

Making Sense of Preschoolers

Course Outline

To make sense of a preschooler is to possess the keys for unlocking the mysteries of human nature as well as for the unfolding of human potential. This fascinating material takes the best that today's science has to offer and delivers it in a usable form to all those involved with this enchanted and ensorcelled age group. This course is designed for all those involved with 2-5 year olds: parents, grandparents, day-care providers, and early childhood educators.

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The instructional video is organized to allow maximum flexibility on how the course is taken. The six hours are divided into four 1.5 hour sections each consisting of three 30 minute modules. This allows the video component of the course to be taken in one of three formats: four 1.5 hour sessions or six 1 hour sessions or twelve ½ hour sessions. The instructional video was structured this way for the convenience of those most likely to take the course: early educators, preschool parents, and day-care providers.

Section 1: Three natural shortcomings NOT to trip over

There are some significant ways in which preschoolers are not meant to be like us and we are not meant to be like them: their untempered nature, their characteristic inconsiderateness, and their ubiquitous separation problems. Their lack of development gives rise to a distinctive preschooler personality profile of common traits, despite their differences in genetics and experience. This preschooler personality profile can also be used to spot immaturity in older children and even in adults who have failed to grow out of the preschooler phase.

The section is all about what is missing and why, along with the natural developmental resolutions for their appropriate immaturities. These insights should form the basis of our interaction with preschoolers. What preschoolers most need us to know is how we can compensate for what is missing in them as well as how we can set the stage for the developmental resolution.

Section 2: Three irreducible needs that must be met.

By irreducible is meant incapable of further reduction or simplification. This irreducible needs provide the bottom line for healthy development in preschoolers. In all our concern about which activities to engage them in and what kind of preparation they need for school, we tend to overlook the most fundamental needs of the preschooler. These needs are deceptively simple yet incredibly profound in their simplicity: to engage in true play, to find true rest, and to have true tears of futility. Fulfillment of these needs is the key to their transformation from the equivalent of the caterpillar stage of their life to the rest of their lifespan. In this section we explore what these needs are all about and the role they play in the healthy development. What preschoolers most need us to know is how to ensure their basic developmental needs are met.

Section 3: Three typical problems NOT to nip in the bud

We are forever trying to get preschoolers to be more like grown-ups. Many adults think they can do this this by attempting to prune out socially unacceptable behaviour. What many adults do not know is that preschoolers exhibit troubled behaviour for some very good reasons, developmentally speaking. When we battle against the symptoms of their immaturity, we can very well undermine their ability to grow out of these transient problems. Three troubling behaviours that fit into this category are tantrums and aggression, resistance and oppositionality, and shyness and timidity. In this section, participants learn what these behaviours mean developmentally and what kind of responses tend to backfire. Also discussed is how to compensate for these developmental hiccups and how to keep these disruptive problems from also disrupting the sense of relational connection that they require. What preschoolers most need us to know is how to address the root problems and how to provide the conditions that help them to truly grow out of these common signs of immaturity.

Section 4: Six common mistakes NOT to make

When not able to make sense of the preschoolers in our care, we are predisposed to make certain common mistakes. In this section the six most common mistakes are discussed and suggestions are provided for how to avoid these pitfalls with preschoolers. Perhaps our greatest faux pas with preschoolers is to subject them to early socializing experiences and to pressure them to conform to social and societal expectations. Premature socialization undermines healthy development. Also discussed are the hidden developmental dangers of much of today's instruction-based schooling and head start programs.

What preschoolers most need us to know about them is that we do not need to push independence. In fact, to do so can make matters worse. And finally, we also need to know that a premature focus on good behaviour actually interferes with the development within them of the most important human motivation of all - the desire to be good. The ability to be a 'preschooler whisperer' depends very much upon knowing what is inherent to the preschooler's nature and what Nature has in mind for them when we do our part.