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Chapter Preview

In the first chapter of this unit on the school years, we have seen that from ages 7 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 Freud and Erikson. 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, and blended families. Although no particular family structure guarantees optimal child development, income levels 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.

Learning Objectives

After completing their study of Chapter 8, students should be able to:

1. Identify the themes and emphases of the psychoanalytic views regarding the psychosocial development of school-age children.
3. Discuss the concept of resilience, and identify the variables that influence the impact of stresses on school-age children.
4. Discuss several factors that seem especially important in helping children cope with stress.
5. Identify the essential ways in which functional families nurture school-age children.
6. Describe the relative influences of shared and nonshared environmental factors on school-age children.

7. Differentiate 10 family structures.

8. Discuss the impact of the different family structures and functions on the psychosocial development of the school-age child.

9. Explain how low income and high conflict can interfere with good family functioning.

10. Discuss the importance of peer groups to the development of school-age children, focusing on how the culture of children separates itself from adult society.

11. Discuss how friendships change during the school years.

12. Discuss the plight of two types of rejected children.

13. Discuss the special problems of bullies and their victims, and describe possible ways of helping such children.

14. Outline Kohlberg’s stage theory of moral development, noting some criticisms.

Chapter Guide

I. The Nature of the Child (pp. 272–279)

*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. Children develop *effortful control*, consciously attempting to master social interactions and emotions. At this time children face the crisis of *industry versus inferiority*. As children strive to develop competence in the skills valued by their culture, 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 and sexual conflicts are quiet. This relative calm allows children to put their efforts into acquiring cognitive skills and assimilating cultural values.

3. Current researchers on development during middle childhood focus on the child’s tendency to engage in *social comparison*, in which the child no longer ties his or her self-concept to the parent’s perspective and exhibits increasing materialism, self-criticism, and self-consciousness.

4. If self-esteem is too low or too high, it may produce less effortful control, which can lead to lower achievement and increased 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. Children who are *resilient* have a greater capacity to adapt well and overcome serious stress despite significant adversity.

6. Minor stressors can accumulate if they are ongoing, especially under stressful living conditions.

7. 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. A recent focus has been on the strengths within the child and community that together enable a child to thrive in difficult circumstances.

II. Families and Children (pp. 280–290)

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

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 basic necessities, encouraging learning, helping them to develop self-respect, nurturing peer friendships, and providing an environment of harmony and stability.

3. Family functioning can break down, such as in the case of divorce or separation. If this occurs during times of transition for children, such as entering into kindergarten or middle school, children can lose the harmony and stability they need.

4. **Family structure** refers to the legal and genetic relationships among members of a particular family. Family structures today include nuclear, blended, single-parent, extended, polygamous, adoptive, stepparent, grandparents alone, homosexual, and foster. Children can thrive in just about any family structure. Every family type is affected by culture.

5. Although the nuclear family is still the most common family structure, more than one-fourth of all school-age children live in single-parent households. This is the dominant family structure among African Americans and some other ethnic communities. Children in single-mother families are at greatest risk. Parents in a nuclear family tend to be wealthier, better educated, healthier, and less hostile than other parents.

6. Two factors that have a crucial impact on children are family income and the warmth or conflict that characterizes family interaction. This latter factor explains why blended families are problematic for many children. According to the family-stress model, economic hardship in a family makes adults more tense and hostile with their children. Ideally, parents work cooperatively in a parental alliance.

7. Every family transition affects the children, especially in middle childhood where continuity is preferred. Major transitions, such as moving homes is a major stress for school-age children, and can result in drug use, quitting school, and other negative consequences.

8. One study showed that the most important correlate with children’s problems was the children’s feelings of self-blame or vulnerability. When a child feels responsible for whatever happens in his or her family, the result is parentification—the child feels he or she must take care of the parents and younger children.

III. The Peer Group (pp. 291–297)

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

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. Although adults don’t always approve of peer influence, children choose peers who are compatible. The culture of children does not necessarily mirror the values of adults, and its values differ by culture.

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

4. 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.

5. What determines popularity in children varies by culture.

6. Several researchers believe that social cognition is the crucial difference between accepted children and rejected children. Well-liked children have an ability to understand social interactions and have greater prosocial skills.
7. Some children are simply neglected, not really rejected (ignored but not shunned). Children who are actively rejected—who are unpopular most of the time—can be classified as either aggressive-rejected or withdrawn-rejected.

8. 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.

9. Researchers define bullying as repeated, systematic attempts to harm a child through physical, verbal, or social attack. Most bullies have a few admiring friends and are socially perceptive. Bully-victims tend to be withdrawn-rejected children, sometimes are aggressive-rejected children.

