: self-determined and responsible behavior, showing concern for the good of others and for oneself as well (Kamii, 1984; Kohn, 2005). Rewards and punishment are incompatible with
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these goals. The Constructivist approach acknowledges the complexity of the ever-changing world; therefore, it teaches children to think for themselves about desirable or undesirable actions rather than telling them predetermined answers to current dilemmas. Power-on approaches to discipline don’t give children information that they can use to construct ideas of right and wrong (Smetana, 2006).

Differences in Discipline Forms

Not surprisingly, each model uses very different forms of discipline (Bronson, 2000). Punishment and reward are used almost exclusively in the authoritarian model (Canter & Canter, 1992; Dobson, 2007). Lack of discipline is the distinguishing feature of the Permissive model. In contrast to these two extremes, but definitely not a blend of them, the Constructivist model offers a multifaceted set of discipline options explained in this book.

These Constructivist options focus on teaching and, like all good teaching, begin with good human relationships. Adults who are responsive, warm, and comforting are essential to children’s healthy development (Gurian, 2001; Howes & Ritchie, 2002; Noddings, 2005). Good relationships between teachers and children do not mean the teacher tries to be a “pal,” just that the teacher is one of the group. The constructivist teacher is still the adult in charge, responsible for setting necessary limits and keeping children safe. However, this is done in a caring and respectful way. Mutually caring and respectful relationships with adults and peers encourage kids to think about the effects of their behavior on other people. Teaching children to think critically is an essential aspect of constructivist teaching about discipline, and about other topics as well. Piagetian scholar David Elkind (2001, p. 7) therefore used the term instructive discipline for the Constructivist model. Constructivist discipline strategies are aimed at helping children construct socially productive behavior rules and values for themselves. The approach is aimed at helping children become better able to reason, and thus become more reasonable human beings.

Differences in Results

What are the results of the different discipline models? We can never be certain about research findings concerning human beings because we cannot ethically control the variables in a person’s life. Each person is a unique blend of genetics, family
dynamics, societal influences, and individual experiences. However, certain trends occur frequently enough to suggest a relationship. The Authoritarian/Behaviorist model is associated with anger and depression, as well as low self-esteem and the inability to make self-directed choices (e.g., Howes & Ritchie, 2002; Knafo & Plomin, 2006; Landy, 2009; Sigsgaard, 2005). Kohn (2005) explains that controlling kids through rewards or praise keeps them from learning to regulate themselves. Those people with an overly permissive background usually demonstrate low self-esteem and difficulty getting along with others. The Constructivist, or shared-power, model results in high self-esteem, good social skills, general competence, and self-discipline (DeVries, 1999; Kohn, 2005; Tzuo, 2007).

Constructivist discipline approaches help most children quickly learn to negotiate solutions to problems, to resolve their own conflicts and to self-direct their learning activity (DeVries & Zan, 1994; Kohn, 2005). Teaching for moral autonomy has lasting results, including a morality of cooperation that results in a balanced understanding of justice (Lapsley, 2006).

Family Concern: Shouldn’t They Learn to Obey?

Many people think in black-or-white terms; they think that you either make kids obey or they are disobedient and run wild. Some cultures emphasize obedience at home, enforced with punishment. Therefore, you may get worried questions about this guidance approach from your students’ families. As in any situation, it is unwise to give advice unless it is asked for; but if it is, here are some suggestions you might offer to parents.

You need to help families understand that working for obedience is settling for much less than moral autonomy. Explain what you have learned about long-term versus short-term goals. Point out that obedience without understanding requires external enforcement of some sort, a reward or punishment (DeVries, Zan, & Hildebrandt, 2002; Kohn, 2005). Teachers can introduce parents to the research provided in Chapters 9 and 10, which describe the negative effects of reward and punishment. A lending library of relevant books, such as Kohn’s (2005) Unconditional Parenting: Moving from Rewards and Punishment to Love and Reason, would be helpful. Be sure to warn families about one of the most common and most devastating reward/punishment approaches: making parental love and approval conditional on obedience. However, remember to listen to what families want for their children and to be respectful of differing views.

TEACHING FOR MORAL AUTONOMY: THE CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH

Certain basic ideas are central to a constructivist approach to discipline:

1. A relationship of mutual respect between adult and child is the foundation for development of moral autonomy (Kamii, 1982). Mutual respect means that it is just as important for you to treat the child with respect as it is for the child to treat you with respect.
2. Constructivist teachers always strive to help children understand why a behavior is desirable or undesirable.

3. Providing age-appropriate choices for kids and supporting them in solving their own problems is a way of showing respect for children and also a way of teaching thinking and assisting understanding.

4. When undesirable behavior occurs, your discipline efforts must address the cause of the behavior for effective teaching to take place.

Now let’s examine these concepts in more detail.

Mutual Respect

Constructive discipline involves respect and affection for the child. The quality of the relationship between child and adult is crucial to the success of any discipline approach (Kragh-Muller & Glocckler, 2010). Unless a child knows you care about him or her, and unless that child is concerned about maintaining a relationship with you, there is really no reason for the child to pay attention to what you ask. Having a relationship with a child requires investing time in getting to know children as individuals and attempting to understand them. If you are going to be effective during a behavior crisis, you need to build a relationship first by spending time on pleasant interaction. Spending time with a kid and listening to that child not only helps an adult understand the child, but also demonstrates

**Reflection**

*In what ways do you—or those you observe—show respect for young children?*

*In what ways do you—or others you observe—show lack of respect for young children?*

Mutual respect between teacher and child is an essential ingredient of effective discipline.
Thinking About Guidance and Discipline

Mutual respect is an essential ingredient of effective discipline, both as the foundation and as part of the process. Any discipline response can turn into punishment if accompanied by put-downs, which, of course, are inherently disrespectful. For instance, to call a child “sloppy” for spilling something, or “mean” for knocking down some blocks, would destroy the educational value of your discipline teaching. The child would focus on self-defense rather than on the problem behavior. It is also important to be aware of how your attitude is projected. Anger or disgust in your expression or tone of voice can override even the most carefully chosen words. Listen to yourself as you talk to the children in your care: Are your words something they would want to listen to? Or are you teaching children to tune you out by relaying a steady stream of commands and criticism?

Helping Children Understand

Like other people, children are more inclined to do as they are asked if they understand the reason behind the request. Often it seems obvious to an adult why a certain behavior is appropriate or inappropriate, but young children have little experience in the world and don’t automatically know all that seems obvious to you. Therefore, you need to help kids learn the reasons behind rules and requests. Sometimes words are helpful teaching tools, but usually young children need experiences to help them understand the explanations. You can teach without punishing by asking...
Chapter 1

Perhaps the most crucial understanding for young children is that other people have needs and wishes different from their own. Dennis’s approach to the following doll-bed dilemma was aimed at helping Sara and Sophie each begin to think about a viewpoint other than her own. Learning to consider the viewpoints of others in making decisions is part of learning moral autonomy. According to Piaget, we also teach moral autonomy and the necessary understanding of others’ views when we help children realize the effects of their behavior rather than merely punishing it. Following is an example of this principle in action:

Mrs. Jensen discovered one day that she had not helped Jazzy to understand why she was asked to leave group time. Jazzy came up to Mrs. Jensen after the group meeting and said, “I’m sorry. I won’t do it again.” Mrs. Jensen asked her, “Won’t do what again?” She was astounded at the child’s honest reply, “I don’t know.” Too often, kids learn to mouth meaningless words of apology or appreciation with no idea about what they mean or why they would be appropriate.

Mrs. Jensen discovered one day that she had not helped Jazzy to understand why she was asked to leave group time. Jazzy came up to Mrs. Jensen after the group meeting and said, “I’m sorry. I won’t do it again.” Mrs. Jensen asked her, “Won’t do what again?” She was astounded at the child’s honest reply, “I don’t know.” Too often, kids learn to mouth meaningless words of apology or appreciation with no idea about what they mean or why they would be appropriate. 

