

HOW DO CHILDREN LEARN ?

Felicitas Kort
<http://www.felicitaskort.com>

Education is a complex art. Children require protection, not suffocation, training in diverse skills without overwhelming, becoming self-aware and sensitive to others, and acting with self-efficacy and cooperation.

Learning occurs in different ways.

I OBSERVATION

This kind of learning is by simple imitation. While observing behaviors and emotions of others, a child will repeat what is seen or heard. New behaviors can occur sometimes immediately when there is a person who acts a behavior which is easy to imitate.

Symbolic modeling refers to watching models perform in videos or movies, and “in vivo” modeling is observing a live person acting or a friend, relative or parent who act behaviors which the child wishes to imitate.

Furthermore modeling combined with guided practice requires a lot of stimulation, yet it can be very successful. A typical example of participant modeling in the case of a dog phobia. The therapist and the child hold hands while the dog is 15 steps away. The therapist asks the child to walk 5 steps toward the dog while holding hands. Then they stop. The therapist asks the child to remain with eyes closed and relax as much as possible while standing. Then, the therapist asks the child to look at the dog while the therapist walks toward the dog and touches his head. These scenes are repeated a few times until the child walks towards the dog and touches his head.

At all times the child has the option to terminate these approximations to the dog. Also, the therapist continuously reinforces the new approaching behavior with words such as “good” “you’re doing fine”. “continue” “you can do it”

II INSTRUCTIONS

It is best to vary instructions instead of repeating them over and over again. The latter makes learning rigid and boring. Attention is necessary in the learning process, as is memory. Common styles of attention are:

Selective attention is the ability to discriminate a positive stimulus vs. a negative stimulus, this style of attention is needed for varied kinds of learning.

Overexclusive attention refers to the reactions of a small child who pays attention to movements and novelty.

Overinclusive attention occurs when children go to school and are exposed to multiple stimuli which will help to cope with the environment.

For example a distracted child can be guided to pay attention using the following steps:

- Place the child in the appropriate posture.
- Let the face and superior part of the body face the parent/teacher and the stimuli.
- Teach the child to keep hands next to the legs while a story is read, and while a group is singing.
- Teach the child to raise a finger to express opinions or ask questions.

III CONSEQUENCES

Designing contingencies – consequences- for reinforcing positive behaviors at school, at home, at social activities is essential.

Positive reinforcement refers to a natural need for approval and follows the pleasure principle. Three types of reinforcing appropriate behaviors are:

- a) - tangible reinforcements (stickers, stamps, happy faces, small gifts)
- b) -verbal or non-verbal social approval
 - statements of approval based upon what the child is doing

Measuring behavior helps to understand whether or not a change is warranted. For. For example, a parent can keep track of progress by marking on a calendar or phone the number of toys picked up each day at bedtime:

Monday 5 Tuesday 7 Wednesday 8 Thursday 5 Friday 7 Sunday 8

At the end of the week a child gets a positive consequence for picking up toys depending on his age and the parent's criteria of what the child enjoys.

This approach aims to promote children's development and behavior in a constructive

and non-hurtful way. Good communication and positive attention help to develop children's skills, makes children feel good about themselves, and less likely to occur behavior problems.

Small children need a safe play environment, a safety proof home means putting dangerous things out of reach, using gates to block entry to hazardous parts of the house. A home with good supervision and interesting things to do stimulates children curiosity as well as their language and intellectual development. It also reduces the likelihood of misbehavior.

Problems arise when expectations are too high or too soon. For example, children have to be always polite, always tidy. Children make mistakes and do not have to be perfect. This also applies to parents who should avoid aiming to become a perfect parent, since this will only lead to feelings of inadequacy and frustration.

To develop a positive relationship with your children, conversations should be based upon things they are interested in, show physical affection (holding, cuddling, kissing, tickling), notice and praise good behaviors, provide engaging activities and spend quality time several times a day, rather than longer periods of time.

Parenting does not mean that children dominate the lives of parents, although it is important to be patient, consistent and available, parents need time alone, and recreation and companionship.