



# Infant and Early Childhood Development

Minnesota Coalition for Targeted Home Visiting  
March 8, 2018

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University of Minnesota – Department of Psychiatry

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## Objectives

- Understand core principles of infant/early childhood development
- Identify 'red flags' for concerns in infant/early childhood development
- Recognize ways to intervene and support children and families during infant/early childhood development
- Reflect on how our own backgrounds and views impact our understanding of child development

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## Clarification: What do we mean by 'babies'?

- Today, we'll be talking about children approximately between 0-3 years old
- Lots of variability across those 3 years in all of the concepts (e.g. attachment, language, etc.)
- And lots of variability within any age across children!

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## Our Agenda Today

- What **is** a baby?
- What are babies **like**?
- What do babies **do**?
- What do babies **know**?
- What makes for **positive** early childhood development and mental health?
- Where does development/ECMH **go awry**?
- What are some **red flags** in child development?
- How do we **help**?

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## Child Development: Setting the Context

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## Meet Fred

- Nonverbal
- When you walk in the room, gets agitated, starts screaming
- When you approach him to introduce yourself, he shies away and gets more upset
- Throws items at you that are nearby
- **What might be going on with Fred? (Poll Everywhere)**

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## Poll Everywhere

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## What is a baby?

- *"There is no such thing as a baby ... if you set out to describe a baby, you will find you are describing a baby and someone." - Winnicott, 1947*

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## Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model



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### Thought Exercise:

- How do you make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich?
  - Peanut butter first
  - Jelly first
  - Peanut butter on one side
  - Peanut butter on both sides
  - Strawberry jam
  - Grape jelly
  - Crusts on
  - Crusts off
  - Triangle cut
  - Rectangle cut
  - Butter on bread
  - Other way not listed

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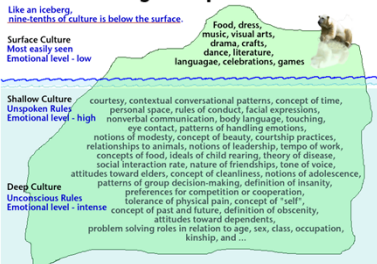
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### The Iceberg Concept of Culture



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### Poll Everywhere

- One way (in one to two words) you think culture could impact your understanding of child development?

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## Cultural Context

- How an individual parent/family influences and understands child development is a factor of combined identities
- How do our own views/experiences affect how we as providers understand/influence families?
  - Expectations about child development, interactions within families, etc. are largely influenced by our own experiences and what we are exposed to!
  - How might this impact our work?

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## Multiple identities

- Greater variation within cultures than across
- Any given individual has multiple identities
  - e.g. Native Minnesotan vs. 'Transplant'
  - With regard to "culture":
    - Male vs. female
    - Straight vs. LGBTQ
    - White vs. non-white race/ethnicity

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- <https://mag-en.thephotoacademy.com/en/discover/six-different-photographers-create-a-portrait-of-the-same-man/?preview=true>

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**Poll Everywhere:**  
Where is your car's blindspot?



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**Keeping our views in mind**

- We aren't the car manufacturer, but we still have to check when operating a car
  - Our main job is not necessarily to solve every one, but to know to look for them!



Blind spot mirror



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**Child Development:  
Background and Basics**

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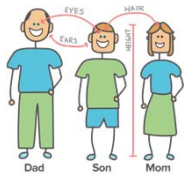
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## Gene-Environment Interactions

- Genetics
- Environment
- GxE

— John Mayer song, “In the Blood”:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ob-iS7baYeI>  
*How much of my mother has my mother left in me?  
 How much of my love will be insane to some degree?  
 And what about this feeling that I'm never good enough?  
 Will it wash out in the water, or is it always in the blood?*



*How much of my father am I destined to become?  
 Will I dim the lights inside me just to satisfy someone?  
 Will I let this woman kill me, or do away with jealous love?  
 Will it wash out in the water, or is it always in the blood?*

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## Gene-Environment Interactions

- Epigenetics:  
 the study of how external factors affect the genes hardcoded in your DNA