10. Boy bullies tend to use physical aggression and girl bullies tend to use relational 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, hostile siblings, and ineffective discipline.

12. Successful interventions to halt bullying involve: 1) changing the social climate within schools, not just identifying bullies (the whole-school strategy), 2) intervening in earlier grades, and 3) evaluating results of the intervention.

IV. Morality in Middle Childhood (pp. 298–302)

Instructional Objective: To explore moral reasoning during middle childhood.

1. Children are more likely to behave prosocially during middle childhood than earlier. Three prosocial values that are evident are caring for family members, cooperating with others, and not hurting anyone directly. Children develop their own standards of right and wrong, guided by peers, parents, and culture.

2. Children usually endorse the morals of their parents and society but will often align with peers.

3. Middle childhood may be a time of increasing prejudice in some communities because social cognition and concrete operational thinking allow children to notice differences in race and religion that they were unaware of before.

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

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

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

5. 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.
Suggested Activities

Introducing Middle Childhood: Psychosocial Development

“Oh On Your Own” Activity: Developmental Fact or Myth?

Before students read the chapter, have them respond to the true-false statements in Handout 8–1.

The correct answers are shown below, along with the text page numbers on which the answers can be verified. Class discussion can focus on the origins of any developmental misconceptions that are demonstrated in the students’ incorrect answers.

1. T (p. 275) 6. F (p. 292)
2. T (pp. 276–277) 7. T (p. 292)
3. F (p. 280) 8. T (p. 294)
5. F (p. 292) 10. F (p. 295)

AV: The Journey Through the Life Span, Program 5: Middle Childhood

See Chapter 7 for a description of Program 5 and the accompanying observation modules, which cover the entire unit on middle childhood.

AV: Transitions Throughout the Life Span, Program 13: A Society (Culture) of Children

Program 13 brings to a close the unit on middle childhood. We have seen that from ages 7 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 program begins by exploring the growing social competence of children, as described by Freud, Erikson, and behaviorists as well as by cognitive and other theorists. The second segment focuses on the growth of social cognition and self-understanding. Next, the program explores the problems and challenges often experienced by school-age children in our society, including the experience of parental divorce and remarriage and living in single-parent and blended families. The final segments consider the various ways in which children cope with stressful situations.

AV: Middle Childhood: Social and Emotional Development (30 min., Magna Systems)

Part of the Developing Child series, this module investigates a variety of issues in social and emotional development: development of the sense of self; family relationships during middle childhood; growth in social cognition; the impact of divorce and two-career families on children; the blended family; and the functions of the peer group.

Classroom Activity: Busing, Charter Schools, and Government-Funded School Vouchers

To help students think about the implications of development during middle childhood, you might ask them to apply what they have learned to the issue of school busing. This issue, which originated during the 1960s, is still unresolved and is often framed in terms of racial balance and equality versus neighborhood stability. Since this ideological argument does not take into account the actual psychosocial and educational development of the school-age child, consider having your students argue for and against busing on these terms. Arguments pro and con might include the following:

Pros

(a) School-age children are able to decenter and understand another point of view; therefore, putting a school-age child in a diversified environment could help to reduce racial prejudices.

(b) A good education that offers individual attention is very important during these years. Hence, if a child is being bused from an inferior school to a better one, busing is a good thing.

(c) Social skills are as important as cognitive skills during these years. Hence, in a multiracial world, children of all races and ethnic groups should have an opportunity to learn to respect one another.

(d) Poverty and concomitant feelings of lack of control over events can be destructive to a child’s ability to plan for the future. If a child is bused into a school and neighborhood in which he or she learns that one’s own efforts and accomplishments can change one’s future, busing would be an advantage.

(e) Modeling is important, so the child who sees and learns to like teachers of many backgrounds will learn to be more open-minded.

Cons

(a) Rejection is a common problem during middle childhood. Hence, busing a few “token” children might be destructive to their self-esteem unless the school is able to prevent rejection on racial grounds.

(b) School-age children look to adults—teachers and parents—as role models. Hence, busing children far away from their neighborhoods—especially to a school where there is mutual hostility between teachers and the parents of the bused children—is destructive.

(c) Play patterns are important. Thus, a child should be able to make friends at school, ideally friends who can come over to play at the child’s home, and vice versa. If the child is bused too far from his or her neighborhood, or the neighborhoods are antagonistic, busing may not be a good idea.
Alternatively, have the class discuss the issue of geographical variation in spending per pupil, which plagues many communities today. Many cities across the United States provide very different educational opportunities for students in wealthy and poor school districts. Ask students to make a study of this issue as it pertains to your campus community. Depending on your school’s location, two other “hot” local issues that could be discussed include the pros and cons of “charter schools” and the fairness of government-funded school vouchers that can be used to pay tuition at private schools, including those with religious affiliations.

