

Literature Review in Toddler Discipline with Focus on Toddlers Aged Two and Three

Assemblies of God Theological Seminary

PCP 539 Counseling Issues In Life Span Development

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December 14, 2001

Abstract

This literature review research paper is intended to give the reader five excellent easily readable references to help discipline an unruly toddler. A toddler is considered, for purposes of this paper, a male or female child between the ages of two and three. The five references to be discussed are; 1) An electronic article by Elaine Gibson entitled, "How Kids Grow: Defining Normal Behavior, Birth Through Age Twelve," 2) The book, *Your defiant child: 8 steps to better behavior*, by Russell Barkley and Christine Benton, 3) Dr. Richard Dobbins book, *Venturing into a child's world*, 4) *Raising emotionally healthy kids*, a book coauthored by Norman H. Wright and Gary Oliver, and 5) Dr. James Dobson's best-selling book, *The new dare to discipline*. All five references will be discussed and thoroughly examined in order to find help and encouragement in training and disciplining an unruly toddler.

What is Normal?

Elaine Gibson has prepared a wonderful online resource entitled, “How Kids Grow: Defining Normal Behavior, Birth Through Age Twelve”(2001). This is a wonderful online resource that shares information with the parent about the normal behaviors to expect from a developing toddler. Not only is information provided, but several articles written by Mrs. Gibson are accessible dealing with some very specific toddler issues and practical advice for parenting those issues. So what does Mrs. Gibson say about normal?

For children aged two, there are several behaviors Gibson points out that are normal, but could be misconstrued as deviant or abnormal. Some of those normal behaviors include, poor eating habits, loves to say, “no,” runs away when under pressure, out-of-control temper tantrums, calls parents back to room after being put to bed, and wants to make all his own decisions(Gibson, 2001). This age requires more smarts than toughness. Being firm and rigid is unproductive and frustrating, but being patient and wise leads to more peace and happiness. “Parents have to be smarter than the two-year-old, not tougher or more out of control than the child is”(Gibson, 2001).

Elaine Gibson offers two short articles on the subjects of “being smarter and not tougher.” In being smarter, the suggestion is offered to use a kitchen timer to solve some problems. Using time to accomplish a task will help the two-year-old understand better and obey better. Set a timer for the child and make a game for her to pick up her toys before the clock dings(Gibson, 2001). Even using a timer for the time-out chair can be an alternative discipline measure that

works. In being more patient than tough, Gibson offers a few key points, as follows, for the parent to note. Instead of being the boss be a manager; describe problems to the child; notice the child's volunteer cooperation; give the child choices; stay calm; step in and do what needs to be done without yelling or begging; when children simply forget, remind them in kind ways; use as few words as possible for reminders(Gibson, 2001).

For the two and a half year old toddler, some behaviors that are considered normal would be indecision between independence and separation, increased temper tantrums, says "no" even when she means "yes," can stutter or stammer, and begins masturbation(Gibson, 2001). What is needed most, according to Gibson, at this stage is patience, kindness, and firmness. Again, she offers two articles for this age group. The first is a detailed description of an appropriate time-out session and the second is on how to avoid useless power struggles. A lot of attention must be paid to the calmness and patience of the parents at this very trying stage of development.

The last developmental level helpful to the reader is the three-year-old. What is normal with this age group of toddlers? By this time the child can unbutton and unzip clothes, does not know front from back or which shoe fits which foot, loves to say, "All by myself," desires to help parents do things, refuses to hold parent's hand, develops sudden fears and phobias, can control bladder and bowel functions, nose picks, fingernail bites, learns to spit and thumb sucks(Gibson, 2001). What and fun age full of energy and life! One of the primary things for parents to remember at this level of development is that a three-year-old looks like a child, but cannot be forced into acting bigger than they really are.

The two articles to read for the three-year-old child are developing a kid-style home

environment and helping the child to discipline himself. Learning what is normal for the toddler and then responding to it appropriately can greatly enhance peace in the home and give the parents some relief and encouragement.

What is Defiance?

Barkley & Benton deal with the strong-willed defiant child that may or may not need some professional attention. In their book, Your Defiant Child: 8 Steps To Better Behavior, they help parents decide whether or not their youngster needs counseling or may just need some special attention by the parents. It also sets forth an eight-step program that can be done by the parents in helping their child overcome their defiant propensity.

This book is written in two parts. The first part primarily deals with answering the questions of whether or not there is something wrong with your child, why this is in your family, and what should you do about it. The second part lays out the eight step program assisting you, the parent, in dealing with and getting along with your defiant child.

In the first part, Barkley and Benton, assert that, “The more you learn about the nature of defiance in children, the less you will view it as something wrong with your child and the more you will see it as a difficult situation with highly workable solutions”(Barkley & Benton, 1998, p. 11). One of the keys to helping you with your unruly toddler is understanding that defiance is natural and can be worked through with success.

There are also certain stressors or causes that, when addressed or eliminated, can reduce the defiance in your little one. “Defiant behavior may be their expression of stress caused by a parent or sibling’s illness, a parent’s extended business trip, or a new baby in the

family”(Barkley & Benton, 1998, p. 12). Defiance may be a display of underlying anxiety that a young child simply has not yet learned to deal with in a healthy way. Every day the circumstances and factors that function in a child’s life changes. “In any given situation, how your child behaves is a function of many factors, among them the child’s innate personality and temperament, the child’s learning history within the family, and the immediate consequences at hand”(Barkley & Benton, 1998, p. 25).

In the second part of the book, Barkley and Benton lay out their plan for resolving this issue of defiance. The eight steps are; 1) Pay Attention!, 2) Start Earning Peace and Cooperation with Praise, 3) When Praise Is Not Enough, Offer Rewards, 4) Use Mild Discipline - Time-Out and More, 5) Use Time-Out with Other Misbehavior, 6) Think Aloud and Think Ahead - What To Do in Public, 7) Help the Teacher Help Your Child, and 8) Moving toward a Brighter Future. Each step has its own full chapter.

Some of the material covered in the second part may be beneficial for the reader to notice. In step four, using mild discipline, Barkley and Benton remind their readers about the difficulty of this step.

Children often respond to the first instances of punishment by throwing temper tantrums and you will need to marshal all your inner forces to resist giving in. Some kids will try to hit you where it hurts - in the heart - by telling you that you are horrible and that they do not love you anymore(Barkley & Benton, 1998, p. 154).

The firm and consistence in disciplining this behavior must be met with patience and endurance.

Also, in step six, what to do in public, the authors state the importance of anticipating

embarrassment. “Getting over any anticipated embarrassment is a big hurdle for some parents, but a little experience will demonstrate that exercising reasonable control over your child in public is nothing to be ashamed of”(Barkley & Benton, 1998, p. 185). We need to be reminded as parents, and not too often, that embarrassment is par for the course and being prepared for it will greatly reduce your anxiety and therefore reduce the stress on you little ones as well.

Child Development(Dobbins)

Venturing Into A Child’s World, by Dr. Dobbins, helps parents get a better grasp of what a child needs in all the dimensions of his development. It includes sexual, physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual development with practical advice on a wide range of parenting topics. This is a Christian-based book with many Scriptural quotes on parenting.

This book contains twelve chapters, and five of those chapters deal with toddler discipline in some aspect. The other seven chapters are very beneficial as the child ages and deal with such topics as infant care, helping your child be comfortable with his or her body, helping your child have a healthy view of God, helping your child find God’s vocational will, parenting through adoption, and stepparenting. For the purposes of this paper only the topics pertinent to toddler discipline will be discussed.

Chapter one is entitled, “Venturing Into A Child’s World,” and is simply a great introductory chapter dealing with the importance of a healthy family structure as a positive environment for a child. Dr. Dobbins states that, “A child is the product of his parents’ love for each other. In fact, that love is the source of his security. That is why healthy parents never allow their children to come between them”(1985, p. 15). I believe this could be one of the most

important aspects of parenting. Parenting is a team effort and that team must be in unity to function efficiently.

Chapter five assists the parent in giving their child what is necessary to become an independent thinker and ultimately a responsible adult. For example, part of this chapter gives some sound advice for instilling healthy communication patterns in your child. “If a child learns that he can talk out his troubles with someone who loves him, when he becomes an adult he will be more likely to talk over his hurts with a friend”(Dobbins, 1985, p. 68). We all know someone who bottles hurts and emotions up and the damaging effect it has on their personality and life. When children learn at a young age to talk openly with someone they have learned to love and trust, the parents, they will continue that pattern into adulthood.

The topic of being a good disciplinarian is approached in chapter six. Too many times parents see discipline as negative and hurtful. Although discipline involves stopping unwanted behavior, it is much more an act of training. “The primary purpose of punishment is to discourage undesirable behavior. On the other hand, the underlying purpose of discipline is to teach our children to use wisely the time, energy, and talents God gave them”(Dobbins, 1985, p. 76). Is not most poor behavior simply a misuse of time, energy, and talent? Think about that even for your own bouts of misbehavior. Seeing discipline from this positive angle should encourage any parent of a young temper tantrum throwing youngster.

Another part of discipline is fostering a healthy conscience. You will not always be the ever-present parent to discipline your child. They must learn to discipline themselves. Chapter seven deals with just that. “If you make the limits you set for your child fair, and enforce them

in a firm and friendly way, you have gone a long way toward assuring him a healthy conscience”(Dobbins, 1985, p. 87). Very simple to understand, yet sometimes hard to follow are the firmness and friendliness that must accompany discipline.

Chapter eight deals with parental consistency, age of moral accountability, cooperation, bad words, and choices and priorities(Dobbins, 1985, pp. 99-115). Kind of a catchall chapter, this segment covers some of the more specific aspects of child-rearing. All of Dr. Dobbins’ principles and suggestions are biblically founded and will work

Emotional Health(Wright & Oliver)

Wright and Oliver deliver this book to all parents which will help them develop themselves as well as their children into emotional healthy people. Emotions influence and even motivate our behavior and it is to be expected that toddlers, with immature emotions will display immature behavior. How to deal with these emotions and shape them is the main thrust of this book.

This book is written in three sections. Section one gives the reader some insights and advice on what emotional health looks like and how to shape that emotional health in children. Section two maps out a strategy for the parent to deal with children’s expressions of suffering from unhealthy emotional pain. According to Wright and Oliver(1995), depression, anger, grief, loss, fear, anxiety, guilt, shame and stress can cause misbehavior and unruliness in children and each of these are dealt with in section two. Section three communicates to parents on their level of emotional health and how that shapes parental response to children.

In section one, the authors help the reader to understand emotions; where they come

from, what function they serve, the rewards and the dangers, and how they differ in children from adults. “What communicates love to us may be quite different from what says ‘I love you’ to our kids”(Wright & Oliver, 1995, p. 48). Therefore, a parent must learn what is being communicated to a child through adult behaviors and words.

There are a great couple of pages that deal with parental listening skills. Wright and Oliver teach some very positive and simple skills for any parent to become a better listener. “Nonverbal communication contains a wealth of information for parents who have learned to listen with their eyes as well as with their ears”(Wright & Oliver, 1995, p. 48).

Personality types and channels of perception have a lot to do with communication as well. “If you have a hard time communicating with your child, it may be because you are not appealing to his or her dominant channel of perception and learning style”(Wright & Oliver, 1995, p. 49). Several tips are given for the parent to help in learning a child’s channel of perception and learning style which is likely to be different even in siblings. In this book is included the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator to help you establish what your child’s specific personality traits are and how that plays out in their communication. “With the insights of personality type, we are less likely to spend time trying to squeeze our children into our own mold, and more likely to raise them to become the unique people God designed them to be”(Wright & Oliver, 1995, p. 66).

The major portion of the book, section two, deals specifically with some major emotional topics. Reading all of these can be helpful for any parent whether or not your child deals with any, some, or all of them. The most helpful aspect of this section is the simple categorization of

each emotional topic and the unique dynamics of that topic.

Finally, the last section of the book is very helpful in understanding one's own emotional make-up. Not only must a parent understand a child's channel of perception, learning style, and personality type, but to be truly effective a parent must also understand these things about themselves. "One of the most challenging aspects of parenting is learning how to deal with the emotions you have in response to your children's emotions"(Wright & Oliver, 1995, p. 218).

