

# childPSYCH News

A newsletter for professionals and parents

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**We are now consulting in Springfield and Ipswich!**



## Concentration and Attention Problems?

The cogmed program consists of 25 training sessions of 30-40 minutes each, done over 5 weeks. It is the intensity of this training schedule that is critical to the program's success. The user/family sets the training schedule with the Cogmed Coach, with plenty of flexibility.

## The Development of Personality by Philip Gosschalk, Clinical & Educational Psychologist

Psychologists and other mental health professionals generally don't like to talk about children in terms of "personality". Why? Well because we believe that someone's personality isn't really formed till adulthood. Hmm you might say, "well Uncle Arthur was always an annoying little boy and now as an adult, he's still annoying". Other people might say, "well Aunt Mary was such a naughty girl in school and now she is a Professional Athlete and disciplined and dedicated to training". So can we talk about children's personality?

Some researchers argue that talking about children in terms of temperament is better. Temperament is what you are born with—how you are biologically wired. For example, your energy level, amount of sleep you need, whether you are a positive person, how comfortable you are in new situations, your ability to concentrate and so on are all temperament traits. Now, depending on the environment you are raised in, this will interact with your temperament style to "shape your personality". For example, if you have a child who dislikes new situations and people (shy), and you also tend to avoid social situations, then you increase the chances of your child having an anxiety disorder and becoming what we call an "avoidant personality". However, if you encourage your shy child to socialise more and you "push" them out of their comfort zone, then they will be less anxious in social settings, less avoidant of people and more open to new experiences. This in turn reduces the chances the child will develop an anxiety disorder.

So personality is really the result of Temperament + Environment.

Does this mean then that all we have to do is provide the right environment and we can prevent any problems emerging? Unfortunately no. However, trying to get the environment right can help reduce any personality problems or mental health problems from developing. If the child is highly shy then you are certainly not going to make them an



*"personality is really the result of Temperament + Environment."*

extrovert. When you are trying to decide on if your child should go to a co-educational school or single-sex school, you are already considering what educational environment would match your child's temperament. In fact, parents spend hours thinking about what the right environment is for their child.

So what is the supposed ideal personality? Well we cannot all be the same of course. When psychologists talk about the ideal personality it really depends on what context. Generally speaking however, someone who is agreeable (i.e., doesn't argue with everyone), open (willing to try new things) and empathic (cares about others) seems to be the most adaptable personality type. These people tend to get along with everyone, get promoted faster at work, do their job better, are more popular and so on.

### Influences on personality

So what are the influences on personality? There are many ways that your personality can be shaped or influenced.

**Behavioural explanation** - As we discussed earlier, the environment you grow up in is a major factor. Mores specifically, some researcher's believe that what "behaviours" are reinforced matter. As one very prominent researcher put it, "personality is the totality of habits". For example, if a child is encouraged to be dependent on their parents, they will never learn to be properly independent. They may become an adult who is "dependent" or insecure even. Teaching your child good habits is important.

**Cognitive explanation** - Yet other researchers argue that is how we see ourselves and the world that shapes

our personality. These researchers have shown that how people respond to us influences our view of ourselves. An example of this is where shy girls are more accepted than shy boys in society. We tend to protect our shy girls and consider them "good listeners" but consider our shy boys to have "poor social skills". Your view of yourself is also first influenced in infancy and childhood from your parents. As parents it is important to encourage our child and support them. Note however, "support" does not mean "doing it" for your child. Instead, if your child is trying to learn to tie their shoelaces, show them and guide them as they try to do it themselves.

### Selecting a parenting style

In essence it means that how we parent our child will influence their personality. For example, if you are overly strict with your child then you may create in them a feeling of inadequacy. The child may feel inadequate with making their own decisions and lack confidence. As adults they can develop a "dependent personality".

So what parenting style should we be trying to use? The answer is an authoritative style. So not an authoritarian style - characterised by a "my way or the highway" approach. Typically this style is very strict, the adult knows all and the child does as they are told. A permissive parenting style isn't good either. This style is can be described as "do what you want". There is little discipline at all and the child is parented inconsistently.