In thinking about the needs and abilities of school-age children, students have an opportunity to apply their knowledge of development to an issue of social importance.

I. The Nature of the Child
(pp. 272–279)

**AV: Eye of the Storm** (25 min., ABC)

When Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in 1968, a third-grade teacher in an all-White school in Iowa decided to teach her children about prejudice. An ABC news team filmed the project. The teacher began by treating all her blue-eyed students as a privileged group; after a few days, she reversed the process, treating children with brown eyes as the privileged ones. The film reveals the children from both groups to be amazingly susceptible to the idea that they are superior to those of different eye color. They display enmity for their “inferiors” and even perform their schoolwork markedly better when they are given privileges such as being first in the lunch line. At the end, the teacher explains the purpose of the experiment, and all the children become friends again. This movie has become a classic, because it uncovers the universal wish of humans to consider themselves superior, as well as showing the courageous effort of one teacher to nip prejudice in childhood.

**AV: Children, Enfants, Niños** (24 min., National Film Board of Canada)

This film has some wonderful footage of children around the world, playing, eating, working, laughing. It has no narration, thus allowing the instructor to comment on the universalities in the childhood experience, as well as the cultural and geographical differences. If your college has the necessary technical facilities you might assign your students the task of viewing and reviewing this film, and writing a narrative for it.

**Classroom Activity: Poverty**

If you did not discuss the U.S. Census Bureau study described in the Classroom Activity “Context, Family Structure, and Divorce Rate” in Chapter 1, this material could form the basis for a supplementary lecture on the impact of poverty on development, especially in terms of the social comparisons made by school-age children.

**AV: Children of Poverty** (26 min., Films for the Humanities and Sciences)

This program profiles a representative sample of American children who are living in poverty—all in homes headed by single women. The program vividly illustrates the impact of poverty on children and their mothers, and focuses on the daily struggle to find safe shelter and food, and to nurture self-esteem in impoverished children.

**Classroom Activity: Salutogenesis: Seeking the Origins of Resilience in At-Risk Children**

The following information will be helpful should you wish to expand on the text discussion of how children cope with stress.

Both biological and environmental factors have been implicated in putting children at risk for psychological problems. Chief among the environmental factors are poverty, family stress, violence and abuse, large family size, parental illness, and substance abuse.

Developmentalists and family counselors are now devoting more time to studying how negative outcomes can be prevented in at-risk children by building in protective factors that promote resilience. Resilience has been conceptualized in many ways. Although there are those who continue to search for stable personality traits that promote resilience, as noted in the text, most researchers view resilience as “a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity. Implicit within this notion are two critical conditions: (a) exposure to significant threat or severe adversity and (b) the achievement of positive adaptation despite major assaults on the development process” (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000, p. 543).

Competence and resilience are not as rare in at-risk children as one might expect. Rather, resilience appears to be a fairly common phenomenon that arises out of ordinary human behaviors (Coleman & Ganong, 2002). For example, in a 32-year longitudinal study of 200 high-risk children in Hawaii, researcher Helen Werner and colleagues (1992) found that 72 of the children developed into competent, well-adjusted individuals by 18 years of age. They were successful despite having been raised in families characterized by four or more of the following risk factors: poverty, perinatal stress, family discord, divorce, parental alcoholism, and parental mental illness.

In an extensive review of the literature, Carl Rak and Lewis Patterson discuss salutogenesis, the origins of healthy resilience in at-risk children. In addition to the study of Hawaiian youths, several large-scale longitudinal investigations of children from urban American and British environments have examined
protective factors in the histories of at-risk children. In all these studies, the dependent variable was competence, as measured by academic success, classroom behavior, and interpersonal skills.

The personality factors that distinguish resilient children include the following:

- an active, evocative approach toward problem solving, enabling children to negotiate emotionally hazardous experiences
- an ability from infancy on to gain others' positive attention
- an optimistic view of experiences even in the midst of suffering
- an ability to maintain a positive vision of a meaningful life
- an ability to be alert and autonomous
- the tendency to seek novel experiences
- a proactive perspective

The authors also note that “superkids” were more likely to be firstborn children and to recover significantly faster from childhood illnesses than their peers.

