



The Melissa Institute
For Violence Prevention and Treatment

Emotional Competence and Anger Management: Preparing Young Children for the Social Challenges of School

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Coming to School Angry: The Role of Coercive Parenting in the Preschool Years

- Numerous variables affect children, including:
 - Temperament
 - Home density
 - Older siblings
 - Exposure to traumatic events
 - Sleep and nourishment patterns

- Parenting practices

Developmental Pathway to Antisocial Behavior

Prenatal

Mother
Smoking/
Substance abuse
Nutritional/health
care

Infancy

Parents
Poor parenting skills
lead to negative
potentially abusive
interactions, high stress,
low social support

Child
Temperament
Sleep and nourishment

Early Childhood

Home
Coercive or
inconsistent
discipline
Poor monitoring
Poor reinforcement

Child
Antisocial behavior



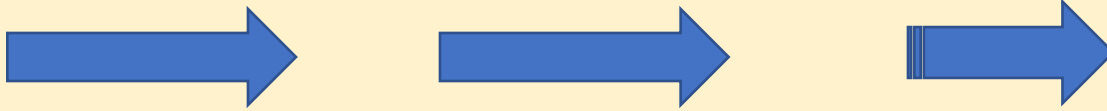
Contributions
of Home Life to
Childhood
Aggression and
School
Maladjustment

(There are many, but three important ones...)

1. Predominance of “**The Parent Child Coercive Cycle**” in parent-child interaction

Work of Gerald Patterson and colleagues at Oregon Social Learning Center

The Parent Child Coercive Cycle



"Stop hitting your sister!"



"No! She started it!!"



"All right! All Right! Take it easy! Just keep the noise down, okay?"

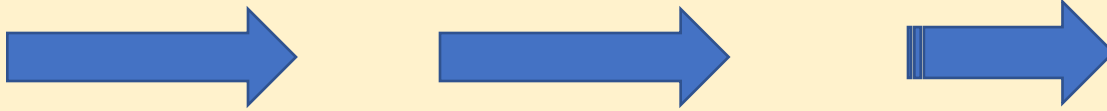


Parent makes a compliance demand

Mother's escape behavior is reinforced & child's antisocial behavior is reinforced

Attack-Counterattack-Positive Outcome

The Parent Child Coercive Cycle



"Time to take your pill"

"No! You can't make me!!"

"All right! All Right! Take it easy! We'll try later."

