



Child Development

PRE-TRAINING ASSIGNMENT

Caseworker Core Training Module VII:

Child Development: Implications for Family-Centered
Child Protective Services

Developed by the Institute for Human Services for the Ohio Child
Welfare Training Program - Revised October 2007

OVERVIEW

You will soon be attending Caseworker Core Module VII, Child Development: Implications for Family-Centered Child Protective Services. In this training you will:

- Learn the process and milestones of child development from infancy to adolescence
- Examine the developmental consequences of child abuse and neglect from birth through adolescence
- Learn a framework for the early recognition of developmental problems
- Understand the importance of including developmental and remedial services in child welfare case plans
- Develop strategies to promote the healthy development of children who have been abused and neglected

To fully comprehend the above, caseworkers need to know basic information about child development. This booklet has two parts.

Part One

The first part of the booklet provides a summary of some key concepts and principles of child development that you are expected to know before attending this training. The material provides the foundation for other important concepts taught in the training. Having participants come to this training with the same foundation, will enhance the trainer's ability to take concepts to a more advanced level. There is a brief test your knowledge form at the end of the reading to help make sure you know this foundational knowledge.

Part Two

The second part is a training worksheet. This worksheet will be used throughout the training to help you apply knowledge gained during the training to child welfare practice. Review the worksheet. If you know some of the answers now, you can fill in the blanks and then compare your answer with what you learn in the training

Remember, the classroom training for this module will build on the following concepts and the attached worksheet will be used throughout the training. So, be sure to bring this booklet with you.

Basic Principles

There are many theories of development and various disciplines approach the study of development from different perspectives. However, despite differing conceptions, the following five principles are agreed upon by the majority of developmentalists.

1. Development is an Ongoing Process

Development begins before conception, since the genetic basis for any individual's development is present in the reproductive cells of that individual's parents, and development continues until death. Earlier theories suggested that all important developmental milestones were achieved before adulthood. We now know that development is an ongoing process with important milestones and stages occurring throughout life.

2. Development Is a Dynamic Process

Development is not static; it involves continuous change and growth. While the rate of growth may vary at different times in the life cycle and among individuals, it is always a continuous process.

3. Development is Directional

Most developmental processes evolve in predictable, defined directions.

Development typically proceeds from simple to complex. For example, we all began as a single cell and developed into a complex organism with millions of cells that are highly differentiated by both structure and function. These cells are organized into more and more complex, interacting structures as development proceeds.

We see the same basic pattern repeated in the progression of motor development. The rudimentary and uncoordinated motor movements of a newborn infant become increasingly complicated and efficient as the child grows. Complicated patterns of gross motor, fine motor, and eye-hand coordination are precursors to such simple actions as walking without falling down, as well as to more complex activities such as playing basketball or playing a piano.

There are similar predictable progressions in cognitive, social, and emotional domains.

4. Development May Involve Stages

At certain predictable times in the developmental process, particular tasks or activities emerge. These developmental points or plateaus are often referred to as "stages."

4. Stages continued

Stages often represent a qualitative change in development, which results in the emergence of an ability or trait that has no obvious precursors from earlier developmental periods. An example is the emergence of stranger anxiety in an infant who previously was happy being held by anyone.

After the emergence of a new skill or behavior, there is usually a period of "leveling off," when the new skills or abilities are practiced, mastered, and integrated into the child's behavior. For example, after an infant has learned to walk, he may spend several months perfecting balance, coordination, and stability.

Stages represent the emergence of more complex behavior patterns that often replace earlier, less effective ones. A four-year old with well-developed language and good social skill is less likely to respond to frustration by having a tantrum than a two-year old in the same situation. The four-year old's skills are more effective in removing the source of frustration and negotiating a solution.

Stages of development are an essential concept for many child development theories, including Piaget, Erikson, and Kohlberg.