Rak and Patterson identified the following family factors that were correlated with the development of resilience in at-risk children:

- age of the opposite-sex parent (younger mothers for resilient male participants, older fathers for resilient female participants)
- four or fewer children in the family spaced more than two years apart
- focused nurturing during the first year of life and little prolonged separation from the primary caretaker
- an array of alternative caretakers—grandparents, siblings, neighbors—who stepped in when parents were not consistently present
- the existence of a multiage network of kin who shared similar values and beliefs and to whom the at-risk youths turned for counsel and support
- the availability of sibling caretakers in childhood or another young person to serve as a confidant
- structure and rules in the household during adolescence despite poverty and stress

In addition to these personal and family characteristics of resilient children, role models outside the family seem to be important buffers for at-risk children. Resilient children tend to have a number of mentors during their growing years, including teachers, counselors, coaches, clergy, and supervisors of after-school programs.

The researchers also note that self-concept plays an important role in resilience. In a study of 18 resilient young men and women whose parents had major emotional and psychiatric disorders, Rak and Patterson found that the adolescents “demonstrated a keen understanding of themselves and their parents’ illnesses, recognized that they were distinct and separate from their parents, thought and acted distinctly from their parents’ illness systems, and had made peace with their experiences and struggles with their parents’ illnesses.” Helen Werner also observed that “the central component in the lives of resilient children [in Hawaii] that contributed to their effective coping appeared to be a feeling of confidence or faith that things will work out as well as can be reasonably expected, and that the odds can be surmounted.”

In a summary of research on competence and resilience in children, Ann Masten and J. Douglas Coatsworth conclude that “Time and again, research points to the importance of parent–child relationships as a crucial context for the development of competence, both for children with ordinary lives and for children facing extraordinary challenges. In U.S. society, the combination of warm, structured child-rearing practices in parents with reasonably high expectations for competence is strongly tied to success in multiple domains and to resilience among children at risk. In extremely dangerous environments, effective parents are likely to be more strict but remain warm and caring. When a parent like this is not available in a child's life, competence is often linked to a surrogate caregiving figure who serves a mentoring role. When adversity is high and no effective adult is connected to a child, risk for maladaptation is high. The development of competence requires the involvement of caring, competent adults in a child's life; ensuring that every child has this fundamental protective system is a policy imperative.” Taking up this theme, the American Psychological Association has started a “Road to Resilience” public education campaign (2008). As part of this campaign, psychologists hold workshops and are developing materials to help parents, school staff, and others foster resilience skills in the home and classroom. Members of the American Psychological Association can download copies of resilience brochures at www.apahelpcenter.org.

Students and the general public can access much of this material, including “10 Ways to Build Resilience,” “Places to Look for Help,” and “Resilience Factors and Strategies” from the APA Web site (www.apahelpcenter.org/featuredtopics/feature.php?id=6).


To further explore this issue, you might ask students to interview a school-age child and share the child's concerns with the class.

If students seem unconvincing that children can be greatly affected by the political situation or other aspects of the exosystem, you might introduce them to books by Robert Coles (The Moral Life of Children [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987] and The Political Life of Children [New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2000]). Also pertinent are the many works on the Holocaust that document profound emotional effects on children—even in cases in which the parents, rather than the children themselves, were victims.

II. Families and Children
(pp. 280–290)

"On Your Own" Activity: Children's Work at Home

To encourage students to think about the amount and kinds of responsibilities that are considered appropriate for school-age children, ask them to answer the questions in Handout 8–2.

In discussing students’ responses, reiterate the fact that there is no consensus on the question of childhood responsibility.

Most developmental psychologists agree that children should have some responsibilities within the home and that these tasks should be discussed openly to ensure that everyone understands that a family is based on mutual respect and responsibility. At the same time, most developmental psychologists consider the child's schooling and friendships to be very important. Household responsibilities should not take so much time and energy that the child has little of either left for study and play.

In your discussion, cover such aspects as the significance of the family's size and socioeconomic status, the existence (or nonexistence) of sex differences in the students’ responses, and the range of expectations reflected in responses and the reasons for it (ask students whether the tasks they assigned are similar to what they remember doing during middle childhood).

AV: The Essentials of Discipline (3 programs, 28 min. each, Films for the Humanities and Sciences)

(This part deals with middle childhood. See description in Chapter 6.)

Classroom Activity: Cooperative (Parental) Alliance and the Binuclear Family

If your class is typical, your students' family structures while children will run the gamut of those described in the text. Although divorce is the legal end to a marriage, in ideal cases the co-parental relation-
ship is a continuing bond that lasts for years. Even so, the social and legal systems still view divorced parents as adversaries. The language associated with divorce adds fuel to this fire: a “broken home” would seem to be one in which something needs to be fixed; “visitation rules” imply that one parent is merely a “visitor” in the home of the custodial parent who, by implication, “owns” the child.