Parent makes a compliance demand



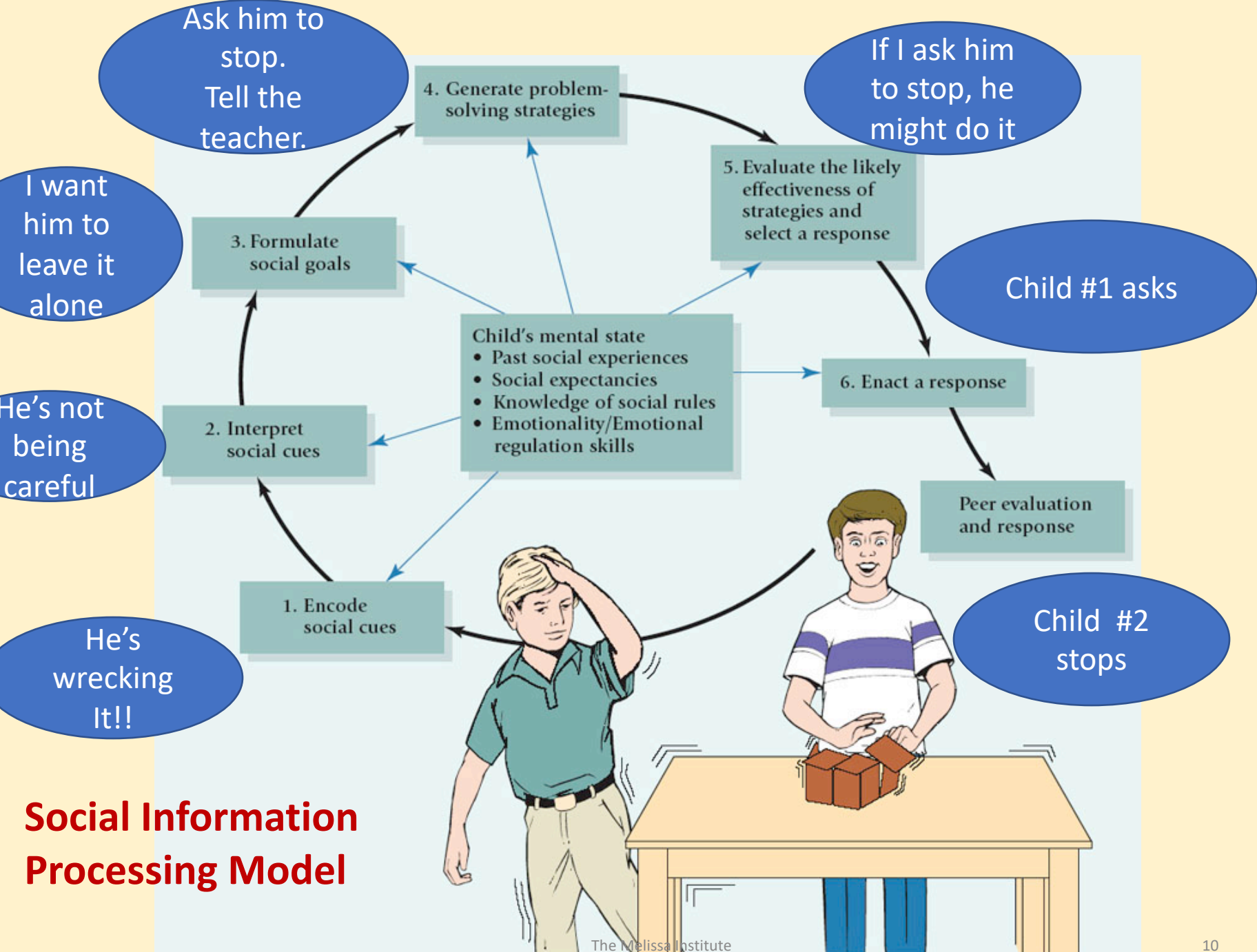
Mother's escape behavior is reinforced & child's antisocial behavior is reinforced

Thus, by preschool age a child may have become openly defiant in a family context in which she or he has learned to "shut off" demands that are unpleasant or unrewarding (Smith et al.)

Effects on Child's Social Information Processing

- Kenneth Dodge, Nicki Crick (and many others) applied SIP theory to the study of how cognitive operations influence aggressive child behavior
- *How do aggressive children manage social interactions?*

