
STUFF AND NEW STUFF

Four new tools for building your child-guidance skills

How Can I Help? A Teacher's Guide to Early Childhood Behavioral Health

Written by Ginger Welch. Gryphon House, 2019. (\$19.95)

Welsh, an early childhood professional and psychologist, takes a clinical look at children's behavioral health issues. While her book uses the framework of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (the standard diagnostic system used by mental health providers), she offers classroom teachers and program administrators a useful and accessible tool for observing and supporting children who may be in crisis.

As a clinician, Welsh asks teachers to look at children through three distinct yet overlapping lenses: biological (medical and genetic background), environment (the physical and social impacts on a child), and relational (psychological needs impacted by social interactions and functions).

Significantly, Welch examines trauma in young children—the serious adversity that impacts more than half of young children in America, citing work presented at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (2004). Although we might casually describe not finding a preferred brand of soda as traumatic, a more proper definition is a stress or harm—physical,



psychological, or emotional—that is so severe it disrupts developmental tasks and milestones. Early care and education teachers are likely to not only observe the impact of trauma but also be called on to deal with the repercussions.

How Can I Help? encourages teachers to become masters of children's developmental sequence and milestones to best help those whose world is not consistent and safe but frightening, unpredictable, and painful. For a range of age groups and disorder categories (like childhood depressive disorders), Welsh identifies symptomatic behaviors (children who are disagreeable, unhappy, or tearful, for example) and supportive, concrete, and practical responses (as avoiding labeling, communicating with the child's family, and reminding yourself that your role is to educate, not control).

Recognizing the ongoing challenges teachers face in working with children with behavioral health disorders, she recommends practices for successful coping and self-care. Charts, resources, and recommended reading lists and Internet links are plentiful. As is the implicit and explicit reminder that teachers are not qualified to make diagnoses but are instead charged with supporting all children in authentic, wise, compassionate, and developmentally appropriate activities and interactions.

Effective Discipline Policies: How To Create a System That Supports Young Children's Social-Emotional Competence

Written by Sascha Longstreth and Sarah Garrity. Gryphon House, 2018. (\$19.95)

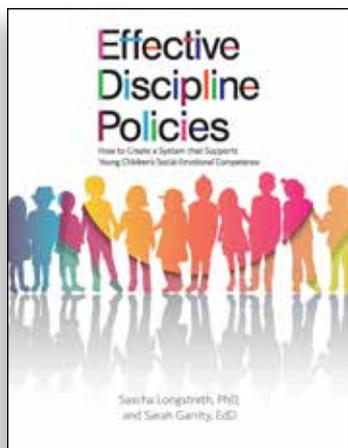
Both startling and heartbreaking, the 2016 National Survey of Children's Health reported that about 50,000 preschoolers had been suspended

from their classrooms at least once. Rather than accepting the inevitability of children's poor behavioral choices and lack of self-regulation skills, Longstreth and Garrity developed a systematic, accessible, and practical system for building strong and effective guidance policies in early care and education programs.

The Teaching and Guidance Policy Essentials Checklist (TAGPEC) identifies and describes seven essential features of behavior-guidance policy for programs serving children from birth to age 8. The authors identify four goals for their system:

- to help ensure that evidence-based practices for preventing and addressing challenging behaviors are consistently implemented across classrooms in a program,
- to build meaningful, authentic, and strength-based relationships with families,
- to support professional development that is in keeping with program goals and established best practices, and
- to guarantee that decision making is fair and equitable.

Garrity and Longstreth argue for a system-level approach to child-guidance policy development.



Today, early care and education is a hodge-podge of unique and often competing philosophies and program structures that lack the continuity and infrastructure that supports public education. Children and families grapple with preschool policies and practices that are inconsistent and often

capriciously applied. The authors recognize variability in how challenging behaviors are identified and addressed, both with children and their families.

TAGPEC identifies seven essentials that contribute to the socio-emotional and academic success of children:

- intentional focus on teaching social-emotional skills,
- developmentally and culturally appropriate learning environment,
- setting behavioral expectations,

- preventing and addressing challenging behaviors using a tiered model of intervention,
- working with families,
- staff training and professional development, and
- using data for continuous improvement.

The TAGPEC humanistic approach holds adults responsible for teaching skills, not simply reacting to transgressions. It recognizes that all behavior is a communication tool, and that relationships guide behavioral choices. In sync with both governmental and professional recommendations (US Department of Education, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, and the Office of Head Start, for example), TAGPEC strives to improve the interactions and responses that have made challenging behaviors a top concern for early care and education program administrators and the in-the-trenches teachers who grapple with making their practices effective and authentic.

Of the book's seven chapters, four set the rationale and framework for the scoring system. Two chapters guide the self-scoring of the 30 evaluation items and, most valuably, provide advice and support for a program's decision to improve policy. The book is rich in charts, examples, scenarios, examples, and resources, thus making it a valuable tool for a program dedicated to working with families to strengthen children's behavioral health.

Push Past It! A Positive Approach to Challenging Classroom Behaviors

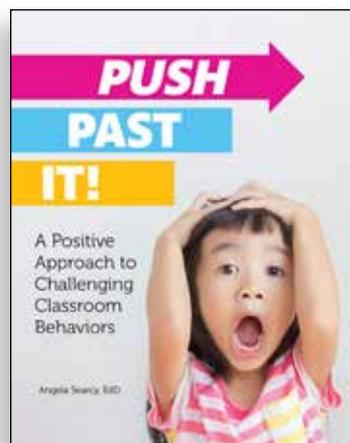
Written by Angela Searcy. Gryphon House, 2019. (\$24.95)

Angela Searcy, EdD, *does* know children, teachers, and families. She knows that too often adults feel overwhelmed, defeated, and anguished when they recognize the limitations of their skills in helping children become more self-regulated, independent, and content.

