

# The Early Years (Birth–5 years)



## Developmental Overview

**D**uring the earliest years, parents are the center of a young child’s universe. Most young children love and admire their parents and caregivers. They also have a strong desire to please their parents. When a child trusts and has a desire to please others, the child is more confident and able to try new skills. For example, during the early years children learn to crawl and walk, learn to eat and toilet, and acquire language. A young child develops self-esteem during the preschool years by facing challenges, experiencing some frustrations, and enjoying many successes.

Disappointment and failure are a necessary part of learning new skills. A young child watches how conflict and unhappiness are handled by those around him. Then the child practices handling anger, conflict, and frustration based on what he has seen. These early lessons contribute to the development of essential coping strategies that the child will use throughout childhood and adolescence.

Young children experiment with independence. A child may flip-flop between relying on her parents and asserting her will. Parents who set firm limits but also encourage, support, and respect their children help them gain confidence and self-control.

Very young children tend to play side by side. However, as children grow and become more independent, they learn to play and interact with other children. Children learn friendship skills, such as learning how to share and take turns. They also learn to use words and talk when they are angry or frustrated rather than yell or hit. Young children also learn how their actions affect others [39].

In this section, we suggest seven areas in which parents have a strong influence over their young child’s experiences. Parents and caregivers can

***Seven areas in which parents exert great influence during a child’s earliest years:***

- brain development & infant attachment*
- impulse control*
- prosocial skills*
- violence on television and other media*
- toys that promote violent behavior*
- early child care experiences*
- managing family conflict*

impact these areas in ways that *encourage and support* their child’s healthy social development. Parents can also help *minimize* aggressive behavior in children. The seven areas in which parents have a major influence are brain development and infant attachment, impulse control, prosocial skills, violence on television and in other media, toys that promote violent behavior, early child care experiences, and managing family conflict. These areas represent a complex interaction of a variety of things that can contribute to a child’s healthy development, or increase a child’s risk for violence [18].

As mentioned in the introduction to this *Guide*, parenting style and family strengths, along with temperament and other factors, are important. They can also contribute to patterns of healthy development or aggression in children. However, the seven areas discussed here seem to play a significant role in whether children become aggressive. Parents also have a significant amount of control over these areas and the skills that their child masters in each area. Brief research summaries are included about each area to help parents understand the role each plays in violence prevention. Also included is a list of resources that suggests where to get additional information and assistance.

## **Your Thoughts and Notes**

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## Brain Development and Infant Attachment

### How do brain development and infant attachment fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

The quality of a baby’s early care—both before and after birth—has a lasting impact on the child’s brain development. This is partly because the brains of humans are still a “work in progress” [4]. At birth a newborn baby has an estimated 100 billion nerve cells called *neurons*. Each neuron forms many *synapses*, or connections made between the brain cells [5; 32]. Synapses that are used repeatedly become permanent, while those less frequently used

*The brain is a ‘dynamic organism’ that consistently reflects and adjusts to the individual’s environment.*

may be lost. The number of brain synapses increases to the adult level by the time a child is 2 years old. However, synapses continue to grow through adolescence and into adulthood [5].

Scientists suspect that early in life there are windows of time when certain parts of the brain are particularly responsive to stimulation and growth ([42], p. 9). If the child’s needs are not met during these periods, the child may lose abilities or have impaired abilities. Poor eating habits, the mother’s substance abuse, or a lack of appropriate stimulation may harm the growing brain [23]. Genes are important, but the brain is a “dynamic organism” that reflects and adjusts to the child’s environment ([23], p. 24).

What we now know about brain growth in young children can help us understand and prevent violence. Dr. Bruce Perry talks about “use-dependent development,” in which “the parts of the brain that grow and the parts that don’t depend on the infant’s experience” ([23], p. 25). Healthy brain development in very young children will enhance their ability to learn and develop friendships as they grow.

It is important to remember that research suggests that there isn’t one thing or experience, biological or environmental, that *causes* a child to become violent. Instead, it is the combination of many things that may “set the stage” for a child to choose violence or to see violence as the only course of action open to him. The occasional mistakes in parenting and caregiving, which we all make, do not doom a child to a lifetime of violent behavior.

This section of the *Guide* discusses some of the risk factors that may contribute to the “roots of violence” ([23], pp. 228–229). This section also discusses how parents can help protect their child from violence during the early stages of life.