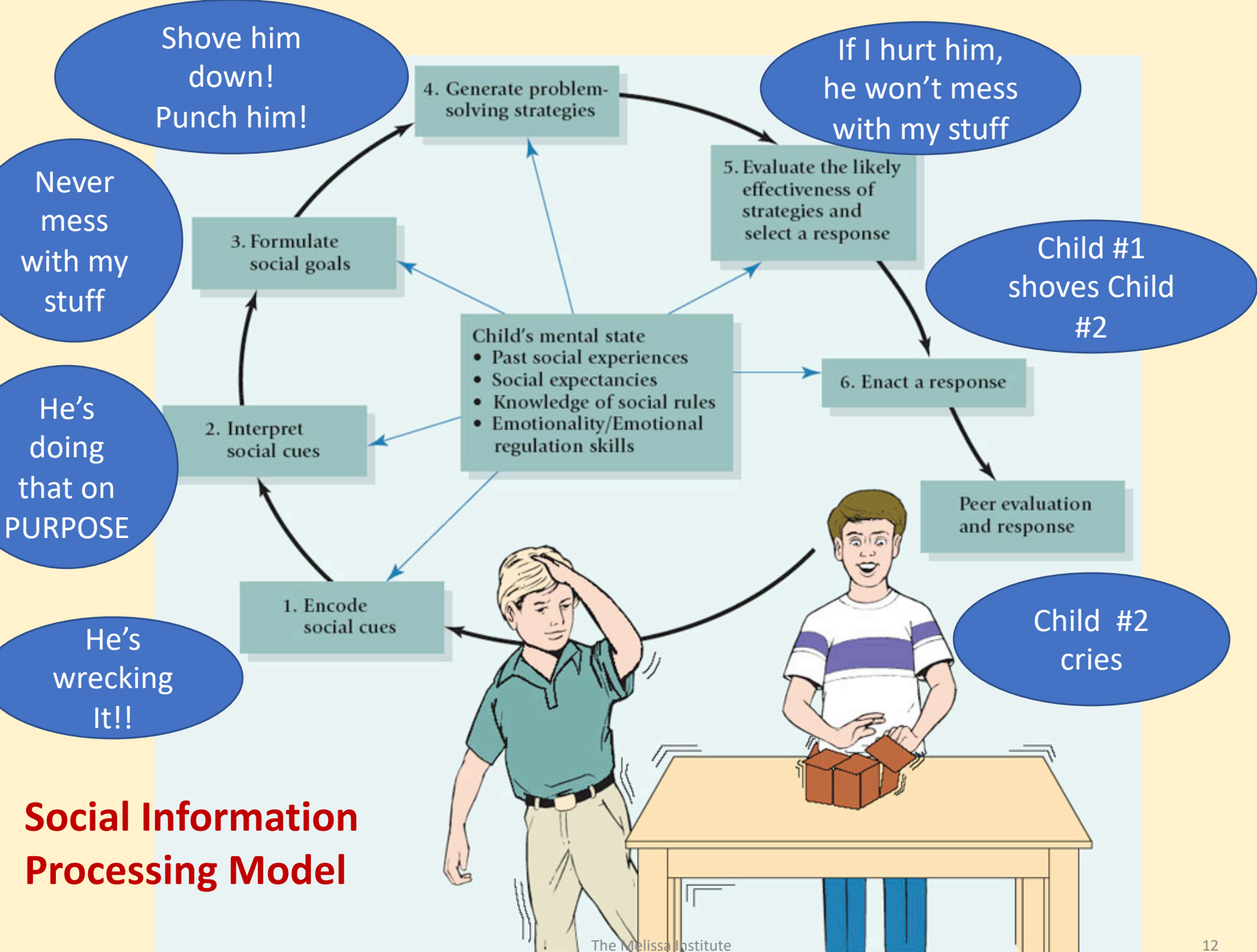
Social Information Processing Model



Social Information Processing **Deficits** in Reactive Aggressive Children

(Dodge, 1991; Crick & Dodge, 1994)

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. attend to available social cues | 1. Hypervigilant for aggressive cues |
| 2. give meaning to the cues | 2. Hostile attributional biases |
| 3. select desired social outcomes | 3. Higher value on retaliation than affiliation |
| 4. Generate possible responses | 4. Narrow solution generation abilities |
| 5. Identify potential consequences of a response | 5. Tendency to evaluate aggression positively |
| 6. act out selected responses | 6. Difficulty enacting prosocial skills |



Social Information Processing Model



Contributions
of Home Life to
Childhood
Aggression and
School
Maladjustment

(There are many, but three important ones...)

**2. Poor modeling of emotional regulation
and non-aggressive problem solving**

- **Social learning opportunities lost**
- **Children may default to aggressive models**



Contributions of Home Life to Childhood Aggression and School Maladjustment

(There are many, but three important ones...)

Predominance of “**The Parent Child Coercive Cycle**” in parent-child interaction

- Poor modeling of emotional regulation and non-aggressive problem solving
- **Missing or inadequate training in emotional competency**



The insight is not just understanding his potential for aggression... but rather understanding why I didn't get my a** whipped.

Jim's Competent Cognitive/Emotional Management

- Able to manage the physiological intensity of initial anger, allowing for problem-solving
- Able to hold time as a constant and apply consequential thinking
- Able consider a range of possible behaviors
- Able to read my environment and correct the course based on newly emerging data
- Able to conclude: This is a fear situation: Act accordingly!
- That is emotional competency



Emotional Competency

Bierman's group concluded that the critical childhood competencies needed for success in kindergarten were:

Emotional Competency

By kindergarten, a child should...