Rather than giving up, adults need to reexamine the techniques that don't work (but are too often repeated to the same result) and explore how children's ages, stages, and communication tools block success.

Using humor and lavish stories of her own fumbling steps in the classroom, Searcy quickly discards the techniques that don't work, like removing materials,

removing a child from an interest area, taking away a privilege, putting a child in time-out, or hoping the child will outgrow the behavior. She takes a deep look



at why exclusions don't work and never teach a desired behavior—in the classroom or in life. In a workshop tone, she invites teachers to hold a mirror in front of themselves to examine, for example, their personal histories of crying, tantrums, aggressive behavior, emotional triggers, and personal

bias, and then to refocus on defining a professional self, using tantalizing exercises.

Over eight chapters, Searcy reviews hallmarks of typical development, analyzes specific behaviors with antecedents and responses (both useful and self-defeating), explores the role of trauma in children's behaviors, and identifies allies and resources for successful interventions. Especially useful are sections on how to interpret and understand how children's behaviors communicate essential information on fear, anxiety, depression, need, or insecurity.

Push Past It techniques assume a traditional preschool classroom (interest areas, a fixed schedule, and routines). The assumption makes her suggested strategies particularly apt. Those strategies are as follows:

- Change you: like explaining rules, spending more positive time with children, or limiting wait time.
- Change the child: such as teaching a calming technique or teaching problem solving with a game.
- Change the consequences: reinforcing positive behavior, whispering to get attention, or giving movement breaks, for example.

More helpful, however, are the strategies for responding to specific challenging behaviors—including physical aggression, clinginess, and tantrums.

Last, Searcy urges teachers to take care of themselves too. Building a nurturing, insights-driven approach to managing challenging behaviors is valuable across the lifespan.

On Being Child Centered

Written by Lisa Murphy. Redleaf Press, 2019. (\$24.95)

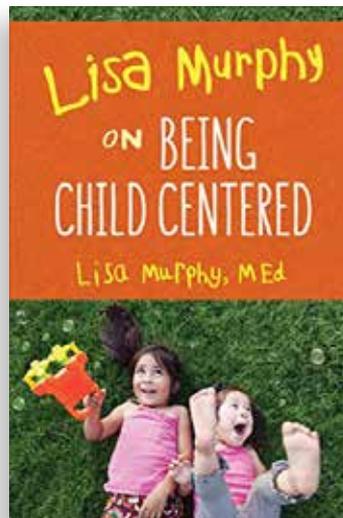
Sometimes a book leaves the reader crying “More!” In this case, Lisa Murphy has harnessed her special talents and experience with children to create a small but powerful tool for building a solid foundation under the house we call childhood.

Murphy is a strong advocate for children's play—the cement that binds creativity, movement, singing, discussion, observation, and reading into a structurally strong, storm-resistant child. And she's eager to challenge the current hollow idea of *child centered* into a strategy for meaningful, achievable, and enriching early care and education.

Her experience, coupled with a joy-filled (and often riotously funny) writing style, seduce readers into exploring and accepting her nine attributes of a child-centered environment:

- Children are provided long periods of uninterrupted **free time** to explore their environment.
- Children have lots of **outdoor** time.
- Children are able to explore the environment with **few restrictions**.
- Adults are **controlling the environment**, not the children.
- Adults serve as **facilitators** within the space.
- Adults are able to **articulate the intention** behind their words and actions.
- Adults are familiar with the key contributions of historical child development **theorists**.
- Adults know the importance of **keeping it real**.
- Children are provided time and opportunity to **create, move, sing, discuss, observe, read, and play** every day.

Long, example-rich chapters delve into each of the nine principles. And after the first chapter, it's clear Murphy is not a fan of laminated lesson plans written and followed for 20 years, schedules that interrupt play (for the convenience of adults), and making



moral issues out of developmental ones (toddlers biting, for example).

Murphy challenges teachers to drill down on features that build real educational success by asking themselves, “What am I doing?” “Why am I doing it?” “Who is it for?” The three questions, she holds, enable teachers to discard meaningless, time- and resource-consuming activities and instead instill interactions that are meaningful and respectful of children and the adults who provide them.

The humor cushions challenges to some long-held, codified teacher practices like asking fake questions (“Are you ready for clean-up?”), schedules in 20-minute time blocks (with no time to settle into meaningful play), and allowing *cute* to be a rationale for planning/doing/buying something. It’s common, for example, to use cotton in teaching children about snow. But she reasons that snow is not cotton, and it’s a waste of time and resources to spend the weekend cutting out snow people and shopping for cotton balls and glue.

Her philosophy, simply stated: “If you want it in their heads, it needs to be in their hands, and if you want it in their hands, it needs to be in their hearts, and it won’t be in their hearts if it’s not something that is of interest in the first place.” Know what children need, respond to their interests, have a strong foundation in the history and best practices of the field, and spend time asking—and answering—the three questions in order to dispel any notion that *child centered* equals *chaos*. Use *On Being Child Centered* to contribute to your own solid foundation under the house we call childhood. ■