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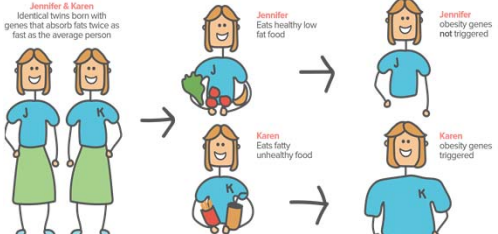
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## Epigenetics Example

**Jennifer & Karen**  
 Identical twins born with genes that absorb fats twice as fast as the average person



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### Prenatal Considerations

- Nutrition
- Prenatal care
- Toxic Stress
  - Social determinants of health
  - Relationship stress
- Environmental Toxins
  - Medications, drug/alcohol exposure

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### What are babies like?

- Temperament
  - Emotion
  - Attention
  - Action
- Appears early in development
- Continuity and persistence throughout development of personality

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### Three Categories of Temperament

Type of Child's Temperament	What?
Easy Child (40% of children)	A child that quickly establishes regular routines in infancy, is commonly happy, and adapts easily to new environments.
Difficult Child (10% of children)	A child that has irregular daily routines, slow to adapt to new things, and tends to be negative and intense.
Slow-to-Warm-Up (15% of children)	A child that is inactive, show mild, reactions, usually has a negative mood, and can adjust slowly to new experiences.

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## Dimensions of Temperament

- Activity level
- Biological rhythms (regular vs. irregular)
- Approach/withdrawal
- Adaptability
- Quality of mood (balance of positive/negative)
- Intensity of reaction
- Sensitivity threshold
- Distractibility
- Persistence/attention span

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## Goodness of Fit

*“Being alert to temperamental differences and understanding how they require different caregiving approaches are crucial to nurturing children’s healthy emotional growth” – Stella Chase*

- How much temperament fits the culture and practices of the society the person is part of
- AND how well the parental responses fit the temperament
- Does NOT mean parent and child temperaments have to match!

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## What do babies do?

- Developmental milestones
- Eating/sleeping/toileting
- Play

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## Developmental Domains

- Cognition (problem solving, thinking)
- Language (communication)
- Adaptive (daily routines/functioning)
- Physical (gross and fine motor)
- Social-Emotional (interactions, relationships, emotion understanding/regulation)

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## Developmental Milestones

- <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones/index.html>
- <http://helpmegrwmn.org/HMG/DevelopMilestone/index.html>
- **How does knowing social emotional milestones help you build supportive relationships and promote social emotional development of infants and toddlers?**
  - Know what to expect – you can encourage, facilitate and assist with the development of skills
  - Can identify when something does not seem right

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## Play

- Functions of play
  - Expression and pleasure
  - Exploration, discovery, and mastery
  - Arousal and regulation in face of novelty, uncertainty, complexity
  - Problem solving , rehearsal and adaptation

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## What does play look like?

- Birth to 12 months (Sensorimotor)
  - Exploration, discovery and differentiation of the property of objects
  - Reaching, grasping mouthing, banging, clapping, dropping, inspecting
- 12-24 months (Functional)
  - Combination: filling-dumping, opening-shutting, fitting-in
  - Constructive play: building and destruction
  - Repetition, imitation and ritual
- 24-60 months (Symbolic)
  - Imaginative play, object substitution, creating story lines with props, plots

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## Language Development

- Progression
  - Cooing
  - Babbling (~6 months)
  - Single words (~8-12 months)
  - 2-3 word phrases (~2 years – “me go” “want milk”)
  - Sentences (~3 years)
- Word spurt/naming explosion around 15-24 months: 10-20 new words per day

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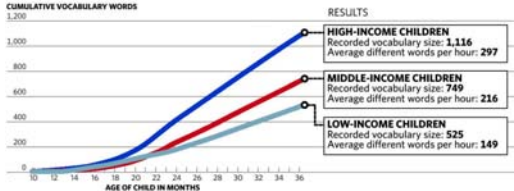
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### How income affects language learning

U.S. research has found poor families speak to their children less, with low-income children learning half as many words as high-income children by the age of 3. The researchers found early language skill was a reliable predictor for school performance later in life.

