



# The Developing Child

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## How Can We as Parents Make a Difference Right From the Start?

Parents of young children always have known how important they are in their children's lives. Children who receive warm and responsive care from their families along with the essentials find it easier to cope with difficult times when they are older, despite possible learning challenges. L. Alan Stroufe, Ph.D., and his colleagues at the University of Minnesota have found that children who are securely attached to their caregivers get along better with other children and perform better in school than children who are less securely attached.

You can help your child in the early years by following these 10 guidelines established by the Reiner Foundation's parent awareness campaign, "I Am Your Child."

- Be warm, loving, and responsive.
- Respond to the child's cues and clues (the sounds they make and their facial expressions).
- Talk, read, and sing to your child.
- Establish routines and rituals.
- Encourage safe exploration and play.
- Make television watching selective.
- Use discipline as an opportunity to teach.
- Recognize that each child is unique.
- Choose quality child care and stay involved.
- Take care of yourself!

Many people make a list of things they want to do each year as a way to set goals. This simple list-making task can provide the same sort of springboard to future plans and ideas for spending positive time with your child. Post the list on your refrigerator, desk, family bulletin board, or bedroom mirror. This list can provide a wonderful source of inspiration and gentle reminders every day.

## Emotional Development

One area in which you can make a powerful impact on your child's life is emotional development. Emotional development contributes to one's attitude about oneself, one's self-esteem. As a parent, you help form your child's attitudes about him- or herself and others because you are such a critical and ever-present model.

Research indicates that there are three areas in which children develop: intellectual, emotional, and social. Of the three, emotional development is the area in which parents have the strongest influence. It is important to make your children feel secure and loved from the very beginning. Children's feelings can be hurt easily, and children can read and interpret their parents' and others' emotional clues quickly. Children respond to positive stimuli, so when they are doing something correctly, praise them. Smile and reward them immediately for their appropriate behavior. Then, when the day is done, put up your feet, relax, and think back over the positive things that have happened in your child's day. This time will help you celebrate what special pleasures your children also bring to the world.

## Gathering Information

Sometimes parents of children with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) refer to the challenges with their children as "tough love." They feel they have to learn different ways to cope with their challenging child. You will need to learn a variety of parenting techniques, and as you learn, your education becomes your tool for success in raising your child.

As the parent of a child with ADHD, you will need to be your child's advocate. Not everyone will understand your child's behavior, and some might question your parenting skills. Be informed, know what works with children who have attentional problems, and stay true to the behavior plan you design. Ignore negative comments from ill-intentioned and uninformed observers. Join local support groups such as Children and Adults With Attention Deficit Disorder (CHADD), and meet other families like yours. Seek friendships among families who understand what you are doing and why.

If you have access to the Internet, search in the area of attention deficit disorder for the extensive collection of information including "chat rooms" where you can talk with other parents of children with ADHD. The Internet will give you immediate access to current information about medications and new research.

Your local public library will have a selection of books on all topics that concern attention deficit. In addition, many libraries also have special-needs sections devoted to printed materials and videos about disabilities that will be an excellent resource for you.

If you are positive, consistent, and begin to use the suggestions here, you will help your child and your family learn acceptable ways to be successful.

## **References and Resources**

*The first years last forever.* Booklet published by the Reiner Foundation, 1010 Wisconsin Ave. NW, Washington, DC, 20007.

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