DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 387 465 SP 036 239

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TITLE Teaching Children Affected by Substance Abuse.
INSTITUTION Education Development Center, Inc., Cambridge, Mass.
SPONS AGENCY Department of Education, Washington, DC.; Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE 94
CONTRACT HHS-100-91-0035
NOTE 72p.; This publication is accompanied by a video that illustrates many of the teaching practices in actual classrooms.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS At Risk Persons; *Children; *Classroom Techniques; Cooperative Learning; *Educational Environment; Elementary Education; Family School Relationship; *Prenatal Influences; Student Evaluation; *Substance Abuse; *Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

This guide presents and describes six effective teaching strategies for use with children affected by substance abuse before birth. This introduction provides information on the scope of the problem and the educational implications. It is noted that even without intervention when the child is still very young, teachers can improve the educational prospects for children at risk. Educators have identified practices that help them to succeed in regular education settings. The six practices are: (1) creating a nurturing classroom environment; (2) encouraging cooperative learning; (3) facilitating transitions and minimizing distractions; (4) helping students manage their behavior; (5) assessing for educational progress; and (6) building home-school connections. Follow-up activities, found at the end of each section in the guide, indicate how to translate the key ideas into practice. The companion video illustrates many of these practices in actual classrooms. An annotated list of resources is included. (Contains 32 references.) (JB)

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Teaching Children Affected by Substance Abuse

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Teaching Children Affected by Substance Abuse

By Sharon Grollman and Joanne P. Brady

Risk and Reality is a joint project of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the U.S. Department of Education (ED). Funding was provided by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, DHHS; the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education, ED; the Head Start Bureau, DHHS; the National Institute on Drug Abuse, DHHS; and the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, DHHS.

This publication was developed by Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC), under Contract No. HHS-100-91-0035 from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Joanne P. Brady and Michael J. Rosati served as Project Directors.

Products developed as part of this contract include:

Risk and Reality: Implications of Prenatal Exposure to Alcohol and Other Drugs (a research review)

Planning for Children Affected by Substance Abuse (a handbook for school administrators)

Teaching Children Affected by Substance Abuse (a video and teachers' guide for elementary school staff)

Risk and Reality: Teaching Preschool Children Affected by Substance Abuse (a video and teachers' guide for preschool staff)

Helping Children Affected by Substance Abuse: A Manual for the Head Start Management Team

Teaching Head Start Children Affected by Substance Abuse: A Training Guide for Education Teams

Instructional techniques described in this manual are included for informational purposes only. Their use by school systems is voluntary.

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1994. Printed in the United States of America.

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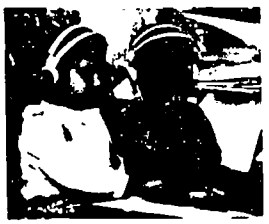

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INTRODUCTION

The Scope of the Problem

The rise in the use of new and potentially more deadly forms of drugs, and the trend toward using alcohol and other drugs in combination, exact a steep price from our society. Experts now estimate that one-half to three-quarters of a million infants are born each year who have been exposed to one or more illicit drugs in utero. When the legal drugs—alcohol and tobacco—are added, the figure rises to considerably more than one million substance-exposed infants.

Prenatal exposure to alcohol or other drugs increases the likelihood that babies will be born prematurely and will be small in height and weight, a condition known as "small-for-gestational-age." Not all preterm or small-for-gestational-age births are due to exposure to alcohol or other drugs. The lack of prenatal care, among other factors, contributes significantly to the likelihood of premature or small-for-gestational-age birth.

Whatever the cause, babies born too soon or too small face serious, life-threatening conditions, including respiratory distress, infections, and increased risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Their fragile physical status and longer in-hospital stays may also make early interaction with parents difficult, and increase stress on parents.

Although the evidence shows that exposure to alcohol and other drugs in utero adversely affects infants at birth, and

that prenatal exposure to alcohol can cause permanent damage, it is not yet clear what the long-term effects—biological or developmental—of prenatal exposure to illegal drugs might be. It is suspected that such exposure can continue to cause problems in childhood and beyond. Children prenatally exposed to illegal drugs such as cocaine and marijuana may be less skilled in verbal ability, have memory deficits, and become easily frustrated with developmentally challenging tasks.

It is important to note, however, that many other factors can also contribute to developmental problems. Lack of adequate parenting skills, family instability, and other environmental factors may compound physical as well as cognitive and behavioral problems. In fact, it is the *combination* of risk factors that is the most potent indicator of later developmental problems.

For example, physically abused children tend to be inattentive, impulsive, and aggressive, and show little creativity in problem solving. Neglected children tend to be inflexible in their approach to solving problems, lack enthusiasm, show poor coping strategies and impulse control, and are very dependent on their teachers. Sexually abused children tend to be preoccupied, depressed, anxious, angry, distractible, and withdrawn. Children who witness violence may be depressed, withdrawn, and have difficulty concentrating.

Environmental risk factors, although strongly associated with poverty, are not always present in, or limited to, low-income families. Abuse of alcohol or other drugs can occur in any family and present a clear danger to a child's healthy developmental progress —particularly in the absence of support and intervention.

Children affected by substance abuse are not necessarily children with special needs, and care must be taken to avoid identifying, labeling, or otherwise segregating them solely because of prenatal or environmental exposure to drugs.

Although some students who have been prenatally exposed to drugs may meet the established criteria for a disabling condition set forth by state and federal regulations related to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), early evidence suggests that most will not. Teachers must continue to create programs that will best address the needs of all children in their classrooms.

When the need for special education services is suspected, the child must be referred for an individualized evaluation in accordance with the evaluation and placement procedures under Part B of IDEA.

Educational Implications

Intervention that begins when the child is still very young, targeted both to the child and to the family, offers the best chance to mitigate children's behavioral, emotional, and cognitive problems—whatever their cause. Even without these early supports, however, teachers can improve the educational prospects for children at risk.

Educators across the country who work with high-risk children have identified practices that can help them succeed in regular education settings. Among these practices are:

- *A safe and supportive classroom environment.* Teachers can create a safe and stable classroom environment by building relationships with individual children over time; fostering child-to-child relationships; and developing classroom rules and predictable routines to help students develop a sense of what to expect. Such a classroom environment provides a critical balance to the unpredictable nature of day-to-day experiences that many children face.
- *Chances to interact, play, and learn successfully with other children.* Teachers can support children's development by creating a classroom community where students can teach and learn from each other.
- *Choices about what activities to pursue.* Teachers can help children move toward independence by creating a structured, trusting environment where choice is possible and children feel safe making choices.

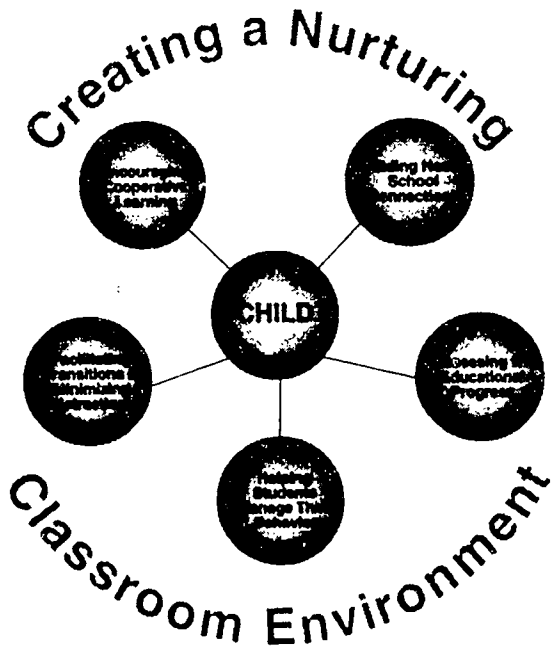
- *Assessment about their development that occurs in natural classroom situations and over time.* By understanding student strengths, interests, and learning styles, teachers can tailor instruction to meet the needs of individual students. In some cases, ongoing assessment may be supplemented by formal assessments to help pinpoint a student's needs and strengths, and to identify interventions that teachers can implement within the context of the regular classroom.

- *Links between their life in the classroom and their life at home.* Even the most vulnerable parents can provide teachers with valuable insights into how their children learn and play. Parents are their children's first teachers and can be important allies in their children's education.

This guide translates these principles into basic practices that teachers can use. The power of these practices rests on two main assumptions: first, that teachers are committed to developmentally appropriate practice—that is, creating a classroom environment and a curriculum based on children's developmental levels and individual needs; and second, that a nurturing classroom provides the essential backdrop for every practice. Only by developing positive, respectful relationships—child to child, teacher to parent, and teacher to child—can early childhood educators build strategies that tap the strengths of individual children.

How You Can Use This Guide

Six practices are described in this guide: Creating a Nurturing Classroom Environment, Encouraging Cooperative Learning, Facilitating Transitions and Minimizing Distractions, Helping Students Manage Their Behavior, Assessing for Educational Progress, and Building Home-School Connections. The diagram below demonstrates how the practices evolve around each child's needs.



The companion video, *Teaching Children Affected by Substance Abuse*, illustrates many of these practices in actual classrooms across the country.

Follow-up activities, found at the conclusion of each section, will help you translate the key ideas into classroom practice.

- *The Video Connection* offers guidelines for viewing the video and tools for adapting these practices to meet the needs of children in your classroom.
- *The Teacher Connection* provides a framework for working with other teachers and

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specialists to build a support network, and to collaboratively generate solutions to student problems.

- *The Parent Connection* offers activities that can help students' parents and caregivers become educational allies by suggesting how they can carry out specific, developmentally appropriate activities at home.

These follow-up activities provide suggestions for evaluating and fine tuning your own practices. They can be adapted to complement organized, professional opportunities offered in your district and to meet your individual needs and the needs of your students.