The text notes that a parental alliance between divorced parents is generally the best situation for children. Building on this theme, legal scholars have argued that divorce attorneys should do a better job of promoting this type of alliance by preparing their clients before the divorce is finalized. You might toss this idea out for a class discussion, perhaps by asking any “experts” in the class to share their experiences, views, and tips. To get the discussion started, you might present the following information.

Following a longitudinal study of post-divorce family relationships, legal researchers coined the phrase binuclear family to emphasize that “sanctioning divorce means . . . developing a healthy language in which we can speak about it—words such as binuclear that can reflect images of a healthy divorced family, rather than words such as a broken home.” The subtext of this idea is that language plays a significant role following divorce, and attorneys and family members need to find better ways to talk about the complex relationships that often develop when a marriage ends.

In some instances, things are relatively straightforward, as when one divorcing parent decides to relinquish his or her parental role. In such cases, parental cooperation and collaboration are nonissues. In most instances, however, divorce necessitates a renegotiation of rules and boundaries in order to shape new co-parenting relationships.

Among the issues that need to be explored are these:

- How much time does each parent plan to spend with the children following the divorce?
- Is each parent motivated to become a collaborative co-parent, or is a “parallel parenting” arrangement preferred?
- How will the co-parents divide the child-care responsibilities?
- Do the co-parents expect the same rules to apply in each household (discipline, chores, allowances, bedtimes, curfews)?
- How will the co-parents negotiate important decisions? Are any unilateral decisions permissible?
- How will information about the children’s emotional and physical states, daily routines, weekly schedules, and school issues be exchanged between the co-parents?

Legal scholars such as Mitchell Karpf and Irene Shatz note that when parents are made aware of children’s basic rights during a divorce process, they often become more highly motivated to form a cooperative alliance.

The seven basic rights that children have during their parents’ divorce include the right to

1. understand that the decision to divorce was their parents’ decision and that the divorce was not their fault.
2. not be asked to serve as a messenger, spy, or mediator; to never be interrogated about the other parent’s private life.
3. maintain independent relationships with each parent; to respect differences in parenting styles in each home.
4. be free from witnessing parental conflict and from having to side with one parent.
5. have regular access and consistent time with each parent.
6. not hear disparaging comments made by one parent about the other.
7. maintain relationships with extended family members on both sides of the family.


III. The Peer Group (pp. 291–297)

AV: The Child’s Personality (30 min., Insight Media)

This film discusses the increasingly important role of the peer group in personality development during middle childhood. The development of independence, the self-concept, and achievement motivation are also examined, as is the subject of child abuse.

AV: Friends and Foes: Peers in Development (60 min., RMI Media Productions)

Peer influence, both positive and negative, is the subject matter of this film. The changing nature of friendship as children grow older, the impact of conflict and negotiation, and the consequences of inadequate peer relationships are also discussed.

Teaching Tip: Peer-Group Interactions

To help your students understand the nature of peer-group interactions during middle childhood, ask them to recall the social organization of their former elementary school.

Ask students to recall the circumstances of social get-togethers—for example, birthday parties and slumber parties. Ask them about the groups that formed on their blocks, in their apartment buildings,
or in their backyards; about groups that formed around other activities (for example, in day camp, in dancing school, after the school play). As students cite and describe various social occasions or institutions, they may also recall some of the feelings and problems associated with socializing during this period.

AV: All in a Summer Day (25 min., Learning Corporation of America)

This film about jealousy and forgiveness in school-age children is based on a science-fiction story by Ray Bradbury. A group of children live on a rainy planet where the sun shines only once every nine years. As they prepare for their first sunny day, one of them—once an earthling—tells of the beauty of the sun. They are envious of her and so lock her up so she can’t enjoy the rare sunny day. When the day is over, she is tearful, they are penitent, and she forgives them—a happy ending not in the original story. This fable can be an interesting way to start a discussion of peer pressure, being different, and the emotional life of school-age children. An interesting question to raise: Which is harder to believe in, a planet without sun or children who feel penitent and forgiving as quickly as these do?

AV: Close Harmony (30 min., Learning Corporation of America)

Winner of a 1982 Oscar as the best documentary, Close Harmony shows the interaction between a group of elementary school students and senior citizens who join together to perform a concert. It is easy to see why this event became significant for all involved and to admire the teacher who made it happen. A possible topic for discussion is: Are there any ways such contact can be arranged in your community? What problems would be involved?

Teaching Tip: The Universality of Rejection

To help your students recognize the universality of rejection during middle childhood, ask if anyone remembers being teased, rejected, or called a derogatory name during the grade-school years. If there is no immediate response, you might share one of your own memories or ask whether the students remember any nicknames for children who were fat, wore braces (“tinsel teeth,” “train tracks,” “metal mouth”), or wore glasses (“four eyes”).

