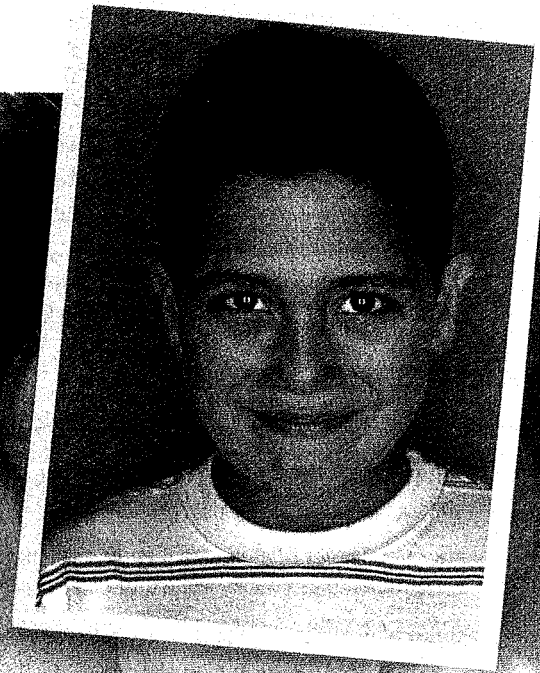
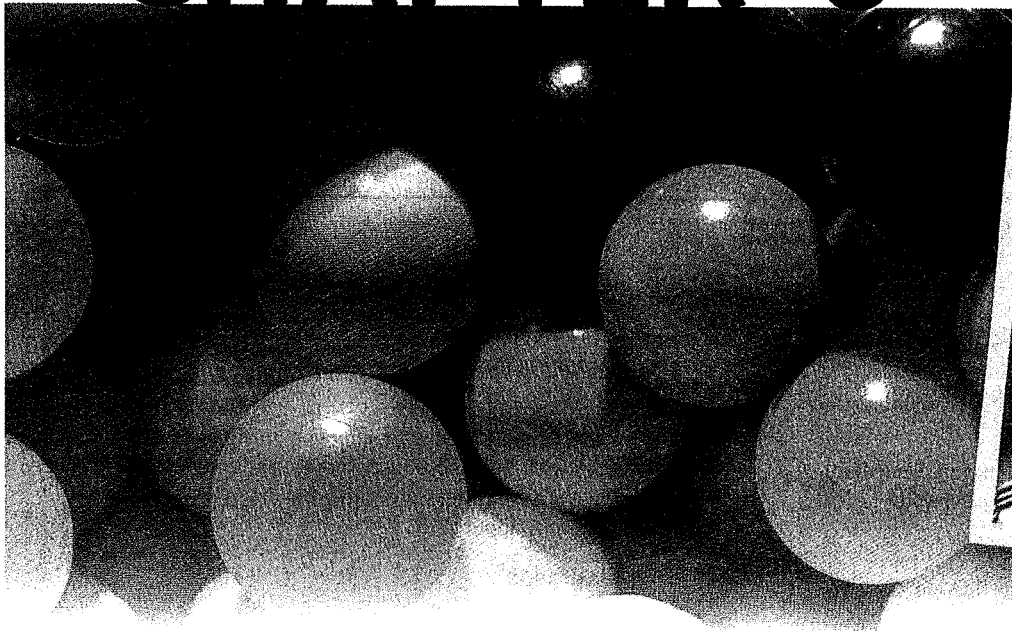


CHAPTER 6



Ryan McVay/Getty Images

Middle Childhood

Ten-year-old José has a new best friend, Matt. The boys bonded over their love of soccer and their passion for chess. Although this offbeat obsession kept them far from the popular kids' group, their take-charge kindness has made them the go-to kids when the class spirals out of control. A perfect example happened last week when the fifth-grade boys decided to play tag using a gaming console.

When he saw everyone jostling, filling up the recess area with joyous noise, Amir ran over and asked, "Can I play?"

Several kids closed ranks, jeering, "No fat kids allowed!"

Then Adam pushed in, as usual, disrupting the game, hogging the device the kids had renamed "the ball." A few minutes later, an anxious child named Malik worked up the guts to timidly enter the group.

"Get out!" erupted Adam, "You wuss. You girl!"

Adam bopped Malik over the head, did his standard imitation of Amir's lumbering walk, and—as usual—a few boys smirked. Malik started to cry and began to slink away. But suddenly, José intervened.

"Cool it, guys," he said. "Man, are you all right? Come join us."

José comforted Malik and managed to tell the other boys to lay off Amir ("Hey guys, that's mean!"), while Matt did his best to keep Adam from disrupting the game. All of this earned these two good-guy heroes exuberant fist pumps from the teacher and the rest of the class!

Why are some children, such as José and Matt, unusually caring, while others, like Adam,

are impulsive, aggressive, and cruel? Why do social hierarchies blossom during late elementary school, and what

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Setting the Context Physical Development

Brain Development: Slow-Growing Frontal Lobes
Motor Skills, Obesity, and Health

Cognitive Development

An Information-Processing Perspective on Intellectual Growth
• *Interventions:* Using Information-Processing Theory at Home and at Work
• *Trending in Developmental Science:* Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
• *Interventions:* Helping Children with ADHD

Emotional Development

Observing and Evaluating the Self
• *Interventions:* Promoting Realistic Self-Esteem
Doing Good: Morality and Prosocial Behavior
• *Trending in Developmental Science:* Exploring the Ethics of Prosocial Acts
• *Interventions:* Socializing Moral Children
Doing Harm: Aggression
• *Interventions:* Taming Excessive Aggression

Social Development

Friendships: The Proving Ground for Relationships
Popularity: Rising in the Peer Ranks
Bullying: Moral Disengagement in Action
• *Experiencing the Lifespan:* Middle-Aged Reflections on My Middle-Childhood Victimization
• *Interventions:* Blocking Bullying
Final Thoughts on Empathy and Sympathy

makes bullying so compelling at this age? How do children bond as friends, and which mental skills allow some 10-year-olds, such as José and Matt, to master complex strategy games, such as chess? How can we promote morality during the older childhood years? This chapter answers these questions and

others, as we enter **middle childhood**, that landmark stage from approximately ages 7 to 12.

To introduce our discussion, let's first briefly summarize why both Piaget and Erikson view middle childhood as the tipping point when we first grasp "the adult world."

middle childhood The second phase of childhood, from roughly age 7 to 12 years.

Setting the Context

As I mentioned in Chapter 5, Piaget believed that young children are tethered to their immediate perceptions. At age 7 or 8, we transcend appearances and think abstractly for the first time. Piaget offered a scientific explanation for why the Jesuits labeled year 7 as the age of "reason." During concrete operations (see Table 6.1), we first think logically about life.

Learning Outcome

- Explain what makes middle childhood unique by referring to Piaget's and Erikson's theories.

Table 6.1: Piaget's Stages: Focus on Childhood

Age (years)	Name of Stage	Description
0-2	Sensorimotor	The baby manipulates objects to pin down the basics of physical reality. This stage ends with the development of language.
2-7	Preoperations	Children's perceptions are captured by their immediate appearances: "What they see is what is real." They believe, among other things, that inanimate objects are really alive and that if the appearance of a quantity of liquid changes (for example, if it is poured from a short, wide glass into a tall, thin one), the amount of liquid changes.
7-12	Concrete operations	Children have a realistic understanding of the world. Their thinking is really on the same wavelength as that of adults. While they can reason conceptually about concrete objects, they cannot think abstractly in a scientific way.
12+	Formal operations	Reasoning is at its pinnacle: hypothetical, scientific, flexible, fully adult. We have reached our full cognitive human potential.

Then Erikson fleshed out the implications of this mental advance. During middle childhood, we realize that succeeding in life requires *industry* (see Table 6.2). We need to control our impulses and work for what we want.

Table 6.2: Erikson's Psychosocial Stages

Life Stage	Primary Task
Infancy (birth to 1 year)	Basic trust versus mistrust
Toddlerhood (1 to 2 years)	Autonomy versus shame and doubt
Early childhood (3 to 6 years)	Initiative versus guilt
Middle childhood (7 to 12 years)	Industry versus inferiority
Adolescence to emerging adulthood (teens into twenties)	Identity versus role confusion
Early adulthood (twenties to early forties)	Intimacy versus isolation
Middle adulthood (forties to sixties)	Generativity versus stagnation
Late adulthood (late sixties and beyond)	Integrity versus despair

Learning Outcomes

- Outline how the frontal lobes develop.
- Describe recent changes in elementary school motor skills.
- Explain what adults can do to promote children's physical development.
- List some facts about childhood obesity.

Physical Development

Reaching Piaget's and Erikson's middle childhood landmarks depends on that human masterpiece structure, the frontal lobes.

Brain Development: Slow-Growing Frontal Lobes

In contrast to other species, our huge *cerebral cortex* takes more than two full decades to mature. The *myelin sheath* — the fatty neural cover — continues growing into our twenties. *Synaptogenesis* (making billions of connections between neurons) is on an extended blossoming and pruning timetable, too, especially in the brain region responsible for thinking through our actions and managing our emotions — the **frontal lobes**.

frontal lobes The area at the front uppermost part of the brain, responsible for reasoning and planning our actions.

Figure 6.1, which compares the size of our cortex to that of other species, shows the huge frontal lobes at the top of the brain. During early childhood, the neurons in the visual and motor cortices are in their pruning phase, which explains why vision develops rapidly and why children master basic physical milestones, such as walking, at a young age. However, the frontal lobes are only beginning their synaptic blossoming when we start toddling around. Pruning in this part of the brain begins at about age 9.

Frontal lobe pruning explains why we have such high expectations for children during late elementary school. We expect fifth graders to grasp complex games such as chess, take responsibility for finishing their homework, and get along with their peers. These adult-like talents are accompanied by expanding motor skills.

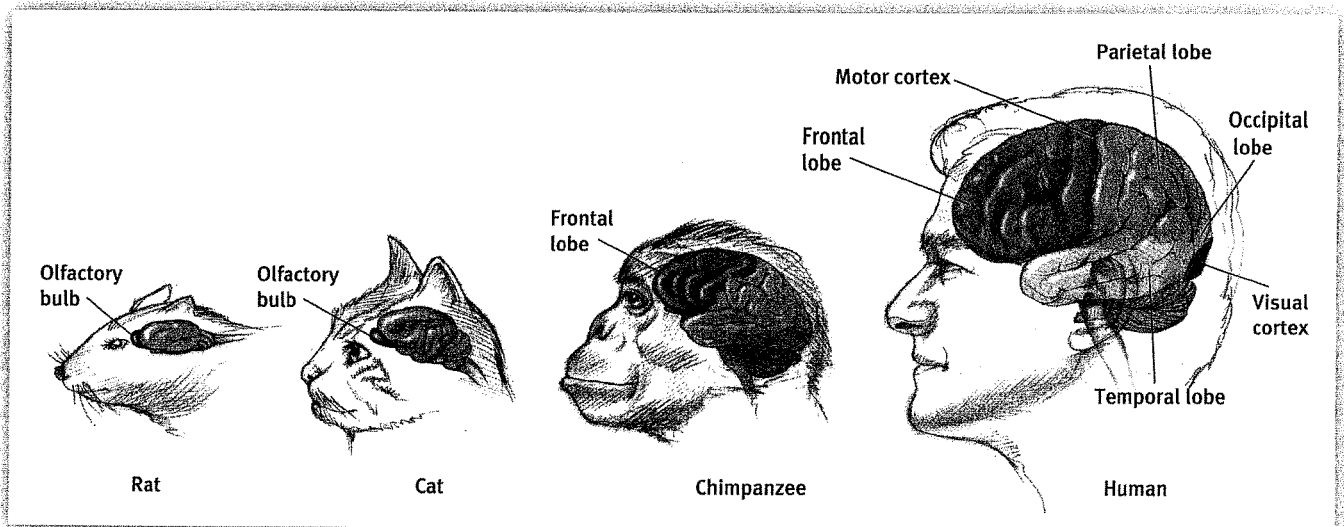
Motor Skills, Obesity, and Health

In Chapter 5, I pointed out that lack of exercise might prevent preschoolers from fully developing their physical skills. Now let's delve into research relating to this issue during the middle childhood years.

