



Relaxed Parenting

...a developmental approach to optimizing your child's growth

Children develop the gradual capacity to negotiate their worlds over time. The opportunities for the acquisition of new abilities occur in predictable stages and times. Nature has found a way to enable kids to succeed in their worlds by sequencing developmental tasks in a way that creates its own opportunity without being overwhelming. The primary role of the parent is to be attentive and alert to changes. This workshop is designed to introduce a relaxed approach to the responsibility of parenting. By examining each developmental period, parents will be trained to identify the timing of natural opportunities to provide tools for their kids. Please enjoy an important discussion about parenting.

I. Introduction

- A. Background and History
- B. Simplified Developmental Approach
- C. Shepherding versus Engineering Children

II. Successful Development

- A. Attachment
- B. Separation
- C. Autonomy

III. Parenting

- A. Common Sense
 - 1. past experience
 - 2. trial and error
 - 3. instinct
 - 4. superkids
- B. Good Enough Parenting
 - 1. love, care, commitment
 - 2. consistent limit setting
 - 3. facilitation of development

IV. Developmental Tasks

- A. Infant
- B. Toddler
- C. Preschool
- D. School Age
- E. Preadolescent
- F. Early Adolescent
- G. Middle Adolescent
- H. Late Adolescent



Very few people have had a greater impact on the way we raise our kids than Benjamin Spock. Dr. Spock never intended to change the way children were raised. In fact, his reason for writing his book was to reassure parents that most kids would grow up just fine without the assistance of the child development experts.

Although Dr. Spock is widely considered the guru of permissive parenting, his lasting contribution was his insistence that the key to raising successful, responsible children was to provide them with a culture that encouraged and rewarded social responsibility.

In a 1997 interview he stated that the most common difficulty facing parents is the fear that they will do the wrong thing. Spock encouraged parents not to be too swayed by “expert” opinion saying, “...don’t be afraid to trust your own common sense. Bringing up your child won’t be a complicated job if you take it easy & trust your own instincts.”

The research evidence supports Dr. Spock’s more relaxed approach to parenting. Studies have been unable to prove that enriched environments produce better developed kids. Rather, the scientific evidence shows that the kinds of things that kids need most (e.g. visual sensory input, the ability to explore and manipulate objects, the presence of speech & social interaction), are available in any child’s environment. Our species has not evolved to require specialized experiences for normal development to occur.

Rather, the routine sequences of development provide their own natural opportunities for growth & learning. An \$88 million longitudinal study supported by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (the largest research study of its kind), found that the quality of childcare made little difference (less than 2%) in three-year-olds’ verbal and social skills.

The majority of the difference disappears by the time the child turns four. The research suggests that the environment that matters most in shaping children is the one that they create for themselves at each developmental stage. This is where the explorations, acquisitions, competencies, limits and attachments take place. These are the foundation elements of healthy and successful children.

Good Enough Parenting

One of the most lasting contributions to the practice of childrearing was the concept of “Good Enough Parenting “ introduced by Winnicott 35 years ago. Winnicott believed that it was both unhelpful and unrealistic to expect perfection from parents. In fact, he felt that demanding perfection in parenting undermined the vast majority of parents who, for all practical purposes, had the tools to be “good enough” to meet the healthy developmental needs of their children.

It is widely understood that the needs of children are most intense in the first five years of life. This is when they are most dependent on their parents for physical and emotional nurturance and protection. If provided consistently, parenting during this period allows for attachment and fosters a basic sense of trust and security in the child.

Once this has been acquired, this establishes a firm foundation for the remainder of childhood, the transition to adolescence and, eventually, the relationship skills that are needed for adulthood. This foundation is the absolute bottom layer of the child’s developmental pyramid. Anything else that develops, from academic success to artistic and musical interests to athletic prowess to financial security rests upon the bedrock of this early developed sense of attachment and basic security.

All children need physical care, nutrition and protection. Beyond these basics, all children’s needs can be considered in one of three major categories: 1) love, care and commitment; 2) consistent limit setting; 3) the facilitation of development.

Love, Care and Commitment

Children need to feel that they are loved unconditionally and consistently. Attachment behavior is the natural consequence of consistent unconditional love and caring. Kids who don’t get loving care and commitment throughout their early and middle childhood do not develop a full capacity for attachment.

Over the long run, this usually produces a child who would be described as insecure or having low self-esteem. These kids frequently have difficulties with peer relationships, authority issues, intimacy, marriage and, eventually, parenting.

Consistent Limit Setting

Children are not born with the ability to exercise internal control over their feelings and behavior. Limit setting helps establish boundaries around behavior that assists the child in dealing with the outside world. Limits also help calm the child by taking control before they



have developed the capacity to self-soothe. Limits and boundaries should be enforced with calm, clear and firm consistency. They should be enforced in a loving way because they are one of the many ways that parents provide care and protection for their kids.

Kids who have limits never question whether they are loved. Kids without limits often wonder if adults care and will misbehave until the situation escalates to the point of requiring limits. Kids who do not receive consistent limits tend to either be incessantly demanding or oppositional in their personalities.

Facilitation of Development

The epigenetic principle holds that each developmental stage inherits the successes and failures of the previous developmental stage. Over the course of the child's life, every single aspect of functioning is pieced together in this sequence of stages that build upon the mastery and competence of the previous experience.

If the child is provided with a secure base from which to explore and manipulate his or her environment, the full range of physical, emotional, intellectual, social, aesthetic, moral and spiritual acquisitions will take place.

The parent's role is to be fully attentive to the timing of the child's needs and alert to natural learning opportunities. This requires no push but rather, the ability to move with the unique flow of the particular child's path through the predictable sequence of developmental stages.