This topic usually triggers lively discussion. Students realize that anyone can feel rejected at any time—even the attractive, friendly, well-adjusted students in the class may have been unpopular or lonely children. A related topic is religious, racial, or economic prejudice. You might ask your students to discuss any books or films they have read or seen that touch on this subject and may have affected them deeply.

Critical Thinking Activity: Bullying and Raising Children to Resist Violence

Each chapter of these resources contains a critical thinking exercise designed specifically to test students’ critical thinking about a topic covered in the chapter. This chapter contains two such activities. This exercise tests students’ critical thinking about bullying. Handout 8–3 contains Web links to research findings followed by a series of questions. Note that empathy and antipathy are also discussed in Chapter 6, so you might want students to review that material before doing this activity.

The answer to this critical thinking activity follows:

1. The first study of bullies and victims (Espelage, Asidao, & Vion, 1999) found that:
   a. Many students tease their peers to go along with the crowd but feel uncomfortable with this type of behavior.
   b. During middle childhood, those who are physically different from the typical child (in race, body size, or dress, for example) are more likely to be victimized, as are those who “are not good at things that everybody else is.”
   c. Students in middle childhood who report bullying other children often state that they are bullied themselves.

2. Although most studies of bullying during middle childhood have focused on boys and physical aggression, Crick and Bigbee’s study of 383 school-age children reveals that girls also experience peer victimization. Boys typically use force or the threat of force; for girls, bullying usually entails relational aggression, in which a person is harmed through hurtful manipulation of her peer relationships or friendships.

   Victims of bullying often experience significant adjustment problems and relatively high levels of emotional distress and loneliness. Relationally victimized children also report more self-restraint problems than their peers, including more difficulty inhibiting anger and greater impulsivity.

3. A psychologist working from the ecological-systems perspective might argue that sex differences in bullying are due to each sex’s overly rigid sex roles. Boys are expected to be tough; they are not allowed to ask for help if they are victimized. Girls are expected to be less physically assertive but are given free rein to be verbally assertive. A psychologist working from the psychoanalytic perspective—particularly one who follows Erikson’s psychosocial stage theory—might argue that bullying becomes common during middle childhood because at this age children are learning to become competent and productive. Children who feel inferior may be more likely to lash out against others.
4. According to research, parents should let their children know how much it means to them that they behave with kindness and empathy for others. Parents who are consistently caring and compassionate, and who treat their children with respect for their dignity and regard for their achievements, are likely to have children who are caring and compassionate. Other parental strategies include providing books that promote compassionate behavior, limiting viewing of violent programs, and encouraging children to watch television shows and movies that promote empathy. While parents obviously cannot shield their children from everything, they can ask children to think about what they saw and to consider other approaches the characters might have taken.

Observational Activity: Gender Roles and Aggression on TV

School-age children are particularly susceptible to operant conditioning, including learning by observation, or modeling. Children who imitate those they admire (parents, teachers, sports and entertainment figures) derive reinforcement from “being like” their heroes.

A potent source of models for the school-age child, like the younger child, is television. By watching television, for example, children learn a great deal about the various roles they may play during their lives, including gender roles, parental roles, and friendship roles. Unfortunately, many of the behaviors modeled on TV reflect undesirable stereotypes and antisocial behaviors that may cast a long shadow on the child’s future social development. The good news is that prosocial behaviors, when they are modeled on television, are just as influential and apt to be imitated as are antisocial behaviors.

For this activity, ask your students to watch several hours of TV, noting the incidence of aggressive behaviors (defined as overt use of force against others) and differences in how males and females are portrayed. Have them use the guidelines in Handout 8–4 in conducting their study, then answer the questions in Handout 8–5.

IV. Morality In Middle Childhood

(AV: Moral Development (two programs, 28 min. each, Insight Media)

This two-part series explores the concepts of morality and moral intelligence. Part one examines the principal theories of moral development, including psychoanalytic, sociobiology, social learning, and cognitive theories. Part two explores how moral reasoning develops from early infancy through adolescence, focusing on the important roles played by parents, peers, schools, and society.

Classroom Activity: The Process of Moral Reasoning

To further explore the process of moral reasoning, you might ask your students to discuss a moral issue relevant to their lives. Although college students generally accept the notion that people should be free to express themselves sexually, they do not agree about what to do if that sexual expression leads to pregnancy. However, because 36 percent of all sexually active teenage girls become pregnant within two years of first intercourse, it is an issue worthy of their consideration.

Both the right to abortion and forced adoption are controversial subjects that would be good topics for class discussion. You may need to get the discussion going by taking one side or the other on the abortion issue or by saying that in order to secure the right to keep her infant, an unwed teenage mother should be required to prove that she can provide competent care, just as every prospective adoptive parent must.

