



THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI
 INSTITUTE FOR
 DISABILITY STUDIES

Possibilities

Early Childhood Inclusion

Upcoming Training Opportunities

Project PREPARE staff invite you to register for one of the free Mini-Conferences scheduled in your area during 2009. The Mini-Conferences offer child care staff members the opportunity to choose two of four topics they want to learn more about as they earn four approved hours of child care facility staff development. The topics include: "Facilitating Hands-On Learning for ALL Preschoolers," "Facilitating Hands-On learning for ALL Infants and Toddlers," "Reaching and Teaching ALL Children: Inclusion" and "Reaching and Teaching ALL Children: Building Relationships." The first series will be held on January 17 in Biloxi/Gulfport, followed by the Greenville location on January 31, February 7 in Natchez, in Grenada on February 21 and in Summit on March 28. Child care centers will be mailed registration details and agenda for the Mini-Conference in their geographical area. At each of the Saturday events, we plan to give away some great door prizes to four lucky winners! Details and registration information for all of the Mini-Conferences can also be found by viewing www.usm.edu/ids/prepare. Please call toll free 1.888.671.0051 and ask for Becky if you have questions.

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PREPARE Essentials

This edition of Possibilities focuses on stress in child care centers and its effects on both child care providers and children. Our hope is to inform child care professionals regarding the negative impact of stress on the well-being of children and those who care for them. Recognizing and reducing stress in child care is crucial to a healthy early childhood environment.

It is a known fact that stress affects us all. We also know that children, just like us, experience stress. How each of us deals with stress affects our health, families, children and those we work with.

When adults are under a significant amount of stress, they are less likely to provide the nurturing type of care that children need for healthy development. We know that children benefit the most when they experience healthy, secure

relationships with adults who are sensitive, nurturing and responsive. Stress can interfere with positive adult/child relationships; therefore, our goal is to suggest techniques that may be helpful in dealing with stressors that often occur in child care environments. We will also provide recommendations for ways adults can help minimize stress for children



Project PREPARE staff, Kristie Bowlin (left) and Ann Henson (right), at the 55th Annual Mississippi Early Childhood Association Conference held in Jackson on October 1-3, 2008.

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A Child's Perspective of Inclusion

Children with disabilities may encounter different types of stressors than children who are typically developing. Certain types of disabilities have symptoms that may also lead to stress such as obsessive compulsive behaviors and over stimulation from environmental situations such as excessive noise. It is important to reduce stress for all children, but it is especially important to recognize the factors that contribute to additional stress and frustrations for children with disabilities. Anxieties are one of the major stressors for young children, especially those with disabilities.

Children that have disabilities also have feelings. The following statements might reflect what a child with disabilities would want others to know:

For the child with fine motor difficulties - Small puzzle pieces are hard for me to use. I like puzzles with something that I can grab onto such as a wooden knob or thread spool. You can glue these onto puzzles that can be bought anywhere.

For the child using a wheelchair - I like it when I can go from center to center and choose toys at my eye level.

For the child with Attention Deficit Disorder - It helps me when we do things in the same sequence each day. I need a consistent routine. It is very hard for me to pay attention. Even when I want to follow directions, sometimes, I just can't.

For the child with Autism - I need to be warned in advance of transitions. Sometimes visual cues will help, such as using a picture of a spoon to alert me to lunch time or a picture of a ball to let me know it is time to go outside to play.

For the child who is non-verbal - Please pay attention to my gestures such as pointing, eye gaze or attempting to vocalize my wants or needs. Sometimes I may need a little extra time. I can often make decisions when given options.

For the child who is hard of hearing - Please use gestures and modeling and look at me when you are talking to me.

For more information about including children with disabilities in your program, please contact Ann Henson at 601.331.7369 or visit www.usm.edu/ids/prepare. You may also call us toll free at 1.888.671.0051.

"The time to relax is when you don't have time for it."
- Author Unknown

Book Spotlight



Preschool Classroom Management: 150 Teacher-Tested Techniques by Laverne Warner and Sharon Anne Lynch (2004), published by Gryphon House. Check this book out at your local library or bookstore.

This book offers practical suggestions for behavior management that increase positive interactions and relationships in preschool classrooms. These suggested practices support the development of children into independent and emotionally-balanced individuals. According to the authors, "Classroom management is a key component in helping children develop into independent individuals who can control their emotions, make positive decisions about their activities, and learn effectively. It is a process that requires interactions among teachers, parents and children to help children understand their own feelings and the feelings of others. Positive interactions and relationships between children and adults are critical to children's successful learning."