By using the activities to bridge theory and practice, and by applying the effective practices in your own classroom, you will improve the learning of children at risk, whatever the cause. You may also prevent their problems from developing into more serious barriers to achievement. Finally, these practices not only benefit children at risk, but also offer benefits to all children in the classroom.

Creating a Nurturing Classroom Environment

A nurturing classroom provides students with a safe, secure, and predictable environment based on positive and stable relationships with teachers, specialists, and peers. This environment is important for all students, especially those whose lives are characterized by a high degree of stress. For some students, school is their only source of stability—a safe harbor they can count on.

A nurturing classroom allows teachers to develop a relationship with their students, determine what they need, and find ways to work together to facilitate the learning process. A supportive climate is the glue that gives strategies their power.

Components of a nurturing classroom include acknowledging students' individual contributions, supporting their growing independence, and fostering their connections within the group. In such an environment, students develop the social competence and self-confidence needed to become active learners.

Beginning the School Year

The first weeks of school can be unsettling, particularly for vulnerable students who have difficulty coping with even the

smallest of changes. You can provide a smooth classroom transition in a number of ways.

- Before school opens, talk to the sending teachers to learn more about incoming students—their learning styles, materials they particularly enjoy, their strengths in key developmental areas, how they relate to adults and peers, what activities they find comforting, and how they cope with change. If incoming students have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), consult with the specialists involved. Use the information to develop activities that match students' interests and abilities.
- Plan activities to personalize students' entry into your classroom. Send personal letters to students and their families, welcoming them. Orient the children to the classroom in small groups, using guided discovery to help prepare them for their new environment. (For more information, see the section on Facilitating Transitions and Minimizing Distractions later in this guidebook.)
- Lay the groundwork for positive parent involvement by meeting with parents, asking them about their child's strengths and preferences, and discussing steps to ease the transition process. Use this time to describe your class, discuss the curriculum, and share your expectations for students.

Children have as much at stake in creating a caring community as the teacher.

Arranging the Physical Environment

The physical setup of your classroom influences children's learning and behavior. When materials are easily accessible and students know where to find them, you promote children's increasing sense of independence.

Before Dawn entered school, she never had anything that she could call her own. She shared a bed with her older sister; she didn't have a dresser, and the few toys in her house were always up for grabs. But now, she has her own cubby. At the beginning of the year, she'd visit her cubby at least five times a day, just to make sure that it was still there. That cubby means a lot to Dawn: it's her space, one that gives her a sense of permanency and a sense of stability. When she sees that cubby, she knows that she has a place in the classroom.

- Provide ample supplies of each type of material to encourage cooperative learning. Children are more likely to work together to build an elaborate city out of blocks when *lots* of blocks are available.
- Organize and label materials. Students with attention difficulties may feel overwhelmed by the richness of classroom materials. An organized classroom where materials are kept in labeled storage containers will reduce competing demands made on students' attention. (See the section on Facilitating Transitions and Minimizing Distractions for more information.)
- Find ways to make your classroom feel as homelike as possible. Include objects that are familiar and reflect the cultural backgrounds of your students (e.g., chopsticks in the kitchen area) to help children develop a sense of belonging. Some teachers take photographs of children and their caregivers at the beginning of the year, then use these pictures to create a bulletin board display with students.
- Give children space that "belongs" to them, perhaps a cubby or a rug used for morning meeting. Ask children to label their personal things with pictures, photographs, and poems.

- Develop a predictable daily schedule. Use visual cues (e.g., posting an illustrated schedule) and words to help students get a sense of the routine and the "workings" of your classroom. Discuss when they can walk around the room, how and where to get their materials, how to accomplish tasks, and what to do when tasks are completed.

- Work with students to develop a *brief* set of classroom rules (e.g., everyone must be safe, people's feelings and belongings must be respected). State them in a clear, positive manner. When students participate in defining the rules, they feel more ownership and better understand how the classroom will operate throughout the year. Post the classroom rules and enforce them consistently. Teachers report that students are more likely to use the classroom rules to arbitrate their own conflicts when they feel they are part of the process.

Beginning the Day

Making a transition from home to school is difficult for many children at risk. Let students know that you are happy to see them. By showing that you are ready to listen when they are ready to talk, you can relieve their anxiety and help them make the bridge more easily.

- The way you and your students launch the morning sets the tone for the rest of the day. Avoid the temptation to use students' arrival time for

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completing last-minute preparations. Instead, stand at the door, taking the time to greet students individually when they walk into your classroom (and to greet parents who drop off their children). "Take the pulse" of children by paying attention to what they say and by reading their facial expressions and body language. Address any concerns or questions children may have. If students have difficulty communicating their needs verbally, talk about your observations: "You look sad today."

- Conduct a morning meeting to foster a sense of community. By using this time to have students do a "group greeting," you help students feel that they have a proper place in the classroom. Invite students to share their ideas and provide a model for offering feedback and praise. Some children may share, "My sister was sick," while others might reveal more personal and powerful information, such as problems in their household. Teachers must be prepared to react to both kinds of situations. You may need to consult with the school psychologist or counselor if you think a referral is appropriate.

- The morning meeting is a good time to help students anticipate the day's events. Announce the activities of the day, including any special events such as visitors to the classroom.

Follow-up Activities

The Video Connection

As you watch the segment *Creating a Nurturing Classroom Environment*, note how teachers have adapted their classrooms.

- The teachers use a variety of routines and rituals to build a predictable, caring environment. Among those shown, which might you adapt for your class?
- Would any aspects of the physical environments shown in the video be useful to incorporate into your classroom?

The Teacher Connection

Meet with some colleagues (specialists within the system, administrators, fellow teachers, parent volunteers, or aides who work in the classroom). Use the following questions to guide your discussion:

- Think about a student in your classroom who has a hard time being a member of the group. How can you help the child feel like she is a member of the classroom community? How could you build on this child's strengths to promote positive peer interactions? What else could you do to provide a more nurturing environment for this child?
- How can you work together to create a nurturing school so that students feel safe (emotionally and physically) not only in their classrooms, but also in the lunchroom, in the halls, on the playground, and in the gym?
- How can you help parents and other caregivers provide children with a more predictable, secure, and stable home environment?

The Parent Connection

Help parents focus on their child's strengths—not merely on their problems. For example, one teacher turned an empty, clean coffee can into an "I Can" can. She began by depositing slips of paper that contained records of each child's achievements (e.g., "I can count to one hundred by twos. I can help my friends tie their shoes"). Then she sent the cans home so that parents could reinforce their children's successes by adding slips of their own. Periodically, the can was emptied so that parents and children could review the growing accomplishments.

Encouraging Cooperative Learning

Student assessments can help teachers tailor cooperative projects that build on students' strengths and interests. (See the section on Assessing for Educational Progress later in this guidebook.) By offering students cooperative learning experiences and assisting children at risk to take part in group problem solving, teachers promote a collaborative—rather than a competitive—approach to learning. When all students have opportunities to become helpers and leaders, they learn to realize and value the different types of contributions each member can make. Students can serve as role models for each other, helping set the tone that it is okay to make choices and take risks. Students with learning problems develop interpersonal and communication skills. They also gain a deeper understanding of the subject material by questioning, observing how peers manage the given tasks, and discovering how they, too, can make a difference. In successful cooperative learning situations, students feel safe to explore and discover their own abilities. They become more self-directed and feel more competent as they teach and learn from one another.

In successful cooperative learning situations, students feel safe to explore and discover their own abilities.

I used to think that independent learning fostered independence. I've now come to realize that learning and working together is what really fosters independence and responsibility in ways that working in isolation could never provide. And when students work together, their learning increases many times over. Students teach each other. They ask really good questions. They learn new perspectives. Just as teachers should not be alone in their professions, students should not be alone in their learning.

Creating the Context

Cooperative learning is more than an occasional event. It is a process that can (and should) occur formally and informally every day throughout the school year during reading and writing, at morning meeting, while cleaning up, and during play. You can weave cooperative learning into all aspects of teaching and learning in a number of ways:

You can signal that making mistakes and asking for assistance are not signs of weakness, but part of the learning process.

- Modify the physical environment to make it conducive to cooperative learning. Replace traditional rows of desks and chairs with rugs for morning meetings. Provide space for learning centers, small-group work, and whole-class instruction.
- Teach and model the skills necessary for cooperative learning—how to wait for a turn, listen to what others are saying, value the ideas of others, and offer thoughtful comments. Talk directly about the importance of these skills and praise students when they practice them successfully.
- Set a tone. You can signal that making mistakes and asking for assistance are not signs of weakness, but part of the learning process. Model for students how to give and receive help and how to include other students in different activities.

- Build "choice time" into your daily schedule so that students with mutual interests can play and work together. Offer suggestions about how students might work together: "Tasha, I noticed you were experimenting with the magnets yesterday. Mike is interested in magnets, too. Maybe you could work with Mike in that area today."

- Create thematic units (i.e., using a particular topic as a vehicle for teaching different content areas) that are flexible in terms of pacing and the types of activities provided. These units provide opportunities for students of different abilities to work together to accomplish a common goal, while receiving additional, focused instruction as needed. For example, you may ask students to use pattern blocks to create geometrical shapes or design a word web to describe a story character.

Designing Group Projects

You can use a variety of teaching techniques that involve a high degree of student interaction and student-initiated activity. Use your student assessments to develop collaborative projects that fit in with your curriculum goals and match your students' interests and strengths.

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- Provide opportunities for peer collaboration, a technique in which a student is paired with another student from the same class in a content area such as reading, writing, or math. This method helps reinforce the

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After taking a trip to the zoo, Freddie announced that he wanted a pet pig. I suggested that Freddie get together with his learning circle to see what they could do. When they discovered that his housing project did not allow pet pigs, they came up with an alternate solution. Together, they cut a piece of brown butcher paper in the shape of a pig and stuffed it. Freddie now has a pet pig. Freddie's mother later told me that Freddie slept with his pig under his pillow.

material for the tutor, while the child being tutored benefits from individualized instruction and attention. Group collaboration involves a group of students sharing the responsibility of a given task and problem-solving together. In "learning circles," students with mutual interests choose an activity to work on together (e.g., making up a game with pebbles and sticks) or discuss issues related to their own lives.