Once students have become involved, you need only moderate the discussion, perhaps correcting errors of fact. After 5 or 10 minutes, ask the class to think about the kinds of arguments they are using. Which of Kohlberg’s stages predominate? Has Kohlberg’s view that values shift through the process of discussion and clarification been substantiated; that is, has anyone taken a new position on these issues? Do men and women in the class approach the problem differently?

Classroom Activity: Using Robert Cormier’s Novel to Teach Moral Development

Sharon Stringer of Youngstown State University suggests assigning Robert Cormier’s novel After the First Death to promote discussion of moral development during childhood and adolescence. Cormier’s young adult protagonists face a variety of moral dilemmas that vividly illustrate the conflicts presented in the writings of Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan.

“Their stories and dilemmas,” Stringer writes, “pose two tests of character. One conflict centers on the decision to conform to authority or disobey in order to preserve the rights of the individual. A second conflict is to balance a rational focus on rights and laws with an ethic of care and concern for human relationships.”

To help her students make meaningful connections between the novel’s characters and their own life experiences, Stringer first asks her students to discuss various ways in which their character has been tested. After reading the novel and discussing it in class, students write a paper describing the moral development of one or more of the characters in the novel. (A good strategy would be to ask students to pick the character with whom they most closely identify.)

Stringer reports that the effect of the novel on students is quite powerful. Commenting on the assignment, one student wrote, “I loved it. I’m not a big
reader. I couldn’t put this novel down.” Another student noted that the assignment “made me draw on my own inner strength, bring out my own ideas.”


Critical Thinking Activity: Moral Reasoning Dilemma
This second critical thinking exercise is designed to test students’ critical thinking about moral thinking. Handout 8–6 contains a brief scenario followed by a series of questions.

The answer to this critical thinking activity follows:

Preconventional level: Moral reasoning at this level is self-centered and emphasizes obtaining rewards and avoiding punishments.

Blake: “There’s no way I’ll be caught. I don’t think the professor even knows what a Web site is.”
Jennifer: “If I turn Blake in, he’ll find some way to get back at me.”
Sharon: “If the term papers are graded on a curve, Blake’s unearned A will affect my class standing.”

Conventional level: Moral reasoning at this level focuses on pleasing other people and obeying the laws set down by society.

Blake: “Who hasn’t cheated at least once in school? If everyone cheats, what’s the big deal?”
Jennifer: “If I turn Blake in, everyone will hate me for being a snitch.”
Sharon: “Blake broke the rules; he should pay the consequences.”

Postconventional level: Moral reasoning at this level emphasizes moral principles and rules of society that are established by mutual agreement, or the principles that are universal (not only in one culture).

Blake: “I’m going to be a computer programmer, not a psychologist. This type of assignment doesn’t indicate anything about my likelihood of success. Besides, I’ve heard that the professor doesn’t even read these papers.”
Jennifer: “It’s not my business; my only concern is whether I do a good job on the paper.”
Sharon: “If people stand by while others cheat, the meaning of grades and a college education will be diminished.”
HANDOUT 8-1
Developmental Fact or Myth?

T  F  1. School-age children typically are more self-critical than they were when they were younger.
T  F  2. Children’s ability to cope with stress may depend on their resilience when dealing with difficult situations.
T  F  3. Children in a shared home environment tend to react to family situations in a similar way.
T  F  4. Biological parents are more dedicated to their children than are adoptive parents.
T  F  5. Acceptance by their peer group is more important to school-age children than having a few close friends.
T  F  6. Older children change friends more often than do younger children.
T  F  7. Those in middle childhood tend to choose best friends whose sex, age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status are similar to their own.
T  F  8. Bullying during middle childhood seems to be universal.
T  F  9. Bullies and their victims are usually of the same gender.
T  F  10. Bullies generally are not socially perceptive.
HANDOUT 8–2

Children’s Work at Home

While middle childhood is the developmental period centered on the child’s growing inclusion in the wider social world, school-age children are also able to participate more fully in the responsibilities of family life.

1. Imagine that you are the parent of a 7-year-old child. What household tasks would you assign to your 7-year-old son? to your 7-year-old daughter?

2. How might the school child’s responsibilities at home affect his or her ability to cope with everyday problems in adolescence and adulthood—for better or for worse?

3. How often are these tasks performed (or how much time do they take)?

4. What tasks do you think would be appropriate for an 11-year-old son? for an 11-year-old daughter?
HANDOUT 8–2 (continued)

5. How often are these tasks performed (or how much time do they take)?

6. In your hypothetical family (indicate the number of members and their ages), how are the decisions made about the division of household responsibilities?