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When preschoolers Sarah and Sophie were tugging on the same doll bed, each screaming, “I had it first!” Dennis, their teacher, resisted coming over and immediately taking the toy away, although it might have been simple to say, “If you can’t play nicely, I’ll have to put this away.” Nor did he start the usual inquisition trying to determine which child had it first so that he could make the fairest decision. Those approaches are common when the teacher’s goal is simply to solve the problem for now and when the discipline approach is Authoritarian.

Because Dennis’s goals are long-term, he wanted to help the children learn to think about their behavior and to develop skills for solving their own conflicts. His discipline approach is constructivist. Therefore, he facilitated decision making on the part of the children instead of making the decisions himself. He helped the girls clarify the problem by stating what it appeared to be: “You both want a bed for your dolls.” He further identified the dilemma: “There’s only one of these beds and two sleepy babies.” Then Dennis asked them what they thought they could do to solve their problem. In this way, he helped the girls learn to think about fairness for both sides.

Problem solving takes practice, just as other complex skills do. It is also dependent on levels of maturity. Young children have limited reasoning ability, but they become more capable when encouraged to discuss their different views. The teacher works with children at their levels of maturation, demonstrating ways of expressing their feelings and suggesting possible approaches to solutions. The teacher may ask questions, such as, “Where else could a baby doll sleep in this house?” This method
Thinking About Guidance and Discipline

still leaves the children in charge of a search for alternatives. Even if they aren’t immediately successful, Dennis doesn’t take over. However, if the children’s frustration and anger appear to be getting beyond their ability to control, he might resort to taking the doll bed and putting it out of reach until they cool down. He then would assure the girls that they could have it as soon as they come up with a solution.

The challenge to teach for understanding is even greater with infants and toddlers than with preschoolers. Sometimes you just have to distract the child from the problem and move on. Yet the toddler years are a crucial time for development of conscience (Kochanska, Koenig, Barry, Kim, & Yoon, 2010). Many people don’t realize how much language children can understand before they can talk, so they don’t try to explain. It is important to remember that you build understanding by explaining—just as you help children learn to talk by communicating with them.

Guiding Choices

Constructive discipline encourages children to make as many of their own decisions and choices as possible. This helps children learn from their mistakes as well as their successes. In other words, your job is to help children learn how to make wise choices, not to make all the choices for them. In the process of learning to regulate their own behavior, children make both good and bad choices for themselves. It is hard, but necessary, to let kids make some poor choices as well as good ones.

Help children analyze their mistakes so they learn to manage their own behavior.
No matter what their age, people tend to learn best the lessons learned through their own experience—especially from analyzing their mistakes. Think about your own mistakes: Probably someone older and wiser warned you, but you had to find out for yourself, didn’t you?

Of course, adults must monitor the choices; not all choices are safe or appropriate. For instance, children don’t have the choice of putting their fingers in an electrical socket to experience a shock. However, they do have the choice of not eating their snack and getting a little hungry, or the choice of not cooperating in play and subsequently being rejected by peers. Teachers whose goal is helping children learn to think for themselves don’t help by thinking and acting for their students. They do not instantly step in and solve conflicts for kids. Instead, conflicts and problems are seen as potential learning situations and opportunities to offer meaningful teaching (Elkind, 2001). The children work at problem solving. The teacher’s job is to facilitate the process as needed.

**TREATING THE CAUSE RATHER THAN THE SYMPTOM**

No amount of respect, teaching, or choice will make discipline effective unless your approach deals with the reasons why the behavior occurred. If you only stop the behavior without treating the cause, the behavior problem will probably continue to be repeated (Kaiser & Rasminsky, 2012). Discipline is like weeding a garden: If you don’t get the roots out with the weeds, the weeds will be back in a few days. Effective approaches to discipline work to get at the root of the problem. Yet, very few discipline/guidance approaches involve considering the cause of a behavior problem before deciding on an intervention. A main focus of this text is matching guidance and discipline approaches to the causes of behavior problems.

It isn’t easy to figure out why children do the things they do. You certainly can’t determine the cause simply by seeing the behavior. For instance, there could be several reasons why Aaron might have spilled water during water play:

- Perhaps he was just having such a good time that he didn’t think about where the water was going.
- Maybe he is a budding scientist who wants to see what happens when the water escapes the water table.
- It is also possible that he spilled because of immature coordination, which made it hard for him to pour the water where he intended.
- Then again, maybe he knew what he was doing and did it on purpose. He might have spilled to get attention or to alleviate boredom.

A useful way to think about the cause of undesirable behavior is to think about what the child needs in order to act in more appropriate ways (Nemeth & Brillante, 2011). You may find it useful to think about the causes of behavior problems using an observation form similar to the one shown in Figure 1–2. Each different cause
DISCOVERING CAUSES OF BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS

Ask yourself the following types of questions as a guide toward discovering the causes of a behavior problem: (There may be several “right” answers.)

**Is the environment meeting this child’s needs?**
- Enough movement?
- Enough privacy?
- Enough space?
- Sufficient materials?

**Is the program meeting this child’s needs?**
- Appropriate challenge?
- Personal interest?
- Meaningful?

**Are behavioral expectations appropriate for this child?**
- Developmentally?
- Culturally?
- Temperamentally?

**Does the child have unmet physical needs?**
- Hungry?
- Tired?

**Does the child have unmet emotional needs?**
- Friendship?
- Trust?
- Self-esteem?
- Personal power?
- Attention?

**Is this child missing some social skill?**
- Perspective taking?
- Entering play?

**Does this child need help with communication skills?**
- “I messages”?
- Negotiation?

**Is the behavior a result of inappropriate role models?**
- Media?
- Admired adults?
- Admired peers?

**Does this child understand why a behavior is important?**
- No experience with outcomes?

**Has this child learned negative ways of getting needs met?**
- Received attention for inappropriate behavior?

FIGURE 1–2 Discovering Causes of Behavior Problems
of behavior problems points to the need for a different solution; there may be interactive causes and solutions, so don’t limit yourself to one answer. Yet, there are many teachers and caregivers who have one solution for any and all infractions of the rules.

Think about how the commonly used time-out bench would affect Aaron in the case of each suggested cause for the spilled water:

- How would the time-out bench affect his feelings about preschool fun if the spill was caused by his eagerness to explore or his scientific curiosity?
- How would time-out affect his feelings about himself if the spill was caused by poor coordination?
- If attention-getting or boredom was the cause, would time-out keep Aaron from spilling water again?

As you read further in this book, you will find suggestions of appropriate responses to each of these and other causes of undesirable behavior.

**Observing to Discover the Cause**

The best way to determine the cause of a child’s behavior is to observe the child carefully and record your observations (Jablon, Dombro, & Dichtelmiller, 2007). You need to know a lot about a child to plan effective discipline. You need to note whether this is usual or unusual behavior, and also under what circumstances it occurs. Are certain activities likely to trigger it? Is there a pattern of when, where, or with whom behavior problems are most likely? What do you know about the child’s home routine, health, or family situation that might provide some clues? Communicating with parents and keeping careful records of child behavior are both indispensable parts of determining the cause of problems. You assess the child’s social learning needs through this process of finding causes for behavior problems. This assessment is an essential guide for effective teaching.

Never overlook the possibility that something you did or didn’t do may have caused a discipline problem. In this book we describe how discipline problems can be caused by 1) teacher expectations that don’t match child development, temperament, or culture; 2) inappropriate school environments; and 3) undesirable adult examples and communication. We also explain how coercive and punitive discipline approaches backfire and create worse behavior problems.

Targeting the cause of a behavior problem is a difficult task, compounded by the fact that there are usually multiple and interactive causes. As you continue to read this text, you will be guided to match probable causes of behavior with appropriate approaches to discipline. Selecting the right approach requires that you understand many different approaches, as well as understand children and the many different reasons for their actions. This text presents a set of guidance/discipline strategies, each
CONCLUSION

This chapter has attempted to stimulate your thinking about your values as they relate to guidance and discipline. Our comparison of discipline approaches resulted in the recommendation of constructivist discipline, rather than an authoritarian or a permissive approach. We began an introduction to ways of implementing constructivist approaches to discipline, with more complete explanations to come in the following chapters.