Studies in affluent nations confirm that today's elementary school children are less proficient physically than in the past. Yes, boys and girls do become stronger and more coordinated as they travel from first to sixth grade. But average scores on standard motor-skill tests are lower today than in previous cohorts, particularly as children advance to higher grades (Burns and others, 2015; Gaul & Issartel, 2016).

The logical reason for this loss, as I suggested in the Chapter 5, is that children no longer regularly play outside. When I was 7 or 8, during the 1950s, after school I biked

Figure 6.1: The human cortex and that of some other species Notice the size of our cortex in comparison to other species. Our mammoth frontal lobes make humans unlike any other animals on earth.



for hours around my town pretending to be a cowgirl (that's true!). In a more recent German study, fewer than 1 in 2 second graders spent at least four days per week engaging in vigorous physical exercise (either indoors or outdoors) for a *single* hour (Kobel and others, 2015).

However, there are dramatic differences from child to child. Perhaps because peers and adults reinforce boys and girls who are skilled at "object control" ("Wow! Katie is terrific at kickball; I want her on my team"), preschoolers with superior motor talents are more physically active during middle childhood (Henrique and others, 2016). Skill at catching and throwing at age 10 predicts exercising more in high school (Barnett and others, 2009). But the correlation between coordination and fitness (aerobic exercise) decreases as children travel into their teens (Haga, Gísladóttir, & Sigmundsson, 2015). And when we see joggers lumbering up the street, it's clear that adults can be very physically fit, without having much motor finesse!

Physically active parents have daughters and sons with better motor skills (Kobel and others, 2015), as we understand when we see 8-year-olds shooting baskets with their moms and dads. Not being a micromanaging parent matters (Bradley and others, 2011). In one Danish survey, if mothers agreed with questionnaire items such as "I keep total tabs on my child's activities," elementary schoolers were apt to live more sedentary lives (Janssen, 2015). Therefore, to raise physically skilled children, encourage outdoor activities, but don't hover over a child.

The passion to become active can occur at any age, as we know when we witness friends or family members become fit after falling in love with ballroom dancing or running marathons at age 55. Change is more difficult with **childhood obesity**. As early as preschool, having a high **body mass index (BMI)** sets children up to confront weight concerns for life. (Check out Table 6.3 for some stereotypes and interesting facts about this health condition.)

Obesity, as Table 6.3 suggests, has clear negative emotional effects. Does being physically active promote academic skills? This question brings me to my next topic — children's minds.



Mylicen Pearson/Alamy

This scene would be typical just a few decades ago. Today, bike riding with friends after school is much rarer.

Developmental Psychology Videos

Physical Activity in Middle Childhood

In this video, you will see just how physical activity contributes to a healthy, happy childhood.

 Achieve

childhood obesity A body mass index at or above the 95th percentile compared to the U.S. norms established for children in the 1970s.

body mass index (BMI) The ratio of a person's weight to height; the main indicator of being overweight or underweight.

Table 6.3: Fact or Fiction: Stereotypes and Scientific Research Related to Child Obesity

Stereotype #1: Children become overweight because they eat excessively and don't exercise.

Answer: False. The tendency to be overweight is epigenetically programmed and shaped amazingly early in life. Rapid weight gain during the first year of life strongly predicts later obesity.

Stereotype #2: Parents are responsible for child obesity, because they overfeed their children.

Answer: It's complicated. Pushing food on infants can prime the epigenetic tendency to put on pounds, but not at older ages.

Stereotype #3: Childhood obesity is increasing.

Answer: False! Child obesity rates escalated dramatically during the 1980s and rose more slowly until about a decade ago. Since about 2012, the prevalence of this health problem has declined, particularly in preschool children.

Stereotype #4: School-based anti-obesity programs that measure children's BMI and inform families about this condition are effective.

Answer: False. These interventions are apt to backfire, making overweight children and their parents anxious and heightening children's tendency to stigmatize overweight classmates.

Stereotype #5: Overweight children tend to be bullied and suffer from psychological problems.

Answer: True, with some heartening exceptions. Unfortunately, peers are apt to reject overweight classmates as early as preschool, and bullying, depression, and suicide are more common among obese teens. But in the African American community and in nations such as Korea, overweight children are less apt to be stigmatized. Moreover, young activists are now using social media to bring home the liberating message that beauty comes in many sizes (more about this in Chapter 8).

Information from: Barrera and others, 2016; Cheung and others, 2016; Eaddy, 2016; Kim, Yon, & Kim, 2016; Ninyanzi, 2016; Puhl & Lerner, 2007; Tavaras, 2016; Vanderloo & Nandich, 2013.

Tying It All Together

1. Drawing on Erikson's and Piaget's theories, name the qualities that make middle childhood (and human beings) special.
2. When Hernando played hide-and-seek with his 4-year-old niece, he realized that while Marissa could run well, she was having trouble not betraying her hiding place and understanding the rules of the game. The reason is that Marissa's _____ cortex is on an earlier developmental timetable than her _____ lobes.
3. Imagine transporting yourself to the 1960s and watching fourth graders in your neighborhood. Which observation is *false*?
 - a. Children were more physically skilled than they are today.
 - b. Children were more physically active than they are today.
 - c. Parents spent more time monitoring children's outdoor play than they do today.
4. Excellent childhood motor skills are *crucially important/not very important* in adult fitness (select the correct phrase).
5. Obesity can be easily managed with diet and exercise (*true/false*).

Answers to the Tying It All Together quizzes can be found at the end of this chapter.

Learning Outcomes

- Outline the information-processing perspective on memory.
- List three examples of executive functions.
- Describe ADHD's features, causes, and treatments.

Cognitive Development

As I discussed in Chapter 5, Piaget and Vygotsky gave us terrific insights into children's developing minds. But neither theorist explained *why* industry locks in. What skills are involved in managing our behavior and working for what we want? Parents might want to know if they can trust a 6-year-old to take care of a dog. Teachers might want tips for helping third graders memorize spelling words, or need strategies to calm students who have trouble sitting still in class. To get this information, everyone would gravitate toward the *information-processing approach*.

An Information-Processing Perspective on Intellectual Growth

Information-processing theorists, as I described in Chapters 3 and 5, divide thinking into steps. Let's illustrate this approach by decoding memory, the basis of all thought.

Making Sense of Memory

Information-processing theorists believe that to become "a memory," information passes through different stages. First, we hold stimuli arriving from the outside world briefly in a sensory store. Then, features that we notice enter the most important store, called *working memory*.

Working memory is where the "cognitive action" takes place. Here, we keep information in awareness and act to either process it or discard it. Working memory is composed of limited-capacity holding bins and an "executive processor," which allows us to mentally process material for permanent storage (Baddeley, 1992; Best & Miller, 2010).

To get a real-life example of the fleeting quality of working memory, you might challenge yourself to remember an address without relying on your smartphone. If you keep that information in your mind, notice that you will succeed at this mental

working memory In information-processing theory, the limited-capacity gateway system, containing all the material that we can keep in awareness at a single time. The material in this system is either processed for more permanent storage or lost.

feat. But if you are interrupted by a text, the information evaporates. In fact, for adults, working memory bin capacity is roughly the size of a city and local street address: seven chunks of information.

Working memory bin size greatly expands from kindergarten to second grade (Kytälä and others, 2019) — which may explain why children reach *concrete operations* at roughly age 7 or 8 (Case, 1999). At this age, children have the memory capacities to step back from their first impressions and remember that what they saw previously (for example, a wider glass in the conservation-of-liquid task) compensates for what they are seeing right now (a taller glass).

Expanding working memory bin size also explains why theory-of-mind capacities click in around age 5. In order to effortlessly relate to people, children must switch back and forth mentally from their own perspective to another person's point of view.

Preschoolers with “larger” working memory bins do better at academics in second grade (Capodieci and others, 2019; Kytälä and others, 2019). But training children to “remember” lists of items does not translate into school success (Sala & Gobet, 2020). Exercise does help. When researchers assigned 4-year-olds to a fitness program, compared to a control group, the active preschoolers had better working memory skills (Hsieh and others, 2018).

Having older sisters correlates with superior working memory, too — perhaps because (in addition to arguing; recall Chapter 5) female siblings help “teach” younger brothers and sisters to remember as they collaborate (“Don’t forget *not* to tell mom we did X, Y, and Z!”) (Kibler and others, 2020).

These studies echo research with mid-life adults that I’ll describe in Chapter 12. Rather than investing in high-tech memory tools, being physically active and talking to stimulating people are the main strategies to combat age-related working memory losses!

Now, let’s turn to an even more basic self-control skill critical to succeeding in the world.

Exploring Executive Functions

Executive functions is a broad term that refers to every frontal lobe feat of self-control. Here are three school-related examples that show how dramatically this talent at the core of being human blossoms as children travel into fourth and fifth grades.

Older Children Rehearse Information **Rehearsal** is a major way we learn. We repeat material to embed it in memory. In a classic study, developmentalists had kindergarteners and fifth graders memorize objects (such as a cat or a desk) pictured on cards (Flavell, Beach, & Chinsky, 1966). Prior to testing, the researchers watched the children’s lips to see if they were repeating the names of the objects to themselves. Eighty-five percent of the fifth graders used rehearsal; only 10 percent of the kindergarteners did. So, one reason why older children are superior learners is that they understand that they need to rehearse.

Older Children Understand How to Selectively Attend The ability to manage our awareness to focus on just what we need to know is called **selective attention**. In a classic study, researchers presented boys and girls of different ages with cards. On the top half of each card was an animal photo; on the bottom half was a picture of some household item (see Figure 6.2). The children were instructed to remember only the animals.

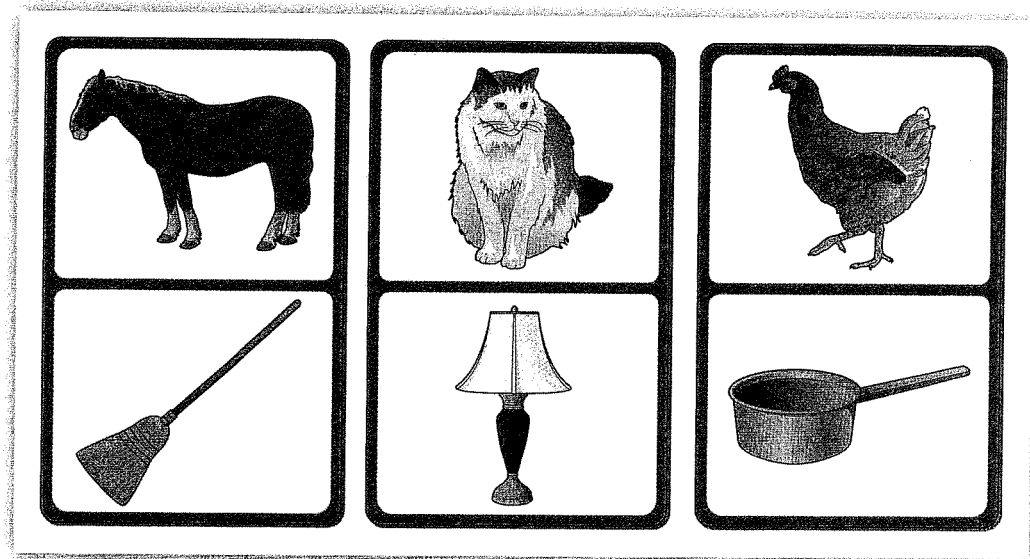
As you might expect, older children were better at recalling the animal names. But, when asked to remember the household items, both age groups performed equally well — suggesting that young children clog their memory bin space with irrelevant information (Bjorklund, 2005) because they cannot selectively attend as well.

executive functions Abilities that allow us to plan and direct our thinking and control our immediate impulses.

rehearsal A learning strategy in which people repeat information to embed it in memory.

selective attention A learning strategy in which we manage our awareness so as to attend only to what is relevant and to filter out unneeded information.

Figure 6.2: A selective attention study In this study measuring selective attention, children were asked only to memorize the animals on the top half of the cards. Then researchers looked for age differences in the children’s memory for the irrelevant household items.