For example, one of the most important foundations of a child’s healthy development is a secure relationship with his parents or with another caregiver [4]. This relationship is called “infant attachment” and is used to describe the ability of a baby to seek comfort from the parent or caregiver. This is the person that the baby will turn to when she is hungry, afraid, tired, ill, or simply wants attention. Healthy attachments for most babies will occur with their parents, brothers or sisters, and a familiar caregiver. Healthy attachments encourage both the baby’s brain development and the baby’s ability to grow and form good friendships later in life.

The baby’s behavior and ability to control his or her feelings develop largely as a result of the quality of attachment the baby has with others [7]. Children who have parents who usually respond to their needs and are sensitive to their emotions generally do well socially in later life. When parents hold their child, talk to the baby, sing to him, and try to see the unique ways he communicates, they help the baby grow into a loving, caring child. Children who have parents who are inconsistent, unpredictable, or insensitive to their child’s needs may have more difficulty forming friendships or deeper relationships as they get older [43]. Unpredictable parenting sometimes leads to “disorganized attachments” and may occur in children whose parents have mental

health problems like depression, alcoholism or other substance abuse, or other stressful family problems [4; 40]. Children who have poor or disorganized attachments may also have problems such as extreme acting-out, in which the child lashes out to hurt others or consistently breaks rules. A child who is unable to form strong relationships may also withdraw and become very quiet or become afraid to play with other children [43].

Healthy, emotionally strong, and secure relationships during childhood create a framework that children use in their relationships with others throughout life. Babies with insecure, disorganized, and weak emotional bonds to their parents or caregivers are at risk for having more trouble feeling empathy for others and building relationships as they grow [32]. At any age, children can have accidents that cause severe brain trauma. In very young children, brain injuries may temporarily or permanently affect social judgment, empathy, and abstract reasoning.

Parents can help develop strong and secure relationships through consistent caring and love and by responding to the young child's cues [5]. When the child's temperament is very different from the parent's temperament, this difference can affect the relationship between the parent and child. A temperamentally easygoing child is more likely to relax, relate well to others, and show secure attachment. A temperamentally fretful or anxious infant may need more nurturing and a quiet environment before she is ready to socialize with others. The extra attention required to soothe a fretful baby may be difficult and make a parent feel inadequate. However, many experts believe that a child's temperament is already formed at birth and is not a sign of parental failure or success. Rather, temperament appears to be a reflection of the inborn traits of the child. Parents who understand those traits and learn how to guide them can effectively support the successful development of their child. Such inborn differences remind parents that they need different strategies to respond effectively to different children [4; 15].

Finally, it helps when parents are aware of environmental or prenatal conditions that might affect brain

development and parent-child attachments. These prenatal conditions include eating right, taking prenatal vitamins, and getting plenty of rest. Mothers' drug or alcohol abuse can affect the unborn baby's neurological development and put infants at risk for low birth weight and disabilities. Maternal depression can interfere with the mother's ability to care for her baby. Trauma, including abuse and neglect that the mother may experience before the baby is born, can impair emotional development and lead to later aggressive behavior in children as they grow up [4; 5].

*Parent-child attachment exerts a strong influence on the child's later social development.*

Improvements in our understanding of the prenatal factors that may contribute to violent behavior have led to the development of a number of intervention programs for pregnant women. As parents, caregivers, teachers, and researchers become more aware of prenatal risk factors, preventive efforts are likely to grow.

## **Who can parents talk to if they are concerned about brain development and infant attachment?**

Pediatricians, other health care professionals, parenting educators, and family counselors can usually suggest resources and help parents assess whether a problem requires additional intervention.

## **Your Thoughts and Notes**

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## Resources on the Web

Infant Child Care

<http://npin.org/library/pre1998/n00392/n00392.html>

Brain Development Research: What It Means for Children and Families

<http://npin.org/library/pre1998/n00147/n00147.html>

Brain Development in Young Children

<http://npin.org/pnews/1997/pnew497/pnew497b.html>

When Babies and Toddlers Are in Child Care, Accreditation Is the Key to Quality

<http://npin.org/library/pre1998/n00144/n00144.html>

Early Childhood Violence Prevention

<http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1998/masse98.html>

You Have until the Count of 3 to Shape Your Child's Future

<http://npin.org/library/pre1998/n00009/n00009.html>

Early Childhood Development and Learning: Ten Key Lessons

[http://www.ed.gov/pubs/How\\_Children/IEarlychildhood.html](http://www.ed.gov/pubs/How_Children/IEarlychildhood.html)