If you are now saying to yourself, “But don’t kids need limits?” then go back and re-read the chapter. If these are new ideas for you, it will take careful reading and thought to understand that there are valuable alternatives to forcing obedience. The choice isn’t just between power-tripping children or letting them run wild.

This chapter offers an overview of ideas presented in the rest of the book. If you can’t visualize how all this works yet, don’t worry; that’s what the rest of the chapters are for. We hope that you will supplement what you read here with further reading from the recommended reading list at the end of the chapter. We also hope that you will spend significant time with young children, proving guidance and discipline concepts to yourself through your own observation and experience.

As you begin to implement the ideas presented here, you should be prepared for less-than-instant success. Understanding complex ideas involves hard work accompanied by trial and error. Changing established ways of interacting with children is also very difficult, requiring time and commitment. At first, as you are practicing new ways, you may even find that your discipline efforts seem less effective than before. As they are learning new approaches, some people report feeling “paralyzed” by indecisiveness about what to do. Just as we urge you to be accepting of children’s gradual learning processes, we urge you to accept your own gradual progress. In addition, when—inevitably—you forget your new plans and don’t live up to your expectations, just try again. That’s what we do.

If you haven’t read the foreword and preface to this book, we suggest you do so. Constance Kamii’s discussion of moral autonomy in the foreword should help you better understand the idea. The preface should provide further explanation about the theory base and intent of the book. The preface also gives an overview of the three-part organization of the text: 1) discipline foundations, 2) discipline approaches, and 3) matching discipline causes to discipline approaches. Be sure to also read the introductions to each section of the text; they will help you understand what you are reading about. We hope you will also read and think about the dedication at the front of the book.

As you continue to read and think, remember that going to school represents the child’s entry into our society (Feeney, Christensen, & Moravick, 2010). This means that teachers of young children have a huge responsibility. For the first time, young children may be encountering the necessities of following basic rules and respecting the rights of others. The skills of problem solving, predicting consequences, and planning ahead are vital in children’s lives (Galinsky, 2010).
Chapter 1

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

1. Create your list of desirable goals for discipline. Compare your list with those of others. Select the three characteristics you would most want to encourage through child guidance. Explain your choices and compare them with a friend’s.

2. Think about your own parents’ approach to childrearing. What characteristics do you think they most valued? How did those values influence your own childhood? Do your choices match those of your parents, or are they different?

3. How would you rate yourself on a continuum from heteronomy to autonomy? How does this rating reflect the discipline approaches of your parents and teachers? If you are heteronomous, can you help children become autonomous?

4. A problem to solve: Markos is using the preschool playhouse broom. Riley wants it and grabs it away. Markos hits Riley, and the battle is on.
   a. Describe a response that solves the problem but does not teach autonomy or self-discipline.
   b. Describe a response that solves the problem and does teach autonomy and self-discipline.

RECOMMENDED READINGS


Chapter 2
Physical and Emotional Development Affect Child Behavior
Each stage of child development brings its own set of needs, abilities, and perspectives. Your knowledge of children’s physical, emotional, intellectual, and social development will help you guard against adult-caused behavior problems. In this chapter, we examine the stages of young children’s physical and emotional development and consider how children’s developmental needs and abilities affect their behavior. As we repeat often in this book, effective discipline addresses the causes of behavior problems. When you know more about child development, you can determine if immature development may be the cause of a behavior problem. Understanding children’s developmental needs and abilities is also necessary for finding effective solutions to discipline problems. You can eliminate many discipline problems by matching your expectations of children to their individual maturation levels. In other words, you cannot expect children to be successful at tasks beyond their developmental level; nor can you blame children for behavior that is a result of maturational level.

Effective child guidance and discipline require knowledge of factors that affect emotional development: Temperament strongly contributes to children’s unique paths of emotional development. Attachment is also a key factor in emotional development. Children have basic human needs that must be met for healthy growth.
Physical and Emotional Development Affect Child Behavior

and development. If these needs are not met, children have difficulty developing emotional regulation. In this chapter, we examine how temperament, developmental stage, attachment, and basic human needs affect children’s emotional competence and how they are related to discipline issues. This chapter is not intended to be a comprehensive coverage of child development. Please refer to the recommended readings at the end of each chapter for more comprehensive sources.

**RELATED PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT ISSUES**

It is obvious that young children’s physical needs and abilities are different from those of adults. We know that young children are often unable to handle new tasks when their needs for adequate rest and nourishment are not met. Infants and toddlers have the greatest need for frequent rest and feedings. As children mature, they are able to be content for longer periods of time between rest and nourishment. However, preschool and early elementary age children still need frequent breaks for physical movement, rest, and nourishment in order to be alert, attentive, and ready to learn. You have probably seen young children repeatedly demonstrate their inability to sit still for very long. However, teachers sometimes forget this last fact and cause trouble for themselves and their students.

**Need to Move Around**

Devon and several of his classmates in Miss Wheeler’s first-grade class routinely upset their teacher’s day. They simply won’t sit still and listen during group time. They are always getting up and wandering around when they are supposed to be working in their seats. Miss Wheeler constantly reminds them to sit still or to go back to their seats. She just doesn’t understand that most young children have difficulty sitting still for very long.

Next door, in Mrs. Jensen’s first-grade room, children are free to move around between learning centers. There is very little enforced sitting in that room, and very little need for the teacher to reprimand anyone. In addition to movement indoors, lessons often include outdoor activity. Sometimes, a parent helper and Mrs. Jensen take the class outdoors for a gardening session on the school grounds, allowing physical movement as well as some hands-on lessons about plant life.

Miss Wheeler feels like a police officer instead of a teacher, but she thinks it is the children who are at fault. Matching her expectations of the children with their level of development would make her life much easier, as well as eliminate a lot of needless tension for her students.

Children need to move, not only for their physical development, but also for their intellectual development. Important brain development is taking place when infants, toddlers, and young children engage in movement and physical play. Brain research shows that physical movement stimulates the myelinization process critical to development of neural pathways in the brain. This myelinization process allows young children to gain control over their muscles and their sensory abilities; it also facilitates their
Chapter 2

cognitive processes (Berger, 2007). Physical movement also increases blood flow to the brain, optimizing its performance. Following physical activity, most children have an increased ability to quietly focus their attention (Tomporowski, Davis, Miller, & Naglieri, 2008). In addition, physical games that require children to watch movements and mimic them with their own bodies help with the development of sensory integration, which aids in the development of reading and writing skills (Gartrell & Sonsteng, 2008).

The skills children learn through physical play are very important skills for preventing and solving discipline problems. Through play, children learn that help them communicate and cooperate effectively with others, as well as to manage their own behavior and emotions. Self-awareness, empathy, self-restraint, problem-solving skills, and assertiveness are just some of these skills that are learned in physical play. Children also build confidence and peer relationships through physical activity, including vigorous rough-and-tumble play (Carlson, 2011). As children negotiate rules, take turns, and lead (or follow) in a physical game, they are developing critical skills they will use throughout their lifetimes.

Research has shown that movement affects brain chemistry in humans of all ages and can be a very effective tool for managing emotional stress (Siegel & Bryson, 2011). An assessment of how girls and boys learn differently points out that movement may be even more important for boys and their reduction of emotional stress (Gurian, 2010). Boys typically need a longer period of time to process their emotions than girls. Girls are often able to use their verbal skills to work through an emotional experience, whereas many boys may need the experience of a physical release to recover from uncomfortable or difficult emotional experiences. These generalities are of course not true for every boy and girl and although our individual needs for movement vary, bodies and brains of all types benefit from physical activity.

In addition, physically competent children tend to have higher self-esteem than less-competent peers (Jelalian & Steele, 2008). Success and enjoyment associated with physical activity affect how children feel about themselves and how they interact with peers. Having good agility, balance, coordination, power, and speed can promote social interaction and peer acceptance.

Reflection

How have your successes or challenges in physical activities affected your self-esteem? Do you notice a change in your ability to focus or your attitude after engaging in vigorous exercise?