AP Images/Chuck Hambleton

The childhood game Simon Says is not just fun and games—it’s tailored to train executive functions by giving children practice in the vital skill of inhibiting their immediate responses.

Older Children Are Superior at Inhibition To measure differences in inhibition, researchers ask children to perform some action that contradicts their immediate tendencies, such as saying, “Press a button as fast as you can each time you see an animal on the screen, but don’t respond when you see a dog” (Pnevmatikos & Trikkaliotis, 2013). This “go, don’t go” challenge is exemplified by the classic kindergarten game Simon Says.

Actually, fostering inhibition — not doing what we feel like doing — is a continual *socialization* goal. From completing your assignments for this class rather than partying, to resisting the urge to check your phone while you are reading this page, inhibiting our responses can be difficult even for most adults.

Using Information-Processing Theory at Home and at Work

So, returning to the question at the beginning of this section, parents will need to regularly remind a 6-year-old to feed the dog. Teachers *cannot* assume that third graders will automatically understand how to memorize spelling words. Scaffolding specific study skills (such as the need to rehearse) or teaching selective attention strategies (such as underlining important words for a test) should be an integral part of education in elementary school. And for everyone else, understand that while, over time, executive functions greatly improve, controlling and inhibiting our behavior takes *effort throughout* life. (See Table 6.4 for some specific information-processing tips to use with children.)

Now let’s look at the insights that information-processing theory offers for understanding and helping children with that well-known condition, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD.

Table 6.4: Information-Processing Guidelines for Teachers and Parents**General Principles for Younger (and Some Older) Children**

1. Don't expect children to remember, without prompting, regular chores such as feeding a pet.
2. Expect most children to have trouble in situations that involve inhibiting a strong "prepotent impulse"—such as not touching desirable toys, following unpleasant rules, or doing homework.
3. Encourage physical activity and collaborative play.

General Principles Throughout Middle Childhood

1. Actively teach study skills (such as rehearsing information) and selective attention strategies (such as underlining important points) for tests.
2. Scaffold organizational strategies for school and life. For example, encourage the child to use a notebook for each class assignment and keep important items, such as pencils, in a specific place.
3. Expect situations that involve multiple tasks (such as getting ready for school) and activities that involve *ongoing* inhibition (such as refraining from watching YouTube videos before finishing homework) to be problematic. Build in a clear structure for mastering these difficult executive-functions tasks: "At 8 or 9 P.M., it's time to get everything ready for school." "Homework must be finished by dinnertime, or immediately after you get home from school."
4. To promote selective attention (and inhibition), have a child do homework, or any task that involves concentration, in a room away from tempting distractions such as the TV or phone.


Trending in Developmental Science: Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)—defined by inattentiveness and hyperactivity/distractibility—is the most widely diagnosed childhood disorder in the United States, affecting roughly 1 in 10 children (CDC, 2019a). Although ADHD may sometimes be diagnosed in preschool, because sitting still and focusing are vital at this age, this label is typically applied in elementary school. Actually, boys are several times more likely than girls to get this diagnosis at every age (CDC, 2019a).

ADHD follows a bewildering array of paths: from first appearing in preschool to erupting during adulthood; from persisting for decades to fading during adult life (Roselló and others, 2020). Twin and adoption studies confirm that ADHD has primarily genetic causes (Thapar & Cooper, 2016). Epigenetic forces are also involved, from being exposed to prenatal maternal smoking to being born premature (Owens & Hinshaw, 2013; see Chapter 2).

Some scientists feel ADHD is caused by the delayed maturation of the frontal lobes. Others speculate that impairments in lower brain centers are to blame (Berger and others, 2013; Hoogman and others, 2013; Wang and others, 2013). Everyone agrees that ADHD is tied to a lower-than-normal output of dopamine, the neurotransmitter that modulates sensitivity to rewards (Silvetti and others, 2014).

The hallmark of ADHD is deficits in executive functions (Atherton and others, 2020; Holst & Thorell, 2020; Roselló and others, 2020). These children have problems with working memory (Groves and others, 2020; Kofler and others, 2020), inhibition, and selective attention (Barkley, 1998). When told, "Don't touch the toys," children diagnosed with ADHD have unusual trouble resisting this impulse.

As you might imagine, performing tasks under time pressure, such as getting ready for school by 7:00 A.M., presents immense problems for boys and girls with ADHD. These children have trouble quickly processing information (Kofler and others, 2020). Moreover, perhaps because of their dopamine deficit, they seem less affected by punishments and rewards (Stark and others, 2011). So yelling or threatening may not work.

These issues explain why school is so difficult for boys and girls with ADHD. Working memory is critical to performing academic tasks. Focusing on a teacher demands inhibitory and selective attention skills. Taking tests can involve exceptional time-management talents, too.

attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) The most common childhood learning disorder in the United States, disproportionately affecting boys; defined by inattention and hyperactivity at home and at school.

Because the same difficulties with inhibition and time management spill over into problems at home, frustrated caregivers tend to resort to power-assertion disciplinary techniques (Wymbs & Pelham, 2010). They lash out at a 9-year-old who seems incapable of getting things in order. They scream at, hit, and punish a daughter who can't "just sit still." Therefore, due to an *evocative process*, boys and girls with ADHD are least likely to get the sensitive parenting that they need. Given these dangers, what should caring adults do? ■■

Helping Children with ADHD

The well-known treatment for ADHD is psycho-stimulant medications such as Ritalin, often supplemented by caregiver (and sometimes teacher) training.

Parent training involves teaching caregivers to effectively use time outs and consistently reward appropriate behaviors (Ryan-Krause, 2011; Young & Amarasinghe, 2010). Caregivers are cautioned not to pressure children to complete time-based tasks.

Because boys and girls with ADHD learn better in noisy environments, provide white background noise to help a fifth grader focus on homework (Baijot and others, 2016). Frequent small reinforcers for good behavior are more effective than promising a big family trip to Disney World next month (Scheres, Tontsch, & Lee Thoeny, 2013).

Since exercise helps all children focus better (Hsieh and others, 2018), caregivers should build more physical activity into the day (Messler, Holmberg, & Sperlich, 2018). Presenting learning tasks in a gaming format is also especially beneficial for children with ADHD (Forster and others, 2014). In fact, students have told me that getting absorbed in games or sports was the treatment that "cured" a sibling's ADHD.

Traditional, medication-oriented experts are listening (see Halperin & Healey, 2011). ADHD can have serious, lingering adult consequences — problems keeping a job, substance abuse issues, poor relationships (Holst & Thorell, 2020; Merrill and others, 2019). Medications reduce these harmful long-term effects (Boland and others, 2020). But drugs can have dangerous side effects. Their long-term impact on development is unclear. Might

exercise, or even providing time for playing games, be a safer way to mend children's brains?

The dramatic early twenty-first-century U.S. rise in the prevalence of ADHD is troubling (CDC, 2019). So is the male tilt to this diagnosis, as boys are more physically active than girls. Without denying that ADHD causes considerable heartache, what role might a poor elementary school child–environment fit play in this "disorder" at this moment in history? ■■



Shannon Fagan/Getty Images

Although he may regularly tune out in class, this boy clearly has no problem being riveted by this game. Therefore, it makes sense that providing high-intensity academics-related video games may help wandering minds.

So far, I have been focusing on executive functions as they relate to school success. In the rest of this chapter, I'll turn to the role this basic frontal lobe capacity plays in our relationships and emotional lives.

Tying It All Together

1. Observe a 6-year-old and list specific examples of failures in inhibition and selective attention.
2. Laura's son has been diagnosed with ADHD. Based on this section, list some environmental strategies to help this child.
3. Bakari argues that ADHD is being over-diagnosed. Make Bakari's case, referring to the information in this section.

Answers to the Tying It All Together quizzes can be found at the end of this chapter.

Emotional Development

Think of the overwhelming executive-function challenges we face during elementary school — cooling down our rage when we get a failing grade or are rejected by our peers, managing our terror and regularly working up the courage to join the daunting kind of social group I described in the introductory vignette. **Emotion regulation** is the term psychologists use for the skills involved in controlling our emotions so that they don't get in the way of a productive life.

Children with **externalizing tendencies** have special trouble with this challenge. Like Adam in the chapter-opening vignette (or children with ADHD), they immediately act on their emotions and often behave disruptively and aggressively. Perhaps you know a child who bursts into every scene, fighting, bossing people around, wreaking havoc on classmates and adults.

Children with **internalizing tendencies** have the opposite problem. Like Malik in the introductory vignette, they hang back in social situations. They are timid and self-conscious, frightened and depressed.

The beauty of being human is that we vary in our temperamental tendencies — to be shy or active, boisterous or reserved. But having serious trouble *controlling* aggression or anxiety puts children at a disadvantage around the world (Chen & Santo, 2016; Fu and others, 2016).

In Chapter 4, I discussed the temperaments that put toddlers at risk for emotion regulation issues — being exuberant or inhibited. Now, let's look at how these temperamental tendencies affect older children's emotional lives, beginning with their perceptions of themselves.

Observing and Evaluating the Self

How does **self-awareness**, or our perceptions about ourselves, change during middle childhood? To answer this question, Susan Harter (1999) asked children of different ages to describe themselves. Here are examples of the responses she found:

I am 3 years old and I live in a big house. . . . I have blue eyes and a kitty that is orange. . . . I love my dog Skipper. . . . I'm always happy. I have brown hair. . . . I'm really strong.

I'm in fourth grade, and I'm pretty popular. . . . That's because I'm nice to people . . . , although if I get into a bad mood I sometimes say something that can be a little mean. At school I'm feeling pretty smart in . . . Language Arts and Social Studies. . . . But I'm feeling pretty dumb in Math and Science. . . .

(Harter, 1999, pp. 37, 48)

Notice that the 3-year-old talks in terms of external facts. The fourth grader's descriptions are internal and psychological, anchored in feelings, abilities, and traits. The 3-year-old talks in unrealistic, positive ways. The fourth grader lists deficiencies and strengths in different areas of life. Moreover, while the younger child seems disconnected from other human beings, the older child scans the social world in a comparative way. So, Harter believes that when children reach concrete operations, they realistically evaluate their abilities and decide whether they like or dislike the person they see. **Self-esteem** — the tendency to feel good or bad about ourselves — first becomes a *major issue* in elementary school.

Actually, self-esteem tends to decline during early elementary school (Frey & Ruble, 1985, 1990; Super & Harkness, 2003). A mother may sadly notice this change when an 8-year-old daughter starts to make comments such as, "I'm not pretty" or "I can't do math." ("What happened to that self-confident child who used to say, 'I'm the most beautiful, intelligent kid in the world?'") Caring teachers struggle with the same comparisons when their fourth graders become exquisitely sensitive to who is popular, which classmates are getting As, and who needs special academic help.

Therefore, to expand on Erikson's theory, the price of entering the real world is both industry *and* inferiority. In fact, inferiority ("I'm jealous because my friend is

Learning Outcomes

- Contrast internalizing and externalizing tendencies.
- Outline changes in self-awareness and self-esteem as children grow older.
- Point out the perils of excessively high or low self-esteem.
- Explain what forces affect prosocial behavior, referring to friendship versus merit, guilt, induction, and moral disengagement.
- Compare the different types of aggression.
- List the forces that may produce a highly aggressive child.

emotion regulation The capacity to manage our emotional state.

externalizing tendencies
A personality style that involves acting on our immediate impulses and behaving disruptively and aggressively.

internalizing tendencies
A personality style that involves intense fear, social inhibition, and often depression.

self-awareness The capacity to observe our abilities and actions from an outside frame of reference and to reflect on our inner state.

self-esteem Evaluating ourselves as either "good" or "bad" based on comparisons to other people.

better than me!”) helps *propel* industry (“I need to work hard so I can be better than my friend!”).

But luckily, most children avoid just feeling inferior, because reaching concrete operations produces another change. Notice how the fourth grader quoted above compares her abilities in different areas such as personality and school. So, as they get older, children’s self-esteem doesn’t hinge on one quality. Even if they are not doing well in a certain area, they take comfort in the places where they shine.