1. Recognize own feeling states
2. Recognize feelings in others
3. Play cooperatively with age-mates
4. Show self-control of aggression
5. Solve problems non-violently



Bierman, K.

1. Recognize Own Feeling States

- **Experience the internal event, name it, and know its purpose**
- **Able to use this knowledge to guide behavior**
 - *“I got scared the last time”*
- **Able to express feeling to others**
 - *“That makes me sad”*
 - *“That makes me angry”*

2. Recognize feelings in others

- **Auditory and visual cues**

- *Child is able to discern and label others' feelings via voice or behavior*

- **Situational cues**

- *Recognizes environments that occasion predictable feelings in others*

- **Generalization** of skill across persons and settings

- *Label stranger's feelings in a strange environment*

Critical for avoiding conflict in a large classroom

3. Play cooperatively with age-mates

- Essentially means ***able to subordinate own wants*** when called upon by peer
- “Sharing” is a good skill for parents to work on
 - Child must understand “ownership” of toy is not changed and it will be returned in “time”
- Preschool is a great incubator for this skill!
 - One of the most frequent causes of distress, but where the skill must be learned prior to kindergarten

4. Show self-control of aggression

- Aggression peaks about age 2 (Tremblay)
- Girls quicker to leave physical behind, but can adapt social/verbal aggression
 - Pre-bullying and bullying behaviors are evident in preschool (see Storey & Slaby in Ref's)
- Trauma can impact aggression control
- Some households are more supportive of aggressive behaviors – *Code switching issues*

5. Solve problems nonviolently

- Related to self-control of aggression
- Emotionally reactive children **over-attribute hostile intentions** to playmates
 - Social Information Processing Model
- Many children **default to aggression** or tantrums because:
 - It has paid-off in the past
 - It's what they know how to do

Fast Track Research Group

See Jones et al., in Ref's.

- 20-year retrospective with **753 kindergarten** students from multiple sites, mostly Euro- and African-American
- Teachers rated **social competence** on 8 item scale (e.g., “Cooperates” “Shares” “Helpful”)

Social Competence Scale – T

INSTRUCTIONS: Please rate each of the listed behaviors according to how well it describes this child.

	Very Well	Well	Moderately Well	A Little	Not At All		Very Well	Well	Moderately Well	A Little	Not At All
1. Functions well even with distractions	0	1	2	3	4	14. Is aware of the effect of his/her behavior on others	0	1	2	3	4
2. Can accept things not going his/her way	0	1	2	3	4	15. Works well in a group	0	1	2	3	4
3. Copes well with failure	0	1	2	3	4	16. Plays by the rules of the game	0	1	2	3	4
4. Is a self-starter	0	1	2	3	4	17. Pays attention	0	1	2	3	4
5. Work/plays well without adult support	0	1	2	3	4	18. Controls temper when there is a disagreement	0	1	2	3	4
6. Accepts legitimate imposed limits	0	1	2	3	4	19. Shares materials with others	0	1	2	3	4
7. Expresses needs and feelings appropriately	0	1	2	3	4	20. Cooperates with peers without prompting (PRO/CDM)	0	1	2	3	4
8. Thinks before acting	0	1	2	3	4	21. Follows teacher's verbal directions	0	1	2	3	4
9. Resolves peer problems on his/her own	0	1	2	3	4	22. Is helpful to others	0	1	2	3	4
10. Stays on task	0	1	2	3	4	23. Listens to others' points of view	0	1	2	3	4
11. Can calm down when excited or all wound up	0	1	2	3	4	24. Can give suggestions and opinions without being bossy	0	1	2	3	4
12. Can wait in line patiently when necessary	0	1	2	3	4	25. Acts friendly toward others	0	1	2	3	4
13. Very good at understanding other people's feelings	0	1	2	3	4						

For every one-point increase on the 8 item scale, the child was...

- Twice as likely to attain a college degree in early adulthood;
- 54% more likely to earn a high school diploma; and
- 46% more likely to have a full-time job at the age of 25



For every one-point decrease on the 8 item scale, the child had a...