- Use information from your student assessments to construct cooperative groupings that suit both the competence and interests of students. If a student seems withdrawn, select a partner who will not overwhelm the child. Group distractible children with peers who can stay on task.

- Structure group projects with students. Talk about how much time they have, and what steps are involved (e.g., brainstorming, choosing an idea, researching, taking notes, writing, revising, illustrating). Have students take turns playing different roles such as record keeper, artist, director, researcher, and organizer. If certain students have difficulty in group situations, assign them roles that would allow them to demonstrate their strengths. For example, if a group of students are writing a collaborative story, a child with limited English skills could be the story

illustrator or designer. Or if a student has difficulty focusing and sitting still, he or she may do well as the organizer, gathering the special materials needed for the project.

- Encourage students to talk about their cooperative learning experiences. Ask open-ended questions to focus students' attention on the positive aspects of the experience: "What made your group work so well today?" Teachers report that when students are aware of what makes things work, they are more likely to recall those skills and use them in other situations.

- Build in time for students to share what they learned during their cooperative projects with the class. Model how to provide positive feedback and ask questions that focus on the product as well as the process. (e.g., "How did you figure out how to make up a game? What are the rules?")

- Broaden your base by engaging the community. Invite local business leaders to come in to your classroom to talk about their skills and expertise; tap community groups, such as churches, synagogues, community service centers, local colleges and universities, and senior citizen centers to recruit volunteers who can work directly with students. By opening your doors, you will bring additional resources into your classroom as well as teach students the value of cooperation.

Broaden your base by engaging the community. By opening your doors, you will bring additional resources into your classroom as well as teach students the value of cooperation.

Follow-up Activities

The Video Connection

Watch the video segment *Encouraging Cooperative Learning.* Use the following questions to guide your viewing:

- In this segment, one teacher talks about the importance of establishing ground rules for cooperative learning. (e.g., During peer conferencing, students need to provide positive feedback to classmates.) Does your classroom have specific ground rules for cooperative learning activities?
- Notice the different group sizes of the cooperative learning activities over this segment. For emerging literacy, which situations lend themselves to paired groupings? Which lend themselves to larger group activities? What principles could you use to guide your thinking about group size?
- When might you select partners for paired reading? When would you leave it open to student choice?

The Teacher Connection

Choose a student in your classroom who has difficulty participating in group activities. Perhaps this student is withdrawn. Or maybe the student's inability to focus and erratic behavior prevent participation.

Meet with a colleague to brainstorm some group projects that would fit in with your curriculum goals and match the student's interests and strengths.

- Think about ideal size and composition of the group. What other students would complement this particular child's style and temperament?

- How could you structure this project with children? What role might the focal child take?

The Parent Connection

Host a parent night featuring children's cooperative projects. Focus not only on the products, but on the process as well. Show slides or a videotape of children working together, or share children's recorded interaction on audiotape. Using children's projects as the centerpiece, pose questions to parents to help them assess how children work together and the benefits of cooperative learning activities: "How are the children using the materials? How are they problem-solving together? What are they learning from each other?" In addition to explaining the importance of cooperative learning, ask parents to practice it. Based on your curriculum, design small-group activities where parents work together to accomplish a certain goal. Then ask each group to share what they did and what they learned. Parents will come away from these sessions with not only a new appreciation of cooperative learning, but a better understanding of the curriculum as well.

Facilitating Transitions & Minimizing Distractions

Understandably, children who are distractible also have difficulty making transitions that occur during the day such as getting off the school bus, getting settled in the morning, or switching from one activity to another.

Making transitions and focusing on activities are two interrelated challenges for many children at risk. Often these children are disorganized and easily distractible; they have no internal framework or "gyroscope" to organize themselves or their environment. They move from object to object and place to place, and have difficulty in completing any given task. These characteristics affect their ability to manipulate materials and learn as well as their ability to participate in group activities. If a classmate walks by, if someone enters the room, or if too many things are on the wall, they might have difficulty refocusing on the task at hand. As a result, they may become restless and aimlessly wander around the classroom. These behaviors are distracting to other students as well. Understandably, children who are distractible also have difficulty making transitions that occur during the day such as getting off the school bus, getting settled in the morning, or switching from one activity to another. Even changes that most children would find welcoming, such as a field trip to the zoo or a class party, can be perceived by others as a confusing or frightening experience.

Predictability of the daily schedule, consistency within and across staff, and firm boundaries will limit changes and help children organize their environment.

Organizing Space and Materials

Children who are distractible and have difficulty managing transitions need space that cuts down on the competing demands for their attention. You can organize your classroom and display materials to meet the needs of students with attention difficulties in a number of ways.

- Design a physical environment that promotes social interaction, and also includes quiet and soothing areas that are not associated with punishment. Designate an area in the classroom—a quiet corner or alcove—where a limited number of students can retreat when they need quiet time. Situate noisy areas (e.g., the art corner) away from quiet areas (e.g., the reading space).
- Use physical barriers such as low wall dividers and tape on the floor to create well-defined areas. Decorate learning centers with pictures, posters, and signs to provide cues about which activities take place in each location and how many students can work there.

I watched the children at the beginning of the year to see where they worked the most. Then I taped the floor in those areas, making different sizes and shapes so that only a certain number of children would fit in each space. This technique has minimized a lot of confusion. Nobody complains, "There are too many kids here." The children know when a space is filled and when there's a place for them. And it helps those children in each area really focus on what they're doing and what they're learning.

Organize materials so that students who are distractible do not feel overwhelmed.

- Offer students the security of a predictable environment. Plan a consistent seating arrangement so that students know where to sit without your direction. Seat children with attention problems in an area with limited distractions (e.g., facing walls that are uncluttered) and away from the classroom traffic.

- Use guided discovery as a way to introduce new materials to students. Some teachers put new materials in a decorated cardboard "mystery box." During the morning meeting, the helper of the day takes out the box and shows its contents to the class. The teacher helps students explore the materials by asking questions that lead to group problem solving. For example, one teacher, who was doing a unit on weights and measurements, put a two-sided balance scale in the mystery box. During the morning meeting she asked students, "What do you think this is? Who might use it? Why? How could we use it in the classroom? Where do you think it belongs in the classroom?" She demonstrated how to use the scale. Then she invited students to choose classroom items that might weigh the same and use the scale to test their hypotheses.

- Organize materials so that students who are distractible do not feel overwhelmed. Label items and put them away in boxes; carefully choose which materials to display. Arrange the materials so that students know where to find them and can access them easily. Provide ample supplies of each type of material to encourage children to work together on cooperative projects.

Developing Transition Activities

Switching from one activity to another often leads to confusion and frustration for vulnerable students. By

developing thoughtful transition steps so that the transition becomes an activity in itself, you will help students make the bridge more easily.

- Plan a predictable daily schedule with activities of appropriate length. Some students need to see as well as hear about the logical sequence of events. Post the schedule with picture cues in a visible place in the classroom. Some teachers have students draw pictures to represent the day's main events (free choice, morning meeting, math, language arts, lunch time, recess, science). Each day, the teacher hangs up the pictures to illustrate what the day's events will be, and the order in which they will occur. A picture is removed once the activity has been completed. Such a technique provides students with a frame of reference for understanding and organizing their day.

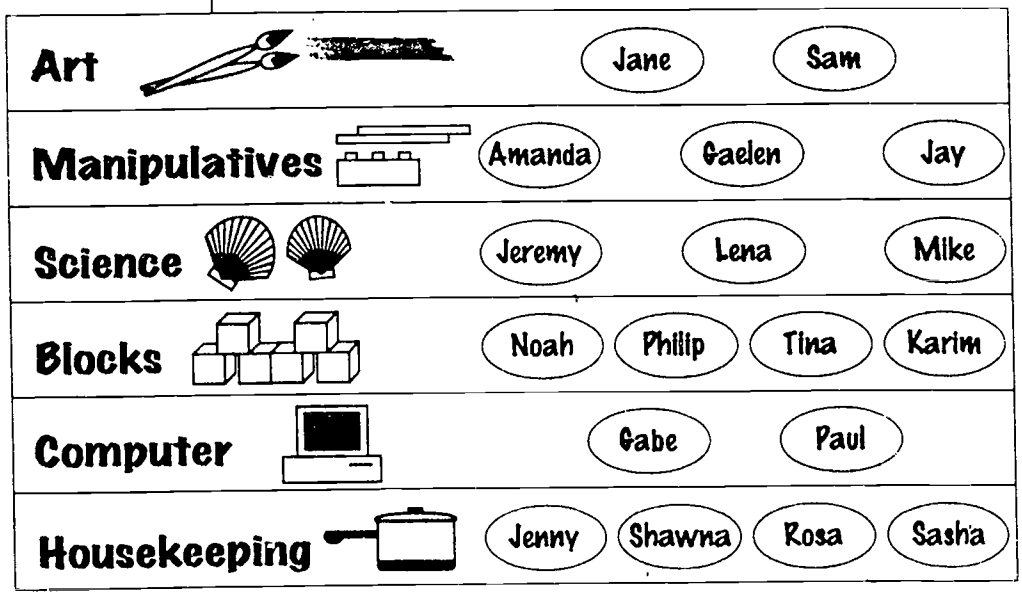
- Talk aloud. If there's a fire drill or if your class is going to the gym, talk about the route you're going to take, who you're going to see, what might happen. By constantly narrating facts, you help your students anticipate what's going to happen and give them opportunities to ask their own questions.