5. Development is Cumulative

Early developmental tasks form the foundation for the development of later, more complicated tasks. This is a critical concept in understanding the importance of early recognition and intervention when children are developmentally delayed. For example, the ability to engage in reciprocal interpersonal relationships is based on trust, a developmental milestone of the first year of life. A child who fails to master early tasks will have more difficulty mastering the demands of later stages, and without remedial intervention, the child's development becomes more delayed, or shows increasingly abnormal patterns, over time.

The negative effects of early developmental deficits increase as the child grows and as demands become more complex. A circumscribed deficit such as the inability to recognize letters of the alphabet does not critically affect the life of a 6-year-old. However, an adult who cannot read faces serious difficulties in social and economic functioning.

NOTE: This concept will be more fully discussed during the classroom training.

Factors That Affect Developmental Outcomes

There are two major categories of factors that affect developmental outcomes; hereditary factors and environmental factors.

1. Hereditary Factors

All human beings have a common genetic structure that determines the course of much of development. This accounts for the basic similarities in the structure and functions of our bodies, and the differences between humans and other species. Many traits are inherited, including eye color, hair color, body type, height, and skin color. The expression of these traits is genetically determined.

When development results directly from the expression of genetic potential, it is called maturation. Maturation developmental milestones generally occur in predictable patterns regardless of environment or culture. Early infant motor skills such as grasping, sitting, crawling, standing, and walking result from maturation.

The pattern of physical development during the first year of life is largely genetically determined. A child will not be able to walk until his physical structure, bones, and muscles, have developed sufficiently to support upright body posture and to bear weight. Infants in all cultures are biologically ready to walk somewhere between age 9- 15 months, however, environment can influence when a child actually begins to walk. A child carried on his mother's back for the first three years of life will not walk at a year. However, were that same child allowed to roam freely on the ground, he would likely have walked around age one.

Abilities that result from maturation do not have to be taught in the same way we teach a child to hold a paintbrush or to ride a bicycle. The child will have to practice a maturational skill to be proficient; however, the emergence of the skill is not dependent upon environmental factors.

2. Environmental Factors

While children are born with different potentials, the capacity for each child to develop healthily is dependent on a nurturing and supportive environment. By working to change a harmful environment into a supportive one, caseworkers can facilitate the developmental potential of the children with whom they work. Multiple environments can positively influence the potential for healthy development.

Prenatal Environment: Prenatal environment includes the chemical balance of mother's body, and the presence of substances or conditions that can enhance or impede developmental processes (for example, a nutritious diet and vitamins, or conversely, the mother's use of alcohol or drugs during pregnancy.)

Physical Environment: The physical environment includes the quality of air the child breathes, the nutritious value of the food the child eats, and exposure to conditions that can cause disease or injury - including child abuse and neglect.

Learning Environment: The learning environment includes the degree and type of stimulation available to the child. Sensory input stimulates and positively shapes healthy cognitive development.

Social/Cultural Environment: The social/cultural environment includes the norms, belief system, values, and standards of behavior that positively regulate a child's life. These codes of conduct regulate virtually all aspects of social life including parenting, family life, interacting with "outsiders" and authority figures; and expectations regarding children's' development and behavior. Development occurs in similar ways and in similar time frames across cultures. However, expectations for child development, children's' behavior, and parenting interactions vary among cultures, because of the differing codes of conduct.

Emotional Environment: The emotional environment includes the nature of the child's interpersonal relationships and the degree of nurturance available. Human relationships are the building blocks of healthy development. Children grow and thrive in the context of close and dependable relationships that provide love and nurturance, developmentally appropriate discipline, security, responsive interaction, and encouragement for exploration. The emotional environment shapes personality, and affects self-esteem, trust, social responsibility, the ability to enter intimate relationships, and resilience.

Developmental Domains

Developmental tasks are typically divided into four categories, referred to as domains.

Physical Domain

Physical development consists of the development of the body structure, including muscles, bones, and organ systems. Physical development is generally comprised of sensory development, motor development, and the nervous system's coordination of both perception and movement.

Sensory development includes the development of vision, hearing, taste, touch, and smell, and the coordination and integration of perceptual input from these systems by the central nervous system.

Motor development includes gross motor activities such as standing, sitting, walking, and running that involve the large muscles of the body and fine motor activities, such as speech, vision, and the use of hands and fingers, that involve the small muscles of the body. Both large and small muscle activities are controlled and coordinated by the central nervous system.

Cognitive Domain

Cognitive development, sometimes referred to as "intellectual" or "mental" development includes thinking, perception, memory, reasoning, concept development, problem-solving ability, and abstract thinking. Language, with its requirements of symbolization and memory, is one of the most important and complicated cognitive activities.

It is important to differentiate language and speech. Understanding and formulating language is a complex cognitive activity. Speaking, however, is a motor activity. Language and speech are controlled by different parts of the brain.

Social Domain

Social development includes the child's interactions with other people, and the child's involvement in social groups. The earliest social task is attachment. The development of relationships with adults and peers, the assumption of social roles, the adoption of group values and norms, adoption of a moral system, and eventually assuming a productive role in society are all social tasks.

Emotional Domain

Emotional development includes the development of personal traits and characteristics, including a personal identity, self-esteem, the ability to enter into reciprocal emotional relationships, and mood and affect (feelings and emotions) that are appropriate for one's age and for the situation.

Note: While each of these four developmental domains can be examined individually, it is misleading to suggest that development occurs separately in each of the four domains. Development in any domain affects, and is affected by, development in all of the other domains.

Reference

Rycus, J.S. & Hughes, R.C. (1998). *Field Guide to Child Welfare, Volume III, Child Development and Child Welfare*. Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America.

Test Your Knowledge

Instructions: Match the correct concept with the following descriptions of a key developmental principle.

	Description	Concept
___	1. Earlier developmental tasks lay the foundation for more complex tasks.	A. Development is On-going
___	2. Development evolves in a predictable, defined direction.	B. Development is dynamic
___	3. Development begins before conception and continues until death.	C. Development is directional
___	4. Tasks or activities emerge at predictable times	D. Development involves stages
___	5. Development is not static it involves continuous change.	E. Development is cumulative

	Description	Concept
___	6. Norms, beliefs, values, and standards of behavior that regulate a child's life	A. Pre-natal Environment
___	7. Nature of the child's interpersonal relationships and degree of nurturance	B. Physical Environment
___	8. Degree and type of stimulation available to the child	C. Learning Environment
___	9. Chemical balance of mother's body	D. Social/cultural Environment
___	10. Quality of air, nutritious value of food, hazards in the home	E. Emotional Environment

	Description	Concept
___	11. Includes the child's interaction with others	A. Physical Domain
___	12. Consists of the development of the body structure	B. Cognitive Domain
___	13. Includes the development of personal traits and characteristics	C. Social Domain
___	14. Includes thinking, perception, and reasoning	D. Emotional Domain

ANSWER KEY: 1:E; 2:C; 3:A; 4:D; 5:B; 6:D; 7:E; 8:C; 9:A; 10:B; 11:C; 12:A; 13:D; 14:B

Training Worksheet



Answers to the following questions will be integrated throughout the upcoming training to help you apply knowledge gained in the training to your child welfare practice. Reviewing this worksheet will give you an idea of some of what you will learn in this module. Be sure to bring this worksheet with you to class so that you can fill in any blanks.

Imagine you are set to visit a four-year old in foster care and you want her to talk to you about how things are going. What challenges may be present when interacting with this preschooler and what strategies might you use to work more effectively with her?

Domain	Challenges	Strategies for Preschoolers
Physical		
Cognitive		
Social		
Emotional		

Training Worksheet continued

List three possible effects of abuse and neglect on the school age child's developmental domains.

Domain	Impact of Abuse and Neglect
Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•••
Cognitive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•••
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•••
Emotional	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•••

Imagine you are working with a fifteen-year old referred by the court for truancy. Your agency placed him with his aunt and you are scheduled to meet with him this afternoon. His aunt has informed you that he has started to skip school again. Keeping in mind the fact that adolescents experience considerable growth in each domain, what would you do to work more effectively with him?

Ways to Work More Effectively With Teens

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