Correct Discipline(Dobson)

The final book of this literature review is The New Dare To Discipline. Probably the most popular book written by Dr. Dobson, this revised edition tackles some very tough discipline issues and balances them between societal expectations and Judeo-Christian ethics. This book focuses on the role of the parent as leader, model, and ultimate authority in the home. Children need firm and gentle love and Dr. Dobson will teach you how to give that kind of love.

Chapters two and three set the foundation for the rest of the book. These chapters handle some of the common sense stuff that goes with parenting. I have chosen three quotes from these two chapters to illustrate some of the valuable material in them.

"Disciplinary action is not an assault on parental love; it is a function of it. Appropriate punishment is not something parents do to a beloved child; it is something done for him or her"(Dobson, 1992, p. 22). Seeing discipline as a function of training, as was previously mentioned in Dr. Richard Dobbins book, helps parents to take off part of the negative connotation of discipline.

"The most effective parents are those who have the skill to get behind the eyes of their

child, seeing what he sees, thinking what he thinks, feeling what he feels”(Dobson, 1992, p. 29).

Simply put, this is empathy. Disciplining a child is much easier and effective when the discipline can be seen and experienced through the child’s world.

“When you are defiantly challenged, win decisively. When the child asks, ‘Who’s in charge?’ tell him. When he mutters, ‘Who loves me?’ take him in your arms and surround him with affection”(Dobson, 1992, p. 51). This is Christian parenting in a nutshell. God has given you charge of this little human and it falls squarely on the parent’s shoulders to teach a healthy respect for authority that is founded in love.

Once the foundation of authority and love have been grounded we may continue studying the details of discipline. Chapters five and six of Dr. Dobson’s book give a great history and account of positive reinforcement. Dobson is a subscriber to reinforcement to teach children. He lays out a five-step guide to reinforcement in these chapters, each with detailed commentary. The five steps or principles to reinforcement are; 1) Grant rewards immediately, 2) Utilize nonmaterial rewards(hugs, verbal affirmation, time, etc.), 3) Behavior learned through reinforcement can be eliminated if reward is withheld long enough, 4) Parents are also vulnerable to reinforcement, 5) Parents often reinforce undesirable behavior and weaken behavior they value(Dobson, 1992, pp. 82-115). Understanding and implementing this material will greatly enhance your parenting skills and you will see positive results.

Another section of Dr. Dobson’s book, chapters eight and nine, cover the three categories of children that have barriers to learning, which includes moral learning. In other words, some children are going to be tougher to discipline and teach than others if they fall into one of these

three categories. These categories are the late bloomer, the slow learner, and the underachiever(Dobson, 1992, pp. 162-191). If a child falls into one of these categories, Dr. Dobson offers very practical and helpful strategies to assist these kids in learning.

Chapter ten is entitled, “Discipline In Morality,” and is probably one of Dr. Dobson’s most amorous topics to deal with. Parents always are asking how to talk to their kids about sex. Now I understand that we will not be broaching this topic for our two and three-year-old toddlers. Nonetheless, it would be worth the read because your toddler will be ready for the information in just a few short years and you, the parent must be prepared.

“We as parents, are guilty of abandoning our children to those who would use them for their own purposes”(Dobson, 1992, p. 206). The entirety of chapter ten is devoted to seeing that this does not happen.

The final portion of the book I would like to make mention of is chapter eleven, “A Moment for Mom.” Since moms on the whole spend more time with their kids than dads, it is beneficial to give at least one chapter specifically to mom. Dr. Dobson shares five timeless morsels of advice for moms. 1) Reserve some time for yourself, 2) Don’t struggle with things you cannot change, 3) Don’t deal with big problems late at night, 4) Try making a list(organize your time with what you must accomplish), and 5) Seek divine assistance(1992, pp. 245-249).

Summary

Each of these resources will be of great aid to the struggling mom or dad with their little bundle of toddler energy. Knowing what is normal in your child’s behavior, understanding the development of your toddler, getting in touch with your emotions as well as your child’s

emotions, being able to identify problems of defiance and how to deal with it, and developing skills for proper discipline will greatly increase your effectiveness and confidence as a parent.

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