- Use multi-modal signals to prepare students with different learning styles for upcoming transitions. Use verbal cues (e.g., "You have 10 more minutes to work on your diorama, and then we're going to the gym. Why don't you get to a good stopping place, and you can work on it later."); visual cues (e.g., referring to the posted schedule); and auditory cues (e.g., playing soft music). Body language, such as holding up your hand, may also signal change. Some teachers use a transition board or choice chart like the one shown on page 30 to help

students track their "path" during the course of the day. Each time students move to a different area of the classroom, they move an icon on the board (a decorated piece of Velcro™ or a clothespin with their name) to indicate where they are in the classroom.

- Develop transition activities to help students switch gears for a new activity. Some teachers ask students to touch their toes with their pinkies to show that they're ready for the next activity. Other teachers call all the children wearing blue shirts to line up first, then students wearing red to line up next. Still others make "footprints" or use tape to make railroad tracks on the floor so that students know where to "line up for the train" headed for the cafeteria. Variety is the key to keeping students attuned and engaged.

- Some students do not respond to group cues. For these children, develop individualized cues and coach them through transitions. There are a variety of strategies you can use; the ones you choose will depend on the child's



individual style and cultural background. Use simple, one-step instructions that specify the task to be accomplished and avoid giving too many directions at once. Gradually, increase the number of steps. Ask children to repeat your directions as a way to check their understanding. Direct them to watch another child who is using a successful strategy. For some children, good eye contact, close proximity between teacher and child, and hearing their names helps them focus.

- Give students tools to help them make transitions at the end of the day. One teacher developed an effective system that helped students remember what to leave at school and what to take home. If papers were to go home, they went in the green folder. Papers that stayed in school went in the red folder. Another teacher gave children "Forget Me Not" notebooks they could use to record things they needed to bring back to school the next day such as homework assignments, permission slips, and lunch money.

Predictability is the key to ensuring a smooth transition, not only from one activity to another, but from one adult to another.

Ensuring Predictability of Staff

Predictability is the key to ensuring a smooth transition, not only from one activity to another, but from one adult to another. Special emphasis may be placed on predictable patterns of staff behavior and routines in a number of ways.

- Develop a handout for specialists and parents who work in the classroom, which should spell out the ground rules for incoming visitors (how adults are introduced), outline the daily routines with special attention to facilitating transitions, and provide tips for engaging students and helping them feel comfortable with new faces. Review the handout with incoming adults before they work in the classroom.

Take pains to prepare students ahead of time for new faces. Before the visitor's arrival, talk to students about what role the person will play in the classroom. (e.g., "Yesterday we said Mr. Novack was coming to visit us. Who remembers Mr. Novack? What special things will he be doing with us today?")

- As much as possible, create a stable and familiar cadre of substitute teachers. Notify students in advance if you know you are going to be absent on a certain day. One teacher makes audiotapes for her students to listen to in her absence. On the tape, she explains the types of activities they'll be doing with the substitute teacher and reassures them that she'll be back the next day.

When children at risk begin to build connections with teachers and other staff members, those connections must be respected. Adults are not interchangeable; every effort must be made to ensure continuity of care over time. Only then will children begin to feel that the world is a trusting and good place. Only then will children begin to trust themselves and take the risks necessary for learning.

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Follow-up Activities

The Video Connection

Watch the video segment *Facilitating Transitions and Minimizing Distractions*. Use the following questions to guide your viewing:

- What are the different strategies that teachers in this segment use to cue children of a change of activity?
- The teachers in this segment organize their classrooms with specific rules guiding the floor plan and storage of materials. As you think about the layout of your classroom, which setups could you change to minimize the level of distraction for your students?

The Teacher Connection

To prepare students for special events and visitors, teachers need to be aware of and plan for any changes in the school routine. Meet with other teachers. Invite school administrators and other staff to work with you to examine the operations of the school, its impact on staff and students, and strategies for creating more predictable routines. Together, consider the following questions:

- Do teachers feel in control of their own schedules?
- Are staff involved in the planning of schoolwide events?
- Are staff given ample notice when special events occur?
- Is there a predictability in the school's daily schedule?
- Are adequate arrangements made for substitute teachers?
- Are staff given choices about whether their class will participate in an event?

- How can staff work together to facilitate transitions and minimize distractions?

The Parent Connection

Making the transition from home to school at the beginning of the day, or school to home at the end of the day, is often difficult for children. Homework assignments and lunch boxes often get lost in the shuffle. As a result, tempers may flare and children are left feeling anxious and unsuccessful. Involve families in helping children make a smooth transition from one setting to another. Ask children to work with a family member to use markers, paper, Velcro™, and tape to develop a "Forget Me Not" folder to remember what needs to come home and what needs to return to school the next day. Provide some examples of systems that already work for children.

Helping Students Manage Their Behavior

Children who experience a great deal of stress in their lives often have difficulty managing their behavior. Aggression may be the only way they know how to exert control over their environment. These behavioral difficulties may be compounded by language and speech delays, such as language-processing problems, poor articulation, limited vocabulary, and limited expressive language skills. When children don't have adequate verbal skills, behavior may be the dominant means of communication. If a child is unable to say, "It's my turn next!," hitting may seem the next best solution.

Teachers can promote positive peer interaction by creating clear standards of expected behavior and a respectful classroom environment that allows children to communicate their needs and exercise their decisionmaking abilities.

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Helping Students Identify and Express Their Feelings

- Help students to identify and articulate their feelings by labeling emotions and exploring them through role playing and conversation. Use open-ended questions. Comment positively on their responses, repeat their responses, and demonstrate positive recognition for improvement.

- Use literature as a way to help children identify and explore feelings. Numerous bibliographies of children's books are now available; these resources can guide you in selecting books that reflect the issues faced by your students. Encourage students to talk about how different story characters feel, how they cope with their situations, and what they learn. Such discussions can help children realize that they are not alone, their feelings are natural, and it is okay to share their feelings with others.

- Provide multiple opportunities for students to express their ideas and feelings verbally and nonverbally. Students who do not feel comfortable talking directly about their emotions may discover new avenues of self-expression in the creative arts (music, drama, art, movement). Observe students to identify effective means of expression.

Jerome came to school with very little language. Sometimes I barely got a "hi" out of him, and that seemed to be the extent of his verbal repertoire. I do a lot of work with puppets. One day I accidentally left Waffles, a rabbit puppet, on the floor. Jerome discovered Waffles and I discovered Jerome as he confided in a fluffy rabbit. He told Waffles that he didn't like going home, but that he liked Waffles, and that he was like Waffles, too, because he loved school. After that, I used Waffles as a way to communicate with Jerome.

Incorporating Play into the Curriculum

Social play fosters language development and social skills as students negotiate what scenarios to play out, what roles to play, what props to use, and what direction the play will take. In addition, it provides children with an opportunity to express their concerns and fears in a safe way. By observing and participating in children's play, you can gain valuable insights into how children perceive their world—their struggles, concerns, and interests—and pinpoint skills that need to be developed.

- Some children have difficulty entering their classmates' ongoing play. Often when children simply ask if they can play too, they are rejected. A far more effective practice involves helping children who are left out assess the play situation. Once children understand the play schema, they are more likely to find ways to enter the play. Begin by asking questions that prompt children to think about the play in progress: "What do you think they are building? What kind of castle is it? What are the knights doing to protect the castle?" Next focus your questions to help the child identify a possible role for himself: "What could you make to help protect the castle?" Offer suggestions if needed.

- When troublesome themes appear in children's play, do not interrupt the play schema. Instead, be willing to take on a role. For example, if a kindergarten child is hitting her "baby" against the stove, pretend you are a little girl and say, "Mommy, you're really angry. How come?" Take notes about these play episodes, objectively describing what the child says and does and how you respond. If these types of themes persist, share your observations with the school psychologist or counselor.

By observing and participating in children's play, you can gain valuable insights into how children perceive their world—their struggles, concerns, and interests—and pinpoint skills that need to be developed.

Redirecting Behavior

Some behaviors consume teachers' time and energy—when students are willfully resistant, destroy their own work or the work of others, or strike out at classmates, seemingly with no provocation. By viewing behavior as a form of communication—a response to internal or external stimuli—you can identify cues and patterns, and design strategies that prevent these problem behaviors from occurring.

By viewing behavior as a form of communication —a response to internal or external stimuli—you can identify cues and patterns, and design strategies that prevent these problem behaviors from occurring.

- When students "break the rules," state firmly what the rules are: "We do not hit others in this classroom, and my job is to make sure that this room is a safe place for everyone." With some children, it is most effective to state the rules assertively and stop the behavior, then discuss it later, once they have regained their composure.
- Let children know how their behavior affects their relationships with their peers: "What did Karim do when you kicked him? Do you really want other children to run away from you?"
- Highlight the logical consequences of events. That is, work with students to create consequences that are connected to the behavior. For example, if a student throws a chair across the room, the student must pick up the chair and put it back in its place. If a student uses a scissors like a sword, the student loses the privilege to use the scissors.
- When rules are consistently broken, bring students together for a class meeting. Use the rules as a way to frame discussions: address the problems openly and involve students in generating their own solutions. (e.g., "I notice that the rules get broken during lunchtime. Why do you think that is happening? What can we do about it?") Record students' responses, then choose which

strategies to implement. Have follow-up discussions with students to review how the strategies are working.

- Provide students with alternatives. If a child does not feel ready to join the group on a particular day, give her permission to read quietly in another area.
- Comment on behaviors. If a child is not able to participate during a class meeting, you can tell other students, "He's not ready *yet*" or "She's not ready *now*." When a classroom truly feels like a community, other students can provide support for children with challenging behaviors by articulating how certain behaviors make them feel and by modeling how to deal with frustration.
- Redirect behaviors. If children cannot control their behavior, you may ask them to go to a designated area where they will not hurt themselves or interfere with the learning of others. Then ignore their behavior while they're in the designated area. Let them know that when they are ready to stop, they can rejoin the class. You will

Our morning meetings didn't last more than five minutes. Students didn't listen to one another. They didn't listen to me. There was so much negative energy. I was at my wit's end. Finally, I turned to my class for advice: I told them that our meetings weren't working, and we had to put our heads together to think of ideas to make them more fun. Collectively we came up with a plan. On Mondays, we would devote our morning meetings to telling each other jokes. On Tuesdays, we wore crazy T-shirts and had a parade around the school. On Wednesdays, we shared funny drawings. Thursdays was silly face day. And on Fridays, we sang silly songs. For the first time, my students were engaged. They laughed. They started talking more, sharing more. Together, we had found the hooks.