Brain and Child Development

<http://www.cpirc.org/tips/braindev.htm>

Brain Development

[http://www.nncc.org/Child.Dev/brain\\_nc.html](http://www.nncc.org/Child.Dev/brain_nc.html)

Nature, Nurture, and Early Brain Development

<http://muextension.missouri.edu/xplor/hesguide/humanrel/gh6115.htm>

New Brain Development Research: What This Means to Parents: Beginning at the Beginning

<http://www.nwrel.org/pirc/hot1.html>

Brain Development in Infants and Toddlers: Information for Parents and Caregivers

<http://www.nccic.org/cctopics/brain.html>

Snapping Synapses in the Early Years

<http://www.idra.org/Newsltr/1998/Apr/Bradley.htm#Art3>

## Impulse Control

### How does impulse control fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

Impulse control, sometimes called *self-regulation*, refers to a child's ability to control his or her behavior. It is natural for young children to show a mix of strong emotions such as excitement, joy, anger, frustration, and disappointment. An important part of growing up is learning how to show emotions at appropriate times and in appropriate ways. Children who learn to control their anger or frustration, and who use words to express their feelings, get along better with others. Lack of impulse control and an inability to manage anger are often the cause of behavior problems in children and contribute to problems with friendships during the school years.

*The abilities to delay gratification, inhibit inappropriate responses, and control anger help children form positive relationships with others.*

Children who have poor impulse control are also more likely to take greater risks and engage in dangerous behavior during adolescence and into adulthood [14]. Research suggests that children start to develop appropriate ways to control their impulses and regulate their behavior as early as 3 years of age [6]. Parents can reduce the chance of violence in children's lives by positively modeling and teaching children different ways to control their anger and impulses [27; 38].

Many young children commonly show their frustration and anger by hitting, screaming, or sometimes even biting. When parents calmly provide words to help children express their feelings and provide children with other strategies for meeting their needs, while at the same time maintaining firm and fair limits for behavior, they help children develop impulse

control. For example, when parents see children taking a toy from another child, they might step in to discuss the feelings of others and the need to take turns. If a child gets mad playing a game and pushes or hits another child, parents should first make sure that the other child is safe, and then let both children know that hitting others is not permitted. Then parents might suggest words that the children could use to express their strong feelings. Parents can encourage children to consider the needs of others.

When parents suggest a reason for choosing one option over another, they are helping children develop empathy, self-control, and problem-solving abilities. These lessons in a young child's life form the basis of self-discipline. Early self-discipline or self-control is related to self-control later in childhood and throughout life [6].

### Who can parents talk to if they are concerned about their child's lack of self-control?

Child care providers and early childhood teachers, pediatricians, other health care professionals, parenting educators, and family counselors are all likely to be able to suggest resources and help parents assess whether a problem requires additional intervention.

## Your Thoughts and Notes

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## Resources on the Web

Helping Young Children Deal with Anger

<http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1997/marion97.html>

Aggression and Cooperation: Helping Young Children Develop Constructive Strategies

<http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1992/jewett92.html>

Violence and Young Children's Development

<http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1994/wallac94.html>

Positive Discipline (Available in English, Spanish, and Chinese)

<http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1990/positi90.html>

School Readiness: Parents and Professionals Speak on Social and Emotional Needs of Young Children

<http://readyweb.crc.uiuc.edu/library/1994/cfam-sr/resintro>

Time Out for "Time Out"

<http://npin.org/library/pre1998/n00194/n00194.html>

Discipline: A Parent's Guide

<http://npin.org/library/pre1998/n00203/n00203.html>

Helping Your Child Learn Responsible Behavior

<http://readyweb.crc.uiuc.edu/library/1993/respons/contents.html>

Biters: Why They Do It and What to Do about It

<http://npin.org/library/1997/n00217/n00217.html>

Appropriate Limits for Children: A Guide for Discipline

<http://www.nccc.org/Guidance/limits2.pdf>

When Children Bite

[http://www.nccc.org/Guidance/dc16\\_children.bite.html](http://www.nccc.org/Guidance/dc16_children.bite.html)

Guidance and Discipline: A Developmental Approach

<http://www.nccc.org/Guidance/guide.dev.apprch.html>

## Prosocial Skills

### How do prosocial skills fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

“Prosocial skills” is a broad term used to identify the behaviors people use to get along with others. When children learn *prosocial* skills, they learn to help and comfort others—especially their friends. Prosocial skills help a child to be empathetic and play well with other children. Some researchers believe that children are born with the ability to be empathetic and that this ability can be strengthened throughout childhood. Parents can influence their children’s readiness to help others by setting an example of empathetic behavior. Parents who are loving and sympathetic, who show kindness and regard for the feelings of others, and who work to prevent their children’s aggressive behavior are more likely to have children who are also kind, helpful, and concerned about the rights of others. The reverse is also true. Children with abusive parents are much less likely to help a child in need and more likely to become aggressive with other children [4].

Friendships are essential for a child’s healthy development. Children without friends often experience serious problems throughout their lives [3]. Children who are rejected by other children may lack the social skills to make and keep friends. When children are asked why they might dislike another child, they often say it is because the child is aggressive [21]. On the other hand, empathetic children are more likely to maintain lasting friendships. This is because an empathetic child is developing a deeper sense of understanding and sensitivity to her friend’s feelings.

Children learn prosocial skills partly by watching and interacting with other children and adults. Parents can support children’s prosocial development in many ways. Parents become “social skills teachers” when they invite friends over or organize children’s playgroups. Parents teach social skills and empathy when they talk to their child about being a host and thinking of their guests’ needs. Parents teach

prosocial skills when they talk with their child about fairness, taking turns, and sharing. Parents can encourage children to resolve their problems through compromise and discussion [37]. Parents teach empathy when they stop aggressive behaviors in young children and help the children discuss their

*Parents teach social competence when they respond to aggressive behaviors in young children, when they discuss feelings, and when they offer children appropriate strategies for interacting with others.*

feelings. Parents can also suggest appropriate choices as the children learn to resolve arguments. Choices might include:

- helping children use words to explain their own feelings and the feelings of others, and
- helping children find ways to resolve the conflict cooperatively without hitting or hurting others.

Encouraging children to be cooperative, caring, helpful, and considerate toward others is an important part of teaching violence prevention [3; 21].

### Who can parents talk to if they are concerned about their child’s prosocial skills?

Child care providers and early childhood teachers, pediatricians, other health care professionals, parenting educators, and family counselors are all likely to be able to suggest resources and help parents assess whether a problem requires additional intervention.

**Your Thoughts  
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## Resources on the Web

Assessing Young Children's Social Competence  
<http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/2001/mccllel.html>

Helping Young Children Deal with Anger  
<http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1997/marion97.html>

Aggression and Cooperation: Helping Young Children Develop Constructive Strategies  
<http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1992/jewett92.html>

Having Friends, Making Friends, and Keeping Friends: Relationships as Educational Contexts  
<http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1992/hartup92.html>

Violence and Young Children's Development  
<http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1994/wallac94.html>

Understanding and Facilitating Preschool Children's Peer Acceptance  
<http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1992/kemple92.html>

Helping Young Children Make Friends at School  
<http://npin.org/pnews/1998/pnew998/inte998a.html>

In the Company of Friends  
<http://ericps.crc.uiuc.edu/npin/library/pre1998/n00357/n00357.html>

Pathways Project: An Interview with Gary Ladd  
<http://npin.org/pnews/1999/pnew799/int799c.html>

The Only Child  
<http://ericps.crc.uiuc.edu/npin/library/pre1998/n00210/n00210.html>

Making Friends  
<http://ericps.crc.uiuc.edu/npin/library/pre1998/n00198/n00198.html>

Sibling Relationships: An Interview with Laurie Kramer  
<http://npin.org/pnews/1999/pnew599/int599b.html>

Developing Social Skills  
[http://www.nccc.org/Guidance/dc14\\_develop.social.skill.html](http://www.nccc.org/Guidance/dc14_develop.social.skill.html)

Children without Friends, Part 1: Their Problems  
[http://www.nccc.org/Guidance/dc26\\_wo.friends1.html](http://www.nccc.org/Guidance/dc26_wo.friends1.html)

Children without Friends, Part 2: The Reasons for Peer Rejection  
[http://www.nccc.org/Guidance/dc31\\_wo.friends2.html](http://www.nccc.org/Guidance/dc31_wo.friends2.html)

Children without Friends, Part 3: Learning about a Child's Strengths and Weaknesses  
[http://www.nccc.org/Guidance/dc32\\_wo.friends3.html](http://www.nccc.org/Guidance/dc32_wo.friends3.html)

Children without Friends, Part 4: Improving Social Skills  
[http://www.nccc.org/Guidance/sac32\\_wo.friends4.html](http://www.nccc.org/Guidance/sac32_wo.friends4.html)

## Violence on Television and in Other Media

### How does television violence fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

There is a lot of evidence that suggests that watching violent television programs has a powerful negative effect on children. The influence of TV violence might be seen immediately in a child's behavior. Sometimes it may not show in his or her behavior until years later. Researchers also suggest that children with emotional or impulse control problems may be more negatively affected by watching violent television programs [2].

There are three main areas where viewing television violence impacts children:

- *Television violence may teach children aggressive behavior and attitudes.* Violence is shown as attractive, effective, and a preferred way to solve problems on many television programs. This includes some popular children's shows. Children who watch a lot of television see many violent acts, many of which go unpunished. Heavy TV watchers are also more likely to become verbally or physically aggressive with others.
- *Television violence may increase a child's fear of the real world.* Children who watch a lot of violent programs believe the world is meaner and more dangerous than those who watch less television. These children may have more worries or fears.
- *Television violence may desensitize children to real violence.* Children who watch a lot of television gradually become less upset by the violence they see. Frequent TV watchers seem to become more accepting of violence. In some cases, children become less caring and less sensitive to others' pain and suffering [1; 22; 29].

Current research on violence in other media (video games, music videos, and movies) suggests that

children who watch violent movies, play violent video games, and listen to violent music experience equally harmful effects. In his 1995 book *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*, Lieutenant Colonel David Grossman, a former West Point psychologist who specializes in promoting and controlling aggression through military discipline, shows how the military uses the research on violence. Grossman describes how violent video games are used in training new recruits to kill the enemy and to desensitize them to the suffering of others [11; 12; 19].

*Children who view a lot of TV gradually become more tolerant of violence and may be more likely to use verbal or physical aggression with others.*

Parents play an important role in controlling the amount of television their children watch. Parents can limit television viewing, especially viewing of violent shows. When children do watch television, their parents may want to sit with them to watch the program and discuss scenes that might be confusing. When parents are involved with what their children are watching on television, the children are more likely to make wise viewing choices.

### Who can parents talk to if they are concerned about the effects media violence has on their child?

Child care providers and early childhood teachers, pediatricians, other health care professionals, and family counselors can provide insights and information. Parents can also contact station networks to register their concerns about inappropriate programming for children or to add their voices to the many organizations working to address the ill effects of media violence on children.

**Your Thoughts  
and Notes**

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## Resources on the Web

Television Violence: Content, Context, and Consequences

<http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1997/aidman97.html>

Video Games: Research, Ratings, Recommendations

<http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1998/cesar98.html>

Guidelines for Family Television Viewing

<http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1990/famtv90.html>

Television Violence and Behavior: A Research Summary

<http://npin.org/library/1997/n00155/n00155.html>

Media Violence and Young Children

<http://ericps.crc.uiuc.edu/npin/library/pre1998/n00154/n00154.html>

Children Now: Study Shows That Media Reinforces Gender Strait Jacket

<http://www.childrennow.org/media/boystomen/index.html>

Children and TV Violence

<http://www.aacap.org/web/aacap/publications/factsfam/violence.htm>

Media Violence: Confronting the Issues and Taking Action

<http://www.growsmartbrains.com/pages1/article5.html>

Television, Violence, and Children

<http://interact.uoregon.edu/medialit/fa/mlarticlefolder/kalin.html>

Violence on Television: What Do Children Learn? What Can Parents Do?

<http://www.apa.org/pubinfo/violence.html>

## Toys That Promote Violent Behavior

### How do toys that promote violent behavior fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

Children's fascination with war play and war toys is not new. Items resembling war toys date from ancient Egypt and the Middle Ages [8]. The fascination with such toys is not limited to children in the United States, but is common in many countries.

Children's television was deregulated in 1984. One result was a sudden rise in war-related cartoons and a rise in the sale of war toys linked to these programs. According to Diane Levin, author of *Remote Control Childhood?*, "within one year of deregulation, 9 of the 10 best-selling toys were connected to TV shows, and 7 of these shows were violent. The sale of toys of violence, including action figures with weapons, soared more than 600% in three years." Media "cross feeding" makes it possible for a child to view the same violent themes in a variety of media. Video games, movies, the Internet, children's books, and comic books may all show the same violent stories and characters [25].

To add to the problem, the war toys sold today look realistic [8]. Many of the war toys used by children in previous generations were less "purpose-specific." Children could use the toys in a variety of ways to invent their own stories or adventures. The children might use other props, such as the trees and natural elements in their own backyards. The war toy often became insignificant as the larger imaginary game unfolded. By comparison, many modern war toys have a single purpose. Instead of encouraging creativity and dramatic play, the toy encourages children to imitate the fighting or violence seen while watching a specific character or TV show [8; 9].

Parents and teachers of young children report the following negative behaviors of many children who play with war toys:

- an obsession or preoccupation with war play and with the products or programs that promote such play

- increased aggression among children when they imitate what they see in violent programs
- a lack of creativity and imagination when children play, because they are just copying what they see on television or in other media

*'It seems reasonable to propose that the lessons children learn in early war play may become familiar and well-rehearsed strategies for resolving real-life conflicts with peers, siblings, or other associates.'*

Two researchers, Watson and Peng [44], have studied the relationship between toy gun play and children's aggressive behavior. They found that toy gun play was one predictor of aggression among young children in day care settings. Other important influences included children's TV viewing and how parents disciplined their children (including if the parents used physical punishment such as spanking). Researcher Gary Ladd notes that, "... parents who tolerate war play may be condoning (if not promoting) a context that breeds antisocial behaviors and values (e.g., aggression toward others, stereotyped views of good and evil). Expanding upon this argument, it seems reasonable to suggest that the lessons children learn in early war play may become familiar and well-rehearsed strategies for resolving real-life conflicts with peers, siblings, or other associates" ([24], pp. 403–404).

Parents can play an important role in encouraging their child's creative, nonviolent play. Parents can refuse to purchase toys that are models from current violent programs. They can also discourage relatives and friends from giving popular war toys as gifts. Instead, parents can provide or make toys



from materials that encourage creativity and adventure play. For example, parents can provide inexpensive “dress-up” clothes resembling fire fighters, police officers, and historical figures—heroes and heroines—that reflect the family’s cultural heritage. A children’s librarian might suggest children’s books or videos that are entertaining and educational and that will engage the child’s imagination.

### **Who can parents talk to if they are concerned about their child’s use of toys in ways that seem to promote violent behavior?**

In addition to child care providers and early childhood teachers, pediatricians, other health care professionals, parenting educators, and family counselors, parents can also contact toy manufacturers and retailers, and join organizations that work to address the ill effects of toys that promote violent behavior.

### **Your Thoughts and Notes**

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## **Resources on the Web**

Playing with Guns, War Play, and Superheroes: What's the Big Deal?

<http://npin.org/pnews/2000/pnew500/int500c.html>

Children, War Toys, and Violent Games

[http://www.cahe.nmsu.edu/pubs/\\_f/f-114.pdf](http://www.cahe.nmsu.edu/pubs/_f/f-114.pdf)

Violent Toys, Nonviolent Toys: What's the Difference?

[http://www.lionlamb.org/violent\\_toys.html](http://www.lionlamb.org/violent_toys.html)

Make Cookies, Not War: TV-Related Toys and the "I Want That" Syndrome

<http://www.growsmartbrains.com/pages1/article2.html>

Parents Group Targets Violence-Themed Toys

<http://www.post-gazette.com/headlines/19990509goodtoys6.asp>

## Early Child Care Experiences

### How do early child care experiences fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

High-quality early child care teaches children important social skills for healthy friendships. In addition, high-quality early child care helps children with their language and problem-solving abilities. Children who can communicate and work well with others generally have greater early school success.

As many as 13 million preschoolers (including 6 million babies and toddlers) spend time in the care of someone other than their parents ([13], p. 53). Research findings on the long-term effects of early care experiences have differed. The research is particularly confusing when researchers look at children's social development. Some studies suggest that children in early group care are more aggressive with their friends. Other studies say the opposite. These studies say that children are more sociable and more cooperative because they participated in early group care.

How can both of these outcomes be true? The short answer is that the impact of early child care on children depends on many factors. These factors include the quality of care (which is highly variable), a mother's or family's attitude toward working outside the home (e.g., the mother may not want to work), conditions of the mother's or father's job (e.g., stress, flexibility), and the presence of stressful family events (e.g., family or financial problems) [16; 26; 41].

It is important that children learn healthy social skills, such as self-control, empathy, cooperation, and conflict resolution. Children are more likely to learn those skills in child care settings that have small groups and an adequate teacher-student ratio. Also, children do better when the teachers are warm and responsive to children, use discipline techniques that help children solve problems, and intentionally model and teach social skills to children [16; 20; 33].

Children in high-quality early childhood programs also do better on verbal and reasoning tests when

they enter school [31]. Children in high-quality early childhood programs had higher reading, math, and mental test scores from toddlerhood through age 21 and were more likely to be in school at age 21 than those who did not receive high-quality care [10]. Some of the effects of early child care are seen through the teen years and into adulthood. Although family characteristics and the mother-child relation-

*High-quality early care experiences provide essential social skills necessary for healthy relationships with others.*

ship affect children's development more than experiences in child care do [31], we know that children who are at risk for school failure show many benefits from having high-quality child care. The converse is also true: children at risk for school failure suffer significantly if they are in poor-quality care [30; 35].

Parents play a critical role in choosing a high-quality child care arrangement for their child. Parents usually look at the hours of operation, the location, and the cost when making their decision. Parents will also want to consider the provider's program and space where the children stay. These are the features that are likely to have an impact on children's emotional, social, physical, and cognitive development. Other concerns include the ratio of adults to children, the size of the group of children, and the education and specialized training of the teachers. Child care resource and referral agencies (CCR&Rs) exist in many communities in the United States to help parents find and select high-quality child care [36].

### Who can parents talk to if they are concerned about the quality of their child's early child care experiences?

Child care resource and referral agencies (CCR&Rs) exist in all states and most large communities to help parents identify high-quality child care

services. CCR&Rs also provide training and resources to early child care professionals to help them improve the quality of care for young children. In cases where parents have serious concerns about the level of care being provided, CCR&Rs can help them identify the appropriate agency for registering complaints.

## **Your Thoughts and Notes**

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## Resources on the Web

Child Care: Is It Good for Children?

<http://npin.org/pnews/1999/pnew599/int599a.html>

The Lasting Benefits of Preschool Programs

<http://npin.org/library/pre1998/n00400/n00400.html>

Aggression and Cooperation: Helping Young Children Develop Constructive Strategies

<http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1992/jewett92.html>

Infant Child Care

<http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1991/howes91.html>

Understanding and Facilitating Preschool Children's Peer Acceptance

<http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1992/kemple92.html>

Assessing Young Children's Social Competence

<http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/2001/mccllel.html>

Recent Research on Mother/Child Attachment

<http://npin.org/pnews/1995/pnewn95/pnewn95b.html>

What Is a Quality Preschool Program?

<http://www.accesseric.org/resources/parent/prschool.html>

Teaching Children Not to Be—or Be Victims of—Bullies

<http://npin.org/library/pre1998/n00142/n00142.html>

New Study Finds Quality of Child Care Is Related to Children's School Success

<http://npin.org/pnews/1999/pnew999/int999b.html>

High-Quality Child Care: Luxury Option or Standard Equipment?

<http://npin.org/library/1997/n00148/n00148.html>

High-Quality Child Care Again Linked to Fewer Juvenile Arrests

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=35early.h19>

America's Child Care Crisis: A Crime Prevention Tragedy

<http://www.fightcrime.org/pdf/childcarereport.pdf>

Family Child Care Study Guide: Socialization

<http://www.nccc.org/Prof.Dev/fcc.curriculum/sg.ch3.html>

Developing Social Skills

[http://www.nccc.org/Guidance/dc14\\_develop.social.skill.html](http://www.nccc.org/Guidance/dc14_develop.social.skill.html)

Choosing Child Care

[http://www.nccc.org/Choose.Quality.Care/dc36\\_choose.care.html](http://www.nccc.org/Choose.Quality.Care/dc36_choose.care.html)

## Managing Family Conflict

### How does the way families manage conflict fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

Conflict, anger, and frustration are a normal part of life. Children learn their first lessons about how to get along with others and handle conflict, anger, and frustration from their family. Children watch how their parents, brothers, or sisters handle conflict and try to handle their problems the same way. If family conflict turns into domestic abuse, children are at great risk of physical and emotional abuse. They are also at risk for engaging in violent behavior as a teen and adult ([45], pp. 1, 6–8).

Children in homes where parents handle problems in a destructive manner—such as using verbal or physical aggression, showing disrespect, or withdrawing from one another—are more likely to be aggressive and have difficulty solving problems with their friends. When children live in homes where they see their parents handling their disagreements constructively by sharing, discussing, and resolving problems, they are more likely to use similar strategies with their friends [34]. Parents can help children learn to deal with their strong emotions, without using violence or aggression, by simply modeling appropriate ways to manage problems, disagreements, anger, and stress [28].

Research shows that parents can change unhealthy patterns of communicating and managing conflict. E. Mark Cummings, a specialist in research on marital conflict and peer relationships, says, “It is never too late to start handling your disagreements in better ways, for your own sake, for the sake of your marriage, and for the sake of your children. It is important that couples deal with their disagreements openly and calmly, respect and listen to one another, try to work toward a solution, and try not to let their anger get the better of them” [34].

One way parents can prevent the likelihood of disagreements and angry outbursts is by creating a

dependable routine within a safe home environment. Routines reduce stress for young children so that they are less likely to feel frustrated or angry. Parents can encourage regular mealtimes, playtime, family activities, and sleep. If parents know about potential changes in the day’s routine, they can inform the child, in advance, and reassure him about what to expect so that he will feel more secure.

*Children in homes where parents address their disagreements in a constructive manner are more likely to use similar strategies in their interactions with peers.*

Young children also learn about cooperation, compromise, and conciliation from their brothers and sisters. Children who have older brothers and sisters who are helpful and kind with younger children also learn to be helpful and thoughtful. Likewise, children who have older brothers and sisters who are destructive and aggressive with younger children learn to behave in more aggressive, destructive ways with their friends. How conflict between brothers and sisters is resolved is very important. If brothers and sisters consistently resolve their disagreements in destructive ways, it may lead to later behavior problems in school [17].

One way that parents can help children learn how to handle their disagreements is by setting an example of resolving problems respectfully. Parents should not allow conflict or arguing to get “out-of-hand.” Brothers and sisters can learn to handle their problems without hurting each other verbally or physically. Parents can help by suggesting other appropriate choices, and “using words” when their children are struggling. Abusive behavior that might lead to domestic violence should not be allowed, either between the parents or the children.

## Who can parents talk to if they are concerned about the ways their family manages conflict?

Family counselors, parent educators, pediatricians, and other health care professionals can provide information and suggest approaches for families to use to better manage conflict.

### Your Thoughts and Notes

## Resources on the Web

Early Childhood Violence Prevention

<http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1998/massey98.html>

Violence and Young Children's Development

<http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1994/wallac94.html>

The Debate over Spanking

<http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1997/ramsbu97.html>

Positive Discipline

<http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1990/positi90.html>

Marital Relationships, Children, and Their Friends: What's the Connection?

An Interview with E. Mark Cummings

<http://npin.org/pnews/2000/pnew500/int500a.html>

Sibling Relationships: An Interview with Laurie Kramer

<http://ericps.crc.uiuc.edu/npin/pnews/1999/pnew599/int599b.html>

How Can Parents Model Good Listening Skills?

<http://www.accesseric.org/resources/parent/listenin.html>

How to Help Your Child Avoid Violent Conflicts

<http://npin.org/library/1998/n00072/n00072.html>

Children and Divorce: Part I

<http://npin.org/pnews/1999/pnew999/int999e.html>

Children and Divorce: Part II

<http://npin.org/pnews/1999/pnew1199/int1199a.html>

Violence and the Family: Report of the APA Presidential Task Force on Violence and the Family  
Executive Summary

<http://www.apa.org/pi/viol&fam.html>

Violence in the Family

<http://www.health.org/nacoa/famviol.htm>

Resolving Conflict Constructively and Respectfully

<http://www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~ohioline/hyg-fact/5000/5218.html>



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