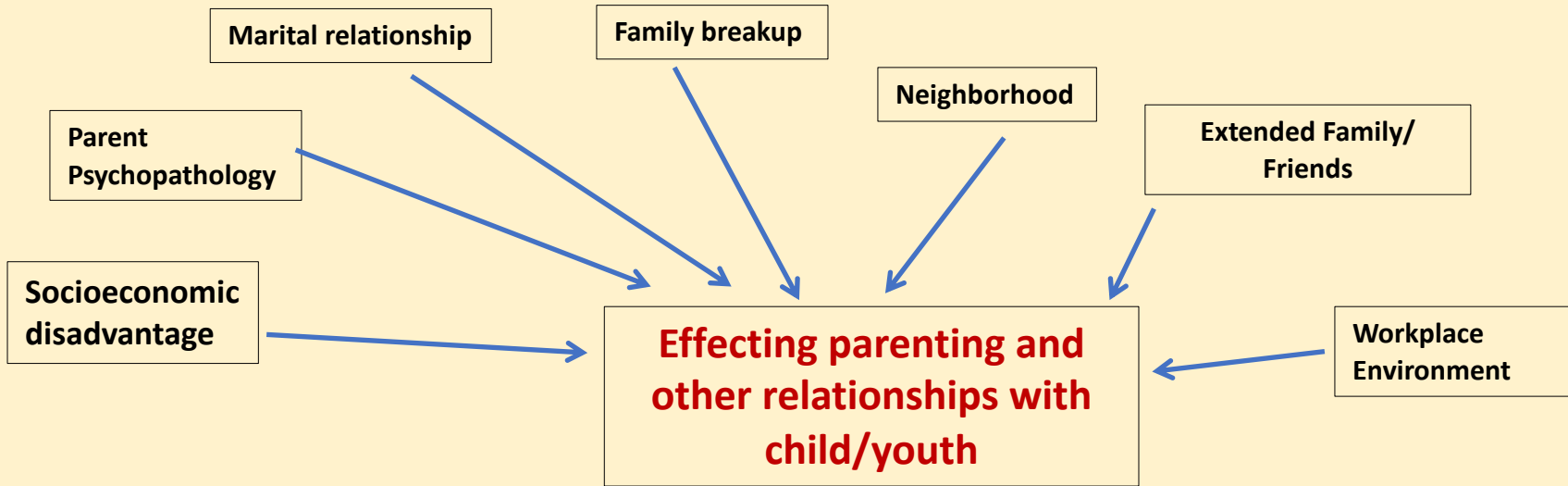
- 67% higher chance of having been arrested by early adulthood;
- 82% higher rate of recent marijuana usage; and
- 82% higher chance of being in or on a waiting list for public housing



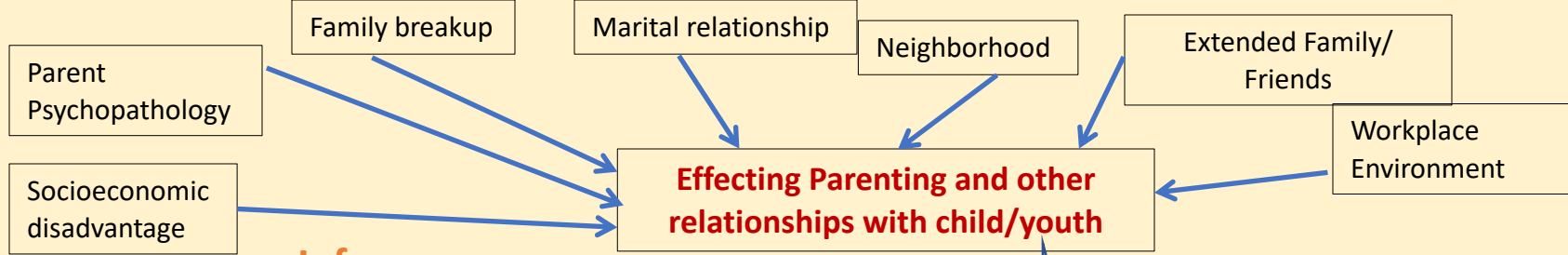
What
Undercuts the
Development
of These Skills?

