Chapter Preview

This chapter brings to a close the unit on middle childhood. We have seen that from ages 6 to 11, the child becomes stronger and more competent, mastering the biosocial and cognitive abilities that are important in his or her culture. Psychosocial accomplishments are equally impressive.

The first section explores the growing social competence of children, as described by Erikson and Freud. The section continues with a discussion of the growth of social cognition and self-understanding. The section closes with a discussion of the ways in which children cope with stressful situations.

The next section explores the ways in which families influence children, including the experience of living in single-parent, stepparent, extended, and blended families. Although no particular family structure guarantees optimal child development, income and harmony and stability are important factors in the quality of family functioning.

Children’s interactions with peers and others in their ever-widening social world is the subject of the third section. Although the peer group often is a supportive, positive influence on children, some children are rejected by their peers or become the victims of bullying.

Because middle childhood is also a time of expanding moral reasoning, the final section examines Kohlberg’s stage theory of moral development, as well as current evaluations of his theory.

What Have You Learned?

The “What Have You Learned?” questions at the end of the text chapter are reprinted here for your convenience in checking students’ understanding of the chapter contents.

1. How do Erikson’s stages for school-age children and for preschool children differ?
2. Why is social comparison particularly powerful during middle childhood?
3. Why do cultures differ in how they value pride or modesty?
4. How does the accumulation of minor stresses compare to the impact of a major stress?
5. What factors help a child become resilient despite severe early stresses?
6. Why does research on nonshared environments not prove that parents are irrelevant?
7. Which of the five family functions is most difficult for divorcing parents?
8. What is the difference between family function and family structure?
9. Why might poverty be harder for school-age children than for children of other ages?
10. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a stepparent family?
11. Why is a safe, harmonious home particularly important during middle childhood?
12. Which of the five family functions is particularly difficult for single parents?
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13. Does the increase in single parents mean that more children will have a difficult childhood? Why or why not?
14. What is the evidence that school-age children benefit from continuity?
15. What are the advantages and disadvantages for children in an extended family?
16. How does the disapproval of tattletales affect bullies and victims?
17. How do children’s games reflect the culture of children?
18. Did children’s clothing in your primary school reflect the culture of children? Explain.
19. How is a child’s popularity affected by culture?
20. What is the difference between being a bully and being a bully-victim?
21. Who is best able to stop a bully and why—victim, teacher, another child?
22. What are the main criticisms of Kohlberg’s theory of moral development?
23. How do children’s conversations impact their moral reasoning?
24. Why don’t children always accept the moral standards of their parents?

Chapter Guide

“On Your Own” Activities: Developmental Fact or Myth? Portfolio Assignment
AV: The Journey Through the Life Span, Program 5: Middle Childhood; Transitions Throughout the Life Span, Program 13: A Society (Culture) of Children; Middle Childhood: Social and Emotional Development
Teaching Tip: Text Messaging During Class Impairs Comprehension
Classroom Activities: Incorporating Media Literacy Into Your Course; Busing, Charter Schools, and Government-Funded School Vouchers

I. The Nature of the Child

Instructional Objective: To describe theoretical views of psychosocial development during middle childhood, highlighting the importance of advancing competencies.

1. Erikson viewed middle childhood as a time for learning with devoted attention and perseverance when children face the crisis of industry versus inferiority. As children strive to develop competence, they correspondingly come to view themselves as either productive and industrious or inadequate and inferior.
2. According to Freud, middle childhood is a period of latency, during which emotional drives are quiet and unconscious sexual conflicts are submerged.
3. Current research on development during middle childhood focuses on the child’s tendency to engage in social comparison, the fact that the child’s self-concept is no longer tied to the parent’s perspective, and the increase in self-criticism and self-consciousness.
4. Academic and social competence are aided by children’s more realistic self-perception. However, high self-esteem reduces effortful control and thus may lower achievement and increase aggression. Self-esteem is not universally valued; some cultures expect children to be modest.
5. Some children cope with and overcome stress better than others. Resilience is a “dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity.”
6. Accumulated stresses over time, including minor ones, are more devastating than an isolated major stress.
7. In general, a child’s interpretation of a family situation determines how that situation affects him or her. Some children can’t wait to leave childhood behind. Other children
feel responsible for whatever happens in their family; the result is *parentification*—the children feel they must take care of the parents and younger children.

8. Important elements that help children deal with problems are the social support they receive from friends, relatives, and pets, and their religious faith and practice.

II. Families and Children

*Instructional Objective:* To help students understand the different family functions and structures and that children can adapt to many different conditions.