According to Harter, children draw on five areas to determine self-esteem: *scholastic competence* (academic talents); *behavioral conduct* (obedience or being “good”); *athletic skills* (performance at sports); *peer likeability* (popularity); and *physical appearance* (looks). As you might expect, children who view themselves as failing in several competence realms often report low self-esteem. However, to really understand a child’s self-esteem, we need to know the priority each person puts on doing well in a particular area of life.

To understand this point, take a minute to rate yourself on your people skills, politeness or good manners, intellectual abilities, looks, and physical abilities. If you label yourself as “not so good” in an area you don’t care about (for me, it would be physical skills), it won’t make a dent in your self-esteem. If you care deeply about some skill where you feel deficient, you would get pretty depressed.

This discounting (“It doesn’t matter if I’m not a scholar; I have great relationship skills”) lets us gain self-esteem from the areas in which we excel. The problem is that children with externalizing issues take this discounting to an extreme — minimizing their problems in *essential* areas of life.



Nicholas Prior/Taxi/Getty Images

According to Susan Harter, even when children are failing in other areas of life, they can derive their self-esteem from the talents where they shine. Do you think this girl can use her joy in her science prize to insulate herself from feeling bad about skills where she falls short?

learned helplessness A state we develop when we feel incapable of affecting the outcome of events, and so give up without trying.

Two Kinds of Self-Esteem Distortions

Normally, we base our self-esteem on signals from the outside world: “Am I succeeding or not doing so well?” However, when children with externalizing problems *are* failing — for instance, being rejected in school — they may deny reality (Lynch and others, 2016) and impulsively blame other people to preserve their unrealistically high feelings of self-worth (Woltering & Shi, 2016). Perhaps you know adults whose anger evokes continual conflict, but who take the position, “I’m wonderful. It’s their fault.” Because these people seem impervious to their flaws and have difficulty regulating their emotions, they cannot change their behavior and so ensure that they continue to fail.

Children with internalizing tendencies have the opposite issue. Their intense anxiety may cause them to read failure into benign events (“My teacher must hate me — she didn’t answer when I said hello today!”) (see Chen & Santo, 2016). They are at risk of developing **learned helplessness** (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978), feeling that they are powerless to affect their fate. They may give up at the starting gate, assuming, “I’m going to fail, so why even try?”

So children with externalizing and internalizing tendencies face a similar danger — but for different reasons. When we minimize our difficulties or assume we are incompetent, we cut off the chance of working to change our behavior and ensure that we probably *will* fail.

Table 6.5 summarizes these self-esteem problems and their real-world consequences. Then, Table 6.6 offers a checklist based on Harter’s five dimensions for evaluating yourself. Are there areas where you gloss over your deficiencies? Do you have pockets of learned helplessness that prevent you from living a full life?

Table 6.5: Externalizing and Internalizing Problems, Self-Esteem Distortions, and Consequences: A Summary Table

Description	Self-Esteem Distortion	Consequence
Children with externalizing problems act out “emotions,” are impulsive, and are often aggressive.	May ignore real problems and have unrealistically high self-esteem.	Continue to fail because they don’t see the need to improve.
Children with internalizing problems are intensely fearful and anxious.	Can read failure into everything and have overly low self-esteem.	Continue to fail because they decide that they cannot succeed, and stop working.

Table 6.6: Identifying Your Self-Esteem Distortions: A Checklist Using Harter's Five Domains

You have externalizing issues if you regularly have thoughts like these:

- **Academics:**
 - "When I get poor grades, it's because my teachers don't give good tests or teach well."
 - "I have very little to learn from other people."
 - "I'm smarter than practically everyone I know."
- **Physical skills:**
 - "When my team doesn't win at baseball, soccer, etc., it's my teammates' fault, not mine."
 - "I believe it's OK to take physical risks, such as not wearing a seatbelt or running miles in the hot sun, because I know I won't get hurt."
 - "It's only statistics, so even though I have asthma, I shouldn't worry about wearing a mask during a global pandemic."
- **Relationships:**
 - "When I have trouble at work or with my family, it's typically my co-workers' or family's fault."
 - "My child (or partner, friend, or parent) is the one causing the conflict between us."
- **Physical appearance:**
 - "I don't think I have to work to improve my appearance because I'm gorgeous."
- **Conduct:**
 - "I should be able to come to work late (or turn in papers after the end of the semester, talk in class, etc.)."
 - "Other people are too uptight. I have a right to behave any way I want."
- **Diagnosis:** You are purchasing high self-esteem at the price of denying reality. Try to look at the impact of your actions more realistically and take steps to change.

You have internalizing issues if you regularly have thoughts like these:

- **Academics:**
 - "I'm stupid and too dumb to get through college."
 - "I can't ever do well on tests; I'm bound to fail."
 - "My memory is poor."
 - "I'll never be smart enough to get ahead in my career."
- **Physical skills:**
 - "I can't play sports because I'm uncoordinated or too slow."
 - "I'll never have the willpower to exercise regularly (or stick to a diet, stop smoking, stop drinking, or stop taking drugs)."
- **Relationships:**
 - "I don't have any people skills."
 - "I'm doomed to fail in my love life."
 - "I can't be a good parent (or spouse or friend)."
- **Physical appearance:**
 - "I'm unattractive."
 - "People are born either good-looking or not, and I fall into the *not* category."
 - "There is nothing I can do to improve my looks."
- **Conduct:**
 - "I'm incapable of being on time (or getting jobs done or refraining from talking in class)."
 - "I can't change my tendency to rub people the wrong way."
- **Diagnosis:** Your excessively low self-esteem is inhibiting your ability to succeed. Work on reducing your helpless and hopeless attitudes and try for change.

Promoting Realistic Self-Esteem

This discussion shows why school programs that focus *only* on raising self-esteem — those devoted to instilling the message "You are a terrific kid" — are missing the boat (Baumeister and others, 2003; Swann, Chang-Schneider, & McClarty, 2007). True self-esteem is derived from industry — working for a goal.

Therefore, when children are having trouble in a vital life domain, it's important to enhance *self-efficacy*, or the feeling that "I can succeed if I work" (Miller & Daniel, 2007).



By complimenting her child for being such a hard worker, this mother is socializing her son to believe that working hard leads to success.

Enhancing Self-Efficacy As developmentalist Carol Dweck has demonstrated, one key to enhancing academic self-efficacy is to praise children for effort ("You are trying so hard!"), rather than making comments about basic ability ("You are incredibly smart!"). In her studies, elementary schoolers who were praised for being "very intelligent" after successfully completing problems had *lower* self-efficacy. They were afraid to tackle other challenging tasks ("I'd better not try this or everyone might learn I'm dumb!") (Molden & Dweck, 2006; Mueller & Dweck, 1998).

Enhancing self-efficacy is important because during concrete operations, children begin to categorize themselves according to fixed labels ("I'm the dumb kid" or "the poor kid in class"). Another

downside of the concrete operational passion for categorizing, described in Chapter 5, is succumbing to rigid gender or racial stereotypes, such as believing girls or children of color can't succeed at science or math.

But when adults praise elementary schoolers for effort and show videos of trail-blazing women of different races triumphing, they are implicitly teaching the lesson, "You are not defined by a fixed criterion such as your gender or ethnic group." Therefore, instilling the efficacious message that "hard work matters" *both* prevents prejudice and preserves self-esteem!

Living in an Efficacy-Enhancing Wider World But just telling children, "If you work hard, you can succeed," is not enough. In one revealing study, children given this "hard work matters" mindset did not have better grades. They were no more willing to tackle challenging tasks (Li & Bates, 2019). So we need to go beyond the simplistic idea that magically changing perceptions works. As I spelled out in Chapter 5, teachers must efficaciously enter students' proximal zones to offer the *concrete skills* children need to succeed (Bandura, 2020). The wider community must also step up to the plate.

Why does self-esteem vary by nation, with elementary schoolers in the Netherlands having higher feelings of self-worth than their German counterparts? Why is self-esteem typically far higher in boys than girls? Why does children's self-esteem depend on being supported by family and peers (Magro and others, 2019)? What good is believing you *personally* can make it if your nation labels you as not-quite-competent because of your gender, sexual orientation, or race? The *whole community* needs to collaborate to promote each child's potential success. ■■

Doing Good: Morality and Prosocial Behavior

During the summer of 2020, this message was forcefully brought home when millions of people risked their health in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic to take to the streets: "We march together as *one* human community." "Never again will we tolerate injustice based on race."

Prosocial behavior is the term developmentalists use to describe these remarkable, global caring demonstrations, as well as the personal acts of helping, sharing, and caring that we perform during daily life. Do we have to be taught to reach out in a prosocial way?

prosocial behavior Sharing, helping, and caring actions.

The answer is no. As you learned in Chapter 4, the impulse to be prosocial and ethical blossoms during our first two years of life. But, there are clear individual differences in the propensity to be prosocial, and we can see these variations starting in our earliest years.

Individual and Gender Variations

In one study, developmentalists visited preschool classrooms and looked at spontaneous sharing, the coming-from-the-heart giving that is different from being told, “Share!” When they followed these children during elementary school, adolescence, and emerging adulthood, the 3-year-olds who shared most readily were more prosocial at every age (Eisenberg and others, 2014). So, if your 8-year-old niece seems unusually generous (especially at cost to herself), she may grow up to be an unusually prosocial adult.

What about your 8-year-old nephew? Are girls generally more prosocial than boys? Girls are more likely than boys to reach out and comfort a classmate who is being bullied (boys tend to actively confront the bully) (Duffy and others, 2016; Mulvey & Killen, 2016; Reijntjes and others, 2016). Girls are more physiologically attuned to others’ distress than boys (Groen and others, 2013). The problem is that being sensitive to another person’s emotional pain may not result in *acting* in a prosocial way.

Decoding Prosocial Behavior in a Deeper Way

Empathy is the term developmentalists use for directly feeling another person’s emotions. Your daughter gets intensely anxious when hearing a teacher berating a friend. She is overcome with horror if she watches demonstrators in the streets being attacked on the nightly news.

Sympathy is the more muted feeling that we experience *for* another human being. Your daughter feels terrible *for* that friend. She gets agitated when seeing videos of protesters and police clashing but isn’t immobilized by distress. Developmentalists believe that sympathy, rather than empathy, is related to behaving in a prosocial way (Eisenberg, 1992, 2003).

The reason is that simply feeling another person’s pain can provoke a variety of reactions, from being paralyzed with fear to behaving in a far-from-caring way. We can vividly see this point when, out of embarrassment, we witness children (and even some adults) laugh hysterically as someone spills a lunchroom tray. To behave prosocially, children need to have the emotion-regulation skills to translate their empathic feelings into a sympathetic response (Eisenberg, 1992).

Actually, as children reach elementary school and can better think through their actions, prosocial behaviors become selective. Preoperational preschoolers automatically offer you their blanket when you are upset because they are egocentric and assume that everything that comforts them will comfort you. However, just as I would not immediately rush in to help if I saw someone being attacked, but instead call 911, the reason elementary school children report for not acting prosocially is that they don’t have the skills to offer aid (Denham, 1998; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998).

Returning to gender differences, this suggests we take a more nuanced approach to the idea that girls are more prosocial than boys. People have different styles of acting prosocially. Sometimes, being prosocial involves actively standing up to a bully (or running in to break up a fight); at other times, it involves comforting and nurturing a person in pain.



Romy Arango Fernandez/NurPhoto via Getty Images

What motivated millions of people to take to the streets to demonstrate for racial justice after witnessing the death of George Floyd in 2020? Insights come as I explore the critical role that empathy (and sympathy) play in prosocial acts.

empathy Feeling the exact emotion that another person is experiencing.

sympathy A state necessary for acting prosocially, involving feeling upset *for* a person who needs help.



Trending in Developmental Science: Exploring the Ethics of Prosocial Acts

The fact that prosocial behaviors are always selective brings up a deeper question: What *moral* considerations determine when we do (and don't) perform prosocial acts?

Issue #1: Merit, Need, and Prosocial Behavior Suppose you are working on a group class project and a few members are slacking off. Your professor says you all will get the same grade, but you know you worked harder than several people in your group. How would you feel?