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help students build impulse control by rewarding them each time they successfully handle a situation.

- Ignore behaviors that do not interfere with a student's participation, such as doodling or tapping on the floor; children often use behaviors such as these to calm themselves or instill a sense of control into the activity they are pursuing.

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- The challenging behaviors that you witness in the classroom are likely to challenge family members at home, too. Invite home-school collaboration. Ask parents about the behaviors that children are exhibiting at home and what techniques are most effective in managing those behaviors. Acknowledge the frustration they may feel and explore how they can channel that energy in more positive ways. Then describe the strategies that you are using in the classroom and suggest how they can be incorporated into their regular routines at home (e.g., setting realistic limits, redirecting behavior, praising children when they do well). Some teachers use a "blue book," which is sent home to parents on a regular basis, to report on the student's progress. Parents then have an opportunity to talk about their concerns and share information.

- Provide students who need special supports with peer mentors and buddies (older students or teachers) to facilitate social behavior. When choosing a buddy, consider not only the individual's skills, but personality and temperament as well. The buddy must be able to respond to the child's particular needs and have the patience to nurture him or her with unconditional acceptance.

- Seek assistance. A nurturing and well-organized environment is not always enough to overcome a child's

difficulties. In these instances, consult with a school administrator, your teaching team, and/or specialists within the system. Share your observations about the child's strengths and weaknesses, pinpointing areas of concern. Request technical assistance— a consultant who can come into your classroom to observe the child in a variety of situations (at morning meeting, during free play,

CASE When Andre first came to school, he had no sense of inner control. He'd kick. He'd bite. He'd spit. He'd stand on tables. He'd knock down what other children had built. He couldn't play with other children. He couldn't join our morning meeting—he'd just dart out the door. But there was something in Andre that got to me—a smile would break out on his face—fleeting, but it was there. That smile was a signal that told me he could be reached if we could give him what he needed—stability, structure, consistency—things that all children need, things that he never had.

We created a buddy system to give him the one-to-one relationship he had sorely missed. Teresa is a teacher with a lot of patience. Andre didn't push her buttons the way he had with other teachers. Arrangements were made so that the first hour of each day, Teresa was Andre's special friend. Everyday she was the one who would greet him at the door. She would pick a game that she thought he would like. With time, he began saying "yes" to things. Sometimes he'd even suggest activities that they could do together. At the beginning, Andre would only stay close to Teresa. Gradually, he began to leave her side to join other children with their activities. But even then, he'd still look over his shoulder to make sure Teresa was there. She is his point of connection.

When there's a sudden transition, when a teacher is absent, he will still fall apart. But Andre has changed. He can listen; he can think before he lashes out; his attention span has increased; he is moving toward cooperative play. It has been a metamorphosis.

at lunch, during small-group work, and working alone) and offer feedback about approaches that might be more effective.

Follow-up Activities

The Video Connection

Watch the video segment *Helping Students Manage Their Behavior*. Use the following questions to guide your viewing:

- Andre's story illustrates how a buddy system can provide a student with the needed structure and support. Are there students in your classrooms who could benefit from such a system? How can you work with older students, parents, volunteers, or other teachers to develop a buddy system for these children?
- Which techniques shown in the video could you incorporate into your classroom to help children manage their behavior?

The Teacher Connection

Meet with some colleagues (specialists within the system, administrators, fellow teachers, parent volunteers, or aides who work in the classroom). Use the following questions to guide your discussion:

- When students in your classroom exhibit challenging behaviors, how do you help them redirect their behavior? How do you encourage them to work together to negotiate their own conflicts? How can you use books as a way to help children understand the feelings of others as well as their own?
- How can you build a buddy system for yourselves, for times when you feel as if you need some time out? What

systems could you put in place? For example, can another teacher or a teacher's aide take over for a little while so you can regain your composure?

- Sometimes you may feel that even your best attempts to help a child manage his or her behaviors are not working. In these cases, how do you involve the child's parents or caregivers? What specialists can you turn to for advice and support? What steps can you take to get the targeted help that the child needs?

The Parent Connection

Assign homework that involves parent participation and encourages parents to talk with children about feelings.

Have children take home a book or poem that explores feelings. For example, *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*, by Judith Viorst (1972), describes the very bad day of young Alexander, who gets more and more frustrated as the day goes on. The picture book *Feelings* by Aliki Branderberg (1984) offers children a small catalog of feelings. Have children read the story with parents. If some students are not yet able to read and parents have difficulty with English, encourage parents and children to look at the pictures and talk about what is happening on each page. Include follow-up questions for parents and children to discuss together. (e.g., "What makes the characters in the story happy? What makes you happy? What makes the characters in the book angry? What makes you angry? When you are having a bad day, what things can you do to feel better?")

Along with the discussion questions, send home a letter to parents about the importance of discussing feelings with children and tips for helping children to identify and express different emotions. In your letter, address the importance of

play as a way for children to safely express their feelings. Suggest ways that parents can support the development of children's play at home.

Assessing for Educational Progress

Teachers can use a variety of tools to assess educational progress. Assessments can help teachers better understand students' needs, and suggest ways to tailor instruction that builds on students' strengths and interests.

Authentic assessment is one approach that can be particularly useful for students who exhibit learning problems. Components of authentic assessment include anecdotal records that focus on students' interaction with the learning environment, rather than on specific content; portfolios, or collections of students' work over time; self-assessments made by children about their own learning process; and peer assessments that include feedback and suggestions offered by classmates during peer editing sessions. Authentic assessment enables teachers to share information with specialists and parents to monitor and support student learning in mainstream settings. It also encourages teachers to actively involve students in documenting and reflecting on their own progress.

Education is a personal, individual, growing experience. Authentic assessment is a tool that allows you to focus on an individual learner—to see the learner through his or her eyes. It's more that just an occasional check; it is an integral part of learning that provides a picture of student growth that is meaningful for teachers, parents, and students.

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Using a Variety of Tools to Assess Student Growth

Assessment is a process that begins on the first day of school and continues throughout the school year. Structure regular periods of observation and use a variety of assessment tools to assist with program planning.

Develop portfolios—a collection of students' work across a series of domains to record qualitative, performance-based portraits of individual students that pinpoint difficulties and strengths.

- Observe students in a variety of situations. Watch how they handle transitions, how they use their free time, what materials they prefer, their style of learning, how they work with their peers and with adults. Notice their particular areas of difficulty as well as special talents and interests.

- Use index cards or a loose-leaf notebook to record daily observations: be nonjudgmental and specific. Include details that capture the child's method at arriving at solutions, as well as the student's attitudes and interaction with the learning environment. Date each observation. As you make your observations, focus on the student as his or her own yardstick.

- Develop portfolios—a collection of students' work across a series of domains to record qualitative, performance-based portraits of individual students that pinpoint difficulties and strengths. Include a range of materials: student drawings, paintings, or collages; photos of "perishable" works such as a volcano made out of clay; photos of students engaged in a group activity; samples of students' stories and journal entries; math assignments; class projects; and audiotapes and/or videotapes that record student performances. Also include notes from parent-teacher meetings.

- Engage students in the assessment process: schedule regular mini-conferences with individual students to offer

feedback and review what they have accomplished. Ask students open-ended questions about what they learned, what they found difficult, what they are most proud of, and what their goals are; have students select their favorite work and add it to their portfolios. Teach students to monitor and rate their on-task behavior, then compare their ratings with yours; provide reinforcement for accurate appraisals. As you talk about students' work, encourage them to articulate how they arrived at their solutions, and use mistakes as teachable moments.

- The portfolio graphically displays the journey the child has taken. Invite students to review their portfolios with you periodically so they can see where they started at the beginning of the year and how much they have grown.

- Encourage students to review and comment on each other's work. If students have written a story, ask them to prepare questions for their peer editor to answer. For example: "Are any parts of my story confusing? What part did you like the best?" Teach and model how to give and accept constructive criticism.

- Recognize that parents represent valuable sources of information. Ask parents about what interests their children, how they spend their time at home, what motivates them, and what activities they find comforting. Set up parent meetings at the beginning of the year to learn more about

Noah and I were reviewing his portfolio filled with drawings of orange squares topped with blue circles. "Which is your favorite?" I asked him. He flipped through his pictures until he found just the right one. "That one," he said with conviction. "That one" looked the same to me as all the others so I asked why it was special to him. "Don't you see? It's the shading," he said. "It's just right." I realized then that what I had originally discounted as repetitive behavior was actually a purposeful, important activity. And from that conversation, I gained a new appreciation of his work—and I was able to become a participant in the process—helping him to explore different possibilities.

the children and to share curriculum goals with them. If English is not their primary language, recruit someone who can serve as an interpreter. Set up regular times to meet with parents during the year to discuss the progress that their children have made and to review their child's portfolio.

Using Assessments to Individualize Instruction

By continually assessing children's social and problem-solving skills in the context of the classroom activities, and by reviewing your records on a regular basis, you will be able to create instructional strategies to meet the needs of individual children. If students have had formal assessments, meet with the specialist to pinpoint specific learning problems and identify additional strategies that you can use to facilitate learning.

- Design strategies for children that are behavior based and not "label" or etiology based. By knowing what each student needs, you can provide the supports that allow each child to feel success.

- Begin with familiar activities, capitalizing on what students already know. Gradually introduce new activities and materials. Tailor activities to match students' learning styles. Whenever possible, translate concepts into concrete activities to provide opportunities for hands-on, multisensory learning (e.g., using cooking as a way to teach fractions or using students' block buildings to explore dimensions and measurements).