This book offers techniques and suggestions to prevent behavior problems before they happen and solutions to try when they do. The book provides information on how to create a classroom with effective daily routines and schedules, analyzing problem behaviors, teaching alternative behaviors, building parent partnerships and developing communication skills.

Getting Started - Adult Strategies for Dealing with Stress

As adults, we should make conscious efforts to reduce stress to better perform our jobs. How can we begin to address stress in our adult lives? What works for one person will not always work for the next. However, there are some strategies that we all should try.

1. Maximize your own health. Exercise daily by taking a walk on your breaks or working out and exercising during your free time. Everyone should try to exercise at least 30 minutes most days of the week. It will make you feel better and relieve stress and its negative effects on your health such as high blood pressure and heart disease. You should also try get at least six to eight hours of sleep each night.
2. Recognize when you need a break and ask for one. Sometimes adults can get overwhelmed in an early childhood environment. Just getting away for a few minutes can help.
3. Find time for yourself. In your free time away from work, enjoy an activity or hobby that can help take your mind off of things that may be stressful in your life.
4. Strive to create a calm and organized work environment. You can play soft, relaxing music at times throughout the day. Organizing the environment will help create a calm place for both adults and children. Sometimes chaos results from children not putting toys back where they belong. When shelves are labeled with pictures and words, children know where the toys belong and will be more likely to put them away.
5. Plan your day. This means using lesson planning as a tool to reduce stress. Knowing what you are doing the next day allows you to gather needed materials ahead of time so that you are prepared.

Resource Room - Helping Children Cope with Stress

Children often need assistance from adults to help them manage and deal with stress. Since children do not have the same level of communication skills as adults, it is harder for them to express stress and to talk about stressful events. Adults often find a friend or someone they can trust to share personal frustrations and feelings with. Most children do not yet have the skills to do that. Child care providers should make an effort to recognize stress signals in children. The following are suggestions that teachers can use to help children relax or calm themselves.

Suggestions for Helping Children with Stress:

- Reassure the child by talking calmly to the child. Be a good listener and allow the child to talk about his or her feelings. Ask open-ended questions that give the child the opportunity to explain how they feel. If a child is non-verbal, an adult can say to the child, "I see that you are (mad, sad, frustrated, etc.). Let's see if we can find something that will make you feel better."
- In certain situations, when children have an extremely difficult time calming down, it is in their best interest to be removed from the situation until he or she is calm. Find a warm, secure and inviting place for children to calm down. If this space is not used as punishment, children will learn to recognize their own stress and ask to go to the "quiet area" as needed.
- Have the child draw a picture to express how he or she feels.
- Have a rocking chair in the room where children can self-soothe when they are over-stimulated.
- Demonstrate to children how to take deep breaths to relax. One can say, "Let's take a few deep breaths together. It can make us feel better."

Suggestions for Preventing Stressful Situations:

- Be knowledgeable about child development and have realistic expectations that are age and individually appropriate.
- Outdoor time allows children to run and play. This is a great way for children to release tensions and to get fresh air. When weather allows, give children the opportunity for outdoor free play at least one hour everyday.
- Plan for transitions to ensure that children are not left waiting for long periods of time without something to do.
- Have a predictable schedule and follow a consistent classroom routine so children know what to expect. Children have a need to feel safe and secure. Predictability helps meet this very important need.
- Create a quiet or cozy area in the room for only one or two children. This will provide a space where children can escape when overwhelmed by the typical early childhood classroom's activities.
- Make sure that meals, snacks and naps are scheduled to best meet the needs of the children.
- Make sure that you have a discipline plan that is not harsh and severe. Physical punishment is not appropriate for young children. Just reminding children of the classroom rules and redirecting their behavior is often enough to correct a problem. Also remember that children with certain kinds of disabilities such as autism may not be neurologically able to comply with the teacher's expectations for compliance.

Signs of Stress in Children

How can we see stressful situations from the perspective of a child?

First, recognize the signs of stress and then pinpoint contributing factors that can be minimized or eliminated.

Indications a child may be stressed include:

- Physical symptoms such as frequent headaches, stomachaches and nausea
- Regression of skills and behaviors previously mastered
- New behaviors such as thumb sucking or hair pulling or twirling
- Withdrawal from activities
- Frequent crying
- Dramatic changes in a child's behaviors
- Acting out or temper tantrums

This is not a conclusive list. It is important to get to know each child as an individual and to know what their normal tendencies are to recognize changes in behavior.

I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.

- Maya Angelou

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To subscribe or to submit materials (pictures, articles, etc.) for consideration, contact Kristie Bowlin at 662.397.1902 or kristie.bowlin@usm.edu.

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