Not very good, at least by the time you are in elementary school. In exploring reactions to stories, researchers found that preschoolers were likely to say that a character who searched for prizes should “share things equally” with a helper, but 8-year-olds tailored their giving to whether the other person had earned the gift. “If he was lazy, there is no reason to share” (Rizzo and others, 2016).

Therefore, one consideration that drives prosocial acts is merit. We want to help people who deserve our help. We are reticent to share with people we view as unworthy of care. But what does being unworthy of care mean?

Returning to your group project, suppose several of your classmates work two jobs; one, unlike you, is a single parent; another can't afford a next-generation tablet. Would it be fair to simply reward the person who does the most work, or should we take people's needs into account?

These moral considerations become salient as children enter their teens. Should we give rewards based on individual merit or based on need (Kornbluh, Pykett, & Flanagan, 2019)? And they naturally translate into adult political stances. If you believe that society offers each citizen a fair shot, you may be reluctant to help needy people “not like you” (such as someone from a different ethnic background). You could be highly prosocial, but confine your helping to your own social milieu.

How does your philosophy about living shape your own prosocial acts? And, how do you feel about the following quandary relating to fairness?

Issue #2: Fairness, Friendship, and Prosocial Behavior Suppose you are on a hiring committee at work. One applicant is a stranger and another is a friend. The stranger has a stronger resume. You firmly believe in fairness, but you also prize loyalty. You cannot let a friend down. What would you do?

Friendship, one study showed, drives the impulse to be prosocial by preschool (Zhang, 2020). Chinese children watched videos of situations in which two people finished the same amount of work. One person was described as a good friend, and the other person as someone the child did not know. When asked to dole out prizes, if both recipients were equally worthy, children gave more to a friend than a stranger. If the stranger worked harder, children gave the stranger and friend an equal amount.

So we have a strong impulse to prioritize friendships over fairness. This preference may be based in evolution, as even chimpanzees preferentially help their favored chimp peers (Engelmann, Haux, & Herrmann, 2019). In one study, 5-year-olds even reported that cheating is highly *prosocial*, as long as you are helping a friend (Zhao and others, 2019)!

Still, this preference has its dark side. Favoring friends and designating strangers as unworthy slides into **moral disengagement**—rationalizing amoral, uncaring acts (“Only my best buddies and people like me deserve help”). What can caregivers do to promote a truly inclusive moral worldview? ❏

moral disengagement

Discounting immoral behavior by invoking justifications, such as “This person deserved that,” or “It doesn't matter because this person isn't in my group.”

Socializing Moral Children

One antidote is to stimulate *theory of mind*—get children to empathize with people in pain who are not in their “tribe.” In one study, researchers told 6-year-olds to react to photos of an immigrant group they saw being victimized: “These

people are from another country and they have different ideas. How do you think they are feeling right now?" The children later shared more stickers with these outsiders, when instructed to empathize with their feelings of hurt (McLoughlin & Over, 2019).

How can we make children more prosocial in general, in their daily lives? Adopt a *mind-minded* parenting style — being alert to children's upset feelings ("Wow, you must feel hurt! What can I do to help?") (Eisenberg and others, 2019). Pay attention to prosocial behavior and attribute these acts to the child's personality — for instance, by saying, "This is incredible! You really are a caring person for doing that" (Eisenberg, 2003).

In a fascinating study, when researchers asked 8-year-olds to recall a time they acted in a generous way, their later behavior became more prosocial (Tasimi & Young, 2016). It was as if they mentally reminded themselves, "I remember how great I felt when I did that helpful thing. I *want* to feel that way again!"

Specifically, use a caregiving strategy called **induction** when a child has acted in a hurtful way (Hoffman, 1994, 2001). Imagine, for instance, that classic situation when your 8-year-old daughter has invited everyone in class but Sara to a birthday party. Instead of punishing your child — or giving that other classic response, "Kids will be kids" — say, "It's hurtful to leave Sara out. Think of how terrible she must feel!"

Induction has several virtues: It offers children immediate feedback about exactly what they did wrong and moves them away from focusing on their own punishment ("Now, I'm really going to get it!") to the *other* child's distress ("Oh, gosh, she must feel hurt"). Induction also allows for reparations, the chance to make amends. Induction works because it stimulates guilt.

Guilt and Prosocial Acts Think back to an event during childhood when you felt terrible about yourself. Perhaps it was the day you were caught cheating and sent to the principal. You probably felt angry and humiliated and wanted to strike back. But you also might have felt that important interpersonal emotion called **guilt**.

In order to feel guilty, children must be old enough to have a theory of mind, the capacity to empathize with another person's distress (which may be why Erikson used the term *guilt* in specifically describing his preschool task).

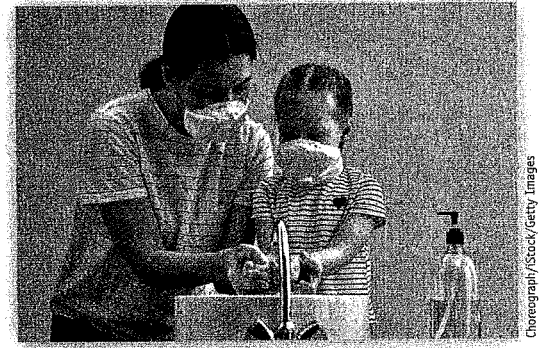
Guilt is painful because it makes us feel bad about ourselves. But it has important benefits. Researchers set up a situation in which they made elementary schoolers feel they had hurt another person and gave them the chance to make amends. The children who said they felt guilty were more likely to write a note of apology. They also felt good about themselves after reaching out in a caring way (Donohue & Tully, 2019).

Did having the courage to admit you acted insensitively ever make you feel proud of yourself? Did apologizing ever make you feel closer to someone you loved? ■■

Table 6.7 (on the next page) summarizes these sections' messages in four tips. Now that we have analyzed what makes us act morally (the angel side of personality), let's examine humanity's darker side, aggression.

Doing Harm: Aggression

Aggression refers to acts designed to cause harm, from shaming to shoving, from gossiping to starting wars. It should come as no surprise that physical aggression reaches its life peak at around age 2½ (Dodge, Coie, & Lynam, 2006; van Aken and others, 2008). Imagine being a toddler continually ordered by giants to do impossible things, such as sitting still. Because being frustrated provokes aggression, it



By encouraging her child to wash her hands and wear a mask during the COVID-19 pandemic, this mother is socializing an important prosocial message: "You are a wonderful, caring person for taking action to protect *other* people's health."

induction The ideal discipline style for socializing prosocial behavior, involving getting children who have behaved hurtfully to empathize with the pain they cause in other people.

guilt Feeling upset about harming others or about violating internal standards of behavior.

aggression Any hostile or destructive act.

Table 6.7: How to Produce Prosocial Children: A Summary Table

- Praise children lavishly when they are being generous, and label them as caring people. Keep reminding them of situations when they acted in a caring way.
- When children behave hurtfully, use induction, alerting them to how the other person must feel.
- When a child has done something wrong, try to stimulate guilt. Tell the child you are disappointed and offer chances to make amends.
- If you want your child to view the world as one human community, when you witness people of different ethnic groups being unfairly denigrated, encourage your son or daughter to empathize with their pain.

makes perfect sense that hitting and having tantrums are normal during the “terrible twos.”

As children get older and become skilled at regulating their emotions, typically rates of open aggression (yelling or hitting) decline (Girard and others, 2019; Jambon and others, 2019; O’Toole and others, 2019). During middle childhood, the reasons for aggression change. Preschool fights center on objects, such as toys. When children have a full-fledged sense of self-esteem, they strike out because they are wounded as human beings (Coie & Dodge, 1998). How do researchers categorize aggressive acts?

Types of Aggression

One way developmentalists classify aggression is by its motive. **Proactive aggression** refers to hurtful behavior that we initiate to achieve a goal. Johnny kicks Jorge to gain possession of the block pile. Sumi spreads a rumor about Moriah to replace her as Tegan’s best friend. **Reactive aggression** occurs in response to being hurt, threatened, or deprived. Jorge, infuriated at Johnny, kicks him back.

Its self-determined nature gives proactive aggression a “cooler,” more calculated emotional tone (see O’Toole and others, 2019). When we behave aggressively to get something, we plan our behavior. We feel a sense of self-efficacy as we carry out the act. Reactive aggression involves white-hot, disorganized rage. When you hear that your best friend has betrayed you, or even have a minor frustrating experience such as being caught in traffic, you may get furious and blindly lash out.

This feeling is normal. According to a classic theory called the *frustration-aggression hypothesis*, when human beings are thwarted, we are biologically primed to strike back.

In addition to its motive — proactive or reactive — developmentalists distinguish between different *forms* of aggression. Hitting and yelling are direct forms of aggression. A more devious type of aggression is **relational aggression**, acts designed to hurt relationships. Not inviting Sara to a birthday party, spreading rumors, or tattling on a disliked classmate all qualify as relationally aggressive acts.

Because it targets self-esteem and involves more sophisticated social skills, relational aggression follows a different developmental path than openly aggressive acts. Just as rates of open aggression are declining, relational aggression rises (Evans and others, 2019). In fact, the overabundance of relational aggression during late elementary school and early adolescence (another intensely frustrating time) may explain why we label these ages as the “meanest” times of life.

Most of us assume relational aggression is more common in girls. But, in research, this “obvious” relationship isn’t always found. Yes, overt aggression is severely sanctioned in women, so girls make relational aggression their major mode (Ostrov & Godleski, 2010; Smith, Rose, & Schwartz-Mette, 2010). But as spreading

proactive aggression Hostile or destructive acts carried out to achieve a goal.

reactive aggression Hostile or destructive acts carried out in response to being frustrated or hurt.

relational aggression Hostile or destructive acts designed to harm others’ relationships.



Excluding someone from your group is a classic sign of *relational aggression* — which really gets going in middle childhood. Were you ever the target of this behavior in fourth or fifth grade?

rumors and talking trash about competitors is vital to dethroning adversaries and climbing the social ranks, teenage boys are just as relationally aggressive as teenage girls (Casper, Card, & Barlow, 2020)!

Table 6.8 summarizes the different types of aggression and gives examples from childhood and adult life. While scanning the table, notice that we all behave in every aggressive way. Also, aggression is not “bad.” Proactive aggression, particularly the relational kind, helps children climb the social ranks (more about this in the next section). Without reactive aggression (fighting back when attacked), our species would never survive. Still, disorganized, rage-filled aggression doesn’t work. Excessive reactive aggression *ensures* that children will be unpopular with their peers (van den Berg, Burk, & Cillessen, 2019).

Understanding Highly Aggressive Children

You just saw that, during preschool, boys and girls typically get less physically aggressive. However, a percentage of children remain highly aggressive as they get older. A small minority get even more aggressive as they travel into elementary school (Girard and others, 2019). These children are labeled with externalizing disorders defined by high rates of aggression. They are classified as defiant, antisocial kids.

The Pathway to Producing Problematic Aggression Longitudinal studies suggest that there may be a poisonous nature-plus-nurture pathway to being labeled as a highly aggressive child.

Step 1: The toddler’s exuberant (or difficult) temperament evokes harsh discipline

When toddlers are impulsive and fearless, caregivers often react by using *power assertion*. They may shame, scream, and hit: “Shut up! You are impossible. You’ll

Table 6.8: Aggression: A Summary of the Types

What Motivated the Behavior?

Proactive aggression: Acts that are actively instigated to achieve a goal.

Examples: “I’ll hit Tommy so I can get his toys”; “I’ll cut off that car so I can get ahead of that driver”; “I want my boss’s job, so I’ll spread a rumor that she is having an affair.”

Characteristics: Emotionally cool and more carefully planned.

Reactive aggression: Acts that occur in response to being frustrated or hurt.

Examples: “Jimmy took my toy, so I’m going to hit him”; “That guy shoved me to take my place in line, so I’m going to punch that ***** out.”

Characteristics: Furious, disorganized, impulsive response.

What Was Its Form?

Direct aggression: Everyone can see it.

Examples: Telling your boyfriend you hate his guts; beating up someone; screaming at your mother; having a tantrum; bopping a playmate over the head with a toy.