- Poverty, Stress, Social Isolation
- Trauma, threat, insecurity

Bierman, K.



Conduct Problems Developmental Model



Infancy

Adolescence

Pre-Natal

Early Childhood

Middle Childhood

Mother
Smoking/
Substance abuse
Nutritional /health care

Parents
Poor parenting skills lead to negative potentially abusive interactions, high stress, low social support

↕

Child
Temperament
Health status

Home
Coercive or inconsistent discipline
Poor monitoring, poor reinforcement,

Child
Antisocial behavior

School
Skill deficient, off-task, aggressive, rejected by teacher and peers,

Home - Child
Disobedient, aggressive, observer/victim of traumatic events

Parent
Eroding discipline and monitoring,

School
Fights, bullies, no homework, academic failure, no connection, substance use, early sex, delinquency, social cognitive deficits

Teachers
Give up; multiple suspensions

Home
Combative with parent, no discipline, less time at home, antisocial peers, low supervision

Conduct Problems Developmental Model

The Melissa Institute



The contributions of school...

Preschool - Elementary

- Aggressive, poorly socialized behavior brings on peer rejection
- Academic difficulties, retention, and/or special education
- Inadequate or missing interventions
- Negative school schemata begin to predominate – Mutual dislike

The contributions of school...

Middle and High

- Exposure to similarly high-risk peers
- Suspensions dominate, often disproportionate (color, disability, gender)
- Bully *victimization* escalates, peaking usually at 7th grade. Frequently “bully-victims.”
- Substance abuse may begin or increase
- Dropout behaviors may start to dominate



The preponderance of middle-class children come to school already **wired-up for success** because most often the skills are the same in both environments.

Do as the adult asks

Share your toys

Don't hit

Wait your turn

Come when you're called

The challenge is to wire-up the others.

Reactive Aggression

- Unplanned, impulsive, reactive anger and aggression
- Hot tempered, easily riled to aggressive behavior
- Often chronic and serious discipline problems
- Numerous social-cognitive deficits and distortions



Building Emotional Competency in Children with Reactive Aggressive Styles

- Learn to understand and take ownership of own behavior and consequences
- Learn to recognize feeling states and behavior cues in others
- Learn to make and maintain positive peer relationships
- Learn and exhibit alternatives to aggressive behavior
- Learn to approach problems systematically

Knowledge of Social Information Processing Deficits must Undergird Treatment

- 1. Hypervigilant for aggressive cues**
- 2. Hostile attributional biases**
- 3. Higher value on retaliation than affiliation**
- 4. Narrow solution generation abilities**
- 5. Tendency to evaluate aggression positively**
- 6. Difficulty enacting prosocial skills**

The 3 Components of Anger must be Addressed

The **PHYSIOLOGICAL** part

- Your physical sensation of becoming or being angry

The **COGNITIVE** part

- What you choose to attend to; how it fits existing schema (e.g., fairness, threat, rights); Labeling

The **BEHAVIOR** part

- How you choose to express yourself- Assertive, aggressive, etc.