**CUMULATIVE VOCABULARY WORDS**



Income Level	Recorded vocabulary size	Average different words per hour
HIGH-INCOME CHILDREN	1,116	297
MIDDLE-INCOME CHILDREN	749	216
LOW-INCOME CHILDREN	525	149

The data was collected from 42 families — 13 professional (high-income families), 23 working class families (middle/low-income) and 6 families on welfare (low-income). SOURCE: The Early Catastrophe by Betty Hart and Todd K. Risley, 1995. TORONTO STAR GRAPHIC

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### The Power of Conversation

- Recent research indicates that quality of words may matter more than quantity
  - “Conversational turns”: a verbal version of serve-and-return (linguistic and social interaction)
- Regardless of income and educational background, children’s brain benefit from conversational interplay
- “Conversation” looks different at different developmental stages
  - Range from cooing, giggling to who/what/where/how questions



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### Tips for Supporting Language Development

- Don’t be a baby.** Avoid baby talk. Speak clearly and simply, using real words and complete sentences.
- Narrate.** As you go about your day with your child, talk about what he and you are doing: “I’m going to cut up this apple so we can share it for lunch.”
- Stretch the truth.** Repeat your child’s words and expand on them. If he replies “App-uh!” to your remark about slicing one, answer “Yes, this is an apple! We’re going to eat this shiny red apple for lunch.” Add those adjectives!
- Read all about it.** Spend lots of time reading to your toddler. Books with rhyming words are ideal for a toddler’s language development, because rhymes help young children distinguish individual sounds and parts of words.
  - Songs — classic, modern, or made-up are wonderful as well!

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### Tips for Interacting with Young Children

- Learn to read the baby's cues and what soothing techniques work.
- Hug them, hold them, and respond to their needs and interests.
- Listen carefully as children communicate with you.
- Play and sing with them often.
- Say "yes" and "I love you" as much as you say "no" and "don't."
- Ensure a safe, orderly, and predictable environment, wherever they are.
- Set limits on their behavior when necessary and guide them calmly, not harshly.

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### What do babies know?

- Brain development
  - Most brain cell connections are made in 1st year
  - In the first few years of life, more than 1 million new neural connections form every second
  - Nearly 80% of brain development occurs between 0-3 years
  - Connections decline after this time to age 10
  - During first 10 years brain is twice as active as adults
  - But brain development does not stop at 3... Brain development continues into our 20s!

• Brain architecture video from Center for Dev. Child: <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/brain-architecture/>

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### Video Visualization

- Brain architecture video from Center for Dev. Child:  
<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/brain-architecture/>

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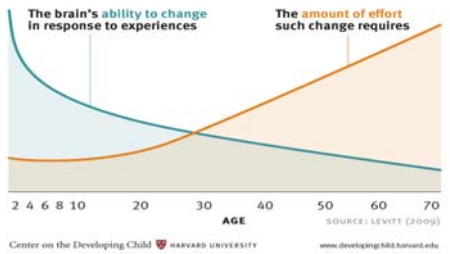
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### Plasticity



Center on the Developing Child HARVARD UNIVERSITY  
www.developingchild.harvard.edu

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### Brain Development

- Interaction of genes and experiences shape brain development
  - ‘Use it or lose it’
- Brain architecture is the foundation for all future learning, behavior, and health
- Adverse (or positive) experiences, especially in early years significantly impact brain development
- Emotional well-being, social competence, and cognitive abilities work together as the brain develops
  - Serve and return interactions directly relates to the wiring of the brain.