Characteristics: Peaks at about age 2 or 3; declines as children get older; more common in boys than in girls, especially physical aggression.

Relational aggression: Carried out indirectly, through damaging or destroying the victim’s relationships.

Examples: “Lorena got a better grade than me, so I’m going to tell the teacher that she cheated”; “Let’s tell everyone not to let Jin play in our group”; “I want Alex’s job, so I’ll spread a rumor that they’re stealing money from the register.”

Characteristics: Occurs mainly during elementary school and may be at its peak during adolescence, although—as we know—it’s common *throughout* adulthood.

get a beating from mom.” But physically punishing a “difficult” toddler is apt to induce more rage (as I will describe in Chapter 7’s discussion of spanking); so, unfortunately, the very children who most need loving parenting often get the harshest, most punitive care.

Step 2: The child is rejected by teachers and peers in school Typically, the transition to being an “antisocial child” occurs during kindergarten or first grade. As impulsive, by now clearly aggressive, children travel outside the family, they get rejected by their classmates. Being socially excluded is a powerful stressor that provokes aggression (Evans and others, 2019). Moreover, because aggressive children tend to have poorer theory of mind and verbal skills (Jambon and others, 2019; Schubert and others, 2019), during elementary school they may start failing their classes (Romano and others, 2010). This amplifies the frustration (“I’m not making it in any area of life!”) and compounds the tendency to lash out (“It’s their fault, not mine!”).

A Hostile Worldview As I just implied, reactive-aggressive children also think differently in social situations. They may have a **hostile attributional bias** (Crick & Dodge, 1996). They see threat in benign social cues (Miller & Johnston, 2019). A boy gets accidentally bumped at the lunch table, and he sees a deliberate provocation. A girl decides that you are her enemy when she sees you laughing with her best friend. So the child’s behavior provokes a more hostile world.

To summarize, let’s enter the mind of a reactive-aggressive child, such as Adam in the chapter-opening vignette. During early childhood, your fearless temperament continually got you into trouble with your parents. You have been harshly disciplined for years. In school, your classmates shun you. So you never have a chance to interact with other children and improve your theory of mind skills. In fact, your hostile attributional bias makes perfect sense. You are living in a “sea of negativity” (Jenson and others, 2004). And yes, the world *is* out to get you!

hostile attributional bias

A tendency of unusually aggressive children to misread other people’s actions as threatening when they are actually benign.

Taming Excessive Aggression

When a child has an externalizing disorder, how should parents act? Avoid the punitive discipline style that exacerbates hostile attributional biases as boys and girls travel into their teens (Yaros, Lochman, & Wells, 2015). Vigorously socialize theory of mind and prosocial behavior using the strategies I have described.

Understand that — as with prosocial behavior — in promoting aggression, the wider world plays a crucial role. Children — for reasons to be explained in Chapter 7 — are unusually susceptible to catching aggression from their peers (Jung, Busching, & Krahé, 2019). Classroom atmospheres that promote bullying tend to provoke aggression in the most placid boys and girls. If infants are raised in violent neighborhoods, they may be infected by their chaotic surroundings despite having a wonderful family life (Miller & Tolan, 2019; Sattler and others, 2019).

But worried parents might use this longitudinal finding to take heart: The same sensation-seeking, risk-taking propensities that promote excessive childhood aggression can be assets during adult life. In an amazing decades-long study, when researchers measured temperament during infancy and then looked at a person’s personality during adulthood, the *one* quality that predicted being highly competent at age 40 was having been fearless during the first year of life (Blatny, Jelinek, & Osecka, 2007). So, a “difficult-to-tame” child may turn out to be an incredibly successful prosocial adult, with the right *person–environment fit*. ■■

Why are peer relationships so vital during middle childhood, and how exactly do older children relate? This brings me to the final topic in this chapter — relationships.



What was this incredibly brave prosocial soldier really like at age 1 or 2? Probably a fearless handful!

Tying It All Together

- You interviewed a 4-year-old and a fourth grader for your class project in child development, but mixed up your interview notes. Which statement was made by the 4-year-old?
 - “My friend Megan is better at math than me.”
 - “Sometimes I get mad at my friends, but maybe it’s because I’m too stubborn.”
 - “I have a cat named Kit, and I’m the smartest girl in the world.”
- Identify which of the following boys has internalizing or externalizing tendencies. Then, for one of these children, design an intervention: Ramon sees himself as wonderful, but he is having serious trouble getting along with his teachers and the other kids; Jared is a great student, but when he gets a B instead of an A, he decides that he’s “dumb” and gets too depressed to work.
- Hikari, a fourth grader, is faced with the dilemma of whether to stand up for a bullied classmate. Which consideration makes him *least* likely to reach out?
 - Hikari has the skills to help.
 - Hikari’s classmate is a good friend.
 - Hikari gets overwhelmed by distress when he sees anyone in pain.
- A teacher wants to intervene with a student who has been teasing a classmate. Identify which statement is guilt-producing and involves the use of induction. Then name which response(s) would promote prosocial behavior.
 - “Think of how bad Johan must feel.”
 - “If that’s how you act, you can sit by yourself. You’re not nice enough to be with the other kids.”
 - “I’m disappointed in you. You are usually such a good kid.”
- Alyssa wants to replace Brianna as Chloe’s best friend, so she spreads horrible rumors about Brianna. Brianna overhears Alyssa dissembling her and starts slapping Alyssa. Of the four types of aggression discussed in this section — *direct*, *proactive*, *reactive*, *relational* — which two describe Alyssa’s behavior, and which two fit Brianna’s actions?
- Mario feels that everyone in the fifth grade is out to get him. What is the label for Mario’s worldview?



SOMETHING TO CONSIDER: Middle Childhood: Socioemotional Development: Exploring Self-Esteem Distortions  Achieve

Social Development

What childhood talents foster peer success? Answers come from examining that core childhood relationship called friendship. Why do children choose specific friends, and what benefits do elementary school friendships provide?

Friendships: The Proving Ground for Relationships

Especially at the youngest ages, physical proximity drives friendships (Lieberman & Shaw, 2019). A child’s best friend is any person who lives around the block. Still, similar interests are important early on. In preschool, an active child will tend to make friends with a classmate who likes to run around. In the vignette at the beginning of this chapter, José and Matt probably connected over their love of chess.

But, since they are in concrete operations, José and Matt probably gravitated toward each other for deeper reasons, such as shared morals (“I like José because

Learning Outcomes

- Outline the different features of friendship and popularity.
- Explain which qualities make children “unpopular.”
- Describe why some rejected children can succeed in adult life.
- Summarize the bullying research.



Although they don't realize it, these 10-year-old best buddies bonding over their secrets and plans may be training each other in the skills to be happily married for life!

we both care about being nice and fair”) (McDonald and others, 2014; Spencer and others, 2013). And, as I've been stressing, with friendship, loyalty looms large (“I can trust José to stand up for me”) (Hartup & Stevens, 1997; Newcomb & Bagwell, 1995). Listen to these fifth graders describing their best friends:

He is my very best friend because he tells me things and I tell him things.

Jessica has problems at home and with her religion and when something happens she always comes to me and talks about it. We've been through a lot together.

(quoted in Rose & Asher, 2000, p. 49)

These quotations would resonate with the ideas of personality theorist Harry Stack Sullivan. Sullivan (1953) believed that a chum (or best friend) fulfills the developmental need for self-validation and intimacy that emerges at around age 9. Sullivan also felt that best friends serve as a vital training ground for adult romance.

The Protecting and Teaching Functions of Friends

In addition to teaching us how to behave in adult love relationships, friends stimulate children's personal development in two important ways.

Friends Protect and Enhance the Developing Self Perhaps you noticed this protective function in the quotation above, in which the fifth grader spoke about how she helped her best friend when she had problems at home. Close friends can mute children's genetic tendency toward developing depression (Reindl, Gniewosz, & Reinders, 2016) or help reduce the symptoms of ADHD (Becker, Fite, and others, 2013).

Friends Teach Us to Manage Our Emotions and Handle Conflicts Friends offer on-the-job training in being our “best” (that is, prosocial) self. Your parents will love you no matter what you do, but the love of a friend is contingent. So, to keep a friendship, children must dampen their immediate impulses and use their theory of mind skills to yield to the other person's needs (Bukowski, 2001; Denham and others, 2003).

This is not to say that friends are always positive influences. They can bring out a child's worst self by encouraging relational aggression (“We are best friends, so Krystyna can't play with us”) and dangerous behavior (“Let's walk together on these scary railroad tracks”).

Having friends doesn't prevent children from being lonely (Schwartz-Mette and others, 2020) — if elementary schoolers have low expectations that their friends will be there for them (Nowland and others, 2019), or feel jealous and insecure. High-quality *reciprocated friendships* promote well-being (Maunder & Monks, 2019).

And as Sullivan would predict, longitudinal studies *do* show that having a close best friend bodes well for adult romance (Schacter and others, 2019). Middle childhood friendships (not being popular) foreshadow adult mental health (Narr and others, 2019)!

Popularity: Rising in the Peer Ranks

The reason is that friendships require collaborating with a person one-to-one. Popularity involves different skills. Children must dominate their peers as they struggle to climb the social totem pole.

Although children differ in social status in preschool, we now understand why “Who is popular?” becomes an absorbing question during later elementary school. Entering concrete operations, as I discussed earlier, makes children passionate to compare themselves to peers. Moreover, during adulthood, popularity fades more into the background because we select our own social circles. In many cases, children’s *entire* social world may be limited to a confined classroom milieu.

Who Is Popular and Who Is Unpopular?

How do children vary in popularity during the socially stressful later elementary school years? Here are the categories researchers find when they ask third, fourth, or fifth graders to list the two or three classmates they really like and dislike:

- *Popular children* are frequently named in the most-liked category and never appear in the disliked group. They stand out as being really liked by everyone.
- *Average children* receive a few most-liked and perhaps one or two disliked nominations. They rank around the middle range of class status.
- *Rejected children* land in the disliked category often and never appear in the preferred list. They stand out among their classmates in a negative way.

What qualities make children popular? What gets elementary schoolers rejected by their peers?

Decoding Popularity

In elementary school, popular children are often friendly, outgoing, prosocial, and kind (Mayberry & Espelage, 2007). However, starting as early as third grade, popularity is linked to high levels of relational aggression, at least in the United States (Ostrov and others, 2013; Rodkin & Roisman, 2010).

Figure 6.3, based on a study conducted in an inner-city school, illustrates this unfortunate truth. Notice that relationally aggressive third to fifth graders were more apt to be rated as popular class leaders. But notice that the association between this poisonous kind of aggression and popularity was stronger for girls — which

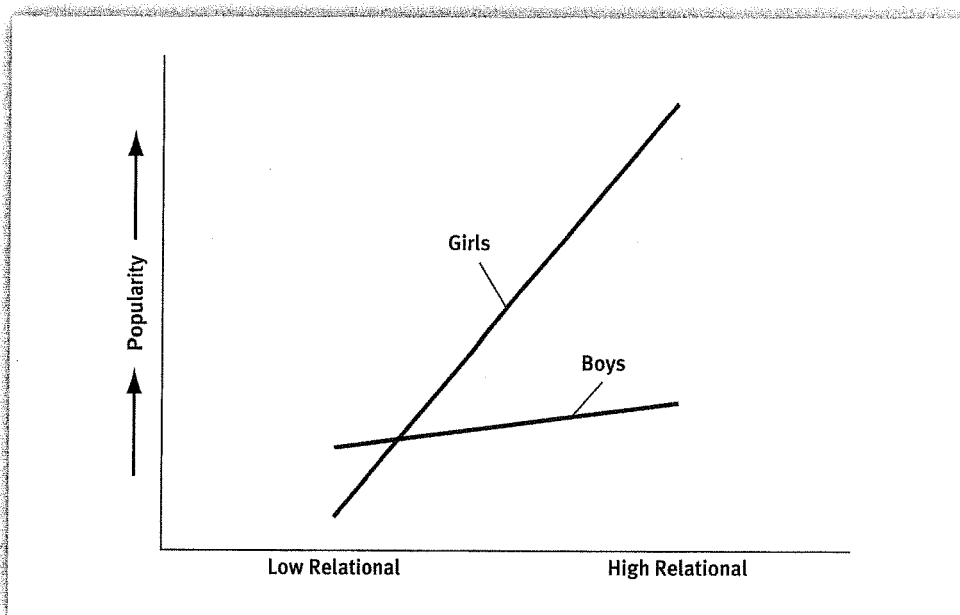


Figure 6.3: Relational aggression related to popularity among 227 elementary schoolers attending a low-income, urban school In this urban school, being relationally aggressive “worked” to make children — both boys and girls — more popular; but this type of aggression was far, far more often effective at promoting popularity among girls.