7. If you can remember them, describe your own responsibilities at home during the school years.
Critical Thinking Activity: Bullying and Raising Children to Resist Violence

Now that you have read and reviewed Chapter 8, take your learning a step further by testing your critical thinking skills on this exercise.

This exercise asks you to explore two related issues: (1) bullying in middle school girls and boys; and (2) how parents can nurture empathy and discourage aggressive behavior in their children. In addition to reviewing the text section on bullying, read the articles at these Web sites before answering the following questions.

www.apa.org/monitor/oct02/bullying.html
www.psychologymatters.org/bullying.html

1. A U.S. Department of Education report on school shootings found that almost three-quarters of student shooters felt bullied. Summarize several other key findings from the report.

2. How do girls and boys differ in bullying behavior? What are some of the emotional consequences of being bullied?
HANDOUT 8-3 (continued)

3. How might psychologists working from ecological-systems and psychoanalytic perspectives explain sex differences in bullying?

HANDOUT 8–4

Observational Activity: Gender Roles and Aggression on TV: Guidelines

This activity asks you to analyze a representative sampling of school-age children’s TV programs, following the guidelines below. After you have finished your viewing, complete the questions on the accompanying handout and return it to your instructor.

1. Watch at least four hours of TV, spread throughout the day.
2. Select programs that provide a representative sampling of what TV has to offer. For example, pick at least one early prime-time program that is watched by schoolchildren, a Saturday morning cartoon, and an “educational” program; take note of the commercials that occur during these programs as well.
3. For each program that you watch, keep a record of the following:
   a. the number of male and female characters in “lead roles”
   b. the prosocial behaviors modeled by male and female characters, including nurturance, empathy, problem solving, and conflict resolution
   c. the antisocial behaviors modeled by male and female characters, especially the use of physical force, verbal aggression, addictive behavior, and deceit
   d. the operant outcomes of the various behaviors modeled by males and females (for example, is “action” more likely to be reinforced in males or females?)
HANDOUT 8–5

Observational Activity: Gender Roles and Aggression on TV: Follow-Up Questionnaire

1. In the space below, list the programs that you watched for this observational activity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Program</th>
<th>Time of Day</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2. Was there a difference in how often males and females played lead roles in the various programs? If so, what impact do you feel this has on school-age viewers?

3. How often was aggressive behavior modeled by males and females? When aggressive behavior occurred, which sex was more likely to use physical force? nonphysical force?
4. How often were prosocial behaviors (helping, praising, sharing) modeled by females? by males?

5. What were the consequences of aggression in the programs you watched? Was aggressive behavior reinforced? Was there a gender difference in the consequences of aggression?

6. What were the consequences of prosocial behaviors in the programs you watched? Was prosocial behavior reinforced? Was there a gender difference in the consequences of prosocial behavior?
Handout 8-5 (continued)

7. What differences did you observe in how males and females were portrayed in the various categories of TV programs? For example, were males and females in “educational programs” portrayed differently from those in cartoons and prime-time programs?

8. Write a paragraph that summarizes how the typical female was portrayed in the programs you watched.

9. Write a paragraph that summarizes how the typical male was portrayed in the programs you watched.

10. What other values, prejudicial attitudes, or stereotypes were reinforced in the programs you watched?
Critical Thinking Activity: Moral Reasoning Dilemma

Now that you have read and reviewed Chapter 8, take your learning a step further by testing your critical thinking skills on this perspective-taking exercise.

Here is a situation that is somewhat similar to Kohlberg’s dilemmas for moral reasoning. Three weeks before their developmental psychology term papers are due, Jennifer and two classmates visit the campus library to conduct online literature searches on their topics. After 30 minutes of surfing the Web, Blake announces that he’s found a Web site that offers inexpensive term papers on a variety of subjects, including the topic of his paper. Jennifer, who has never cheated in her academic career, says nothing and maintains her concentration on her own research. Sharon, who is appalled by Blake’s intention to cheat, vows that she will report Blake to their professor.

In choosing their selected course of action, Blake, Sharon, and Jennifer each made a moral decision. Behavior alone does not indicate moral thinking, however. Your job is to write a justification that each student might use at each of Kohlberg’s three levels of moral reasoning—preconventional, conventional, and postconventional. To help you get started the first one is filled in for you.

Preconventional Reasoning

Blake: “There’s no way I’ll be caught. I don’t think the professor even knows what a Web site is.”

Jennifer:

Sharon:

Conventional Reasoning

Blake:

Jennifer:

Sharon:

HANDOUT 8-6 (continued)

Postconventional Reasoning

Blake:

Jennifer:

Sharon: