
UNDERSTANDING THE PRE-SCHOOL CHILD

I. Developmental Tasks of Early Childhood

- A. Learning to control the elimination of body wastes.
- B. Learning sex differences and sexual modesty
- C. Getting ready to read
- D. Learning to distinguish right and wrong and beginning to develop a conscience
- E. Learning physical skills necessary for ordinary games
- F. Building a wholesome attitude toward oneself

II. Skills of Early Childhood

During the early childhood years, children learn and develop many skills. Children learn by repetition and will work at something until they do it well. Pre-schoolers are usually willing to try new things, having few fears to inhibit their learning activities.

When a child is ready to learn a new skill, he has reached the “critical moment” for that learning to occur. If denied the opportunity to learn a given thing at the critical moment, it will be more difficult for him to learn that skill in the future.

III. Common Emotions of Early Childhood *

Young children experience most of the emotions normally experienced by adults. However, the stimuli that give rise to them and the ways in which children express their emotions are markedly different:

Anger

The most common causes of anger in young children are conflicts over playthings, the thwarting of wishes, and vigorous attacks from another child. Children express anger through temper tantrums, characterized by crying, screaming, stamping, kicking, jumping up and down, or striking.

Fear

Conditioning, imitation, and memories of unpleasant experience play important roles in arousing fears, as do stories, pictures, radio and television programs, and movies with frightening elements. At first, a child’s response to fear is panic; later, responses become more specific and include running away and hiding, crying, and avoiding frightening situations.