Data from Waasdorp and others, 2011

explains why we view relational aggression as mainly a female activity. Relational aggression earns girls more social mileage than boys.

Relational aggression is especially effective at propelling popularity during pre-adolescence, when rebellion is in flower and social status often becomes children's primary goal (Dumas, Davis, & Ellis, 2019; more about this in Chapter 9). The good news is that the study described in Table 6.9 shows that being "popular" is different from being personally liked.

When researchers asked fifth graders questions such as those in Table 6.9 and then tracked their later social status, boys and girls whose agenda was being popular (those agreeing with the green items, lines 4–6) did rise in the social ranks. But in sixth grade, the class preferred people with the blue agendas (lines 1–3) — children with prosocial goals. So reaching out in a caring way is important at every age if we look at what *really* matters: being liked as a human being.

Now let's focus on the fifth graders who checked the red items on the table (lines 7–9) — children terrified about socially goofing up. This socially anxious group became *more* unpopular over time (Rodkin and others, 2013). Who do peers reject?

Rejected Children Have Externalizing (and Often Internalizing) Problems

Actually, the traits that universally land a child in the rejected category are externalizing issues. Classmates shun boys and girls (like Adam in the chapter-opening vignette) who make reactive aggression a major life mode (van den Berg, Burk, & Cillessen, 2019). Children with internalizing disorders may or may not be rejected. However, a child who is *socially anxious* — such as Malik in the introductory vignette, or the fifth graders who agreed with the red items on Table 6.9 — is apt to be avoided as early as first grade (Degnan, Almas, & Fox, 2010).

Moreover, a poisonous nature-evokes-nurture interaction sets in when a child enters school extremely socially shy. As children realize that people are avoiding them, their shyness gets more intense. So they become less socially competent — and increasingly likely to be rejected (and, as you will see, victimized) — as they advance from grade to grade (Booth-LaForce & Oxford, 2008).

A *bidirectional* process is also occurring. The child's anxiety makes other children nervous and want to retreat. In response to your own awkward encounters, have you ever been tempted to walk in the opposite direction when you saw a shy person approaching in the hall?

Rejected Children Don't Fit in with the Dominant Group Children who stand out as different are also at risk of being rejected: boys who don't conform to

Table 6.9: Social Goals in Fifth Grade and How They Related to Peer Preferences a Year Later

1. I like it when I learn new ways to make a friend.
2. I try to figure out what makes for a good friend.
3. I try to get to know other kids better.
4. It's important to me that the other kids think I'm popular.
5. I want to be friendly with the popular kids.
6. It's important to me to have cool friends.
7. It's important to me that I don't embarrass myself around my friends.
8. When I am around other kids, I mostly just try not to goof up.
9. I try to avoid doing things that make me look foolish around other kids.

Information from Rodkin and others, 2013.

traditional gender stereotypes (Braun & Davidson, 2016); low-income children in middle-class schools (Zettergren, 2007); immigrant children; boys and girls with disabilities — any child who classmates label as “different” or “weird,” or “not like us” (see also Postigo and others, 2019).

Exploring the Fate of the Rejected

Is childhood rejection a prelude to poor adult mental health? The answer is sometimes. Unusually physically aggressive children are at risk for getting into trouble — at home, in school, and with the law — during adolescence and in their adult years (more about this pathway in Chapter 9). Being friendless during childhood predicts having psychological problems as a young adult (Sakyi and others, 2016).

Still, being rejected for being different can have surprising benefits. Consider an awkward little girl named Eleanor Roosevelt who was rejected at age 8 but ended her life as a revered First Lady and role model for women (and all human beings). To understand the fleeting quality of childhood peer status, you might organize a reunion of your fifth- or sixth-grade class. You might be surprised at how many unpopular classmates flowered during their high school or college years.

Bullying: Moral Disengagement in Action

[It's] mostly immigrants [who are rejected] / The quiet ones / The weak ones / The new ones . . . The retarded / The freaks / Those who don't dress well or look like an idiot . . .

[She] might be rejected, but because she is a very lonely girl . . .

(quoted in Postigo and others, 2019, p. 25)

Children who are different can triumph in the proving ground of life. This is not true on the proving ground of the playground. As you just read, being different, quiet, weak, or even feeling lonely and being new to school provokes **bullying** — being teased, made fun of, and verbally or physically abused by one's peers.

As I have implied, it's normal for children to be bullied as they strive for status. But the roughly 10 to 20 percent of children subject to chronic harassment fall into two categories. One type is **bully-victims** (Casper, Card, & Barlow, 2020). These children are highly aggressive boys and girls who bully, get harassed, then bully again in an escalating cycle of pain. The classic victim, however, has internalizing issues (Crawford & Manassis, 2011). These children are shy, low on the social hierarchy, and unlikely to fight back (Cook and others, 2010; Degnan and others, 2010; see the above quote and my personal confession in the Experiencing the Lifespan box on the next page).

Home used to be a refuge for children who were being harassed at school. Not anymore. Social media and smartphones have made bullying a 24/7 concern.

Cyberbullying, aggressive behavior carried out via electronic communication or social media, is more toxic than traditional bullying in several respects. Broadcasting demeaning comments via Instagram or Facebook ensures having a large, amorphous, enduring audience that multiplies the victim's distress. (“Everyone can see this!” “It's permanently online!” “Whenever I open my phone, I get traumatized again!”)



Although she didn't fit in with her snobbish, patrician childhood group, by standing up for racial equality and pressuring her husband (U.S. president Franklin D. Roosevelt) to admit Jewish refugees during the Holocaust, Eleanor Roosevelt, the U.S. post-World War II ambassador to the United Nations, became the social conscience of a nation.

bullying When children (or adults) harass or target a specific person for systematic abuse.

bully-victims Exceptionally aggressive children (with externalizing disorders) who repeatedly bully and get victimized.

cyberbullying Systematic harassment conducted online or via text.

Experiencing the Lifespan Middle-Aged Reflections on My Middle-Childhood Victimization

It was a hot August afternoon when the birthday present arrived. As usual, I was playing alone that day, maybe reading or engaging in a favorite pastime, fantasizing that I was a princess while sitting in a backyard tree. The gift, addressed to Janet Kaplan, was beautifully wrapped — huge but surprisingly light. This is amazing! I must be special! Someone had gone to such trouble for me! When I opened the first box, I saw another carefully wrapped box, and then another, smaller box, and yet another, smaller one inside. Finally, surrounded by ribbons and wrapping paper, I eagerly got to the last box and saw a tiny matchbox — which contained a small burnt match.

Around that time, the doorbell rang, and Cathy, then Ruth, then Carol, bounded up. “Your mother called to tell us she was giving you a surprise birthday party. We had to come over right away and be sure to wear our best dresses!” But their excitement turned to disgust when they learned that no party had been arranged. My ninth birthday was really in mid-September — more than a month away. It turned out that Nancy and Marion — the two most popular girls in class — had masterminded this relational aggression plot against me.

Why was I selected as the victim among the other third-grade girls? I had never hurt Nancy or Marion. In fact, in confessing their role, they admitted to some puzzlement: “We really don’t dislike Janet at all.” Researching this

chapter has offered me insights into the reasons for this 65-year-old wound.

Although I did have friends, I was fairly low in the classroom hierarchy. Not only was I shy, but I was that unusual girl—a child who genuinely preferred to play alone. But most important, I was the perfect victim. I have always disliked competitive status situations. When taunted or teased, I don’t fight back.

As an older woman, I still dislike status hierarchies and social snobberies. I’m not a group (or party) person. I far prefer talking one-to-one. I am happy to spend hours alone. Today, I consider these attributes a plus (after all, having no problem sitting by myself for many thousands of hours was a prime skill that allowed me to write this textbook!), but they caused me anguish in middle childhood. In fact, when I’m in status-oriented peer situations even today, I still find myself occasionally getting teased by the group!

P.S. I can honestly tell you that what happened to me in third grade is irrelevant to my life. I can’t help wondering, though: Suppose, as would be likely today, my classmates had been invited to my so-called birthday via social media: “Janet is having a party, and she is inviting X, Y, and Z.” Could being targeted through this humiliating, public venue have caused more enduring emotional scars?

Moreover, cyberbullying is emotionally easy to carry out, as it removes inner controls. Children can lash out free from feeling the sympathy (and guilt) linked to seeing a victim’s pained face. This inner freedom may explain why, although boys are more likely to bully in person, with cyberbullying the gender disparity tilts more toward girls (Smith and others, 2019).

Still, the same motives propel each type of harassment: Kids bully for revenge (as reactive aggression, or to get back at someone). Kids bully for recreation (it’s exciting and fun). Kids bully because this activity offers social rewards, or reinforcement from one’s peers (Postigo and others, 2019).

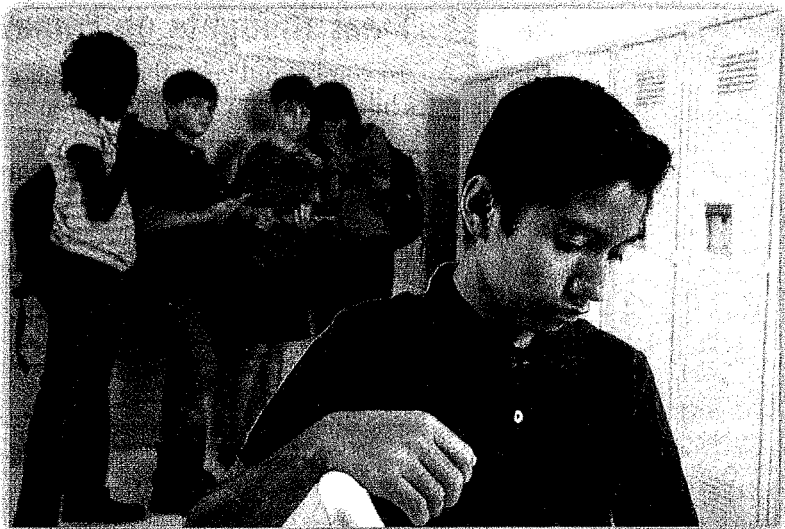
Actually, bullying — of any kind — demands an appreciative audience. One person (or a few people) does the harassing, while everyone else eggs on the perpetrator by laughing, reacting, posting similar comments, or passively standing by.

What forces at school promote **bystander behavior** — not intervening or egging a bully on? Bullying, as you might suspect, is common in hierarchical classes where popularity is prized (Troop-Gordon and others, 2019). Inequality of status is a red flag. Are a few kids very popular, and the rest of the class left socially far behind (Laninga-Wijnen and others, 2019)? Bullying is prevalent when students have a low level of trust in their school (Teng and others, 2020). It’s more apt to erupt in smaller classes — perhaps because in these suffocating, confined places, hierarchies become rigid and intense (Garandean and others, 2019).

bystander behavior Applauding or passively watching as someone is being victimized, and so encouraging a bully’s behavior.

What provokes the courage to abandon the bystander role? A basic prerequisite is moral distress, believing that targeting this particular classmate — or bullying — is ethically wrong (Gini, Thornberg, & Pozzoli, 2020). Children are more likely to defend a victim when they don't prioritize being popular. It's harder to intervene when the bully perpetrator is a member of the popular group (Pouwels, van Noorden, & Caravita, 2019). Therefore, taking a *developmental systems approach*, adopting this heroic stance, depends on both our personal attributes and wider context of life.