Skills Training with Children with Reactive Aggressive Styles

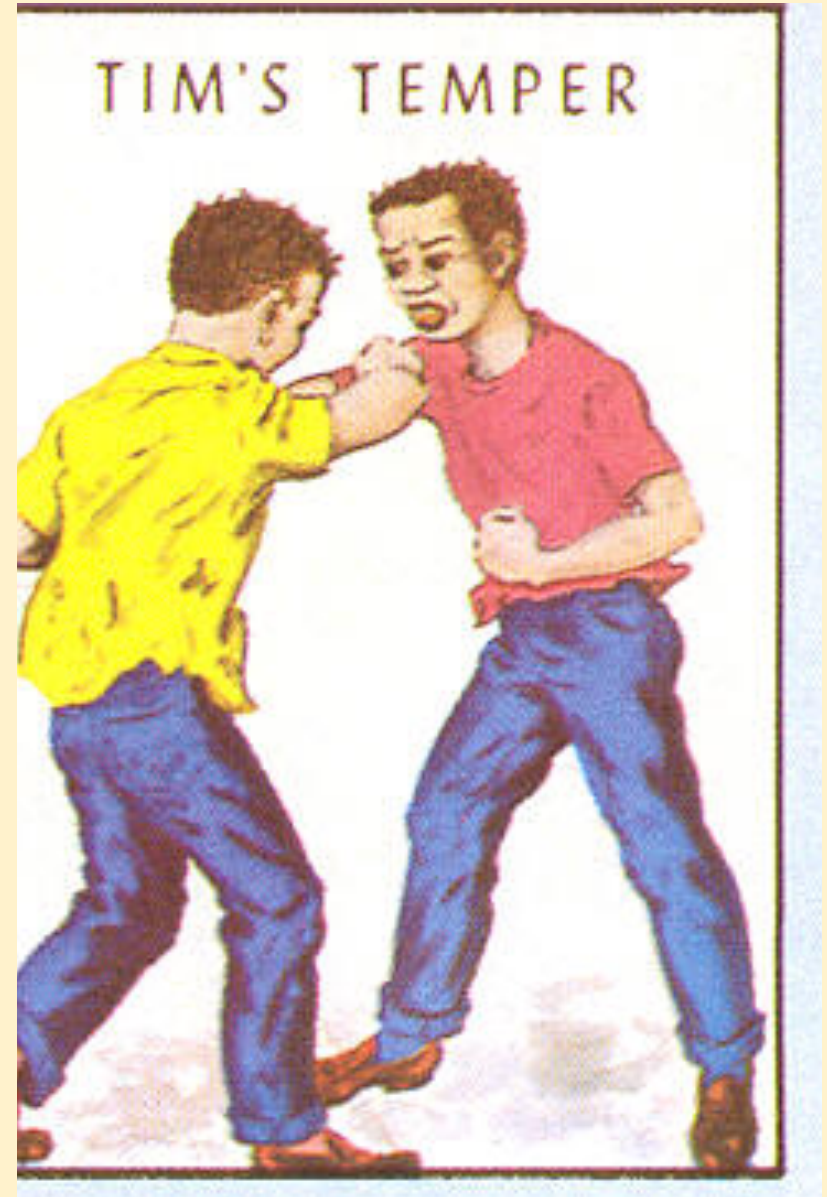
- Acquire insight into the features of their own anger and aggression – The **KNOWLEDGE** component
- Gain new behavioral responses to high-risk situations – The **SKILLS ACQUISITION** component
- Learn to engage new skills in multiple contexts – the **GENERALIZATION** component

KNOWLEDGE Goals with Children who have Reactive Aggressive Styles

- Affective education – e.g., anger continuum
 - Cognitive-Emotive relationship
 - Cue recognition – self and others
 - Perspective taking acquisition
 - Role of the environment – what or who can be avoided, moderated, or managed?
 - Ownership of behavior – locus of control
-
- Acquire insight into a problem-solving methodology

Knowing WHAT vs. Knowing HOW

- Knowing about a new behavior is NOT the same as being able to enact that behavior under rapidly moving conditions of ambiguity and emotion



SKILLS ACQUISITION Goals with Children who have Reactive Aggressive Styles

- Palliative anger regulation procedures
- Use of self-instruction for anger control
- Use of consequential thinking
- Use of assertiveness skills
- Use of problem-solving to address current issues
- Techniques for managing relapse
 - *In vitro* and then *in vivo*

GENERALIZATION Goals with Children who have Reactive Aggressive Styles

- The **contexts** of concern are identified, and generalization support energized early
 - *Parents, school personnel, prosocial peers*
- **Bridges** between training and authentic environment are created
 - *Homework tasks are essential*
- Possible **barriers** are identified and procedures to address them identified

In Conclusion

- Violence in the home leads to violence in the community and in the school
- Struggling parents need support, training, and encouragement to begin to replace entrenched, multi-generational patterns of coercive child rearing
- Schools in high-risk neighborhoods need to reach into homes to assist busy, often stressed parents prepare their children for the challenges of large group learning
- School mental health professionals need to target research-supported interventions towards the specific social and emotional needs of high-risk children

Thank You Very Much!