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### Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health

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## ECMH

- “The developing capacity of the young child to experience, **regulate**, and express emotions; form close and secure interpersonal **relationships**; as well as **explore** the environment and learn, all in the **context** of family, community, and cultural expectations for young children. **Early childhood mental health is synonymous with healthy social and emotional development.**”

– Zero to Three Infant Mental Health Task Force

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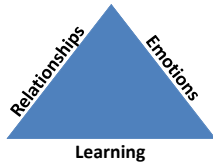


## Social-Emotional Development

Forming close and secure **relationships**

Experiencing, expressing, and regulating **emotions**

Exploring the environment and **learning**



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## Parent-child relationships

- **Attachment:** *The mutual, strong and long lasting relationship (emotional bond) between a child and their primary caregiver*
  - Attachment also develops with significant adults such as other parent, family members and teachers.
- System of biologically-based behaviors (e.g., crying, clinging) that support their need for closeness and begin at birth
- Infant’s ties to mother are necessary for proximity and survival
- Nurturing relationships provide children with a sense of safety and confidence, and offer a **buffer against stress**
- **Research indicates** infants respond more to human faces and voices, prefer mother’s voice/face

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## Secure Attachment

- Caregiver responds to child's needs for food, warmth, comfort, attention
  - Overall responsiveness and attention, not every single time
- Can have many attachment figures, but usually 1-2 primary in infancy
- Secure attachment allows for:
  - Formation of new relationships
  - Managing emotions
  - Exploring
  - Learning
- If parent is preoccupied, anxious, or unavailable, the child may develop an insecure attachment

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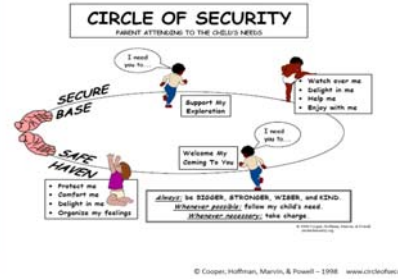
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## Social Referencing

- Babies look to parents for cues for how to behave and react
  - Toddler falls down, whether he/she starts crying often depends on parents' reaction
- Visual Cliff example:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h\\_UHkFUzHQ4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h_UHkFUzHQ4)

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## Caregiver Sensitivity

- Ability to be aware of and evaluate the child's signals in a meaningful, accurate, and appropriate way
  - “Reading the baby's cues”
- Child feels “seen,” “felt,” and “known”
- Makes secure attachment possible
- Key ingredient for social referencing to work

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## Serve and Return

- Combination of reading your child cues AND responding appropriately at the right time! (aka interactional synchrony)
  - A manifestation of caregiver sensitivity
  - “When an infant or young child babbles, gestures, or cries, and an adult responds appropriately with eye contact, words, or a hug, neural connections are built and strengthened in the child's brain that support the development of communication and social skills.”
    - Harvard CDC video
    - <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/serve-return-interaction-shapes-brain-circuitry/>
  - Absence of responsive relationships can threaten a child's development, well-being
    - Tronick Still Face video
    - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=apzXGEBzht0>

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## Self-regulation

- Parent-child interactions shape initial ability to regulate behavior and emotions
  - Co-regulation, self-soothing are building blocks of later independent self-regulation skills
- **Self-Regulation:** *The child's ability to gain control of body functions, manage emotions, sustain focus and attention and actively control arousal and their response to it.*
  - Key component of social-emotional development/mental health
- Review on your own:
  - Video resource to go more in-depth about self-regulation skills
  - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m4UGDaCeo\\_s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m4UGDaCeo_s)
  - Games to build self-regulation skills
  - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H\\_01brYwdSY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H_01brYwdSY)

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## Where can development go awry?

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## Where can development go awry?

- Poverty
- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)
- Race/racism
- Parental mental health
  - Maternal/paternal depression, history of trauma
- Child factors (e.g. psychopathology)
  - Autism, developmental delays, difficulties with self-regulation

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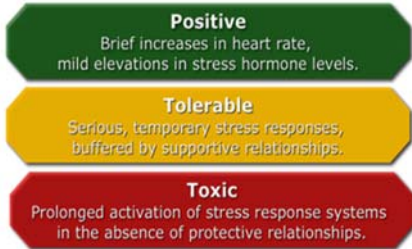
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## Toxic Stress

- Strong & prolonged activation of stress response systems in the **absence** of buffering protection of adult support
  - Recurrent abuse, neglect, severe maternal depression, substance abuse, family violence
- **Trauma:** A reaction to a traumatic event or situation that overwhelms a child's ability to cope, and inhibits him/her from moving forward with life in a normal manner

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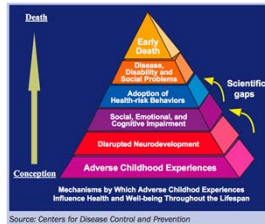
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## Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

- Abuse
  - Physical, emotional, sexual
- Neglect
  - Physical, emotional
- Household dysfunction
  - Mental illness
  - Incarcerated relative
  - Mother treated violently
  - Substance abuse
  - Divorce



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## What doesn't ACEs score tell us?

- Guidance, not causal
- Doesn't tally positive/protective factors
- Details around the context of the experience
- Duration of experience
- Timing of experience
- "first 18 years"
- Other events occurring at the time

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### The Resiliency Puzzle

#### Protective factors (Family/Community)

- Availability of primary caretaker
- Ties to extended family and/or supportive adults
- High expectations of child
- Consistent family rules
- Well balanced discipline Family routine, rituals and stability
- Pre-traumatic level of stress and coping
- Social support
- Cultural identity
- Safe, positive, nurturing school experience

#### Protective factors (Child)

- Age of the Child
  - Marker ages: 6M, 18M, 3Yrs
- Flexible temperament
- Secure attachment
- Robustness
- Regulatory capacity
- Strong cognitive, problem solving and verbal skills (symbolic)
- Positive self- esteem
- Mastery motivation

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### Red Flags for Development

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### Red Flags

- Withdrawal (not just acting out)
- Problems in relating
- Problems in self-regulation (mood and activity level)
- Sensory disturbances/reactivity
- No pretend play by 2 years
- No single words at 15 months or 2-3 word phrases by 2 years
- “Stimming” (visual, motor)
- Feeding problems - not just picky eater
- Parent, teacher, or other caregiver voices concern
- You are concerned but “can’t put your finger on it”

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### Recognizing our biases in our concerns

- Recall: Blind spots
- Reflection
  - Consideration of your own experiences
  - Your own culture/identity's views
  - How might these shape your definition of a 'concern'




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### What is Implicit Bias?

- Subtle, often subconscious stereotypes that guide our expectations and interactions with people.
- Examples from concerns about child development -- preschool expulsion
- Let's listen together:  
<https://www.wfdd.org/story/bias-ist-just-police-problem-its-preschool-problem>



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### Gilliam's work on preschool expulsion – Part 1

- 135 educators shown videos of children in a classroom setting. Each video had a black boy and girl, and a white boy and girl. The teachers were told the following:
  - We are interested in learning about how teachers detect challenging behavior in the classroom. Sometimes this involves seeing behavior before it becomes problematic. The video segments you are about to view are of preschoolers engaging in various activities. Some clips may or may not contain challenging behaviors. Your job is to press the enter key on the external keypad every time you see a behavior that could become a potential challenge.
- While the teachers were asked to detect "challenging behavior", no such behavior existed in any of the videos. Yet when asked which children required the most attention, 42% of the teachers identified the black boy.
  - Eye-tracking technology showed teachers more closely observed black students, and especially boys, when challenging behaviors are expected.

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## Gilliam's work on preschool expulsion – Part 2

- Teachers given a one-paragraph vignette to read, describing a child disrupting a class (hitting, scratching, even toy-throwing).
- The child in the vignette was randomly assigned what researchers considered a stereotypical name (DeShawn, Latoya, Jake, Emily)
- Teachers asked to rate severity of the behavior on a scale (1-5).
  - White teachers consistently held black students to a lower standard, rating their behavior as less severe than the same behavior of white students.
  - Black teachers, on the other hand, did the opposite, holding black students to a higher standard and rating their behavior as consistently more severe than that of white students.

