Chapter 10
Social and Emotional Development in Early Childhood

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Five-year-old Mikey stands in line with twenty other kindergartners, just ahead of Benito and Richie, two of his neighborhood friends. The three boys are eager to be out on the playground, but they wait for the teacher to swing open the large exit door. Then, without pushing, they walk out quietly, though quickly, with the class. Once outside in the bright October sunshine, their self-restraint breaks down. Shouting with glee, they race toward the play equipment. “Hey! It’s a boat!” Mikey calls out, pointing to a large climbing structure in the center of a sand-filled area. The structure, made of wood, ropes, and old car tires, looks nothing like a boat, but its placement in the middle of the sandlot inspires the boys’ imaginations. “C’mon! Let’s climb on!” Mikey urges, and the other two scramble up behind him. They play joyously for a time, taking turns being captain. Just when their excitement has begun to subside, Benito yells in mock alarm: “Oh, no! We’re sinkin’! Swim for it!” With that, he jumps into the sand and begins flailing his arms and legs. Laughing and shouting, the others jump off too, and the trio makes its way to “shore.”

This episode, drawn from a detailed observational study of preschool behavior (Stroufe et al., 1984), illustrates much about the social achievements of early childhood. First, Mikey and his friends demonstrate that children between the ages of 2 1/2 and 5 experience a dramatically expanding world. In industrialized cultures, day care, nursery school, and kindergarten take them increasingly away from home and parents; in many nonindustrialized cultures, starting at about age 2 children spend much of their time in mixed-age groups of children, rather than with their mothers (Whiting and Edwards, 1988). In these new settings young children are propelled by a natural curiosity to explore. No one has to tell Mikey and his friends to play on the climbing structure. The motivation and ideas for their activities come from themselves. Notice too how the boys’ world is enlarged by their rich interactions with one another. Early childhood is the age when true peer relationships emerge. This capacity for relationships with peers will expand and become more elaborate throughout childhood.

Second, the example of Mikey and his friends illustrates that early childhood is a time of notable developments in self-reliance, self-control and self-regulation. Toddlers are not expected to direct their own activities without adult guidance or to be able to control their own impulses. Yet just a few years later children are routinely expected to tolerate minor delays and frustrations; to control aggressive impulses, such as pushing, shoving, and hitting; and not to need constant supervision. These new expectations have
significant effects on children’s developing self-concepts. Whether Mikey thinks of himself as capable or incapable, kind or mean, stems in part from how he meets adults’ demands for self-regulation.

Third, our opening example shows that during early childhood youngsters begin to explore adult roles. Mikey and his friends take turns being captain of a ship, a role they have heard about in stories and seen on television. This exploration of roles takes place during play, especially social fantasy play. Typically preschoolers try out the roles of adults they are close to or see often: mother, father, teacher, grocery store clerk, police officer, and so forth. All over the world, children use play to act out both culturally universal adult activities, such as cooking food and caring for children, and culturally specific activities important among adults in their own culture, which might include going to work in an office in North America or paddling canoes and fishing in the South Pacific (Farver and Shin, 1997).

A major theme of this chapter is the organization and coherence of preschoolers’ behavior. Children’s emerging capacities fit together and support one another. For example, the capacity for play supports the capacity for early peer relationships, and vice versa. At the same time, the behavior of individual children becomes increasingly coherent and distinctive; they manifest characteristic styles of responding and pervasive expectations concerning themselves and others. It is no exaggeration to say that by age 5 a personality has formed.

This chapter explores the social and emotional changes that occur in early childhood. We begin with a closer look at some of the hallmarks of early childhood development we just introduced: the child’s expanding world, the move toward greater independence, and the emergence of self-control and self-management. We then turn to other areas of development that are important in the preschool years, including young children’s sense of self, their peer relationships, their emotions, their play, and the influences of their parents.

Questions to Think About As You Read:

- How are social, emotional, and cognitive development interrelated in the preschool years?
- What can preschool and day-care teachers do to foster healthy social and emotional development in early childhood?

SOME HALLMARKS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Child’s Expanding World

One of the major changes of early childhood is expansion of the child’s world. The majority of North American children in this age group spend time outside their homes in day care, preschool, or kindergarten. Experiences at school and in day care can be extremely important. For example, a young child’s general adjustment, competence with peers, and complexity of play have all been found to be related to the quality of day care and relationships with teachers (e.g., Howes, Hamilton, and Matheson, 1994; Pianta and Steinberg, 1992).

Peers also exert an increasing influence during the preschool years. Peer relationships become a central arena for developing and expressing certain new capacities, such as an understanding of fairness and reciprocity (mutual give-and-take). Because peer relationships are so important, we devote an entire section of this chapter to them.

Sibling relationships, too, become increasingly important. Like parents, older siblings can provide a unique framework within which preschoolers’ development takes place. For
instance, young preschoolers can engage in joint fantasy play with a nurturant older sibling in a way they cannot do with their mothers (Boer and Dunn, 1992). They also listen carefully to conversations between their mothers and older siblings, as shown by the fact that their interruptions are much more often relevant to what is being said than are the interruptions of 2-year-olds (Dunn and Shatz, 1989). Thus, some of what children learn from siblings is acquired indirectly by watching and listening to them interacting with others. We will discuss sibling relationships more extensively in Chapter 12.

All the new arenas of development that emerge during the preschool years influence one another. Experiences with preschool teachers, for example, influence peer relationships, as do the skills and understanding developed in relating to siblings (DeHart, 1999). At the same time, successful peer relationships can promote better relationships with siblings (Kramer and Gottman, 1992) and tend to elicit more positive responses from teachers.

### Moving Toward Greater Self-Reliance

Accompanying the preschooler’s entry into a broader world is the development of greater self-reliance. All developmental theorists see this as an important achievement. Psychoanalytic theorists emphasize the child’s sense of independent purposefulness, which Erikson (1963) called initiative. Social learning theorists, such as Albert Bandura (1997), emphasize the child’s growing self-efficacy, or sense of being able to do things on his or her own as a result of repeated experiences of mastery.

Greater self-reliance is supported by several capacities of 3- and 4-year-olds:

- motor skills such as climbing and manipulating objects that allow them to do many things for themselves;
- language and other cognitive abilities that enable them to think, plan, and solve problems in ways they could not do as toddlers;
- a growing ability to tolerate delays and frustrations, to stick to a task despite obstacles and setbacks; and
- an emerging capacity for imagination and fantasy play that allows preschoolers to maintain a sense of power in a world generally controlled by adults—an important psychological foundation for strivings toward independence.

Some children, however, have trouble moving toward greater independence. They may hover near teachers or require a great deal of encouragement to meet simple challenges (Stroufe, Fox, and Pancake, 1983). For them, infantile dependency is hard to leave...
behind. We see this problem in Meryl as a 3-year-old when she clings to Karen in everyday situations. Meryl is not just showing normal instrumental dependency, a need for help from adults when trying to solve complex problems or perform difficult tasks. She is also showing emotional dependency, an abnormal need for continual reassurance and attention from adults (Sears, Maccoby, and Levin, 1957). Emotionally dependent children need such contact not just when they are upset, but virtually all the time. We discuss the origins of such problems in a later section.

Self-Control and Self-Regulation

At a family picnic, Frank is organizing a race between 2-year-old Maggie and her cousins. The children are to run across the yard, touch the big oak tree, and then run back to the starting line. Frank gives the signals “Ready . . . get set . . .” But before he can say “go,” Maggie bolts off toward the oak tree, and the other two girls quickly follow. It takes five tries before Frank can get all three girls to wait until they hear the word “go.” Are they just not listening to his instructions, or are they really having trouble following them?

A developmental psychologist could tell the greatly exasperated Frank that the second explanation is correct. The ability to inhibit a physical action until given a signal to proceed is something that emerges gradually during the preschool years (Thompson, 1998). The Soviet psychologist A. R. Luria (1961) studied this ability in children ages 2 through 4. When a green light came on, the children were to press a rubber bulb held in one hand, and when a red light came on, they were not to press. The 2-year-olds made many mistakes, pressing for red lights as well as for green. Not until age 4 could most children reliably inhibit a response to the wrong color. And it is not just that 4-year-olds understand the instructions better. The 2-year-olds realize they are not supposed to press on red, but somehow they just can’t stop themselves. The ability to inhibit an action until a “go” signal is given is just one aspect of a larger ability to monitor and direct one’s own behavior—that is, to exert self-control and self-regulation. This larger ability is a major development of the preschool period (Kopp, 1992).

Psychologist Eleanor Maccoby (1980) has listed some other signs of self-control and self-management that emerge by the end of the preschool period. Many of these involve the ability to reflect on one’s own actions—that is, to monitor and direct those actions as needed. Most also involve being able to inhibit actions, delay gratification (wait for rewards), tolerate frustration, and adjust behavior to situational demands. According to Maccoby, compared with younger preschoolers, older preschoolers are better able to

- weigh future consequences when deciding how to act;
- stop and think of possible ways around an obstacle blocking a goal;
- control emotions when goal-directed activities are blocked, thus greatly decreasing the likelihood of tantrums;
- concentrate—that is, block out irrelevant thoughts, sights, and sounds and focus instead on what is needed to reach a desired objective; and
- do more than one thing at a time, as long as those things are not incompatible or highly complex.

These abilities are not fully developed by the end of the preschool period; further advances will occur later. Nevertheless, the preschool years are a time of great progress in exercising management and control over the self. We will return to the topic of control over the self when we discuss emotional regulation.

THE DEVELOPING SELF

The cognitive advances of the preschool period discussed in Chapter 9 have a profound effect on the development of a child’s sense of self. It is during this time that children start to be aware of themselves as persons (Eder and Mangelsdorf, 1997). They know that

Instrumental dependency:
A child’s normal need for adult help in solving complex problems or performing difficult tasks.

Emotional dependency:
A child’s abnormal need for continual reassurance and attention from adults.
minds exist, that they have a mind, and that they are a particular person. Partly because of their new capacity for thinking about categories, they see themselves as boys or girls—like one parent in gender and unlike the other. In this section we discuss these and other changes in self-understanding that occur during the preschool period.

