Submission for Encyclopedia of Child Behavior and Development

Contact Information for Self-Care Submission:

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Self-Care Development

Synonyms

Thoughtful attendance to oneself; a personal skill of caring for oneself

Definition

Self-care development involves the progressive expansion of skills related to caring for oneself that are refined by experience, direct instruction and maturity. Self-care includes the ability to improve, restore and maintain one’s own personal health and psychological wellness.

Description

Self-care involves any activity of caring for personal needs. These needs may be addressed physically such as eating or exercising to maintain a healthy body or psychologically such as moving away from potentially dangerous situations or emotions. Self-care strategy development has also been linked to self-sufficiency and self-management. Developmental milestones in evaluating normal child growth often consider personal self-management and care for self.

Self-care developmental techniques involve identifying explicit and implicit patterns of need and developing appropriate and socially acceptable strategies to respond and contribute to productive and functional personal growth and development. As the child grows and learns to meet personal needs, self-care can be observed in self-initiated behaviors. For example, the child moves from “falling asleep” to sleeping for rest for energy to play or to learn. Self-care might also be observed in verbal communications. With increasing skill and accomplishment, self-managed and self-determined goals related to self care are accomplished. As cognitive capacity and socialization develops so too does self-care. Self-care development is facilitated by creating an environment conducive to learning: teaching the child to listen to self, identifying internal and external needs, and how best to manage personal care will assist with development.
**Self-care Techniques**

Developmentally, self-care techniques will change with maturity, skill and experience. For example, an infant cries as a technique for self care. By school age, telling the teacher about a bully may offer a more appropriate strategy and by adolescence, using self-reflective questions to identify triggers that create stressors may provide a foundation from which future self-care techniques develop.

Self-care techniques involve the development of self-managed, activity processing resources implemented in response to needs and desires. Building strong support systems and developing internal resources that are important to maintaining a healthy, stress-free lifestyle.

**Relevance to Childhood Development**

Self-care in children is an important part of individual development. It can be related to sense of identity, self-confidence, independence and impacts social relationships both within and outside the family. Some self-care activities include: grooming, personal hygiene, physical activity, eating properly, and maintaining safety. These factors are beneficial to development; they involve the child in how to self-regulate a better quality of life. The family plays a critical role in the development of these self-care strategies. “Family units” teach children self-care: through direct instruction and modeling and the child often learns these skills through trial and error and gradual approximations. Poor self-care choices often lead to greater behavioral problems that may impact daily lives and school. Poor self-care strategies can affect health as well as relationships with families or peers. It is important to continue to teach children self-care beginning at a young age and continuing forward as developing more self-reflective options help the child.

**Relevance to Parent-Teacher Relationships**

Early childhood programs that promote communication between parents, children and teachers can help to build a strong working relationship in support of self-care. This communication can help early childhood professionals to better understand the parent’s perception and to help them as they developmentally teach self-care techniques to their children.

The goal in self-care is to develop a strategies and skills to identify personal need and to respond appropriately to those identified concerns.

**References**