An authoritative parenting style is one where you have rules based on principles (e.g. You must show appreciation by saying Thank You"). The parent provides explanations for why they are disciplining the child, they also apologise to the child if they have perhaps over reacted. Authoritative parents are consistent in their parenting and avoid physical punishment as much as possible. They are firm in their voice when reprimanding and try to avoid yelling. The authoritative parent provides the child with an opportunity to correct their behaviour. This parenting approach will help with shaping a more adaptable personality in your child.

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## Learning Problems?

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## The Needs of Children Born Premature

Although the rate of premature births is not high, numbers are increasing due to more older first-time mothers, the use of assisted reproductive technologies, and changes to resuscitation and intervention policies. Advances in maternal and neonatal care have dramatically improved survival rates for even the most vulnerable of infants born prematurely; however, children born very preterm may have ongoing health concerns, slower overall growth, and be more predisposed to infections.

Very preterm infants are born before the brain is mature, and current research has not yet clarified how development of the brain outside of the womb compares with development within the uterine environment. For example, development of the auditory system may be incomplete for children born before 30 weeks, and the differential effect of auditory development within the noisy environment of the neonatal intensive care unit is unknown. Despite recent studies that have found these children have cognitive abilities (IQ scores) within the average range, their scores are generally lower than those of children born at full-term. Problems in cognitive functioning are common

effecting language development, attention and impulse control. ADHD and learning disorders are common.

Children born very prematurely also begin life with an increased susceptibility to delays in language development, attention problems, working memory disturbances, and executive functioning difficulties that contribute to later learning problems. Even subtle deficits in functioning may become more apparent as the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural demands of life increase as children born very preterm grow older. More than half of those children born with VLBW (very low birth weight, less than 1500g) and 60-70% of children born with ELBW (extremely low birth weight, less than 1000g) have need of later learning support at school, and these difficulties with learning have been documented as persisting into adolescence.

At childpsych we can conduct cognitive testing to determine what the child's learning needs are. We are also able to provide learning support services and other support services such as Speech Therapy.

Parents can help their child by helping them to learn organizational skills and using behavior management strategies to help the child maintain attention.

## Late Emerging Reading Difficulties

For some children, reading progress may fall behind in the third or fourth grade. About 40% of children with reading problems will be late emergers. Why? Well it does not seem to be because the children were "missed" or "fell through the cracks". Instead, it appears that in grade three and four, different cognitive skills are



needed to read efficiently. These cognitive skills require more than just strong ability to "sound out". They include the ability to read speedily and understand what they have read. This makes sense as in the early years recognition of the word, rather than speed of reading and reading comprehension are the focus. Some of these children can be identified by testing for reading comprehension skills and reading fluency in Grade 3. Secondly if the reading problems show a one year delay then an assessment by an educational psychologist is warranted immediately. However, if you are concerned about a student's progress, then regardless of how "behind" they are, it is best to conduct a full assessment by a psychologist.

## Emotional Awareness

Good emotional awareness or emotional competence has been implicated in good psychological health and academic achievement. Emotional competence refers to such



things as social skills, self awareness and awareness of other people's emotional states. One study found that such self awareness

often assisted with better attention control. The researchers argued that awareness of one's own emotional state reduces the stress and distractibility that children experience when experiencing a negative feeling.

Children with ADHD often become frustrated when faced with challenging tasks, so one part of their intervention is to develop their

## Autism Services

childpsych provides a specialist autism clinic focused on assessment and diagnosis and intervention services. Our autism interventions are delivered by psychologists accredited to work with children with autism spectrum disorders.

- ✓ Assessment and diagnosis of autism
- ✓ Management of children with autism to age 18 years
- ✓ Behavioural interventions, social skills, transition to school, treatment of other conditions such as anxiety, depression
- ✓ Special education development classes and remedial teaching classes