- Determine how much time each student needs to complete assignments and what types of support are needed; tailor activities accordingly. Students who are distractible may need shorter assignments and/or extra time to complete tasks. Provide prompts to help students who have difficulty getting started. For example: "What do you need to do first?" or "What's your next step?" Offer immediate feedback.

- Develop learning centers in your classroom that tie into your students' learning styles and interests. One teacher created a learning center devoted to insects when she discovered her students' fascination with them. This center provided a spectrum of experientially based activities. Students constructed insects with oak tag, paper fasteners, and pipe cleaners (kinesthetic/fine motor skills); assembled insect puzzles (visual perception); matched and classified insects (visual discrimination); and diagrammed parts of the insect's body (science). This study of insects extended beyond the classroom. Students caught and observed real insects and used their experiences as the basis for storytelling, journal writing, drawing, and creative movement.

Develop learning centers in your classroom that tie into your students' learning styles and interests.

Follow-up Activities

The Video Connection

Watch the video segment *Assessing for Educational Progress.* Use the following questions to guide your viewing:

- Notice how one teacher talks to a student selecting an entry for her portfolio. In what ways does the teacher encourage the student to think critically about her own work?
- Portfolios can be organized in a variety of ways. Which aspects of the portfolios shown in this segment could you use for your students?

The Teacher Connection

A number of formal assessments and checklists are available for recording a student's level of mastery in a given area. (See the Resources section at the end of this guide.) Work with other teachers to review and rate each checklist in terms of:

- *Appropriateness:* Is it developmentally appropriate; that is, are the measures based on children's developmental levels?
- *Accessibility:* Is it easy to use? Once filled out, will it be readily understood by specialists and parents?
- *Usefulness:* Will the information capture a student's learning style? Particular interests? Areas of strength? Skills that need to be developed? Are students rated across a range of developmental domains?

After comparing the pros and cons of each checklist, choose one to use in your classroom. Report back to the group about its effectiveness.

The Parent Connection

Parents play a critical role in their children's education. For families who have a child with behavior and learning problems, the parent-teacher partnership is particularly critical. Parents' meaningful involvement in all aspects of the education process can lead to better educational outcomes. Some teachers develop log books, recording progress as well as difficulties, which parents and teachers both use to share information about a child. This provides a major record of a child's problems with homework or behavior, and serves to generate solutions and mark special accomplishments.

Building Home-School Connections

Parents who abuse alcohol and other drugs may sometimes seem less receptive to teachers' invitations to become informed and involved in their children's education. But discounting parents will only widen the gulf between the school and the family, and the true victims will be the children. Schools and families need to work together as allies with a common goal—the future of the children. When the parents are not the sole caregivers, schools can involve a grandparent, foster parent, aunt, uncle, older sibling, or cousin.

Even the most vulnerable parents can provide teachers with important clues about how their child functions best.

Building alliances with families is a gradual process, one that takes time and requires an active, sometimes aggressive effort. But the payoffs are high. Even the most vulnerable parents can provide teachers with important clues about how their child functions best: what triggers acting-out behaviors, and what can control them; what their children like to play; when they're doing well and when they are hiding their potential. Family perspectives are not merely legitimate . . . they are critical.

Beginning the School Year

The importance of creating a nurturing community is important for parents as well as for students. Take steps at the beginning of the school year to let parents know that their

participation is welcome and needed, and that you are interested in having them share their expertise as well as their concerns.

- Identify children's primary caregivers. Introduce yourself to them (by letter, phone call, or home visit) to welcome them to your classroom. Inform them about your daily schedule and procedures for visiting and volunteering.

- Conduct parent-teacher conferences to involve them in their child's educational program. Make arrangements with students from the local middle school or high school to provide onsite babysitting services for children and their siblings during this time. When speaking with parents, be a listener and acknowledge them as the experts in their child's behavior.

- Inform parents and/or other caregivers about what you are doing in the classroom and why. For some, social events (potluck suppers, holiday parties) offer opportune moments for you to talk about classroom activities, routines, and curriculum goals, and to invite parents' participation. Conduct a "back to school" night so that parents can explore the child's learning environment and experience firsthand the importance of certain activities and ways to promote their use at home. For those who are unable to attend these events, messages sent home about

Conduct a "back to school" night so that parents can explore the child's learning environment and experience firsthand the importance of certain activities and ways to promote their use at home.

Marlene F. Nelson

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class activities open the door to communication. If parents don't speak English, find someone to help you translate a letter in the parents' language.

- Develop outreach activities. If parents do not show up for parent-teacher conferences or for the orientation sessions, do not assume that they are disinterested. Find ways to reach them. If parents are unable to meet you at the school, make a home visit or meet at a community center or church in their neighborhood.
- Ask parents who are actively involved in the school to be "buddies" or "mentors" for families at risk. Mentors may make home visits to establish connections with families and serve as intermediaries for the school. Such a system builds self-esteem in the "mentor," while providing a model for parents at risk.

Parents are the principal influence on their children's education and development, as well as their primary

I used to get really angry when parents couldn't get their children to school on time or when permission slips sent home never came back signed. I'd think, "These parents are not even trying. Don't they care?" Then I went to this workshop on effective approaches for involving high-risk families and the dynamics of addiction and recovery. At the workshop, a panel of parents spoke about their own lives—what led them to abuse alcohol and other drugs, the impact of substance abuse on their children, and what schools did to support their children and their families during the recovery process. Their stories made me realize that children do love their families and their families love them—and that I had to continually reach out to families to draw them in.

nurturers and protectors. As the stress that affects families increase, parents often doubt their own capacity and question their own skills. All parents can benefit from guidance that offers realistic ways for them to act in partnership with teachers and support their children's learning.

- Invite families to attend a class breakfast or potluck dinner to see their children perform. Teachers report that when children are in the spotlight, even very high-risk families will attend. Involve children in making the invitations, preparing the food, and hosting the event. Encourage them to give family members a guided tour of the classroom and explore the materials with them. When you plan events such as these, consider the logistics; oversights send messages that parents are not the priority. Provide onsite child care or invite the siblings to attend. If transportation is a problem, find parents and/or staff who are willing to drive other parents to and from activities. Schedule events at times convenient for parents to attend to ensure greater participation. Develop a parents' survey or informally check in with parents to find out the best times for them to attend. If you know that a parent will not be participating, ask the child and parent who else could come, such as an older sibling, a grandparent, or even a specialist with whom the child has developed a special relationship. All children want to know that someone is there for them.

- Involve parents in setting realistic expectations for their children—understanding the limits of what children at different ages can (and cannot) do, and having fewer, but consistent household rules. Stress the importance of predictability. Convey through modeling as well as conversation more positive ways to interact with children.

Involve parents in setting realistic expectations for their children. Stress the importance of predictability.

- Encourage parents to give their children responsibilities at home and offer suggestions for making household chores into learning activities (e.g., counting out silverware or matching socks). Explain how giving children responsibilities that are in keeping with their developmental abilities and age can build children's independence, skills, and feelings of self-worth.
- Teach parents about classroom assessment. In time, they will become active partners in observing and recording their child's development.
- Involve parents in activities that they can do at home to engage the child's interest and spur development.
- Create a lending library with multicultural videos, toys, books, and audiocassettes that families can borrow. Wordless books are effective, especially for those parents

Tyler needed structure, and that was something he didn't have. At home, he watched TV for hours. He had no regular bedtime. He ate whenever and wherever he wanted. There was no such thing as a family dinner. And it showed in the classroom. Mealtime was particularly difficult. So I talked to his mother and asked if we could have lunch together with Tyler. One day, over tuna fish sandwiches and carrot sticks, I modeled how to provide Tyler with the structure that he needed: I sat close to him; I told him what we would be eating, explained what the rules were—that when he was done eating he could ask to be excused and quietly look at some books. When he started kicking the leg of his chair, that was a signal to me that he was going to lose it, so I leaned over and gave him a hug—and he regained his composure. Then Tyler went off to his books and Tyler's mom and I talked about what happened and the different strategies that I had used. We talked about the importance of structure—what it meant to Tyler—and different things she could do to ensure it.

who cannot read. Both child and caregiver can look at the pictures together, talk about what is going on each page, and make up stories together. Send home materials they can use to reinforce skills being taught in your classroom. One teacher discovered that sending home ordinary tape was the biggest hit. With tape, families turned their homes into museums, showing off their children's work.

- Assign projects that involve interviewing family members about their childhood: the stories, songs, games, foods, and traditions of their culture. One teacher involved families in exploring the meaning of heroism. She invited family members into the classroom to share their personal stories about who their heroes were and why. Based on these discussions, students drew pictures of heroes, had follow-up discussions about the qualities that make people heroes, and read and wrote their own stories about heroes.

- Provide guidelines and suggestions for helping children with their homework. If parents do not understand the assignment (and the child does not either), provide phone numbers of people (a volunteer parent, for instance) who can offer assistance.

- When problems arise, invite families in and work together on problem solving and decisionmaking.

Supporting Vulnerable Families

You can be a powerful, supportive influence in encouraging parents to seek help for their children.

- Encourage parents or caregivers to let you know when a crisis occurs at home (such as a death of a family member, witnessing family or community violence, shifts

in foster care placements). That way you will gain an understanding of the child's situation and provide the needed supports. Honestly share your school's policies about confidentiality and let them know your role as an advocate for their child and the family.

- Work with a social worker or school counselor to establish parent support groups. In these groups, parents and other caregivers can nurture one another, as well as look to outside agencies for special services. Such groups provide participants with the opportunity to lead as well as learn, and establish notions of reciprocity and trust that are healing for adults, in the ways they are for children.

You can be a powerful, supportive influence in encouraging parents to seek help for their children.