- AV: The History of Parenting Practices; The Essentials of Discipline: The Middle Years
- Classroom Activities: Cooperative (Parental) Alliance and the Binuclear Family; Problem-Based Learning: Family Structure and Parenting
- “On Your Own” Activities: Genograms; Children’s Work at Home

1. There is an ongoing debate between those who believe that genes, peers, and communities are more important influences on children’s psychosocial development and those who believe that a child’s parents are much more powerful. *Nonshared* influences on most traits are far greater than *shared* influences. Even so, all researchers agree that both nature and nurture are important.

2. *Family function* refers to how well the family nurtures its children to develop their full potential. Families that function well nurture school-age children in five essential ways: by providing material necessities, encouraging learning, helping them to develop self-respect, nurturing peer friendships, and providing an environment of harmony and stability.

3. *Family structure* refers to the legal and genetic relationships among members of a particular family. Harmony and stability are especially crucial during middle childhood. Family structures today include *extended, nuclear, single-parent,* blended, adoptive, *polygamous,* stepparent, grandparents alone, same-sex, and adoptive. Children can thrive in just about any family structure. Every family type is affected by ethnicity, nationality, and culture.

4. Two factors that have a crucial impact on children are family income and the warmth or conflict that characterizes family interaction. According to the *family-stress model,* economic hardship in a family makes adults more hostile and harsh toward their partners and children. Ideally, parents work cooperatively in a parental alliance.

III. The Peer Group

*Instructional Objective:* To help students appreciate the impact that peers and the social environment have on psychosocial development during middle childhood.

- AV: The Child’s Personality; Friends and Foes: Peers in Development; All in a Summer Day; Close Harmony
- Teaching Tip: Peer-Group Interactions

1. Children learn lessons from peers that adults cannot teach. The *culture of children* includes the rules and rituals that children understand and pass down from older children to younger children.

2. Personal friendship is more important to school-age children than is acceptance by the peer group.

3. As children grow older, friendships become more important, more intense, and more intimate. Those in middle childhood tend to choose best friends whose backgrounds, interests, and values are similar to their own.

4. Some children are simply neglected, not really rejected. Children who are actively rejected—who are unpopular most of the time—can be classified as either *aggressive-rejected* or *withdrawn-rejected.*

5. *Aggressive-rejected* children are antagonistic and confrontational; *withdrawn-rejected* children are timid, withdrawn, and anxious. Both types of children misinterpret social situations, lack emotional regulation, and are likely to be mistreated at home.
6. Several researchers believe that social cognition is the crucial difference between accepted children and rejected children. Well-liked children have prosocial skills.

Observational Activity: Gender Roles and Aggression on TV

7. Researchers define bullying as repeated, systematic attempts to harm a weaker person. Bullying may be physical, verbal, or relational. Cyberbullying is a particularly devastating form of relational bullying. Bullying during middle childhood seems to be universal.

8. Withdrawn-rejected children tend to be particularly vulnerable to bullying. Aggressive-rejected children may also become victims, called bully-victims (or provocative-victims).

9. Most bullies have a few admiring friends and are socially perceptive.

10. Boys tend to use physical aggression and girls tend to use verbal aggression.

11. The origins of bullying may lie in a brain abnormality or in a genetic predisposition; these are then strengthened by insecure attachment, a stressful home life, ineffective discipline, hostile siblings, and other problems that intensify aggressive impulses rather than teach effortful control.

12. One intervention that has proven to be effective in halting bullying is to change the social climate within schools (the whole-school strategy), so that students and teachers learn ways to stop bullying attacks whenever they see them occur. It is critical that the program be evaluated on an ongoing basis.

IV. Children’s Moral Codes

Instructional Objective: To explore moral reasoning during middle childhood.

AV: Moral Development
► Classroom Activities: The Process of Moral Reasoning; Using Robert Cormier’s Novel to Teach Moral Development
► Critical Thinking Activity: Moral Reasoning Dilemma

1. Many forces drive children’s growing interest in moral issues, including peer culture, personal experience, and empathy.

2. Kohlberg studied moral reasoning by telling hypothetical stories that pose ethical dilemmas to children, adolescents, and adults. In examining the responses to these dilemmas, he found three levels of moral reasoning, with two stages at each level.

I. Preconventional: Emphasis on getting rewards and avoiding punishments.
   Stage One: “Might makes right.”
   Stage Two: “Look out for number one.”

II. Conventional: Emphasis on social rules.
   Stage Three: “Good girl” and “nice boy.”
   Stage Four: “Law and order.”

III. Postconventional: Emphasis on moral principles.
   Stage Five: Social contract.
   Stage Six: Universal ethical principles.

3. Kohlberg’s theory has been criticized for failing to take into account each culture’s distinctive morals and values and for ignoring gender differences in moral reasoning. Kohlberg also did not seem to recognize the shift from adult to peer values.

4. Three common values among 6- to 11-year-olds are protect your friends, don’t tell adults what is happening, and don’t be too different from your peers.