Table 6.10 summarizes these points and other chapter insights in a “Should I stand up to a bully?” questionnaire. Let's end this chapter by scanning programs tailored to combating bullying at school.



What might cause one of these children to intervene as this classmate is being bullied? The answer, as you can see in the text, depends on complex forces.

Blocking Bullying

In the classic, widely used Olweus Bully Prevention Program, administrators plan a school assembly to discuss bullying early in the year. Then they form a bullying-prevention committee composed of children from each grade. Teachers and students are on high alert for bullying in their classes. The goal is to develop a schoolwide norm to not tolerate peer abuse (Olweus, Limber, & Mihalic, 1999).

Do this program and the many bully-prevention programs now in operation work? Not always very well (Gage, Rose, & Kramer, 2019). Because bullying and its evil twin, relational aggression, are such potent ways to gain status, this activity is hard to control.

In writing this chapter, I'm thinking that one reason some anti-bullying programs may be less than effective is that they teach this lesson in an arid, academic way. Administrators exhort students, “Don't bully. It's mean.” They don't address the structural issues I mentioned and, worse yet, encourage boys and girls to tell on their relationally aggressive (bully) friends. ■■

Developmental Psychology Videos

Bullying

In this video, you will explore the origins and types of bullying behavior and consider the effectiveness of anti-bullying programs. Achieve

Table 6.10: “Should I Stand up to a Bully?” Research-Based Summary Considerations

(red items 1, 5, 8 = likely to defend a victim; gray items = likely to remain a bystander)

Classroom Considerations

1. Is my school supportive and caring?
2. Is my class very hierarchical, with a few very popular kids?
3. Is the bully who is doing the harassing in the popular group?
4. Is my class very small?

Personal/Individual Considerations

5. Do I believe that what is happening is morally wrong?
6. Do I care deeply about being popular?
7. Do I think this victim is unworthy of my help, or deserves what they get?
8. Is the victim my good friend?
9. Is the bully my good friend?

Final Thoughts on Empathy and Sympathy

To combat bullying, the research earlier in this chapter suggests that we encourage children to empathize (and then sympathize) with victims firsthand. That's why personally viewing George Floyd's death on that viral video during the summer of 2020 brought home a basic prosocial lesson to the world: "Hurting *any* fellow human being is wrong."

How can schools and communities instill this prosocial message, given that competition, status, and bullying are also "basic" to being human beings? Stay tuned for information in Chapter 7.

Tying It All Together

1. Best friends in elementary school (pick false statement): *support each other/have similar values/encourage prosocial behavior.*
2. Describe in a sentence the core difference between being well-liked and being popular.
3. Which child is *not* at risk of being rejected in late elementary school?
 - a. Miguel, a very shy boy
 - b. Nicholas, who lashes out in rage at other kids
 - c. Elaine, who is relationally aggressive
4. Based specifically on this chapter's points, design your own anti-bullying program.

Answers to the Tying It All Together quizzes can be found at the end of this chapter.

SUMMARY

Setting the Context

Piaget and Erikson view **middle childhood** as the life stage when we first become adult. Concrete operations allows children to go beyond their immediate impressions and think abstractly. During middle childhood, we learn that the key to success lies in industry, managing our impulses, and working for what we want.

Physical Development

All the achievements of middle childhood are made possible by our mammoth, slow-growing **frontal lobes**. During this life stage, motor skills expand; but, because children no longer play outside, the average elementary school child today is less physically competent than in the past. Children who are well coordinated tend to be more physically active. Parents can stimulate motor skills by sharing physical activities and not micromanaging their daughters and sons. But **childhood obesity** sets boys and girls up for a more difficult life, and having a high preschool **BMI** predicts lifetime weight struggles.

Cognitive Development

Information-processing theory allows us to understand how industry locks in. In this perspective, material is processed

through **working memory** in order to be recalled at a subsequent time. As children get older, working memory bin capacity dramatically expands, which explains why children reach concrete operations at age 7 or 8. Our ability to keep other people's perspectives in mind explains why theory-of-mind capacities improve through adolescence. Exercise and relating to older siblings help promote working memory during the preschool years.

Executive functions—the ability to think through our actions and manage our cognitions—dramatically improve during middle childhood. Children become adept at **rehearsal**, **selective attention**, and inhibiting their immediate responses. The research on executive functions provides a wealth of insights that parents and teachers can use in real life.

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), the most common childhood disorder in the United States, causes widespread problems at home and school. This condition, usually diagnosed in elementary school (more often among boys), can have many pathways and causes. Treatments involve medication, training for parents and children, and providing white noise, exercise, and high-intensity games. The dramatic rise in contemporary Western ADHD diagnoses could be partly a product of a poor child-environment fit.

Emotional Development

Emotion regulation, the ability to manage and control our feelings, is crucial to having a successful life. Children with **externalizing tendencies** often “act out” their emotions and behave aggressively. Children with **internalizing tendencies** have problems managing intense fear. Both temperamental tendencies, at their extreme, cause childhood problems.

Self-awareness changes dramatically as children move into middle childhood. Concrete operational children think about themselves in psychological terms, accurately scan their abilities, and evaluate themselves in comparison with peers. These realistic self-perceptions explain why **self-esteem** normally declines during elementary school. Relationships, academics, behavior, sports, and looks are the five areas from which elementary school children derive their self-esteem.

Children with externalizing tendencies minimize their difficulties with other people and may have unrealistically high self-esteem. Children with internalizing tendencies may develop **learned helplessness**, the feeling that they are incapable of doing well. Two keys to promoting self-esteem in every child are enhancing self-efficacy and constructing a culture where every boy and girl can succeed.

Prosocial behaviors and morality seem built into our human biology but differ from child to child. There also is consistency, with prosocial preschoolers tending to be prosocial later on. Girls are more apt to comfort victimized children, but women are not necessarily more prosocial than men. Each gender acts prosocially in its own distinctive way.

Behaving prosocially involves transforming **empathy** (directly experiencing another’s feelings) into **sympathy** (feeling for another person), and feeling able to effectively provide aid. Two considerations that drive prosocial behaviors are “Does this person deserve my help?” and “Is this person a friend?” Both tendencies, while understandable, can foster **moral disengagement**, turning a blind eye to the pain of other groups. To encourage a more universal moral sense, get children to personally sympathize with the feelings of “different” human beings, praise prosocial acts, label these acts as part of the child’s basic personality, and use **induction** (get a child who has behaved hurtfully to understand the other person’s feelings). Induction helps stimulate prosocial behavior because it induces **guilt**.

Aggression, or hurtful behavior, is also basic to being human. Rates of overt aggression (hitting, yelling) decline as children get older and are replaced by less openly aggressive acts. **Proactive aggression** is hurtful behavior we initiate. **Reactive aggression**

occurs in response to being frustrated or hurt. **Relational aggression** refers to acts designed to damage social relationships. Relational aggression reaches a peak during late elementary school and adolescence and is present in girls and boys. High levels of reactive aggression provoke unpopularity at any age.

A two-step pathway may produce a highly aggressive child. When toddlers are very active (exuberant) and have trouble regulating their emotions, caregivers respond harshly and punitively—causing anger and aggression. Then, during school, the child’s “bad” behavior provokes social rejection, which leads to more reactive aggression. Highly aggressive children may have a **hostile attributional bias**. This “the world is out to get me” outlook is understandable because aggressive children may have been living in a rejecting environment since their earliest years.

To help highly aggressive elementary schoolers, avoid harsh punishment and cultivate theory of mind skills. Understand that aggression is also fostered by living in a toxic neighborhood and school. Acting-out, risk-taking girls and boys can flourish if they find the right environment as adults.

Social Development

Friendships, those close one-to-one relationships, become vital during elementary school. In childhood (and adulthood), we select friends who are similar and look for qualities such as loyalty and common moral worldviews. Friends provide emotional support and teach children how to have fulfilling love relationships during adult life.

Popularity is different from friendships because this activity involves competing to rise in the peer ranks. While relational aggression helps children climb the popularity totem pole, being kind causes children to be well-liked. Rejected children are disliked—either because of serious externalizing or internalizing problems, or because they are different from the group. Although unpopular, friendless children are at risk for later emotional problems, children who are rejected for being different may excel as adults.

Children who are unpopular are vulnerable to chronic **bullying**, whether they are aggressive **bully-victims** or shy, anxious children. The anonymous, 24/7 public nature of **cyberbullying** makes this behavior more toxic than face-to-face harassment. Because bullying depends on peer reinforcement, combatting **bystander behavior** is vital. Having the courage to stand up and defend a victim is promoted by complex external and personal forces. To act morally in real life, it’s important to personally experience sympathy when you see other human beings in pain.

KEY TERMS

aggression, p. 177	cyberbullying, p. 185	hostile attributional bias, p. 180	prosocial behavior, p. 174
attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), p. 169	emotion regulation, p. 171	induction, p. 177	reactive aggression, p. 178
body mass index (BMI), p. 165	empathy, p. 175	internalizing tendencies, p. 171	rehearsal, p. 167
bullying, p. 185	executive functions, p. 167	learned helplessness, p. 172	relational aggression, p. 178
bully-victims, p. 185	externalizing tendencies, p. 171	middle childhood, p. 163	selective attention, p. 167
bystander behavior, p. 186	frontal lobes, p. 164	moral disengagement, p. 176	self-awareness, p. 171
childhood obesity, p. 165	guilt, p. 177	proactive aggression, p. 178	self-esteem, p. 171
			sympathy, p. 175
			working memory, p. 166

ANSWERS TO Tying It All Together QUIZZES

Physical Development

1. Our abilities to transcend immediate appearances and control our emotions to work for a goal make middle childhood (and humanity) special.
2. Marissa's *motor* cortex is on an earlier developmental timetable than her *frontal* lobes.
3. (c) Parents used to be less micromanaging or heavily involved.
4. Excellent childhood motor skills are *not very important* in adult fitness.
5. False; it's difficult to manage obesity with diet and exercise.

Cognitive Development

1. Answers are up to the students, but examples should center on not being able to focus on something that requires careful attention, and reacting impulsively when a child should be able to inhibit her responses.
2. Don't put your son in demanding situations that involve time management. When he studies, provide "white" background noise. Use small immediate reinforcers,

such as prizes for good behavior that day. Get your son involved in sports or playing exciting games. Avoid power assertion (yelling and screaming), and go out of your way to provide lots of love.

3. Bakari might mention the fact that boys are more often diagnosed with this disorder and that exercise mutes the symptoms of this condition. Each phenomenon suggests that, rather than being an internal, biological "problem," ADHD results from a poor childhood-environment fit.

Emotional Development

1. (c) This child has clearly not left the preoperational bubble.
2. Ramon = externalizing tendencies; Jared = internalizing tendencies. *Suggested intervention for Ramon:* Point out his realistic problems ("You are having trouble in X, Y, Z areas"), but cushion criticisms with plenty of love. *Suggested intervention for Jared:* Continually point out reality ("No one can always get As; in fact, you are a fabulous student"). Get Jared to identify his "hopeless and helpless" ways of thinking, and train him to substitute more accurate perceptions.



3. (c) Being overwhelmed by distress makes people less likely to reach out prosocially.
 4. (a) induction, good for promoting prosocial behavior; (b) shame, bad strategy; (c) guilt, good for promoting prosocial behavior
 5. Alyssa = proactive, relational; Brianna = direct, reactive
 6. Mario has a hostile attributional bias.
4. Based on this chapter, my anti-bullying program would focus on getting children to use their theory of mind skills to encourage them to sympathetically identify with a victim's pain. I would try to change the class structure to discourage fixed popularity hierarchies and increase everyone's sense of trust in the school. I'd be forthright about discussing the issues that prevent intervening to help: being loyal to friends, needing to be popular, seeing victims as deserving what they get. I'd use the children as real mind-minded collaborators to brainstorm ways of counteracting these natural impediments to taking a stand. It also might be helpful to have children "remember" how good they felt about themselves when they did act prosocially in the past.

Social Development

1. The final choice is incorrect as best friends can encourage negative behavior.
2. Being popular demands being aggressive and competitive—qualities that may not make children well-liked by peers.
3. (c) Unfortunately, relationally aggressive children are popular.

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