- Work with a social worker or school counselor to make referrals to available community resources such as treatment centers; drug, alcohol, and cessation programs (Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous); and self-help organizations that provide support for family members of people who are struggling with addiction.

- Advocate for a case management approach, which brings all the service providers together to pool their understanding of the problems that a student is experiencing, and plan for effective, but not redundant, interventions. In some schools, the players can sit down together on a regular basis and review the caseload. The chief benefit accrues to the family. But schools benefit, too, as they play a major role in linking disparate services together, building contacts, and developing a common working style with a variety of agencies.

Follow-up Activities

The Video Connection

Watch the video segment *Building Home-School Connections.* Use the following questions to guide your viewing:

- The parents in the video segment mention repeatedly the importance of having a personal relationship with their children's teachers. How can you foster such relationships with parents of children in your class?
- In one scene, a parent engages in an art activity with a group of children. In another scene, a parent reads to the class. If you see your role as being a model for parents, how might you prepare those parents who volunteer in the classroom to assume similar responsibilities?

The Teacher Connection

You may notice that the compassion and concern that you feel for vulnerable children does not always extend to parents who abuse alcohol and other drugs. Substance abuse is a charged issue; the mere mention of the topic may elicit a host of reactions. As a professional, however, you need to come to terms with those feelings and reexamine them in the context of the best available knowledge about the patterns of addiction and recovery. With other teachers, examine your attitudes, values, and stereotypes about parents at risk, and how they influence your interaction with families. Analyze what messages you send to families through body language and communicated expectations. Seek ways to build an understanding about vulnerable parents and empathy for them; and strategies for involving them in their children's education.

The Parent Connection

To offer parents a safe haven, schools must develop ongoing programs that focus on parents' needs. Talk with the PTA

about the importance of involving all families in their children's education. Ask for their input and their assistance in:

- developing outreach activities for families (i.e., training parents to be mentors for incoming families and those at risk);
- creating lending libraries for families;
- turning an underutilized area of the school into a parent resource room;
- hosting parent workshops about childrearing topics; and
- sponsoring events and programs that reflect families' day-to-day basic needs (e.g., health and job fairs, adult literacy programs).

Conclusion

Teachers everywhere face real challenges in working with students at risk. Still, there is promising news for students, their families, and for teachers. Students prenatally exposed to alcohol and other drugs and to various environmental risk factors are not necessarily students with special needs; they are not some new kind of consumer for education.

Teachers with a background in early childhood education and an understanding of developmentally appropriate practice have many of the tools they will need to meet the challenges they face. And teachers do not have to face these challenges alone; additional resources are available. By developing partnerships with people in the school and within the community, teachers, administrators, parents, and community service providers can collaboratively draw upon their power, expertise, and capabilities to help students affected by substance abuse maximize their potential.

RESOURCES

The Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education do not endorse any private or commercial products or services, nor products or services not affiliated with the Federal government. Sources of information listed on this and the following pages are intended only as a partial listing of the resources that are available. Readers are encouraged to consult other sources of information to find products and services relating to prenatal drug exposure that are available to them.

Introduction

Bredekamp, S. (Ed.). (1987). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8.* National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1509 16th Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20036-1462. $5. Provides guidelines to help teachers and policymakers create a curriculum suited to the needs and developmental levels of young children.

Florida Department of Education. (1991). *Cocaine babies: Florida's substance exposed youth.* The Prevention Center, Suite 414, FEC, 325 W. Gaines Street, Tallahassee, FL 32339. Free.

Florida's challenge: A guide to educating substance-exposed children. Prepared by The Prevention Center, Florida Department of Education, under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. Available from the National Audiovisual Center, 8700 Edgeworth Drive, Capitol Heights, MD 20743-3701. $40. A 45-minute video and participant workbook covering medical aspects of prenatal drug exposure, the home and community environment, the school and classroom environment, and behaviors and interventions.

Garbarino, J., Dubrow, N., Kostelny, K., & Pardo, C. (1992). *Children in danger: Coping with the consequences of community violence.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. $25. Examines the effects of community violence on children's development and what schools can do to provide these children with predictable, supportive environments to enhance their resilience.

A nation's challenge: Educating substance-exposed children. Available from the National Audiovisual Center, 8700 Edgeworth Drive, Capitol Heights, MD 20743-3701. $50. A two-hour video of a national teleconference on prenatal drug exposure sponsored by the Florida Department of Education and U.S. Department of Education. Features experts from the fields of medicine and education and includes a resource guide for classroom teachers.

Poulsen, M.K. (1992). *Schools meet the challenge: Educational needs of children at risk due to prenatal substance exposure.* Resources in Special Education, 650 Howe Avenue, Suite 300, Sacramento, CA 95825. $10 plus $1 shipping and handling.

Villarreal, S., McKinney, L., & Quackenbush, M. (1992). *Handle with care: Helping children prenatally exposed to drugs and alcohol.* ETR Associates, P.O. Box 1830, Santa Cruz, CA 95061-1830. $17.95. Written by a multidisciplinary team of authors, this book provides teachers, counselors, and parents with insights into the effects of prenatal exposure to alcohol and other drugs, and how schools can make a difference.

Vincent, L.J., Poulsen, M.K., Cole, C.K., Woodruff, G., & Griffith, D.R. (1991). *Born substance exposed, educationally vulnerable.* Council for Exceptional Children, 1920 Association Drive, Reston, VA 22091-1589, (703) 620-3660. Available for $6.25 + shipping (members); $8.90 + shipping (nonmembers).

Creating a Nurturing Classroom Environment

Hammond, M. & Collins, R. (1993). *One world, one earth: Educating children for social responsibility.* Philadelphia, PA: New Society Publishers. $14.95. Offers concrete suggestions for teachers to help build cooperative, trusting learning environments; enhance group spirit; raise difficult and sensitive issues; and develop community support for children between the ages of 3 and 15.

Lickona, T. (1991). *Educating for character: How our schools can teach respect and responsibility.* New York: Bantam. $12.50. Provides strategies and steps for creating classroom communities. Includes sections on conducting classroom meetings and managing behaviors through joint problem solving.

McCracken, J.B. (Ed.). (1986). *Reducing stress in young children's lives.* National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1509 16th Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20036-1426. $7. Describes the everyday problems that young children face and ways that teachers can help children develop the strength and skills to cope with them.

York, S. (1991). *Roots and wings: Affirming culture in early childhood programs.* St. Paul, MN: Toys 'n Things Press. $22.95. Provides strategies for creating a culturally responsive school. Includes strategies for integrating cultural awareness into all aspects of a classroom and hands-on activities that shape respectful attitudes toward cultural differences.

Encouraging Cooperative Learning

Kagen, S. (1992). *Cooperative learning: Resources for teachers.* San Juan Capistrano, CA: Resources for Teachers. (Revised edition). Available from Kagan Cooperative Learning, 27134 Paseo Espada, Suite 302, San Juan Capistrano, CA 92675. $29. A resource guide to introducing and cultivating cooperative learning in the classroom. Includes many activities along with theoretical overviews.

Graves, N. & Graves, E. (1988). *What is cooperative learning? Tips for teachers and trainers.* Santa Cruz, CA: Cooperative College of California. $25. Comprehensive and practical guide to cooperative learning. Activities for use with children and/or adults. Includes diagnostic and theoretical material.

Katz, L.G. & Chard, S.C. (1989). *Engaging children's minds: The project approach.* Norwood, NJ: Ablex. $29.95. Provides helpful suggestions for designing cooperative projects. Topics addressed include selecting a project topic, planning criteria, and the teacher's role in engaging and sustaining children's interest over time.

Facilitating Transitions and Minimizing Distractions

Hohmann, C. & Buckleitner, W. (1992). *K-3 learning environment.* High/Scope Press, 600 N. River Street, Ypsilanti, MI 48198-2898. $22. A guide to arranging the classroom and creating a daily schedule to support a range of learning experiences.

Los Angeles Unified School District. (1989). *Today's challenge: Teaching strategies for working with young children pre-natally exposed to drugs/alcohol.* Distributed by the Midwest Regional Center for Drug-Free Schools and Communities, 1900 Spring Road, Suite 300, Oak Brook, IL 60521, (708) 571-4710. Free. Offers guidelines for providing continuity and reliability through routines and rituals and ways to facilitate smooth transitions from one activity to another.

Mitchell, A. & David, J. (1992). *Explorations with young children: A curriculum guide from the Bank Street College of Education.* Gryphon House, Inc., 3706 Otis Street, Mt. Rainier, MD 20712. $19.95. A comprehensive guide that covers a range of topics including designing the learning environment. Provides strategies for scheduling, arranging activity areas, and selecting and organizing classroom materials.

Saphier, J. & Gower, R. (1987). *The skillful teacher: Building your teaching skills.* (Revised edition). Carlisle, MA: Research for Better Teaching, Inc., 56 Bellows Hill Road, Carlisle, MA 01741. $21.95. Provides suggestions for helping students pay attention and stay on task.

Helping Students Manage Their Behavior

Branderberg, A. (1984). *Feelings.* New York: Mulberry. $3.95. Offers children a small catalog of feelings through pictures and text.

Dreyer, S.S. (1994). *The bookfinder: When kids need books,* Vol. 5. Circle Pines, MN: American Guidance Service. $49.95. A comprehensive guide to children's literature about the needs and problems of youth age 2 and up. Includes books on a variety of issues such as dealing with anger, developing autonomy, peer relationships, and sharing.

Lipson, E.R. (1991). *The New York Times parent's guide to the best books for children.* New York: Times Books. $15. An annotated listing of children's books organized by title, author, illustrator, audience, and subject matter. An excellent planning tool for teachers.

Nelsen, J., Lott, L., & Glenn, H.S. (1993). *Positive discipline in the classroom: How to effectively use class meetings and other positive discipline strategies.* Rocklin, CA: Prima Publishing. $14.95. Provides suggestions for how to use the classroom meeting as a vehicle for building a nurturing classroom environment.