As the kids around her raised their hands, Ryanne hung her head. She really hoped her teacher wouldn’t call on her. She had no idea what her third-grade class was even working on at the moment. She was kicking a scrap of paper around on the floor under her desk and fidgeting impatiently in her seat. She wondered why it was taking so long for the class to be released for recess. When Ms. Garcia finally told them to push in their chairs and head outside, Ryanne was so relieved. As she crossed the playground, she saw a group of kids lining up to race each other across the blacktop. Ryanne ran to join them. She raced five times, winning each race she ran. She felt relaxed and proud as she reentered her classroom. Two friends asked her to sit by them as they walked to the rug in the front of the room. Ryanne was happy to sit quietly and listen to her teacher during literacy time, and she even raised her hand to respond when her teacher asked the class a question. ☞
Physical and Emotional Development Affect Child Behavior

Small-Muscle Coordination Takes Time

Not only do young children have a need to exercise their large muscles regularly, but they also need practice with small-muscle skills. Young children typically are not very adept at small-muscle work (NAEYC, 2009). Both the need for large-muscle activity and the lack of small-muscle ability create problems in classrooms where children are expected to sit at their seats and do paperwork much of the day. Such a schedule focuses on the children’s areas of weakness, and therefore puts huge pressure on them.

Individual differences and gender play a role in the development of dexterity. Girls tend to be more advanced than boys in fine motor skills and in gross motor skills requiring precision, such as hopping and skipping. Boys generally excel in skills that require force and power, such as running and jumping (Berk, 2007). For most children, it is a fact of physical development that fine motor coordination lags behind gross motor coordination. Nate, who is a fast runner and a great climber, may not be able to tie his shoes yet; and Makayla, the best in her kindergarten class at jumping rope, may struggle to write anything but her name. Placing pressure on these children to perform above their current level of development will result in frustration and feelings of failure. Negative behaviors are likely to follow. Matching your expectations to children’s abilities will avert some potential discipline struggles.

Although you want to be careful not to push fine motor tasks too early, fine motor development can be encouraged appropriately. Ample opportunities for practice, appropriate tools (scissors that actually cut, for instance), and adult support assist children’s fine motor dexterity. Working with modeling clay and using age-appropriate woodworking tools are other excellent ways to build fine motor skills in young children. By the time they enter the primary grades, children are usually much more capable of fine motor work than when they were preschool age, when it often generates neurological fatigue.

Need for Food and Rest

Young children also have a need for nutritious food and rest in order to work and play cooperatively at school. Many children today are misnourished, with a large amount of their calories coming from non-nutritive foods. Eating too many non-nutritive foods contributes to our ever-growing rate of childhood obesity, and affects children’s behavior (Jelalian & Steele, 2008). Too much sugar or a lack of protein or complex carbohydrates can lead to a sugar crash. This crash may affect individual children differently. You may know a child who loses all self-control if he or she has too much sugar or gets too hungry. Some may become impulsive, while others may become withdrawn or distracted. Allowing for snack time, with healthy, low-sugar snacks, may prevent discipline problems. When schools don’t provide snacks, asking for healthy snack donations from businesses or other parents can also help build community.

Sometimes, Kayla cannot seem to focus on any of the morning classroom activities, and Dennis, her teacher, figures that she didn’t eat much breakfast that day. When this happens, he allows her to have her mid-morning snack a little early. Dennis is taking into consideration Kayla’s individual needs as well as the group’s needs. The
allowing for snack time, with healthy, low-sugar snacks, may prevent discipline problems.

standard practice of snack time acknowledges the fact that children in general can’t eat much at one time, and can’t go as long between meals as older people can.

Scheduled rest time at the preschool level also acknowledges a physical need at that age, but formal rest periods tend to disappear once children enter kindergarten or first grade.

Mrs. Jensen is trying to teach Zoe and others with similar needs how to take a break when they need it, rather than push themselves beyond their limits. Her classroom offers several soft, secluded spots, and her schedule offers the flexibility to use them.

emotional development and guidance

Each child experiences the world in different ways. Children’s relationships with family members and others, their cultural context, and their brain development are just some of the factors that affect their unique path of emotional development.
Temperament, gender, and individual strengths and weaknesses also affect emotional development (Denham, 2007). In the following pages, we specifically explore some of these factors and how they may play into discipline issues in the classroom. Meeting children’s basic emotional needs is essential to creating a peaceful learning environment. Meeting their needs is also essential to children’s overall success in school and life beyond.

**Temperament**

The definition of *temperament* continues to evolve as we gain understanding about children and their individual differences. Temperament is a component of personality. It is, in part, determined by our genetics, but is also influenced by how we are nurtured (Eisenberg, Eggum, Sallquist, & Edwards, 2010). Our individual temperament determines how we react to stimuli and how we regulate these reactions (Galinsky, 2010; Rothbart & Bates, 2006). Some children jump right into new settings, yet watch carefully and for a significant time before trying something new. Some children experience very intense anger and joy, and others are more even-tempered. You may know some children who quickly recover after an upset, while others may need a long time to calm down. Just like adults, some children are easily distracted, yet others cannot be deterred from their focus. These are all examples of different dimensions of temperament. The development of emotion regulation is largely dependent on temperament (Macklem, 2010). Learning appropriate ways to express emotions and acceptable reactions to stimuli is easier for some children than it is for others, based on each child’s individual temperament. A child who quickly approaches new settings and is not highly sensitive to stimuli has an easier time adjusting to a school setting. A child who has strong intensity of reactions or struggles with transitions has a harder time adjusting to any setting. It is important to remember that the way the child reacts is not his or her fault, but rather a combination of temperament and life experiences.

Temperament determines not only how the child reacts, but also how others react to the child. The challenge for the caring adult is to respond positively to the more difficult child. Some children adapt easily to change, have a pleasant mood, and their emotions are easy to read, making them a joy for caregivers and teachers. However, some children who are born with a high energy level, a short attention span, difficulty with change, or a negative outlook are often in trouble with their teachers and less accepted by their peers (Sterry, Reiter-Purtill, Garstein, Gerhardt, Vannatta, & Noll, 2010). Although these children can be difficult, they need your help and understanding, because their difficult temperaments are making life more difficult for them, too. These individual differences in temperament influence children’s social interactions throughout their lifetime and can have long-term effects on their mental health.

When Annelie cries at the drop of a hat, her friends tease her, calling her a “crybaby.” Children like Annelie need significant support with social skills and emotion regulation to prevent them from developing low self-esteem or other emotional or behavior problems. Caregivers must focus their interests on adapting the environment and teaching styles to accommodate the needs of the children involved. This is
part of making the school fit the child, as opposed to trying to make the child fit the school. Helping children develop emotional competence can be done through emotion coaching, which is discussed at the end of this chapter. Emotion coaching in the classroom not only helps children develop lifelong skills, but also helps prevent discipline problems.

When teachers assess the cause of a discipline problem to determine the best action to take with a child, temperament is often a consideration.

Annelie and Jack are attempting to build a road system together, each with her and his own idea of where the road should go. When Dennis sees that Annelie’s frustration level is beginning to rise, he knows from prior experience that she may need some help calming herself down. Dennis calmly approaches Annelie before she rises completely out of control and invites her to continue building her road in the sand at the sensory table. Dennis knows that the sand play and some time alone help calm Annelie. Dennis does not attempt any negotiation between Annelie and Jack when he knows that her intensity of emotion is too high for this to be effective.

Developmental Stages

Although individual differences play a significant role, children nonetheless progress through various predictable developmental stages in their emotional development. Children build on what they learn in one stage to progress onto the next, and as they do so, they lay the foundation for their mental health throughout their lives. It is important to note, however, that one developmental stage is not completed, like a closed book, when the child moves on to another stage. All stages are continually revisited and built on as the child grows and continues developing for the rest of his or her life. Erikson’s (1963) theory of personality encompasses the entire lifespan and attempts to explain patterns of behavior throughout every stage of life.

According to Erikson’s widely respected theory, each of these stages has a particular focus, or developmental task, that influences the child’s responses at this time. In his explanation of these stages, Erikson addresses the emergence of emotional development (Eisenberg, 2004). We find Erikson’s explanation of emotional development especially relevant to discipline issues. Understanding child behavior in terms of the stages that Erikson describes can help us prevent discipline problems; this understanding can also be used to guide intervention when problems do occur. We discuss here only the stages relevant to early childhood, although Erikson’s stage theory continues through adolescence, adulthood, and old age (Figure 2–1).

These stages correlate roughly to ages, but individual differences and diversity of experiences create variations from this norm. As mentioned, as children proceed
Physical and Emotional Development Affect Child Behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trust vs. Mistrust</th>
<th>Babies learn whether the world around them is safe and nurturing.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy vs. Shame</td>
<td>Toddlers learn to define themselves as individuals or feel shame about their independent urges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiative vs. Guilt</td>
<td>Children learn to test their individual powers and abilities or feel guilty about making mistakes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry vs. Inferiority</td>
<td>Children extend their ideas of themselves as successful workers or learn to feel inferior and incapable.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

FIGURE 2–1  Erikson’s Stages of Child Development

along their developmental path, they are continually building on and continuing their growth in previous stages of emotional development. Teachers and parents also may notice a child who is in an emotionally stressful situation at home regressing to a previous developmental stage.

**Trust versus Mistrust**  Even if you never plan to work with babies, you need to know about the *trust versus mistrust* stage of development, which Erikson relates to infancy. Erikson explains that infants’ early interactions with their parents form the basis for the development of emotional regulation (Eisenberg, 2004). When babies are making their first discoveries about what kind of world they have entered, they are forming the foundation of emotional health for the rest of their lives. Many are welcomed into homes where they are the center of attention, and their slightest protest is met with efforts to alleviate distress. These babies begin to trust early that they are important and that someone cares for them enough to meet their needs. For these babies, the world is a safe and friendly place. However, some babies aren’t so lucky. Their parents may be overwhelmed with personal problems, and a baby is just one more worry, or their caregivers may be overworked and untrained. These babies may continually cry from hunger or other discomfort without any response. What a different image of themselves and their world these babies get!

Children’s early efforts to communicate their needs deserve a response. Responsive adults are setting the stage for children to build trusting and cooperative relationships throughout their lifetime (Elliott & Gonzalez-Mena, 2011). When a child’s needs are unmet, the child feels insecure and does not trust in others to care for him or her. Trust develops along with attachment to a significant adult. Later in this chapter, we talk more about attachment as a basic human need and a foundation for healthy emotional development.

Children continue to actively work on developing trust during preschool and in the early school years, especially if they had a problem with it earlier. They are looking for evidence that they can count on people in their larger world. Some have had negative experiences in their past that lead them to expect continued disappointments from everyone they encounter (Dykas & Cassidy, 2011). You may see some of these children constantly checking to see if someone is still their friend. They may
also frequently seek the reassurance of the teacher’s attention. Others just expect rejection, as in the following example:

September 29th was the first child’s birthday in her class. However, Mrs. Jensen didn’t see Noah’s mother put party invitations into six of the children’s cubbies. As the first child discovered hers, a mad rush of others hopefully checked their cubbies. There were a few shouts of delight and many disappointed faces. “Oh dear,” Mrs. Jensen thought. “I should have made it clear that party invitations should not be distributed at school unless all children are included.” Mrs. Jensen noticed that Connor didn’t even bother looking. He didn’t expect to be invited, just as he couldn’t believe that other children would let him join in their play.

Connor’s life hadn’t made him feel secure or wanted. He had been in four foster homes in 2 years. Mrs. Jensen wondered what his birthdays had been like. Mrs. Jensen reached for her circle-time basket and removed the story she’d planned to read, replacing it with A. A. Milne’s *The World of Pooh*. She put her bookmark on page 70, “In which Eeyore has a birthday party and gets two presents.” She also changed her plans for the topic of the group discussion, deciding to discuss feelings of being left out.

Mrs. Jensen begins group time by sharing a short and humorous, but sad personal story of a time she remembers feeling left out as a child. Two children share similar experiences. When Mrs. Jensen reads the part of the story where Piglet wishes Eeyore “Many happy returns of the day” and Eeyore can hardly believe that his friends remembered his birthday and even gave him presents, Connor giggles especially loudly.

After the story, the group discusses how Eeyore felt, and they come up with a list of ways to help him trust his friends next year. Mrs. Jensen then points out how she put paper candles on her calendar to mark all the children’s birthdays. She ends with an explanation about most homes not being big enough to invite a whole class, so they will have birthday celebrations in the classroom for everyone. (Class parties are acceptable this year because she doesn’t have any children in her class from families who don’t celebrate birthdays or holidays.) She mentions the birthdays coming up during the next few months, and Connor beams as she ends with, “and December 6th we’ll celebrate Connor’s birthday!”

If a child’s experiences repeatedly lead to a lesson in mistrust rather than trust, that child’s whole life can be affected. Future friendships—and even marriages—may suffer from this lack of trust. It first appears as insecurity with friends and excessive demands on teachers. Later in life, an inability to trust coworkers and the suspicion of spouses can undermine relationships. As relationships fail to withstand the pressure, a vicious cycle of self-fulfilling prophecy is perpetuated. We have all known children and adults who fit this pattern: They expect others to reject them, so they behave in ways that invite rejection. Your challenge is to help children have experiences that will reverse this cycle and help them begin to develop trust in caring adults.

*Autonomy versus Shame*  Erikson’s *autonomy stage* is the period when children work at defining themselves as separate from the adults they have, until now, completely
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The toddler years are the time for development of autonomy, as Erikson defines it. As infants, children are so dependent that they actually consider themselves a part of their parents or caregivers. But toddlers suddenly begin to see that they are separate people, with ideas and wills of their own. They need to test this new revelation to make sure it is true and to convince themselves of their independence. While this period is commonly known as the “Terrible Twos,” this testing stage may not actually begin until age 3, but it can create serious discipline problems for the unwary adult. The formerly docile child suddenly responds with an emphatic “No!” to all suggestions and tests the limits that are set.

Georgia is so caught up in her ability to say “No!” that she sometimes says “No!” to things she really wants. Dennis asks her to join the group at the snack table when she is in a particularly assertive mood. “No,” says Georgia proudly, enjoying her moment of control. Dennis knows that Georgia is asserting her power to say “Yes” or “No,” but she is likely to want some snack when the other children start eating theirs. When Georgia inevitably changes her mind and does decide to join the group at the snack table, Dennis doesn’t lecture her about the fact that saying “No” means she doesn’t get any. Instead, he subtly looks the other way when she comes to the table for snack, allowing her to join in without feeling embarrassed. He then cheerfully gives her the option to choose apples or raisins, encouraging her budding independence by allowing her to make decisions for herself.

Dennis allows the children in his preschool room as many opportunities as possible to make decisions and choices. These opportunities not only help children feel proud of their increasing independence, but also may help them cooperate during times when there is no choice. Children who routinely have a chance to exercise their personal power are often more able to accept times when adults must make the decisions. Nancy offered choices to Ava to encourage her cooperation at the end of her day in the early care and education center, as shown in the following example.

It seemed that Ava was asserting herself by refusing to cooperate when getting ready to go home, antagonizing her tired and hurried father. Nancy didn’t give any attention to the undesirable behavior by wheedling and bribing her to get her boots and coat on, nor did she take away Ava’s independence by forcing her to put them on. Instead, Nancy gave Ava some choices about how to get ready. “Do you want to put on your boots first or your coat first?” asked Nancy. “Would you like me or your daddy to help you with your zipper?” was the next question. “Can you put on your own boots, or would you like help?” was another. In no time at all, Ava was ready to go and feeling proud of herself.

Erikson’s theory says that when children do not develop emotional autonomy, they develop a sense of shame instead. Shame can be caused by their experiences with adults who don’t understand what is happening when children assert
themselves; these adults think that their job is to stamp out “naughtiness.” Unfortunately, they may only be successful at making children believe they are being bad, when really the children are just working at being grown-up. As a result, the children develop feelings of shame about the natural urges of independence.

Initiative versus Guilt  Erikson’s next stage of development is initiative versus guilt. Most preschool and many kindergarten children are in this stage. You will see them further testing their individual powers and abilities. As their physical and intellectual abilities increase rapidly, they try out new and more challenging skills. This stage is like a bridge that children may continually move back and forth across, trying out being a “big kid” and then moving back into the security of their dependency on caregivers (Koplow, 2007). Children in this stage want to feel involved and powerful as they try out new tasks. They may be competitive and want to be the best at everything they do. Or they may be intimidated and fear failure when tasks are too difficult for them.
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It is helpful to offer children appropriate opportunities to feel successful, as in the following examples:

Aalivah is always right there when it is time to prepare the morning snack. She takes great satisfaction in setting the table or spreading cream cheese on celery sticks. She practices small motor coordination, and even math skills, as she meticulously places five raisins on each celery stick. Her feelings of accomplishment and confidence are also growing.

Aalivah and her classmates are invited to assist with many necessary jobs in the morning session of preschool. They care for the class guinea pig, cleaning her cage and feeding her. They water the plants, sweep up under the sand table, and organize the dress-up clothes on hooks. They take pride in this work because their teacher, Dennis, communicates his belief in the children’s abilities. The teacher accepts the children’s ability levels and doesn’t make a fuss if a job isn’t done perfectly, or if a little something is spilled in the process.

Whenever the morning staff thinks about developing a new learning center, they first discuss the plan with the students. Dennis knows from his classes in early childhood education, as Nancy knows from raising four children, that children learn much from the planning process and that their involvement helps ensure that the new materials are used appropriately. After a field trip to a bakery, the children want to set up a bakery in the pretend play area. Instead of looking all weekend for materials, Dennis and his assistant Nancy invite children to bring things from home that could be used in a bakery. The weekly newsletter explains the plan to parents and asks them to contribute. On Monday, the children arrive with muffin tins, cupcake wrappers, bakery boxes, baker’s hats, and frosting spreaders. The children have already decided to use the play kitchen, a table, a cash register, and play money from the classroom.

As the interested children work to arrange these materials in a way meaningful to them, they cooperate in problem solving and planning. They are willing to invest effort to resolve disagreements in their bakery. Before long, things are set up to their satisfaction, and several kids are busily baking and serving their happy customers. These children are feeling good about the work they have done, and it shows in their behavior.

When teachers save all the work for themselves, no one “wins.”

In the afternoon session at Midway Children’s Center, the teacher makes the snack in advance and pours juice for each child. Joanne, the teacher, discourages the children’s offers to help, telling them that they will only spill it if they try to pour their own juice. Joanne spends long hours after school and on weekends preparing materials and rearranging the classroom. She prides herself on always having everything ready for her students when they arrive. She wouldn’t dream of using class time to set up a new activity; everything is strictly preplanned and scheduled. She doesn’t have pets in her class because she doesn’t have time to care for them, and the children “are too young to do it properly.” Everything is under control: hers. In spite of all her careful planning, Joanne has many more discipline problems than the morning staff does. The students often seem disinterested.
in what Joanne has planned for them. They frequently “misuse” the materials, pursuing their own ideas instead of copying the model at the art table. When the children don’t follow Joanne’s plans, she tells them how disappointed she is.

Javier and his friends feel ashamed when they disappoint their teacher. They don’t understand that it is their healthy curiosity and energy that is getting them into trouble. They only know that what they are interested in doing is “bad.” They assume that they are bad children. Because Joanne’s training is with older children, she isn’t familiar with this stage of child development. Thus, she often misinterprets the children’s actions.

What a different kind of experience this teacher and her young students would have if Joanne only knew how to harness their constructive energy into activities that would develop their sense of initiative.

**Industry versus Inferiority** School-age children are working through an emotional development stage that builds on the preschool stage of initiative versus guilt. Erikson calls this next stage *industry versus inferiority*. During this phase, children are extending their ideas of themselves as workers and contributing members of society. If they feel successful, their behavior mirrors their good feelings about themselves; on the other hand, negative behaviors result when children have negative feelings about themselves. Their developmental task in this stage is to earn recognition for productive work and to master the tools necessary for this work. In a subsistence society, this stage means learning to hunt, fish, cure skins, gather berries, and preserve food. For today’s mainstream society, it means learning to read, write, think quantitatively, and work cooperatively. Feeling successful at this age means seeing yourself as a capable person. Once again, children need to have opportunities for real work that is meaningful to them and that they are allowed to do on their own.

Mrs. Jensen’s first graders were planting seeds this afternoon as part of their study to learn how things grow. They had read about what plants need to grow and now they were reading the specific directions on the seed packets. They had a variety of fast-growing seeds available: beans, radishes, lettuce, and alfalfa. They also had access to a variety of planting materials and containers.

Some were interested in the idea of watching bean sprouts grow in a jar of water. Others liked the idea of growing an alfalfa crop in a paper cup filled with dirt. The prospect of actually growing a radish to eat was exciting to others. The students had the opportunity to explore as many of the options as they wished. They also had the freedom to do their planting in their own way. The parent helper was worried because some of the seeds weren’t being planted at the recommended depth. Mrs. Jensen reassured him that the variety of planting approaches and the varying results were an educational experience. The children certainly weren’t worried. They felt very important to know that they were starting the process of making something grow.

When the seeds were planted, the students began making journals for recording the growth of their plants. The children made the books themselves, counting out
Too many children are labeled as failures at this stage. You certainly have seen the devastating consequences for the child who fails to begin reading on society’s schedule. This is the child whom others shun for being dumb. This is the child who disrupts class out of frustration and anger. This is the child the teachers are eager to send off to the reading specialist. Many students who eventually become school dropouts begin dropping out in first grade (Denham, 2007). Lifelong inferiority complexes begin early. The children in the following examples were spared.

Emily had a narrow escape. She came home in tears, saying, “I’m dumb now.” Her teacher had said she wanted Emily to go to the reading specialist for help on her phonics skills. Fortunately, this step couldn’t be taken without a parent conference. Miss Wheeler explained to Emily’s mom that Emily didn’t seem able to do the daily phonics worksheets; therefore, she obviously needed special help. Emily’s mother was puzzled by this report, because her daughter was already reading at home and wrote wonderful stories, too. Her teacher was surprised to hear about Emily’s success at home. She couldn’t figure out how a child could read and write but not be able to do phonics sheets. Miss Wheeler was new to first grade after teaching in the upper grades and wasn’t knowledgeable about beginning reading. She didn’t realize that phonics sheets are much more abstract than actual writing is, and that most children learn phonics through meaningful writing experiences. Miss Wheeler listened to the child’s mother, however, and did not further damage Emily’s belief in herself as a learner.

Many schools today expect children to be reading fluently before they may be developmentally ready to do so. Some children simply aren’t capable of fluency by the second grade and need more time for the necessary brain pathways to develop. Austin was one of these kids. His parents and teachers met to discuss his reluctance with reading. They saw his strengths and progress and were confident that he would become a more capable reader in time. They made sure that he had plenty of opportunities to experience books at his level and many purposes for writing, but they made no judgments to him about his level of performance. They wanted to be sure that he maintained the view of himself as a successful learner. If Austin couldn’t read chapter books in the second grade, it was not the end of the world. However, feeling like a failure could endanger his self-esteem and his future ability to learn. This child was supported as he negotiated the industry versus inferiority stage in his own time.
Families and Attachment

A secure attachment is the foundation for healthy progression through all the stages of emotional development. Secure attachment is a loving relationship with special people; interacting with these people is pleasurable, and their nearness is comforting in times of stress (Berk, 2007). Infants and young children need to be supported, accepted, and comforted as they learn about the world. When a parent provides this type of environment for a child, the child forms a secure attachment with his or her parent (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). Developing a secure attachment includes giving a child room to explore while also being aware of and sensitive to the child’s needs (Landy, 2009). This is the beginning of trust development, as mentioned when we discussed Erikson’s stage of trust versus mistrust (Erikson, 1963).

Some of the most difficult children you will encounter as a teacher come from family situations where their attachment experience has been stressful, dysfunctional, or even dangerous (Perry & Szalavitz, 2011). Children with attachment issues are often unable to express their own feelings, and they may be aggressive toward or reject others. Children with attachment problems may be whiny, impulsive, needy, or disorganized and unpredictable. Typically, these children are not well liked due to their behavior (Riley, San Juan, Klinkner, & Ramminger, 2008).

For instance, Tomas may be very successful at pushing other people away when they try to engage him. He may act quite nasty to others and appear unworthy
of affection and attention. If Tomas was abandoned, neglected, or abused, his behavior is understandable. If he could not trust in a caregiver to consistently respond to and protect him, his repulsive behavior is only a protective mechanism. He is attempting to protect himself from what he believes will ultimately be rejection from everyone he encounters.

Reflection
What did your parents or other significant adults teach you about caring for others? Were they trustworthy and responsive? How did your experiences with them affect your future relationships?

Teachers and Attachment

Fortunately, during the preschool and early school years it is not too late to intervene in the lives of children with attachment problems. When a child enters a school or early education setting without the foundation of a secure attachment, the most important task for the teacher is to focus on building a positive, consistent, and trusting relationship with that child. Children who are more securely attached to their teachers get along better with other children and have fewer behavior problems (Riley, San Juan, Klinkner, & Ramminger, 2008). If Tomas doesn’t have a responsive and supportive caregiver at home, a secure relationship with his teacher can help meet his attachment needs (O’Connor & McCartney, 2006). His caring teacher can disprove his expectation of rejection. He can learn to trust his teacher. Rather than reinforcing Tomas’s belief that he is unworthy of love and caring, a caring teacher can provide Tomas with a predictable and safe environment, consistently respond to his needs, and show positive feelings toward him. He can learn valuable relationship skills from this bond that will help him succeed in all his future relationships.

In the following example, we see how a teacher builds a positive relationship with a child who really needs her patient and consistent care. As Tristan learns that he can trust his teacher to accept and care for him, he learns how to build his own caring relationships with others.

Tristan’s behavior had become increasingly aggressive since his arrival at the early care and education center last fall, and Sheri was very concerned. In fact, things were getting out of control. Last week, when she had to remove Tristan from the block area where he was hitting other children with blocks, he had hit and kicked her uncontrollably. She tried to hold him soothingly, but his outburst didn’t stop until he was exhausted. He refused to be comforted by her. After Tristan calmed down in a safe place, Sheri reframed what happened, assuming the best in Tristan. She said to him, “You wanted Luke to build with you in the block area and you felt mad when he wouldn’t play with you, so you hit him. You didn’t know what else to do. Let’s talk about what you could do differently next time you want to play with Luke.” Now that Tristan was calm, Sheri was able to ask him questions to get him thinking and problem solving.

Sometimes when Tristan had to be removed from an activity because of his behavior, he directed some pretty harsh words toward Sheri. Sheri knew better than to take this personally, and she knew she needed to remain calm and consistent.
Notice that Tristan is beginning to bond with Sheri as well as to feel proud of himself. When we work with children with difficult behavior, it is important to remember what Dr. Becky Bailey says in her Conscious Discipline program, “There are no bad children, just hurting children” (Bailey, DVD, 2004). As in the case of Tristan, out-of-control behavior is often a cry for help. As teachers build positive and supportive relationships with the children in their classrooms, they create an environment of caring and cooperation that is the foundation for each child’s success.

Human Needs

Forming a secure attachment is a basic need for healthy emotional development. Beyond attachment, there are other emotional needs that all humans continue to have throughout life. Adler (1917) proposes that power, attention, and acceptance are basic human needs required for individuals to feel personal significance and a sense of belonging. When these needs are met, people feel good about themselves and tend to interact with others in positive ways. This creates a cycle of positive interaction that further convinces them that they are significant in their world. When these needs are not met, the reverse is true: Human nature leads people who feel insignificant to behave in ways that further alienate them from the acceptance and approval they desire. These needs apply to adults as well as children.

Power  A need for being in charge of your own actions, also known as personal power, is central to feeling significant (Adler, 1917). Children and adults who experience too much external control over their behaviors have unmet power needs. This may make them bossy and controlling of others, or it may overwhelm them with frustration and anger. Sometimes temper tantrums are a result of feeling powerless. You may have
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seen situations when children began screaming and crying when told they had to do something that seemed insignificant.

If you have spent much time with young children, you may have heard one of the following statements (or said one as a child yourself): “I don’t have to!” “My mom said!” “You’re not the boss of me!” These are clear evidence of children’s attempts to get personal power. This need for power is often evident when watching children play. Themes of invincibility and control are very attractive to kids. Unfortunately, this play is often violent and may reflect the violence that children have seen in their homes, communities, or the news. The children most likely to play out these violent themes are those who feel the most powerless and vulnerable (Levin & Carlsson-Paige, 2005).

Young children are especially vulnerable to unmet power needs because they are able to make so few actual decisions for themselves. This is another reason why it is important to let them have choices when possible, and to redirect them toward activities they are allowed to do, rather than just telling them what they aren’t allowed to do. When giving choices, it is important to offer just a couple of options so the child is not overwhelmed and to be sure both options really are acceptable to you and to the child. Too often, adults offer children a choice between two things the child does not want; this is not a true choice. Children whose power needs are met are definitely easier to get along with.

Attention A major indicator of significance and social recognition is having other people pay attention to you. Being ignored is painful because it makes you feel unimportant. Having someone listen to what you have to say or be interested in what you are doing is incredibly validating. Unfortunately, many adults unwittingly teach children to misbehave in order to get the attention they crave. They pay no attention to children who are getting along well or who are working productively; they give attention only when there is a problem. This means that many children have no idea how to get attention in positive ways; therefore, they strive to get it in negative ways. Interestingly, the drive for attention is so strong that people would rather have others mad at them than ignoring them.

مؤهز جاكسون has been sitting in group time waving his hand wildly, hoping to get a turn answering a question. He knows all the answers, but never gets a chance to show it. He is getting very disgusted at listening to other kids who don’t know the right answer. Why won’t Miss Wheeler call on him? He could tell her the right answer. Jackson decides not to wait to be called on anymore; he yells out the answer to the next question. Miss Wheeler instantly reprimands him for breaking the rule about raising his hand and sends him to the time-out bench. As he sits there all alone, he sees the plants that the class planted last week. Some are starting to sprout. Jackson breaks the tender shoots off the plants.مؤهز

Noticing what children are doing and commenting to them about what you see without any judgment goes a long way toward meeting their needs for attention. Rather than waiting for children to ask for our attention or to seek it with negative
Acceptance Being accepted by others is another essential human need. Some people behave in ways that makes others want to be with them, while others do just the opposite. Young children generally lack understanding of others’ feelings, and this often causes them to act in ways that result in rejection. Teachers of young children see variations of the following situation over and over again. You must be prepared to help children learn more useful strategies.

Reflection What could Miss Wheeler say to Jackson to show that she notices him, even if she isn’t going to call on him? Can you think of a time someone noticed something about you without any positive or negative judgment? How have you shown others you care simply by noticing what they are doing?

Joe wanted to play with Logan, an older and admired playmate, so he ran up to him and exuberantly banged into him. Logan didn’t see this as a friendly gesture, so he shoved Joe away—hard. Joe fell against the wall and cried brokenheartedly, not just from the bump, but also from the rejection.

Motives of Misbehavior

Dreikurs (1964) expands on Adler’s theory of basic human needs to discuss children’s behavior specifically. Dreikurs proposes that children often misbehave in an unconscious attempt to have their basic needs met. Specifically, behavior problems may be the result of a need for power, attention, revenge, or an attempt to avoid failure. Avoidance of failure means a child has totally quit trying. This is the result of experiencing too many failures in the quest to fulfill personal needs and becoming convinced there is no hope of success. Children may also have behavior problems when they cannot regulate their emotions. When children do not understand their emotions and do not have the skills to express them in a socially acceptable way, behavior problems are often the result.

Emotion Regulation

Emotion regulation refers to our ability to control our internal reactions and outward expressions of our emotions (Landy, 2009). When children develop emotion regulation, they can identify their feelings and verbalize them to others, they can cope with emotional highs and lows appropriately, and they can refrain from acting on their impulses when needed. Children also learn to delay gratification and motivate themselves into action as they develop emotion regulation skills. Emotional competence expands on emotion regulation. Emotionally competent children are aware of their own emotions and the emotions of others. They can also read social cues and show empathy to others (Gordon, 2009; Gottman, 1997).

Developing emotional competency takes time, and there is much for children to learn. Learning how to deal with frustration, how to cope with fear and anxiety,
and how to express pleasure in an appropriate way are some of the most important aspects of developing emotion regulation. Unfortunately, some people never master these skills, even throughout their adult years. You probably know at least one adult who cannot control his or her anger, or you may have a friend who is overwhelmed by his or her fear and anxiety. We develop the ability to regulate our emotions in several ways. Our genetic makeup, brain development, temperament, and attachment affect our ability to regulate emotions (Macklem, 2010). This means that our ability to regulate our emotions does not depend only on our environment. Each individual comes into the world with some natural emotional strengths and challenges. Our individual temperaments play a major role in the development of emotional competency. If negative mood and an intense reaction style are elements of Annelie’s temperament, then learning to regulate her emotions will be a more difficult task for Annelie than for a more even-tempered child.

In addition to temperament, developing a secure attachment with a caregiver may be one of the most important contributors to developing emotional competency. Through the foundation of secure and trusting relationships with consistent caregivers, children begin to understand their emotions as well as the emotions of those around them. As discussed earlier, a secure attachment involves a responsive adult who acknowledges a child’s emotions and provides comfort when needed. In this way, a child experiences empathy from the caregiver and begins to learn how to express empathy for others, a critical element in developing emotion regulation (Gordon, 2009; Landy, 2009).

As children’s brains and nervous systems mature, they can learn to better control their emotions.
In addition to teaching emotion regulation skills, caregivers also serve as models for emotional competency. Children learn to identify their feelings and put them into words by watching those around them.

Many studies show that academic success is linked to learning emotion regulation skills (Graziano, Reavis, Keane, & Calkins, 2007). When we are under stress, it is more difficult to remember and understand what we learn. When children or adults react impulsively to stressors, the “fight-or-flight” region of our brain, officially known as the amygdala, takes over. The amygdala directs our instant passionate responses to any perceived threat, without taking the time to consider if we are making a good decision (Cozolino, 2006; Goleman, 2011). As children mature and learn emotion regulation skills, they are increasingly able to engage the thinking area of the brain, in the frontal lobe, to handle emotional situations. When children operate from their frontal lobes, they are able to problem solve and learn new skills. They are also able to cooperate better with peers, because they begin to understand the emotions of those around them. When schools focus on helping children develop their emotional competence, academic achievement increases, quality of relationships with peers and teachers improves, and behavior problems decrease (Macklem, 2010).

Helping Children Develop Emotional Competence

With adult assistance, children learn to behave in socially acceptable ways as they mature. We already mentioned that attachment is crucial to developing emotional competence; therefore, forming a positive and supportive relationship with children in your classes is the first and possibly most important step in assisting in their emotional development. If children trust you, they will be able to express their emotions to you much more easily. For children who have not experienced a secure attachment, learning to express their emotions in an acceptable and healthy way may not come easily. If you work on developing your relationship with them as the first step, their emotional competence will gradually begin to grow as well.
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There are many other proactive ways to help children develop emotion regulation skills. Teaching children to be aware of their emotions and how to handle them in healthy ways is called emotion coaching (Gottman, 2004). Teachers are some of the best emotion coaches. Being aware of your own emotions and taking care of your own emotional health is the foundation for emotion coaching. Remind yourself and your class that all emotions are acceptable, but all behaviors are not. Have discussions with the class about ways we express our emotions, and set clear limits on behavior in the classroom. As a class, identify the emotions of characters in books and stories, and allow children to express their emotions in role-play with puppets or figures. You can place visual cues in the classroom with emotion words or facial expressions. Allowing children to draw pictures or make up their own metaphors to represent feelings can be helpful, particularly for children with limited language abilities. Talk about children’s emotions during conflicts between peers, asking about or pointing out the facial expression of the other child, and help them to name the feelings they are expressing. These coaching techniques help children learn to read the emotions of others and develop empathy.

When a child is distressed, there are simple emotion coaching steps you can follow to help a child develop emotional competency. Begin by listening to the child’s feelings without judgment or criticism. After hearing the child, help him or her put feelings into words. This helps the child develop an emotion vocabulary for the future. When children feel heard and have a label for how they feel, they are often able to move beyond their distress. If a child is still distressed, you have a great opportunity to help him or her identify appropriate solutions to the problem. Another powerful tool is to acknowledge your own emotions to your students and model techniques for calming yourself, such as taking deep breaths or taking your own quiet time. Figure 2–2 shows some of the strategies you can use to teach emotion regulation.

Acknowledging and accepting children’s emotions can go a long way. Many times our anger is more manageable after we have expressed it to someone who understands. Instead of minimizing, criticizing, or denying children’s emotions, allow them a time and place to feel all of their emotions. Continually communicate the message that no emotions are prohibited, only that certain behaviors are off limits. You can enforce limits of behavior, but acknowledge the child’s emotion as valid. Listen to children’s verbal and nonverbal expression of emotions, and help them put their emotions into accurate words.

FIGURE 2–2 Emotion Coaching Techniques

- Build positive, respectful relationships with each individual child.
- Integrate discussions about emotions into the curriculum.
- Acknowledge children’s feelings (don’t minimize or ignore emotions).
- Help children put their feelings into words they understand.
- Model appropriate expressions of your own feelings.
Sarah and Sophie are playing house. Sarah is being the “mommy” and pushing her baby in the buggy, when Sophie decides she is ready for her turn. She grabs the buggy away, knocking Sarah over in the process. As Dennis approaches, Sarah is crying as she tells him, “I hate Sophie! She’s mean!” Dennis sits beside her, putting an arm around her, and says, “I can see you’re really angry with Sophie for taking your baby buggy. I feel angry too when someone takes away something I really want. I’ll go with you while you tell Sophie that you’ll finish your turn with the buggy and then she may have her turn after you.”

Dennis also acknowledges Sophie’s feelings, “I can tell you’re sad that you don’t have that baby buggy right now. Sometimes it’s hard to wait, and it’s okay to be sad. It isn’t okay to grab toys from our friends. Next time, I know you’ll ask or wait your turn.”

As children develop emotion regulation, they learn not to cry at minor disappointments and how to comfort themselves when upset. They also gain the ability to control impulsive behavior. Impulse control is needed for a social skill such as taking turns, which requires that a child be able to postpone the immediate gratification of desires. When Molly puts her thumb in her mouth instead of crying after her mother drops her off, she demonstrates the ability to soothe herself. When Dylan is able to wait his turn on the slide, he shows that he can delay gratification. Min Ho’s non-expressive style is evidence that he has learned his family’s cultural standards for emotion regulation.

**Conclusion**

Children’s physical and emotional needs affect their behavior. Understanding child development is necessary for dealing with discipline issues. Many factors contribute to emotional development in children, and children’s unique temperament and attachment experiences play a major role in their ability to understand and regulate emotions. Children need responsive parents and teachers to meet their basic needs and support them in developing emotional competence. As children are guided to identify and regulate their own emotions, they learn to cooperate and care for others.

**For Further Thought**

1. Observe an early childhood setting, watching for examples of young children’s inability to sit still for very long. What problems do you see when adults forget this aspect of child development?

2. As you observe young children, try to identify different temperaments as described in this chapter. What is the difference between a person’s current mood and that person’s temperament?
Physical and Emotional Development Affect Child Behavior

3. Think about people you know well. Do any of them exhibit signs of an insecure attachment as described in this chapter? How does that problem affect their social interactions?

4. Observe toddlers, watching for expressions of developing emotional autonomy as described in this chapter. How do adults respond? Do you recommend any different responses based on your understanding of this aspect of emotional development?

5. Observe preschoolers, watching for expressions of their desire for real work. Does their environment meet this need? What changes could be made to assist their development of initiative?

6. Observe your own emotions, put a name to a feeling, and talk about it with someone.

7. A problem to solve: Jeremy, a first grader, is not working on his writing assignment. He is wiggling around in his chair and distracting other students.

   a. What are some possible causes of this behavior?
   b. How would you address the various causes?
   c. How might the problem have been avoided?

RECOMMENDED READING/VIEWING