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## Gilliam's work on preschool expulsion – Part 3

- Some teachers were also given information about the disruptive child's home life, to see if it made them more empathetic:
  - *[CHILD] lives with his/her mother, his/her 8- and 6-year-old sisters, and his/her 10-month-old baby brother. His/her home life is turbulent, between having a father who has never been a constant figure in his/her life, and a mother who struggles with depression but doesn't have the resources available to seek help. During the rare times when his/her parents are together, loud and sometimes violent disputes occur between them. In order to make ends meet, [CHILD'S] mother has taken on three different jobs, and is in a constant state of exhaustion. [CHILD] and his/her siblings are left in the care of available relatives and neighbors while their mother is at work.*
- Teachers who received this background reacted more empathetically, lowering their rating of a behavior's severity
  - BUT only if the teacher and student were of the same race.
  - If the race of the teacher and the child were different, severity rates were higher and teachers ended up feeling that the behavioral problems were hopeless/very little could be done
- "When people feel some kind of shared connection to folks, when they hear more about their misfortunes, they feel more empathic to them. But if they feel that they are different from each other ... it may actually cause them to perceive that person in a more negative light." – Walter Gilliam

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## More information on Gilliam's work

- <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/04/black-students-teachers-implicit-racial-bias-preschool-study>
- Walter Gilliam giving a talk on this work (for more detail)
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljezDWdTPDg>

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## What Can We Do?

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## Recognizing Biases

- “The real problem with unconscious bias is that it’s unconscious”
  - So what do we do about it...?
    - <https://www.dividedstatesofwomen.com/2017/12/21/16801568/unconscious-bias-racism-sexism>
- Recognizing our biases as a ‘super power’
  - When we are aware of them, we can do something about them (challenge the automatic/implicit thoughts)

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## Be a Behavior Detective

Behavior has a **message**

Children may display “**challenging behavior**” because they do not have other skills to meet their intended need

Understand the behavior, meet the child’s need, **teach children what to do** in place of the challenging behavior

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### Putting on our Detective Hats

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JT3MNsIWGs>
- Let's put on our detective hats to consider what a child in a real life situation is trying to communicate through his behavior
- What kinds of things are we looking at in terms of verbal and non verbal cues?
  - Poll Everywhere?

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### How Your Visits Can Help

- Create emotionally **safe** environments for young children (freedom from physical harm, fear, harshness, humiliation, ridicule, blaming, chaos)
- Develop strong **relationships** with parents and families (trusting, helpful)
- Young children thrive when things are **consistent** (consistent caregivers), familiar, and predictable (predictable routines)
- Referral **resources** available to address concerns

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### Watch Me Grow!

- Catch problems that might otherwise go unnoticed
- Identify children in need of further assessment
- Access Early Intervention or other services
- Prevent problems from becoming more serious
- Opportunity to find out what's on the parent's mind.
- Help parents to become expert observers of their child's development.

• <http://helpmegrowmn.org/HMG/Refer/index.html>

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### Help the Child by Supporting the Parent

- Partner with parents
- Start where they are-follow their lead
- Support their own treatment, connect them with resources (health care, local/state protective services, mental health services, educational services)
- Support social networking
- Be generous with your empathy and respect
- Be fully available
- Recognize and manage the inevitable vicissitudes of transference and countertransference
- Nurture "mentalization"
- Sustain a climate of hope

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### Reminders to Helpers/Providers

- Acknowledge the work is demanding and stressful
- Get peer support
- Get reflective supervision
- Find self care and stress management strategies that work for you
- Partner with administration-create a climate of respect
- Mentoring and continuing education

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### Conclusion

- Babies are a product of their interactions and context
- Babies show personalities from very early in life
- Babies develop in key domains (CLAPS)
- Babies know a lot very early! (Experience shapes brain development)
- Key ingredients of positive development
- Risk factors for positive development and ECMH
- Look for key red flags to warn us something is wrong
- Activate resources/intervene as early as possible!
- Keeping in mind how our own views/biases may affect perception of development
  - norms, values, beliefs about child development, including what is typical vs. problematic

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