Prutzman, P., Stern, L., Burger, M.L., & Bodenhamer, G. (1988). *The friendly classroom for a small planet: Children's creative response to conflict resolution.* Philadelphia, PA: New Society Publishers. $14.95. Includes hundreds of exercises, activities, and methods designed to nurture self-esteem, build cooperation and community, develop effective communication, promote self-awareness, and empathy.

Segal, M. & Adcock, D. (1983). *Play together grow together: A cooperative curriculum for teachers of young children.* White Plains, New York: Mailman Family Press. $8.95. Focuses on conflict resolution for preschoolers and kindergartners.

Smilansky, S. & Shefatya, L. (1990). *Facilitating play: A medium for promoting cognitive, socio-emotional and academic development in young children.* Gaithersburg, MD: Psychosocial and Educational Publications. $29.95. Presents a theoretical analysis of sociodramatic play and offers suggestions for assessing and developing the play abilities of children between the ages of 3 and 8.

Van Hoorn, J., Nourot, P., Scales, B., & Alward, K. (1993). *Play at the center of the curriculum.* New York: Macmillan. $20. Examines the connections between play and development and provides strategies for building a curriculum that supports play.

Viorst, J. (1972). *Alexander and the terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day.* New York: Aladdin. $3.95 A humorous picture book that describes the bad day of a young boy who gets more and more frustrated as the day goes on.

Assessing for Educational Progress

Grace, C. & Shores, E. (1992). *The portfolio and its use: Developmentally appropriate assessment of young children.* Southern Association on Children Under Six, P.O. Box 5403, Little Rock, AR 72215-5403. $10. Examines how assessment portfolios can be used as an evaluation tool and as way to communicate with parents. Includes a kindergarten checklist, a summary review of assessment instruments, and a listing of related resources.

Meisels, S.J. (1993). *Work sampling system.* Rebus Planning Associates, Inc., P.O. Box 1746, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1746. For a catalog and price list, call (800) 435-3085. A performance assessment designed for preschool through grade 3 that includes developmental checklists, portfolios, and summary reports. All components make use of seven categories of performance and behavior: personal and social development, language and literacy, mathematical thinking, scientific thinking, social studies, the arts, and physical development.

National Association for the Education of Young Children and National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education. (1991). Guidelines for appropriate curriculum content and assessment in programs serving children ages 3 through 8. Washington, D.C.: *Young Children*, Vol. 46, No. 3, 21-38. Ties guidelines for curriculum planning and assessment to how young children learn and develop.

Perrone, V. (Ed.). (1991). *Expanding student assessment.* Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1250 North Pitt Street, Alexandria, VA 22314-1403. $14.95. Experts in the field explore how student assessment can be expanded so that is tied to the content of the curriculum and to the standards that are set for learning.

The following organizations provide workshops and materials about authentic assessment:

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
1250 North Pitt Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314-1453

Greater ACE Consortium
California Assessment Collaborative
730 Harrison Street
San Francisco, CA 94107

Project Spectrum
Harvard Graduate School of Education
Appian Way
Cambridge, MA 02138

Southern Regional Education Board
592 10 Street, N.W.
Atlanta, GA 30318-5790

National Black Child Development Institute
1463 Rhode Island Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20005

National Association of Elementary School Principals
1615 Duke Street
Alexandria, VA 22314

Building Home-School Connections

Building support and resources for the family: A family resource movement video. (1988). Available from Family Resource Coalition, 200 S. Michigan Avenue, Suite 1520, Chicago, IL, 60604, (312) 341-0900. $20 (coalition members); $25 (nonmembers). A catalog of books and pamphlets is also available free of charge. This 15-minute video is intended for volunteer and staff training.

Henderson, A., Marburger, C. & Ooms, T. (1986). *Beyond the bake sale: An educator's guide to working with parents.* National Committee for Citizens in Education, 900 2nd Street, N.E., Suite 8, Washington DC 20002-3557. $10.95. Provides strategies for developing family-school partnerships.

Kaplan, L. (1986). *Working with multiproblem families.* New York: Free Press. $16.95. A comprehensive resource book on how to work with and help vulnerable families. Includes chapters on characteristics of vulnerable families, assessing their needs, conducting in-home assessment, and intervention strategies to empower the family.

Lyons, A.R. & Smith, A. (1984). *Involving parents: A handbook for participation in schools.* High/Scope Press, 600 N River Street, Ypsilanti, MI 48198-2898. $12. Covers such topics as home-school relations, school support, parent education, and home-based instruction.

Straight from the heart: Stories of mothers recovering from addiction. (1992). Video available from Vida Health Communications, 6 Bigelow Street, Cambridge, MA 02139. Organizations may order a free preview. $275. Portrays a culturally diverse group of six mothers recovering from alcoholism and drug addiction. By listening to women's stories about their involvement with alcohol and other drugs and the hard facts about recovery, viewers will gain a greater insight into the dynamics of addiction and recovery.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project has always relied on the talents, cooperation, and vision of many people. We wish to thank the project officers who worked together to make this effort possible: Laura Feig and Sharman Stephens (Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, Department of Health and Human Services) who have coordinated this interagency project; Charlotte Gillespie (Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Department of Education) who guided the development of the elementary school materials; and Susan Weber (Head Start Bureau, Department of Health and Human Services) who guided the development of Head Start materials. We also appreciate the support provided by the National Institute of Drug Abuse and the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention.

We also wish to thank the members of the Consensus Development Panel who worked to define the underlying assumptions that form the basis of project products:

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We also extend our heartfelt thanks to members of our Working Group who met with us several times and reviewed all of our products. This enthusiastic and knowledgeable group of professionals generously offered their expert guidance and support throughout the project. Their insights have guided both our thinking and our work; their contributions have been invaluable.

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For assistance in developing this guide and the video, we gratefully acknowledge the contributions of many people in the field and at EDC:

Meredith R. Adams
Shzuko Akasaki
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Michele Caterina
Ingrid Chalufour
Tasha Davidson
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Meynardo Gutierrez
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Marlene Nelson
Jane Raphael
Carolyn E. Roy
Teresa Schoenmann-Blanchette
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Renee Washington
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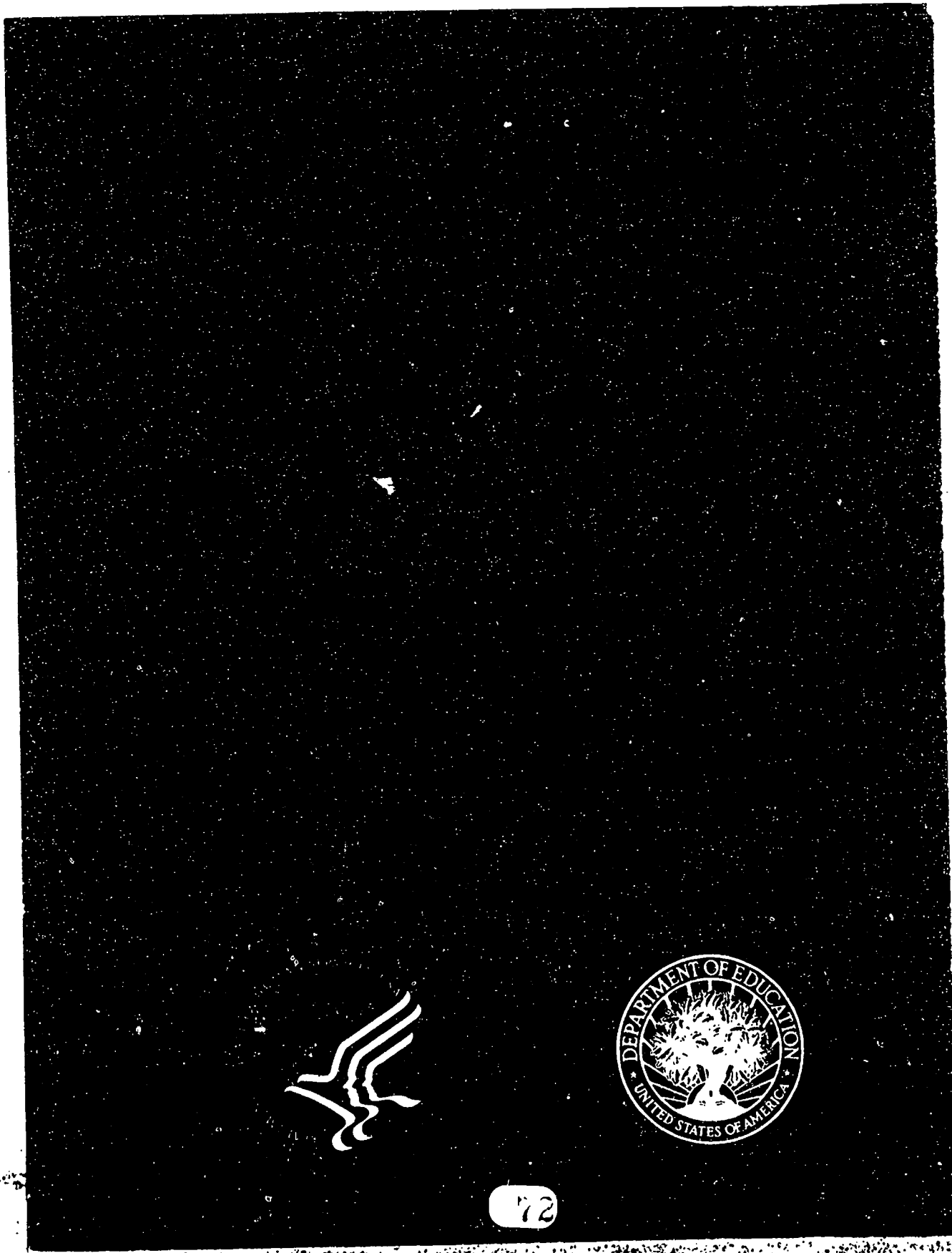
Design: DECODE, Inc.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