Changes in Self-Understanding

Late in toddlerhood children become able to represent the self mentally. But this mental representation involves immediate experiences, one at a time (I am eating an apple, I am sitting on the swing, I am walking up the stairs, etc.) (Fischer, Shaver, and Carnochan, 1990). Not until the preschool period do cognitive advances enable the child to represent a variety of different experiences and alternate among them. A preschooler can mentally move back and forth among particular experiences, between particular experiences and more general ones (getting ready for bed last night versus what bedtime is like in general), and between past and present (Harter, 1998). This ability to represent alternative experiences can also be seen in fantasy play. In the following example, a preschooler, J., is playing with several figures in a dollhouse:

“He has to go upstairs, Mommy.”
Then, to the Mommy doll, “Watch, Mommy.”
(J. releases the figure so it falls down the steps.)
“He fell down, Mommy. He’s crying, Mommy. He’s a boo boo on his head.”
(J. makes crying sound effects for the figure.)
“Ouch, ouch, I hurt my head.”
(Wolf, 1990, p. 24)

This ability to move mentally back and forth among different experiences makes for a much more comprehensive sense of self (Fischer, Shaver, and Carnochan, 1990; Harter, 1998).

Dennie Wolf (1990) has described another capacity that underlies preschoolers’ expanding sense of self. Children can now uncouple various aspects of experience. They can, for example, pretend and at the same time observe themselves pretending. Similarly, they can look at themselves in a mirror and know that is me, while at the same time being aware that I am watching myself. This capacity makes the sense of self significantly more mature.

But the preschooler’s sense of self is still limited. Children this age have trouble understanding that they are the same person when they feel different in different situations (such as nice in one situation and mean in another) (Fischer, Shaver, and Carnochan, 1990). They cannot coordinate such disparate experiences into a unified sense of self (Eder and Mangelsdorf, 1997). Simultaneous understanding of different aspects of the self, understanding the selves of others, and self-reflection must all await later childhood and adolescence.

Self-Constancy and Self-Esteem

By internalizing parents’ rules, challenging those rules (and feeling guilty), and then once again achieving harmony with parents, preschoolers experience what Louis Sander (1975) calls self-constancy—a sense that the self endures despite temporary disruptions in relationships.

To understand the emergence of a sense of self-constancy, picture Malcolm, who has just turned 3. He is eyeing the window blind cords, which he loves to play with but is forbidden to touch. DeeDee, who is cleaning a nearby closet, glances over at him. Malcolm is aware not only of his own intention to pull on the cords, but also of his mother’s knowledge of that intention. Such awareness enables Malcolm to deliberately upset the relationship with DeeDee by doing what he knows is counter to her wishes. He reaches for the cords and begins to pull them vigorously, knowing full well that his mother sees his actions as both bad and deliberate (Emde and Buchsbaum, 1990; Kochanska, 1993). “Malcolm!” says DeeDee sharply. “Stop that right now!” This response is just what Malcolm expected.
Malcolm also understands that the self who has just done wrong and is being scolded is the same self who a moment before was in harmony with DecDec. Equally important, Malcolm knows he can reinstate the former harmony by making up with his mother—for example, by saying he is sorry. This is an early form of the concept of reversibility, discussed in Chapter 9—an understanding that the effects of a transformation can later be undone. A 3-year-old can engage in such advanced thinking only in well-practiced, concrete situations. Nevertheless, the ability to do so is very important. It allows Malcolm to understand the continuity of his self in relation to his mother.

Preschoolers like Malcolm also start to think of themselves as having dispositions—ways of being—that are consistent through time (Eder and Mangelsdorf, 1997). All children acquire this ability, but not all come to think of the self in exactly the same way. Each child develops a particular view of the self based on his or her unique experiences. Most young children, but not all, think of the self as good and kind and likable, and as competent and effective in the world. These positive thoughts and feelings about the self are referred to as self-esteem (Coopersmith, 1967). When 4-year-old Malcolm tells his father “I’m the best!” referring to his basketball skills, it suggests he has high self-esteem, or at least a high evaluation of his own physical abilities. Such favorable self-evaluations probably stem from a history of positive exchanges with others, especially with caregivers. When adults communicate warmth, empathy, and positive regard for a child, they encourage high self-esteem (Sroufe, 1990). We will say more about the development of positive self attitudes in Chapter 12.

**Gender and the Self**

Gender is a central organizing theme in development. It plays a key role in the way people define and experience their worlds. In all cultures, parents and others treat boys and girls differently and expect different things from them (Whiting and Edwards, 1988). Because of this, children learn cultural stereotypes regarding male and female behaviors and characteristics. This learning begins early and is pervasive (Ruble and Martin, 1998). It manifests itself in children’s activities, preferences, and social styles (Bem, 1989; Fagot, Leinbach, and O’Boyle, 1992; Serbin, Powlishta, and Gulko, 1993). Even among preschoolers, gender is so salient that a child’s most advanced thinking is often applied to it. Preschoolers label and categorize different activities in terms of gender (Fagot, Leinbach, and O’Boyle, 1992).

- Gender is a key aspect of the preschooler’s emerging self-concept (Ruble and Martin, 1998). Being a boy or a girl is central to the definition of the self. Development of a gender-based self-concept involves three steps:
  - First, children gradually adopt sex-typed behavior—actions that conform to cultural expectations about what is appropriate for boys and for girls.
  - Second, children simultaneously acquire gender-role concepts—a beginning knowledge of the cultural stereotypes regarding males and females.
  - Finally, children develop an emotional commitment to their particular gender, which is part of the process of identification with parents.

We will discuss identification with parents later in the chapter. Right now, let’s consider sex-typed behavior and the development of a gender-role concept among preschoolers in more detail.

**Changes in Sex-Typed Behavior**

The development of sex-typed behavior occurs in a series of phases. By age 2, children already show gender-related preferences in toys. Boys have learned to play largely with trucks and cars, while girls have learned to gravitate toward soft, cuddly toys (Ruble and
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Martin, 1998; Serbin, Powlishta, and Gulko, 1993). Such early learning probably results from imitation and reinforcement. These early preferences are not absolute, however, as illustrated in our story of 2-year-old Mikey’s attachment to Raggedy Ann. At this young age, children in all cultures have a limited understanding of gender-related behaviors. They have learned that certain objects go with mommies or daddies (e.g., lipsticks versus neckties), but they do not yet understand the broader categories of gender, nor do they know that they share a gender with one of their parents.

By age 3 or 4, children know a great deal more about “gender-appropriate” objects and activities (Ruble and Martin, 1998; Serbin, Powlishta, and Gulko, 1993). They exhibit categorical thinking about what is male and what is female, having a rather firm idea about which occupations, activities, and behaviors belong to each. In addition, they begin to show much more sex-typed behavior. For example, preschool girls around the world show more interest in and nurturance toward babies than do their male peers (Whiting and Edwards, 1988). Preschool girls also generally prefer to play with one other child at a time, in contrast to boys’ preference for group activities (Benenson, 1993).

Studies of how sex-typed behavior is learned in the United States show that it pervades our society. Even when their children are babies, most American parents dress boys and girls in different clothing, decorate their rooms differently, give them different playthings, and interact with them differently (Fagot, Leinbach, and O’Boyle, 1992). Parents encourage sex-typed play beginning in the toddler period by reacting more positively when toddlers play with “gender-appropriate” toys (Ruble and Martin, 1998). Differential treatment of boys and girls increases during the preschool years (Maccoby, 1990). If children behave in gender-inconsistent ways, parents and peers are often quick to give negative feedback.

Judith Langlois illustrated this by getting preschoolers to play with “gender-inappropriate” toys and then inviting their mothers, fathers, or peers to watch (Langlois and Downs, 1980). Mothers were often accepting of the “cross-gender” play, but fathers and peers were not. Fathers had the strongest negative reactions, especially to the sight of their sons playing with “feminine” toys. Just as Frank encouraged Mikey to shun girls’ toys, so other preschoolers are channeled into sex-typed behaviors.

Developing Gender-Role Concepts
By age 4 or 5, children start to learn more abstract cultural beliefs about gender differences (Bem, 1989; Serbin, Powlishta, and Gulko, 1993); that is, they begin to acquire gender-role concepts. Learning gender-role concepts is based partly on cognitive maturation, and

Sex-typed behavior becomes very common in early childhood.
partly on countless experiences of being told and shown what is considered appropriate for boys or for girls. From these experiences young children begin to abstract more generalized ideas about gender (Ruble and Martin, 1998).

Gender-role concepts are well ingrained in adults. In our culture, as in many others, males are viewed as more aggressive, competitive, self-confident, and ambitious, while females are seen as more emotional, kind, interpersonally sensitive, and domestic (Ruble and Martin, 1998). (A more complete list of gender stereotypes found in North American culture is given in Table 10.1.) These gender stereotypes can be summed up by saying that the male role is instrumental (men are viewed as geared to getting things done), while the female role is expressive (women are seen as oriented toward feelings). As early as age 3, children show some awareness of gender stereotypes, and by age 5 their knowledge of gender stereotypes is typically high (Serbin, Powlishta, and Gulko, 1993).

The marked increase in sex-typed behavior and growing understanding of gender differences during the preschool period help encourage a rather strict gender segregation in the classroom and on the playground (Maccoby, 1990; Serbin, Powlishta, and Gulko, 1993). The fact that we see Maggie, Mikey, Malcolm, and Meryl playing with other children of their own gender is no accident. Children this age know they are boys or girls, they know these are categories of people, and they see themselves as members of one category or the other (Ruble and Martin, 1998; Serbin, Powlishta, and Gulko, 1993). In addition, they tend to attribute positive attributes to their own gender and negative attributes to the opposite gender (Ruble and Martin, 1998).

Striking evidence that a sense of gender emerges during the preschool period comes from studies of children whose genitals were ambiguously formed at birth (Money, 1975; Ruble and Martin, 1998). Such children are sometimes assigned to the wrong gender; that is, genetically male babies are mistakenly identified as girls, and genetically female babies are mistakenly thought to be boys. If the error is discovered before age 2½ and the child is raised from then on as the biologically correct sex, problems rarely arise. The toddler accepts the new sexual identity with little distress or resistance. Reassignment to the other

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 10.1</th>
<th>SOME CHARACTERISTICS REGARDED AS STEREOTYPICALLY MASCULINE AND FEMININE BY NORTH AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Masculine Characteristics</strong></td>
<td><strong>Feminine Characteristics</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Emotional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td>Home-oriented</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skilled in business</td>
<td>Kind</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mechanical aptitude</td>
<td>Cries easily</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outspoken</td>
<td>Creative</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acts as a leader</td>
<td>Considerate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-confident</td>
<td>Devotes self to others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Takes a stand</td>
<td>Needs approval</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ambitious</td>
<td>Gentle</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not easily influenced</td>
<td>Aware of others' feelings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dominant</td>
<td>Excitable in a major crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Expresses tender feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes decisions easily</td>
<td>Enjoys art and music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t give up easily</td>
<td>Tactful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stands up under pressure</td>
<td>Feelings hurt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likes math and science</td>
<td>Neat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive</td>
<td>Likes children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventurous</td>
<td>Understanding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ruble, 1983.
sex after toddlerhood tends to be very hard; such children may grow up still thinking of themselves as belonging to their original gender. Thus, there seems to be a sensitive period for beginning to develop a sense of gender.

**Understanding Gender Constancy**

One important aspect of children’s developing sense of gender is an understanding of gender constancy—the fact that gender is permanent despite changes in age, dress, hairstyle, or behavior (Bem, 1989; Ruble and Martin, 1998). Three-year-olds know they are boys or girls, and they know the characteristics and activities usually associated with their gender, but they may still be unsure whether changes in superficial characteristics (such as boys wearing dresses and playing with dolls or girls cutting their hair short and playing with footballs) can produce a change in gender. This uncertainty is related to the appearance-reality problem discussed in Chapter 9.

The earliest age at which children show an understanding of gender constancy depends on how it is assessed (Ruble and Martin, 1998). When researchers made gender-inappropriate changes in hairstyle and dress to a drawing of a boy or a girl, and then asked preschoolers, “If the child did this would he (or she) still be a boy (or a girl)?” very few said gender remained the same despite these changes in appearance (Emmerich et al., 1977). But it is possible the children assumed that because these were just drawings, the experimenter could change the figure’s gender at will. Sandra Bem (1989) designed a study to see if preschoolers would make the same error regarding real children. She showed them photographs of actual male and female toddlers, first nude with sexual anatomy visible, then dressed in clothing considered appropriate for the other sex. Almost half the 3- to 5-year-olds and more than half the girls knew the child’s gender remained unchanged even when dress changed. Moreover, three-quarters of those who knew the difference between male and female genitals passed the gender constancy test. Similarly, when preschoolers are asked whether they themselves would change gender if they changed their style of dress, virtually none say yes (Ruble and Martin, 1998).

An understanding of gender constancy is related to the concepts of conservation discussed in Chapter 9. The child eventually grasps that gender remains the same despite superficial transformations (changes in hairstyle and dress). The fact that a grasp of gender constancy begins to emerge before an understanding of other conservation concepts suggests the great importance of gender to young children.

**Explaining Sex-Typed Behavior and Gender-Role Development**

Several different explanations have been proposed for the development of sex-typed behavior and gender-role concepts.

- Social learning theorists explain these developments partly in terms of the rewards and punishments children experience for appropriate and inappropriate behavior.
- Cognitive theorists see gender-role learning as an example of children’s emerging understanding of categories, scripts, and schemas. When children grasp the categories male and female and learn something about the objects and activities associated with each one, they begin to apply this knowledge to themselves as a member of one category or the other.
- **Gender schema theory** brings together the social learning and cognitive positions (Serbin, Powilshta, and Gulko, 1993). According to this theory, children use their cognitive abilities to form a concept or schema of the characteristics of males and females, with the content of the schema based on the child’s particular social learning history.
- Psychoanalytic theory emphasizes developmental changes in relationships with parents. In striving to be like the parent of the same gender, a child adopts that parent’s behaviors, attitudes, and values. Note that this theory has cognitive elements because it involves children recognizing a similarity in gender between themselves and one of their parents and then abstracting out the essential features that help define that parent as a man or a woman.

In a variation of psychoanalytic theory, Nancy Chodorow (1989) has argued that boys define their masculinity by contrasting themselves with their mothers, whereas girls define
their femininity in terms of similarities with their mothers. Chodorow's theory is based on
the Freudian assumption that both boys and girls begin by having the strongest relationship
with their mothers. Boys then separate from their mothers in terms of identification,
emphasizing the differences between them, whereas girls stress how they and they mothers
are alike, thus connecting with their mothers in new ways. The result, in Chodorow's view,
is that boys define themselves in terms of separateness, understand people in terms of their
different interests, and show a more empathic individuation, or sense of being a unique
person. Girls, in contrast, define themselves in terms of connectedness, see people in terms
of their similarities, and have a stronger capacity for sensing the feelings of others.

**SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: THE NEW WORLD OF PEERS**

Peers are of great interest even to toddlers, as we discussed in Chapter 8. By age 2 children
often show the rudiments of social turn-taking (Howes, 1988; Rubin et al., 1998). They
speak to or show something to another child, wait for a response, and then repeat the cycle.
Most of this early turn-taking, however, centers on objects, and toddlers really respond to
each other's specific intentions only occasionally (Bronson, 1981). Not until the preschool
period, as children's mastery of language grows, do their peer interactions become sus-
tained and highly coordinated (Brownell, 1990; Hartup, 1992).

Two illustrations vividly contrast toddlers' and preschoolers' peer interactions. The
first is a "conversation" between two boys, 13 and 15 months of age. Bernie, the younger,
initiates the exchange by turning and looking at Larry, who has been watching him while
mouthing a toy. Bernie then "speaks" to Larry:

Bernie: Da... Da.
Larry: (Laughs very slightly as he continues to look.)
Bernie: Da.
Larry: (Laughs more heartily this time.)
The same sequence of Bernie saying "da" and Larry responding with laughter is
repeated five more times. Then Larry looks away and offers an adult a toy. Bernie
pursues him.
Bernie: (Waving both hands and looking directly at Larry.) Da!
Larry: (Looks back at Bernie and laughs again.)
The sequence of "da" followed by laughter is repeated nine more times. Finally,
Bernie turns away abruptly and toddlers off. Larry laughs once more in a forced
manner and then silently watches Bernie depart.
(Mueller and Lucas, 1975, p. 241)

The second conversation is between a boy and a girl, both 5 years old. The
boy is testing the girl's competence, and the girl is rising to the challenge:

Boy: Can you carry this? (Shows girl a toy fish.)
Girl: Yeah, if I weighed 50 pounds.
Boy: You can't even carry it. Can you carry it by the string?
Girl: Yeah. Yes I can. (Lifts fish overhead by string.)
Boy: Can you carry it by the nose?
Girl: Where's the nose?
Boy: That yellow one.
Girl: This? (Carries it by the nose.)
Boy: Can you carry it by its tail?
Girl: Yeah. (Carries it by tail.)
Boy: Can you carry it like this? (Shows how to carry it by fin.)
Girl: (Carries it by fin.) I weigh 50 pounds about, right?
Boy: Right.
(Garvey, 1977, p. 59)
Although Bernie and Larry are socially competent for toddlers, perhaps because they are longtime acquaintances, there is a world of difference between their interaction and that of the 5-year-olds. The 5-year-olds can share a fantasy, make up rules for a game, respond to each other’s questions, demonstrate novel procedures, and in general coordinate their behaviors in ways far beyond the abilities of any pair of 1-year-olds.

**Competence with Peers**

Successful entry into a peer group and competence with peers are complex matters. They cannot be gauged just by measuring the amount of contact a child has with other children. If a child’s contacts are mostly aggressive or consistently asymmetrical, with the child always in the role of follower, even a large number of contacts doesn’t imply social competence. Conversely, sometimes playing alone doesn’t mean lack of social competence. Playing alone is different from hovering near a group of other children but being unable to join in (Coplan et al., 1994). Even children who are rated socially competent by their teachers or who are popular with peers will at times play by themselves in group settings (Rubin et al., 1998).

A convergence of measures is generally needed to gauge a child’s competence with peers. Detailed observational studies show that children who engage and respond to peers with positive feelings, who are of interest to peers and highly regarded by them, who can take the lead as well as follow, and who are able to sustain the give-and-take of peer interaction will be judged by teachers and other observers as having social competence (LaFreniere and Dumas, 1995; Vaughn and Waters, 1981). These various measures of social competence are usually in agreement, which is not surprising because they tend to foster one another (Howes, 1990; Rubin et al., 1998; Sroufe et al., 1984). For example, when children engage peers in positive ways, they are better liked, and that popularity can encourage additional positive behaviors that keep attracting peers (Denham and Holt, 1993).

Our chapter-opening example illustrated what socially competent preschoolers are like, especially the positive emotions that such children express toward peers. Mikey conveyed his excitement about seeing the climbing structure as a boat through his tone of voice, his posture, and his facial expression. If he had suggested the boat idea in a flat, matter-of-fact way, the other two boys might have ignored it. But Mikey’s enthusiastic “Hey! It’s a boat!” brought the other two running. His enthusiasm captured their interest and was contagious. This ability to have fun and to share that fun with others is one reason such a child is popular with peers (Sroufe et al., 1984).

**Early Friendships**

Preschoolers not only prefer certain other children to play with; interviews and detailed observational studies have shown that they form partnerships with one another that may last for a year or more (Howes, 1988; Park, Lay, and Ramsay, 1993). These early peer relationships may endure partly because adults promote them and partly because the children involved are continually in contact with each other at day care or preschool. Nevertheless, by age 4 or so, children have considerable capacity to maintain friendships through their own efforts (Hartup, 1992; Rubin et al., 1998).

Young friends behave differently with each other than they do with nonfriends (Hartup, 1992; Hartup and Laursen, 1993). They have more frequent positive exchanges and are more cooperative in problem-solving tasks. When placed in experimental conflict situations—with, for example, each partner being told a different set of rules for a game—friends also disagree with each other more often than mere acquaintances do. However, these conflicts are less heated, result in fairer solutions, and do not cause the children to separate. Preschool friends are clearly motivated to maintain their relationship. Being able to continue a relationship despite conflicts offers important opportunities to learn how to be together (Hartup and Laursen, 1993). The sharing that young friends do may also mark the beginnings of learning about justice (Rubin et al., 1998), a topic we will return to when we discuss friendship in Chapter 12.
The Importance of Peer Relationships

Early relationships with peers are important for several reasons. As we mentioned in Chapter 2, the peer group is a major setting for learning about the concepts of fairness, reciprocity, and cooperation. It is also a critical setting for learning to manage interpersonal aggression, as the episode between Malcolm and April illustrates. In peer groups children learn a great deal about cultural norms and values, such as gender roles, as well. Finally, experiences within the peer group, whether positive or negative, can greatly affect a child’s self-concept and future dealings with others. Perhaps for this reason, how well a child gets along with peers is one of the strongest predictors of later success. It is related to levels of adjustment, psychological problems, and even school achievement (e.g., Rubin et al., 1998; Teo et al., 1996).

Increased peer interactions can sometimes help children overcome developmental problems. For instance, when socially withdrawn preschoolers were given the opportunity to interact one-on-one with somewhat younger children in a series of special play sessions, they became more outgoing in their regular classrooms (Furman, Rahe, and Hartup, 1979). Having a chance to interact successfully with a peer seemed to enhance both social skills and confidence about peer relations. Interacting with a more competent, but tolerant, same-age peer (or even an older sibling) would also be expected to enhance social competence. Another remedial approach, effective to some extent, is directly teaching socially isolated children interaction skills (Mize and Ladd, 1990).

EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Because all areas of development are interrelated, it is not surprising that emotional changes during the preschool years are as dramatic as cognitive and social ones. These changes include a growing understanding of emotions and their causes, a rapidly expanding capacity for regulating emotional experiences (part of a general increase in self-regulation), and the further development of the self-evaluative emotions (Eisenberg et al., 1993; Lewis, 1992; Stroufe, 1995).

Young Children’s Understanding of Emotion

By the preschool period, children have learned a great deal about emotion and emotional expression (Saarni, Munnin, and Campos, 1998). For example, their understanding and use of emotional words expands rapidly (Ridgeway, Waters, and Kuczaj, 1985). About half of all toddlers use the word good, but only about 7 percent use the word sad. By age 6, children consistently use such words. They also understand complex emotional concepts such as jealous, proud, embarrassed, and miserable. Preschoolers’ reading of positive emotions in natural settings shows close agreement with that of adults, although they are still not very good at interpreting the range of negative emotions others may express (Fabes et al., 1994). Preschoolers also have trouble distinguishing what people really feel from what they appear to feel. This is not surprising, given their struggle with the appearance-reality distinction. Thus, young children have no difficulty distinguishing between pictures of happy and sad faces, but they have great difficulty understanding that someone who is sad may put on a happy face (e.g., to protect someone else’s feelings) or that someone who is really happy may not show happiness (e.g., Friend and Davis, 1993).

During the preschool period children acquire a better understanding of the causes of emotions. By age 4 they know emotions are influenced not only by what happens, but also by what people expect to happen or think happened. For example, 4-year-olds know that a
girl may be sad if she mistakenly thinks she isn’t going to get a prize she wants (Harris, 1994). But if the girl looks as if she isn’t sad, children this age would typically become confused about how she feels. It is not until between the ages of 5 and 8 that children become able to integrate situational cues and visible expressions of emotion to infer how someone else feels.

The Growth of Emotional Regulation

**Emotional regulation** includes the capacities to control and direct emotional expression, to maintain organized behavior in the presence of strong emotions, and to be guided by emotional experiences. All these capacities expand significantly during the preschool years. Some of them are revealed in preschoolers’ increasing ability to tolerate frustration.

**Tolerating Frustration**

An important aspect of emotional regulation is the ability to tolerate frustration—that is, to avoid becoming so upset in a frustrating situation that emotions get out of control and behavior becomes disorganized. This ability begins to appear by about age 2 and expands dramatically throughout the preschool years (Bridges and Grohnik, 1995; Eisenberg et al., 1994; van Lieshout, 1975). When confronting a frustrating situation, such as an attractive toy that is inaccessible, older preschoolers are less angry and tantrum-prone than younger children are. They also stay engaged with the problem despite their frustration, and they make more constructive responses, such as seeking direct help.

This emerging capacity affects relationships with parents. Defiance of parents’ requests and passive noncompliance with them decline markedly between the ages of 2 and 5 (Kuczynski and Kochanska, 1990). Children are increasingly able to tolerate the frustration of being asked to do something counter to their own wishes. They also begin to learn how to use negotiation to resolve such a conflict.

Another form of tolerance for frustration is **delay of gratification**, the ability to forgo an immediate reward, such as a small piece of candy, despite strong desire for it, in order to have a better reward later. With support from an adult, preschool children can usually endure the frustration of delaying gratification. The wait may not be easy for them, but most manage to get through it. The ability to delay gratification will expand in the middle childhood years to the point where the child can wait even in the absence of adult help (Mischel, Shoda, and Rodriguez, 1989).

Researchers are not yet sure why tolerance for frustration improves so noticeably during the preschool years. Children are probably becoming able to suppress their feelings to some extent, making them appear less upset (Maccoby, 1980). At the same time, they are learning strategies that help them limit the buildup of tension that tends to accompany frustration. For instance, in experiments in which attractive toys are locked inside a Plexiglas box, some preschoolers distract themselves by turning to other activities. This strategy redefines the situation as one in which the inaccessible toy is no longer the central focus of attention (e.g., Wolf, 1990). Undoubtedly, such strategies help reduce tension and make the situation more bearable.

**Showing Flexibility in Emotional Expression**

The ability to exert self-control over emotions would be a mixed blessing if children couldn’t adjust its level to suit particular situations. Some situations demand a great deal of self-restraint, while others allow children to be as impulsive and expressive as they want. The ability to adapt to these different situations is called **ego resiliency** because the ego, or self, is showing the capacity to be flexible in its control over the expression of impulses and feelings (Block and Block, 1980). Mikey is showing ego resiliency in the scene at the start of the chapter. He is able to line up quietly when the teacher requests, but he also runs, shouts, and plays gleefully during outdoor recess. Like all ego-resilient children, Mikey can be spontaneous and expressive in some settings, reserved and self-disciplined in others (Sroufe, 1995). The behaviors he shows at any given time depend on the particular situation.
Internalizing Standards

Along with preschoolers' growing capacity for controlling the expression of emotion comes a growing awareness of standards for behavior and the use of those standards as guides for words and actions. The incorporation of standards into the self is called internalization. At first the standards are held by those responsible for socializing the child, but gradually they become part of the child as well (Kochanska and Aksan, 1995).

Once the child has internalized standards, he or she will comply with parents' prohibitions even when the parents aren't present (Bugental and Goodnow, 1998). If an experimenter gets a preschool child to do something against a parent's rules when the parent is not there, the child will typically show signs of distress and may confess to the parent when the parent returns (Emde and Buchsbaum, 1990). Another indication of the internalization of standards is concern for other people. In their third year children not only respond emotionally to mishaps they cause or witness, but also seek to make reparations (Cole, Barrett, and Zahn-Waxler, 1992). Thus, internalization is the bridge from control of the child by others to the child's self-regulation (Power and Manire, 1992).

Internalization is also a cornerstone of moral development (Turiel, 1998). By age 3 or so, according to Robert Emde, the moral self arises (Emde et al., 1991). Children begin to understand that some behaviors are right and others are wrong. By age 4 they view moral transgressions, such as hitting someone or not sharing, as more serious than conventional transgressions, such as eating ice cream with your fingers. They make such judgments more independently from adults than do younger children (Smetana, Schlagman, and Adams, 1993). It is as if they have internalized not just standards of behavior but also a sense that certain standards entail moral obligations.

Parents encourage this change in preschool children by changing their socialization techniques as the preschool period progresses (Power and Manire, 1992). Instead of direct, at times strong, controls ("No, no! Don't hit!"), they begin to use indirect external controls ("What a good boy to let Bobby play with your new boat!"), and finally, they start to encourage internal self-regulation ("I'm counting on you to divide up those cookies fairly"). Encouraging self-regulation also involves reasoning and persuasion. The parent might explain why a certain distribution is fair and just. On the basis of their own studies and a review of others' research, Power and Manire (1992) conclude that when parents provide information about rules and values and underscore that information through their own consistent behavior, young children are more likely to behave responsibly in the parents' absence.

Preschoolers can maintain organized behavior when working on hard problems. They can carry out activities that require several steps and do not lead to immediate rewards.

Internalization:
The incorporation of standards of behavior into the self.
The Self-Evaluative Emotions

Internalization of standards affects the emotional experiences of preschoolers. Children can now feel genuine guilt and pride, two emotions that involve evaluating the self against internalized standards (Saarni, Mummé, and Campos, 1998; Sroufe, 1995). These emotions are different from the beginnings of shame and pride that toddlers experience. For example, preschoolers’ guilt reactions occur not because of what their parents do or say, but because they themselves know they have done something wrong. Guilt no longer arises only from a fear of being punished; it is also due to an undermining of self-esteem caused by failure to live up to an internalized standard (Kochanska, 1993). Preschoolers’ guilt reactions are also more organized than toddlers’ shame—they are not just global, all-encompassing states of anxiety—and they occur more as a result of particular behaviors. The specificity that characterizes preschoolers’ guilt allows the attempts at making up that we discussed earlier (Kochanska, 1993; Lewis, 1992).

Likewise, true pride is distinguished from toddlers’ joy in mastery because it is based on self-evaluation. Toddlers often show just as much pleasure when an adult solves a problem as when they solve it, but preschoolers are usually happier when they find the solution themselves (Stipek, Recchia, and McClintic, 1992). Children perceive that they have done a good job, and consequently feel proud. Pride reactions are more common and stronger when the problem solved or the task accomplished is difficult than when it is easy (Lewis et al., 1992). This tells us that preschool children evaluate the complexity of what they are trying to do and have their own standards of performance.

Emotional Development, Aggression, and Prosocial Behavior

Aggression refers to forceful, negative acts directed against others or their possessions, while prosocial behavior refers to positive feelings and acts directed toward others, with the intention of benefiting them (Eisenberg and Fabes, 1998). Both types of behavior are closely related to emotional regulation. When Malcolm acts aggressively toward April, hitting her to get possession of the tricycle, he is letting go of self-restraint and acting on impulse. Aggression generally involves relinquishing self-control and spontaneously lashing out, while refraining from aggression involves self-management. Prosocial behavior also involves self-management, but in a different way. To be kind or helpful to someone else, you must often make a conscious effort to put aside your own desires and enter into the other person’s needs and point of view. This requires a substantial amount of self-regulation. Thus, as the capacities for self-management and emotional regulation unfold in children, we would expect to see changes in both aggression and prosocial behavior. In fact, this is exactly what happens.

Developmental Changes in Aggression

When 12-month-old Maggie roughly pushes away her mother’s hand to get at her favorite toy, she is not really being aggressive. Although her behavior is assertive and purposeful, she does not intend to cause physical or psychological harm. This intent is central to true aggression; only when Maggie is cognitively advanced enough to appreciate the consequences of her actions can she engage in genuine aggression (Maccoby, 1980). This ability develops sometime during toddlerhood, when representational thought emerges. During toddlerhood we see an increase in angry outbursts in response to constraints imposed by parents, as well as in negative behavior directed toward peers. Such negative behaviors actually reach their peak in toddlerhood and the early preschool period (Coie and Dodge, 1998). However, much of the negative peer interaction of toddlers is object-centered, as when two children pull on a plaything in order to possess it (Howes, 1988). Not until the preschool period, when children better understand the self as an agent and the concept of fairness, does true interpersonal aggression become common. The aggression that arises now includes actions whose only purpose is to cause another person distress (Hartup and Laursen, 1993; Maccoby, 1980). By this age, too, there is consistency in the level of aggression found in individual children (Coie and Dodge, 1998).
During the late preschool and early elementary school years aggressive behavior changes. Children’s overall level of aggression declines because of a drop in instrumental aggression, the use of aggression as a means to get something (Hartup and Laursen, 1993). Malcolm is engaging in instrumental aggression when he tries to wrestle the tricycle from April’s grip. Older children are much less likely to become involved in such a squabble because by the end of the preschool period, they have learned alternative ways to settle disputes over objects.

Although instrumental aggression declines sharply in middle childhood, hostile aggression—aggression aimed solely at hurting someone else—does not (Coie and Dodge, 1998). Most acts of hostile aggression during middle childhood are concerned with getting even. Children lash out when they perceive that their rights have been violated or their egos threatened. Over the elementary school years hostile aggression changes dramatically in form. Older children become much more prone to verbal insults than to hitting.

The Development of Empathy and Altruism

Two related forms of prosocial behavior are empathy and altruism. Empathy (experiencing the emotions of another person) underlies altruism (acting unselfishly to aid someone else). When empathy is aroused, children are more willing to be helpful, or altruistic, toward others (Eisenberg and Fabes, 1998).

Both empathy and altruism follow a developmental course parallel to that of aggression, because the same cognitive factors underlie all three. To engage in true aggression, altruism, or empathy, children must understand they are independent agents responsible for their own actions. They must also grasp that their actions can cause feelings in other people different from the feelings they themselves are experiencing.

Researchers have suggested that the development of empathy and altruism has three phases (Hoffman, 1979; Zahn-Waxler et al., 1992). In the first phase, during infancy, the child shows a primitive capacity for empathy by crying when another person is distressed. But the child as yet has little understanding of who is actually upset. On hearing another baby cry, 8-month-olds will often crawl to their own mothers and seek contact with them (Hoffman, 1979). Apparently, the distinction between self and other is not yet clear in infants’ minds. At this stage, crying when another person cries is more aptly described as contagion than as a sign of empathy.

In the second phase, during early toddlerhood, advances in the concepts of self and others enable the child to engage in more purposeful helping behaviors. Children may hug or pat another child who is crying, bring their mothers over to the crying youngster, or bring the child a favorite toy. But these actions do not really take into account the needs of
the other child. Instead, toddlers do what would be helpful to themselves in that situation; they bring their own mothers or their own favorite toys.

In phase three, during early childhood, the capacity to take the perspective of others, and with it the capacity to respond to others' needs, increase dramatically (e.g., Radke-Yarrow and Zahn-Waxler, 1984; Zahn-Waxler et al., 1992). Although these capacities are widespread among preschoolers, actual displays of helping are relatively rare in natural settings. The fact that children can experience another person's distress does not guarantee they will immediately offer comfort or assistance to someone who is upset (Kestenbaum, Farber, and Stroufe, 1989). One reason they don't may be because they know adults will often help.

How have researchers discovered these stages in the development of empathy and altruism? The work of Marion Radke-Yarrow deserves special mention because it shows how naturalistic observations and laboratory studies can be used together (e.g., Radke-Yarrow and Zahn-Waxler, 1984). Radke-Yarrow asked forty-one mothers to record in detail their children's reactions to distress in others as they occurred in everyday settings. Because of the possibility of bias in the mothers' reports, assistants sometimes observed and recorded the same incidents as the mothers. In addition, Radke-Yarrow supported all her findings with laboratory experiments.

Not only did Radke-Yarrow's data reveal the developmental phases just outlined, they also suggested that a parent's style of caregiving greatly influences a child's prosocial behavior. In keeping with a social learning perspective, a young child's tendency to feel empathy is related to experience with nurturant caregivers who provide models of empathy and helpfulness toward others. Just telling the child not to hurt other people is apparently not enough. The parent must clearly state the consequences for the victim, explain to the child principles and expectations regarding kindness, and convey the entire message with intensity of feeling about the issues involved. Not surprisingly, the kind of caring, nurturant parent who provides these types of lessons also tends to foster a secure attachment in young children. In accord with Bowlby's theory, security of attachment in infancy predicts a high level of empathy and prosocial behavior in the preschool years (Kestenbaum, Farber, and Stroufe, 1989). By experiencing an empathic caregiving relationship beginning in infancy, children not only learn how to be cared for, but how to care as well. Children with secure attachment histories bring forward a basic responsiveness to others.

The frequency of prosocial behavior increases throughout the preschool years as well as later in childhood (Eisenberg and Fabes, 1998). This is true for both boys and girls, although there may be some gender differences in expression. Boys and girls are equally likely to show helpful behavior to others in need, but girls appear to show more kindness and consideration.

THE ROLE OF PLAY IN PRESCHOOL DEVELOPMENT

Play is the province of children. Once their more fundamental needs have been met—that is, whenever they aren't eating or sleeping or seeking attention from adults—children will play, often for hours on end. Even emotionally disturbed children play, although the quality of their play is notably affected. The absence of play is considered a sign of extreme abnormality (see Chapter 15). This intrinsic motive to play shows how much of children's behavior lies outside the influence of external reinforcement. No one has to teach children to play; they do so naturally. No one has to reward children for playing; play is its own reward.

Play serves important functions for children. It is a means by which they can be active explorers of their environments, active creators of new experiences, and active participants in their own development. Play is a laboratory in which children learn new skills and practice behaviors and concepts that lie at the very edge of their capacities (Lillard, 1993). Play is also a child's social workshop, an arena for trying out roles alone and with other children, and for expanding and preserving a sense of self. For preschoolers, play is also an
arena for emotional expression, often concerned with important themes and feelings from everyday life (Fischer, Shaver, and Carnochan, 1990). Let’s look more closely at the emotional function of play before turning to some of play’s social functions.

Play and Mastery of Conflict

By the preschool years play becomes the child’s foremost tool for dealing with conflict and mastering whatever is frightening or painful. This was shown in a film Jeanne Block and her colleagues at Berkeley made during the civil disturbances of the 1960s. The sandbox play of children at that time was filled with police and civilians in conflict. We illustrated the importance of play as a vehicle for expressing a young child’s current anxieties at the end of our story about Mikey. In Mikey’s make-believe drama, which is based on an actual case observation (Rosenberg, 1984), the little boy is caught in the midst of his parents’ crashing cars, just as Mikey is caught in the middle of Frank and Christine’s persistent clashes. Similarly, another 4-year-old’s mother observed her daughter dwelling on a recent fear in her play. The day after she was scared by a large dog, she pretended to be a dog terrorizing a group of dolls. She barked ferociously while crawling on the floor and then reassured the dolls by saying, “It’s OK. He won’t hurt you.” In such ways preschoolers work their anxieties into play and thereby master them. In fact, play often centers on the most frightening of topics, such as being lost or having to fight off monsters (Rosenberg, 1984).

Play is also an arena for working through ongoing developmental issues. Consider how children resolve the issue that arises when they realize they have less power than their parents. This resolution is often worked out in play (Breger, 1974; Wolf, 1990). In play the child can safely turn the tables and become the powerful one. A common game preschoolers initiate with parents is “you be the baby and I’ll be the mommy (or daddy).” The child might say: “Now you go right to bed!” (Parent: “Can I read?”) “No, you have to go right to sleep!” The power roles are reversed in play, and the parent is charmed, not infuriated.

Pretend solutions are usually a healthy outlet for preschoolers. Because they involve active confrontation of a problem, they provide a prototype for more mature solutions in later years. Recognizing a conflict and doing something about it, rather than denying it, is a growth-enhancing response (Breger, 1974). With further development, of course, pretend or play solutions must be left behind. Nevertheless, they represent the beginnings of active mastery of conflict.

A history of parental support and nurturance can help children find these healthy resolutions to issues and conflicts. Preschoolers whose parents are nurturant and supportive
tend to engage in fantasy play that is more flexible and elaborate, and they are more likely to bring negative themes to successful resolution (Rosenberg, 1984). As Rosenberg repeatedly observed in case studies of children with histories of secure attachment, Mikey brings the issue of being caught in the midst of parental conflict to a satisfactory close ("He got his leg broken! Here comes the ambulenz. They take him to the hospital. They fix it!"). Such pretend dramas and their resolutions are an adult's entrée to the child's inner world and an indicator of positive adaptation during the preschool period.

Role Playing
Another important function of preschoolers' play is providing an opportunity to try out social roles and cultural values. In play, children can be mommies and daddies, doctors, police officers, or robbers. In play, they can act out their aspirations as well as their fears. Dressing up in grown-up clothes and playing at grown-up jobs are also important parts of identifying with parents and exploring gender roles.

Cultural factors influence the quantity, form, and themes of young children's social fantasy play. In one study, Jo Ann Farver and Yoolim Lee Shin (1997) studied social fantasy play among Korean-American and European-American 4-year-olds enrolled in two different preschools. During free play at school, the Korean-American children engaged in less social fantasy play than the European-American children did, apparently because such activity was not encouraged at their preschool and no props for fantasy play were provided. In an experimental setting where props for fantasy play were provided, the Korean-American and European-American children engaged in equal amounts of social fantasy play, but the content and form of their play differed. Korean-American children's play focused on everyday activities and family relationships, and they tended to be nonconfrontational and to minimize conflict in their play. In contrast, European-American children's play focused on fantasy themes and danger, and they were more likely to assert themselves and reject their partner's ideas and behaviors. These differences reflect differences in cultural values. The Korean-American children came from immigrant families in which group harmony and interdependence were emphasized, whereas the European-American children came from families in which the mainstream American culture's emphasis on individuality and self-expression was more prominent.

Social fantasy play is normal and healthy for preschoolers. In fact, the more a young child engages in social fantasy play and the more flexible and elaborate that play is, the more likely the child is to be judged socially competent by teachers (Connolly and Doyle, 1984; Rosenberg, 1984). Developmentalists are not yet sure of the reasons for this correlation. Perhaps skill at social fantasy play promotes acceptance among other preschool children. Or perhaps popular preschoolers simply have more opportunities for this kind of play. Whatever the explanation, skill at social fantasy play is an indicator of a preschooler's overall quality of adjustment.

THE PARENTS' ROLE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

The social and emotional development and behavior of preschoolers is related both to their history of earlier care and to the care they receive during the preschool period (e.g., Sroufe, 1988; Youngblade and Belsky, 1992). Competent, well-adjusted preschoolers have typically had supportive, nurturant care from their parents since infancy. In the following section, we take a look at some aspects of parenting that are important at this age.

Important Aspects of Parenting in the Preschool Period
Some of the same qualities of parenting that are important for infants and toddlers remain important for preschoolers. These include parental warmth, emotional responsiveness, and sharing of positive feelings with the child. For example, preschoolers whose parents are
emotionally responsive tend to show empathy for others and to engage in prosocial behavior (Fabes et al., 1994). Similarly, parents who are emotionally responsive, accept their child’s autonomy, and often share positive feelings tend to have preschoolers who are socially competent with peers and cooperative with their parents (Denham, Renwick, and Holt, 1991; Kochanska and Aksan, 1995; LaFreniere and Dumas, 1995). Such correlations do not prove cause and effect, but their consistency with infant studies certainly suggests that parental warmth and responsiveness are important.

Certain parental qualities become newly important during the preschool years, largely because children’s needs and abilities are changing. For instance, consistency in the parents’ approach to discipline and agreement between the parents concerning child-rearing practices tend to be more important for preschoolers than for younger children (Block and Block, 1980; LaFreniere and Dumas, 1995). This may be because the expanded cognitive abilities of preschoolers cause them to become confused by inconsistencies.

As children’s abilities and needs change during the preschool period, the developmental tasks they face also change, and with those changes come related changes in the parents’ tasks. These new sets of tasks are summarized in Table 10.2. Just as in toddlerhood, parents must gradually give children more responsibility, while remaining available to step in and help if the children’s resources are exceeded. According to Erikson, the preschool period is a time when children may attempt to do too much as they strive for mastery. If parents frequently ridicule or punish a preschooler’s failures, the child may experience pervasive feelings of guilt (Erikson, 1963). Thus, parents must neither push preschoolers too fast nor thwart their efforts. This role is similar to the one parents played when the child was a toddler, but now they are dealing with a much more mature and competent youngster. Parents must also try to display clear roles and values in their own actions and show the flexible self-control they hope to promote in their child.

Some of the characteristics of parents who raise well-adjusted preschoolers are summed up in what Diana Baumrind (1967) calls authoritative parenting. Authoritative parents are nurturant, responsive, and supportive, yet they also set firm limits for their children. Their preschoolers typically have a number of positive qualities: they are energetic, emotionally responsive to peers, curious, and self-reliant.

Other parenting styles that Baumrind has identified are not generally associated with such positive characteristics in children. One is permissive parenting, in which the parents totally fail to set firm limits or to require appropriately mature behavior. This pattern is associated with children who are impulsive, low in self-control, and lacking in self-reliance. Another parenting style associated with problems is authoritarian parenting. Authoritarian parents are unresponsive to their children’s wishes and inflexible and harsh.

### Table 10.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents’ Tasks</th>
<th>Children’s Tasks</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nurturance</td>
<td>Accepting care and developing trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training and channeling of physical needs</td>
<td>Complying and controlling self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching and skill training</td>
<td>Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orienting child to family and peers</td>
<td>Developing a general understanding of the social world</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promoting interpersonal skills and control of emotion</td>
<td>Role taking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guiding formation of goals, plans, and aspirations</td>
<td>Achieving self-regulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transmitting cultural values</td>
<td>Developing a sense of right and wrong</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Clausen, 1968.

**Authoritative parenting:** A parenting style in which the parents are nurturant, responsive, and supportive, yet set firm limits for their children.

**Permissive parenting:** A parenting style in which parents fail to set firm limits or to require appropriately mature behavior of their children.

**Authoritarian parenting:** A parenting style in which parents are unresponsive, inflexible, and harsh in controlling behavior.
in controlling their children’s behavior. This pattern is related to apprehension, frustration, and passive hostility in European-American children throughout childhood and into adolescence (Baumrind, 1991).

The meaning and impact of parenting practices seem to depend somewhat on cultural context (Greenfield and Suzuki, 1998). For example, effective parents in traditional Chinese-American families show many characteristics of Baumrind’s authoritarian parenting category, including parental control, directiveness, and strictness. However, at the same time they show many characteristics of authoritative parenting, such as reasoning with children about misbehavior. These seemingly contradictory characteristics of traditional Chinese parenting reflect the Chinese concepts of chiao shun (“training”/“teaching appropriate behaviors”) and guan (“to govern”/“to care for or love”) (Chao, 1994). Children in these families do not typically show the negative outcomes of authoritarian parenting seen in European-American children. It appears that the categories of authoritarian and authoritative parenting may not be as meaningful in traditional Chinese culture as they are in European-American culture. In addition, researchers have recently found that nonabusive physical punishment is associated with heightened child aggression in European-American families, but not in African-American families (Deater-Deckard et al., 1996). This difference may be due to differences in how physical punishment is used or what other parenting behaviors are associated with it; for instance, African-American parents usually do not combine physical punishment with a withdrawal of love, as European-American parents often do (Parke and Buriel, 1998).

Different styles of parenting may be appropriate in different contexts, as we suggested in Chapter 2 (Parke and Buriel, 1998). More controlling, strict, and even authoritarian parenting appears to be more common in dangerous inner-city neighborhoods, and it is not clear that such parenting practices have negative consequences in these contexts. Some studies suggest that they are even associated with more positive outcomes among the urban poor (Baldwin, Baldwin, and Cole, 1990). One likely explanation for this finding is that parental control and directiveness in dangerous settings is associated with care and concern and is not experienced by children as rejection.

Less successful styles of parenting can be associated with negative situations in the parents’ lives, such as high levels of stress or marital conflict. At the same time, such negative family situations can have direct adverse effects on children. For instance, preschool children are quite vulnerable to conflict between their parents, as can be seen in Maggie’s reaction to her parents’ fighting. Marital conflict has been shown to be related to negative play with peers, anxiety about parents’ whereabouts, and an increased level of behavioral problems (Katz and Gottman, 1993). The particular effects on children may depend on the form of marital conflict they experience. Lynn Katz and John Gottman (1993) have found that mutually hostile patterns of parental interaction are associated with aggression and related problems in children, while a pattern in which the father becomes angry and withdrawn is associated with such problems as anxiety.

Divorce may also have a negative impact on preschool children because they are now cognitively mature enough to grasp the anger and incompatibility between the parents, but not yet mature enough to understand the marital breakup is not their fault (Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan, 1999). When Judith Wallerstein and Joan Kelly (1982) interviewed a large number of 3½- to 6-year-olds following their parents’ divorce, they found that self-blame was preschoolers’ predominant response. Younger children would probably not be capable of such a reaction. In Chapter 12 we will say more about the effects on children of marital conflict and divorce.

**Identification:**
The process by which children strive to be like their parents in thoughts and feelings as well as in actions.

**Identification with Parents**
The cognitive advances of the preschool period allow children to be influenced not just by how their parents treat them but also by what the parents are like in general. Psychoanalytic theory offers a possible explanation for this. It holds that children strive to be like their parents, not only in actions but in thoughts and feelings as well. This process is called *identification*. Historically, psychoanalysts have argued that children identify most
strongly with the parent of the same sex, and that this is the basis for the child’s own sense of gender. Our own view is that relationships with both parents, and the parents’ relationship with each other, all may influence the preschool child’s emerging sense of self.

To better understand the process of identification, consider it from the child’s point of view—say, from the viewpoint of Malcolm at age 2. In moving away from the great dependency of infancy, Malcolm at first sees no boundaries to his newfound abilities. Overflowing with excitement at each new achievement, he feels all-capable and all-powerful. But inevitably clashes of will with his parents bring Malcolm face-to-face with limits to his independence. No matter how resistant he might be to his parents’ wishes (and children this age are often testimony to the strength of the human spirit), he cannot hold out indefinitely against the overwhelming evidence that his parents are more powerful than he.

What is Malcolm to do in this situation? Relinquish his newfound autonomy and return to his earlier dependency? Surely not. Psychoanalytic theory proposes another solution. Malcolm can identify with his parents, incorporating their attributes into his own self. In this way he becomes more like his parents and thus more powerful, as they are. Notice how instead of relinquishing his newly formed self, Malcolm’s sense of self develops further. He internalizes characteristics he perceives in his parents and thus acquires new feelings, beliefs, and values (as well as new standards of behavior, which we discussed earlier). The period that follows—beginning at about age 3 or 3½—is often considered idyllic by parents. The child shows more confidence and security, a new level of cooperativeness, and a closer alignment with the parents.

Of course, identification isn’t possible until a child has some ability to understand the parents’ attitudes and feelings, not just observe their actions. This is why identification doesn’t become apparent until the preschool period, when such cognitive ability emerges. It is also no accident that the appearance of identification coincides with the appearance of true interpersonal aggression, true empathy for others, and a marked increase in self-regulation. All of these developmental changes are intimately connected. Self-control, for example, partly involves internalizing parental standards and using them as guides for behavior.

Cognitive readiness to identify with parents and accept their beliefs, rules, and values may not be enough to ensure that this process occurs. There is general agreement that internalization of the parents’ rules and values is also influenced by the quality of the parent-child relationship. A relationship that facilitates internalization probably involves certain cognitive elements, such as clear communication (Grusec and Goodnow, 1994). At the same time, a loving, supportive relationship may provide an important motivational and emotional framework for internalization. For example, when parents overemphasize their power in teaching rules to children, the children can feel very anxious about prohibitions and fail to internalize them (Hoffman, 1994). In contrast, when parents are clear in conveying rules and explain the reasons for them, they generate only moderate anxiety in children and therefore promote genuine acceptance of the rules. A base of shared positive feelings between parent and child is also very important (Kochanska and Aksan, 1995). Coercive techniques may get a child to comply with the parent’s rules, but more positive approaches bring enthusiastic cooperation. Such committed compliance leads to true internalization, in which the child complies even when the parent isn’t present.

Given that the quality of the parent-child relationship may affect the internalization of rules, it isn’t surprising that security of attachment during infancy and toddlerhood is related to a child’s openness to socialization and identification with family norms and values during the preschool years. Everett Waters has drawn upon social learning theory, cognitive developmental theory, and Bowlby’s attachment theory to explain this connection (Waters et al., 1991). In keeping with our Chapter 8 discussion of

In early childhood there is both change and continuity in parent-child relationships—change because of the child’s development and continuity because the foundation laid earlier in the relationship remains.
socialization from the inside, Waters argues that securely attached infants are already committed to the family system long before they understand the rules. When the rules are then conveyed to them as preschoolers—through prohibitions, praise, and so forth—their reaction is, “If that’s the system, that’s for me.” In other words, a positive orientation toward socialization and family rules is part of secure children’s attachment relationships. All that is required for these children to internalize those rules is the cognitive maturity of the preschool years and opportunities to learn the details of the family do’s and don’ts.

THE COHERENCE OF BEHAVIOR AND DEVELOPMENT

A major theme of this book is that child behavior and development is coherent, orderly, and logical. There is sense to the way various influences combine to shape the child, to the way each child develops an interrelated set of characteristics, and to the way one phase of development paves the way for the next. While coherence in behavior and development exists from the beginning of life, it becomes even more apparent during the preschool period.

The Coherence of the Self

Coherence can be seen very clearly in the individual characteristics of preschool children. Clusters of characteristics go together in a logical, meaningful way (Eder and Mangelsdorff, 1997). For instance, children who have high self-esteem also tend to have flexible self-control, to show more prosocial behavior, and to be better liked by peers (Sroufe, 1983). Those rated as more socially competent by teachers engage in more social play, show more positive feelings toward other children, and are more well-regulated emotionally (Howes, 1990; Rubin et al., 1995). In contrast, children who show hostility do not show much prosocial behavior (Eisenberg and Fabes, 1998), nor is prosocial behavior common among children who are highly dependent on their preschool teachers (Sroufe, Fox, and Pancake, 1983). Once again, the various characteristics make sense together: Children do not display a random assortment of disconnected traits; instead, their behavior reflects a logical and coherent underlying self. By the end of the preschool years it is possible to see children as having distinctive personalities.

Parents’ behavior helps explain why certain clusters of characteristics tend to be found together in preschoolers, forming logical, coherent patterns. For example, parents who are emotionally supportive of their children, encouraging independent abilities and a capacity for self-control, also support peer relationships, in part by initiating and supporting opportunities for their child to play with other children (Ladd and Hart, 1992; Lieberman, 1977). These aspects of the parents’ behavior are logically connected to each other; support in one area is coupled with support in another. Thus, it is not surprising that high self-esteem and self-reliance in preschoolers tend to accompany social competence with peers. Other clusters of characteristics in preschoolers also seem to be logically linked to the kinds of experiences parents have provided.

The Coherence of Behavior Over Time

Just as there is logic and coherence in a preschooler’s current behavior, so there is logic and coherence in how the child’s behavior has developed over time. For example, children who had secure attachments in infancy also tend to be secure in their attachments in the preschool years (Vaughn and Waters, 1990). At the later age attachment must be measured differently than in infancy, because the brief separations of the Strange Situation would not be likely to provoke attachment behaviors in preschoolers. Everett Waters and Brian Vaughn developed a home observational procedure for this purpose, the Attachment Q-Sort, which focuses on the use of the parent as a base of security.
Chapter 10  Social and Emotional Development in Early Childhood

Preschoolers with a history of secure attachment in infancy vary in such characteristics as their social involvement and activity levels, but they tend to share certain positive patterns of behavior (Sroufe, 1983). They have high self-esteem, are popular with peers, and show little negative emotion or hostile aggression. This is not to say that these preschoolers never use force; in fact, they tend to be quite assertive and sometimes display instrumental aggression in struggles over objects (Sroufe, 1983; Maccoby, 1980). However, they do not seek to injure other children either in response to frustration or without obvious provocation. Generally, they are empathic toward their peers, and they have a greater capacity for forming friendships than preschoolers with a history of anxious attachment (Kerns, 1996; Pancake, 1985; Youngblade and Belsky, 1992). They also tend to show more self-reliance, more curiosity, greater flexibility, and more positive emotions in interacting with peers (Arend, Gove, and Sroufe, 1979; Sroufe, 1983; Sroufe et al., 1984; Waters, Wippman, and Sroufe, 1979).

A very different profile is typical of preschoolers with a history of anxious-resistant attachment. These children are unable to sustain the give-and-take of peer interaction and often wind up neglected by peers. They have low self-esteem and little capacity for flexible self-management (Sroufe, 1983). They also have a great need for support and contact with teachers, often hovering near them (Sroufe, 1988; Sroufe, Fox, and Pancake, 1983). They show less prosocial behavior toward peers than children with secure attachment histories, not because they are hostile but because their immaturity and low tolerance for stress makes them unable to do so. For example, one 4-year-old, on seeing another child with a cut lip, clapped his hand over his own mouth and climbed up on a teacher’s lap (Kessenbaum, Farber, and Sroufe, 1989). Such children also are frequent targets of bullying by peers.

Preschoolers with histories of anxious-avoidant attachment show yet another profile. They are often emotionally isolated or hostile and aggressive toward other children (Sroufe, 1983). Some of these children show aggression that is calculated and without immediate provocation. For instance, in response to a playmate’s remark that she had a stomachache, one little girl jabbed her fist into the other child’s stomach. When the playmate complained, “That hurt!” the girl punched her again (Troy and Sroufe, 1987). Lying, blaming others, and behaving defiantly are also common in these children. Yet these same antisocial children also show strong dependency needs. Through their negative behaviors they elicit much guidance, support, and discipline from teachers (Sroufe and Fleeson, 1988), and they spend more time than their classmates sitting on the teachers’ laps during group activities (Sroufe, Fox, and Pancake, 1983). During group activities or when it’s time to go home, their efforts to seek contact with the teacher often have a desperate quality. But ironically, when greeted by a teacher or when very upset, they deliberately turn away.

This pattern of behavior is complex, but its developmental link to anxious-avoidant attachment is coherent and understandable. The hostility toward or isolation from peers, the desperate dependency on adults, coupled with avoidance of adults when contact with them is appropriate, can all be interpreted as reflecting low self-esteem, general mistrust, and unresolved needs for nurturance arising from profound doubts about the availability of care beginning early in life.

Explaining Developmental Coherence

The coherence of young children’s behavior over time is partly due to the fact that many influences on children continue exerting themselves in much the same ways they have in the past. Among these consistent influences is the amount of support children receive from parents. Research shows that there is substantial consistency in the level of parental support over time (Pianta, Egeland, and Erickson, 1989). Children who were nurtured and encouraged but given reasonable limits as toddlers tend to be treated in a similarly appropriate way as preschoolers.

Another influence on preschool children that helps explain the coherence of their behavior over time is the fact that they are becoming increasingly consistent forces in their own development. By the preschool period, parents and other observers describe
Individual differences in children's emotional responses and social behavior become increasingly prominent and stable during the preschool period.

particular children as behaving in fairly consistent ways (e.g., Vaughn et al., 1992). Moreover, research shows that preschool children have developed consistent expectations about their social worlds (Bretherton, 1991; Main and Hesse, 1990; Rosenberg, 1984). Some preschoolers routinely expect other people to be responsive to them, whereas other preschoolers routinely expect the opposite. These consistent expectations and patterns of behavior are powerful influences on current development. They tend to elicit certain reactions from others, and those reactions, in turn, reinforce how the child tends to think and act.

For example, parents, and even unfamiliar adults, show less positive emotions toward a difficult child than toward the child's siblings (Bugental, Blue, and Lewis, 1990). This less positive reaction can, in turn, help maintain the original difficulty. Similarly, other children do not like aggressive children and frequently reject them as playmates (Rubin et al., 1998; Sroufe, 1983). This rejection may encourage further aggression on the part of the disliked children.

Just like parents and peers, preschool teachers also respond in ways that reinforce the emerging personalities of young children (Sroufe and Fleeson, 1988). With children who are well managed, self-reliant, and sociable, teachers are warm and accepting. They hold age-appropriate standards for such youngsters and expect them to comply with their directives with little external control. At the same time, they directly promote the acceptance of these children by peers (White and Kistner, 1992). These responses, not surprisingly, tend to further encourage the very behaviors the children originally displayed.

In contrast, preschool teachers are quite controlling of children who are timid or impulsive (often those with histories of anxious-resistant attachment, like Meryl). They also make allowances for such children, accept their immature behavior, and are very nurturant toward them, much as one would be with a younger child. Once again, the teachers' responses tend to reinforce the original patterns. With aggressive or hostile children, teachers are controlling and at times even angry. They rarely expect compliance, and they discipline these children often. Since they do not expect these children to exert self-control, the children are not encouraged to manage themselves. Thus, although teachers can often have
a positive influence on children with troubled histories, the behavior of such children often works against them, eliciting responses from teachers that confirm the children’s negative expectations about themselves.

**Stability and Change in Individual Behavior**

Personality may be thought of as a structure that evolves over the early years of life. At its base is the history of responsiveness and care provided during infancy and toddlerhood, a history that leads to an attachment relationship. The quality of the attachment relationship, in turn, strongly predicts certain aspects of a child’s behavior during the preschool period and also apparently forms the basis for later resilience in the face of adversity (see the box below). The power of a secure attachment relationship seems to lie in promoting a beginning sense of self-worth and an abiding sense of relatedness or connection to others, which Erikson calls basic trust.

In subsequent periods, parents of securely attached children build upon this base by supporting their children’s independent initiatives, by promoting self-control, and by maintaining a clear parental presence through emotional support and demands for appropriate behavior. The parents, in other words, develop a system for exerting control over their children that doesn’t stifle the children’s efforts at exploration and autonomy. This control system (in addition to the attachment relationship) is another avenue by which parents influence their children’s personality development.

The quality of the control system that parents establish predicts different behaviors in children than the quality of the attachment relationship does. For instance, attention and activity problems in elementary school are related to parents’ failure to maintain appropriate

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**A CLOSER LOOK**

**RESILIENCE**

Even in the face of adversity, some children seem to do well (Werner and Smith, 1992). Other children, following times of developmental difficulty, bounce back and again function well. Both of these circumstances have been used as examples of resilience. The term is certainly an apt description for such cases. But how are they to be explained?

In the history of developmental psychology, such children were first referred to as “inulnerable” or “invincible.” E. James Anthony (1974) wrote that some children were like glass, easily shattered. Others—the “inulnerable” —were more like steel, with adversity simply bouncing off them. These terms carried the unfortunate implication that some children were not affected by adversity. It also suggested that these children inherently had “the right stuff.” Thus, “in vulnerability” suggested a fixed trait of the child, a part of his or her inborn temperament. To some extent, resilience is still often applied in this trait-like way. In a prime example of circular reasoning, resilience is sometimes used simultaneously as evidence and explanation for children’s positive functioning—that is, Why are these children doing well? Because they are resilient. How do we know they are resilient? Because they are doing well. The question remains, Why are they doing well?

Research shows that resilience is not a magical trait that some children have from birth. Rather, it is a capacity that develops over time in the context of a supportive environment. Some children do cope better with stress than others, but these tend to be children with histories of secure attachment and ongoing parental support (Fianta, Egeland, and Sroufe, 1990). Likewise, when troubled preschoolers whose functioning improves are compared with other children whose problems persist, differences in their early histories are found. Those troubled 4-year-olds who improve more often have supportive early histories including secure attachments (Sroufe, Egeland, and Kreutzer, 1990). Similarly, children whose functioning improves between middle childhood and adolescence are distinguished from those who continue to struggle by an early supportive history, current parental support, or both (Sroufe, Carlson, and Levy, 1998).

It is the case that some children cope better with difficulty and adversity than others. It makes sense to describe them as resilient. But such a capacity is best understood as a developmental outcome, not as an inborn trait.
APPLYING RESEARCH FINDINGS

INVESTING IN PRESCHOOLERS

Since children's basic personality characteristics and the core of their self-esteem emerge by the end of the preschool period, growth-enhancing experiences during early childhood should be quite valuable; an investment in the child. This idea has inspired many intervention programs for preschoolers at developmental risk from living in economically disadvantaged environments. Contrary to early expectations, intervention programs do not primarily affect IQ scores. Although programs do tend to boost test scores temporarily, these effects fade within a few years after the program ends. What is of more lasting benefit is the empowering of youngsters who participate in high-quality preschool programs. These children tend to develop greater self-esteem, more positive attitudes toward education, and a stronger belief in themselves as able learners—factors that can continue to affect them even into adulthood. They also, in fact, do better in school.

An excellent example of the long-lasting effects of a preschool intervention program can be seen in the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project. The developers of this very successful program conducted a genuine experiment. They identified 123 young African-American children living in poverty and randomly assigned 58 of them to the program group. The other 65 served as controls. The long-term effects were dramatic, as shown in Figure 10.1. Compared with participants in the control group, young adults who had experienced the intervention program as preschoolers were significantly more likely to have at least a twelfth-grade education, to earn a steady income, to own their own home, and to have stayed off welfare and out of trouble with the law. These positive results translate into important economic benefits for society as a whole.

The cost of the program was just a little over $12,000 per child, but society gained back more than $88,000 per child in savings on the cost of schooling (children in the program had less need for special education), welfare, involvement in the criminal justice system, and settlements for victims of crimes, as well as in the taxes these children later paid (see Figure 10.2).

However, such long-term benefits result only from preschool programs of high quality. The High/Scope Perry Preschool Project was a model of high-quality early childhood education. It included two years of daily preschool classes in which the children participated in selecting their own learning activities in an environment rich with materials. Such child-initiated learning activities were vital to the program's success because they encouraged the empowering of the children (Schweinhart, Weikart, and Larriar, 1986). The High/Scope Perry Preschool Project also included weekly visits by staff members to the children's homes, which gave parents an opportunity to learn about what their children were doing in the classroom, to witness firsthand their children's progress and skills, and to discover how they could help. In this way, the parents were encouraged to become active participants in supporting their children's development. Active involvement of the parents is central to the long-term success of early childhood intervention because it can continue long after the preschool program is over. Other factors that contribute to a successful program are a stable staff, a low child-teacher ratio, and a fairly long duration. Preschool intervention programs that lack these key characteristics cannot be expected to yield such a high return on investment (Schweinhart and Weikart, 1993).

![Figure 10.1](image)

HIGH/SCOPE PERRY PRESCHOOL PROJECT: MAJOR FINDINGS AT AGE 27

(Source: Schweinhart and Weikart, 1993, p. 54.)
boundaries between themselves and their child and to support the child’s development of
self-control and self-management (Carlson, Jacobvitz, and Sroufe, 1995). Not surprisingly,
measures of the quality of early attachment combined with later measures of parental guid-
ance in self-control predict a child’s behavior much better than either set of measures does
alone (e.g., Sroufe, Egeland, and Kreutzer, 1990; Teo et al., 1996).

When personality is viewed as a developmental structure that is built up over time, it
becomes clear that early experiences or early temperament do not directly cause the child’s
behavior in the preschool period. Nor is it the case that the child’s typical patterns of behav-
ior cannot change. Fundamental change in children is always possible. For instance, since
the quality of care a preschooler currently receives affects how well that child functions,
improvement in care during the preschool period will have positive consequences for a
child’s behavior, even for a child who was anxiously attached earlier. As was the case in
prior periods of development, the social support available to parents and the level of stress
they experience are critical to the quality of the child care they provide. Across various cul-
tural groups, measures of parental stress and social support have been shown to be related to
the degree of security a young child feels, the quality of the parent-child relationship, and
the child’s acceptance by peers (e.g., Jennings, Stagg, and Connors, 1991; Melson, Ladd,
and Hsu, 1993; Nakagawa, Teti, and Lamb, 1992). In the Minnesota longitudinal study, the
single best predictor of change from anxious attachment in infancy to confident functioning
in kindergarten was the mother’s formation of a stable, supportive partnership during the
intervening years, as we mentioned in Chapter 2 (Erickson, Egeland, and Sroufe, 1985). We
can see these processes at work in the changes in Meryl’s behavior during the preschool
years.

Even though fundamental change in a child is always possible, it can become more
difficult as personality increasingly stabilizes. In infancy, assessments of the caregiving
received or other environmental measures often predict later behavior better than measures
of the infant’s own current behaviors do. By the time the child is a preschooler, however,
this is no longer so clearly the case. Assessments of preschoolers (apart from caregivers)
predict later behavior quite well, even up to adolescence and early adulthood (Sroufe,
Carlson, and Shulman, 1993). Apparently, developmental history has now become part of
the child, and a distinctive personality is emerging and becoming stable. In subsequent
periods, behavior will become even more stable, with certain patterns like aggressiveness
being very difficult to change. For these reasons, researchers have become increasingly
interested in early intervention to change maladaptive behaviors. Such interventions are
the topic of the box on page 364.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Program Operation</th>
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<td>Crime victimization</td>
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Value in 1992 dollars
Total public benefits = $88,433
Net public benefits = $76,077
$7.16 return on the dollar

Figure 10.2
HIGH/SCOPE PERRY PRESCHOOL PROJECT: PUBLIC COST AND ECONOMIC BENEFIT PER PARTICIPANT
(Source: Schweinhart and Weikart, 1993, p. 55.)