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Developments

Serving children and families by promoting
Interdisciplinary education and research • University-community programs • Dissemination

Fred Rogers (1928-2003)

In Rogers' Neighborhood Of Make-Believe Lived Children's Television As It Should Be

In the late 1960s, Lynette Friedrich Cofer and her colleague, Aletha Huston, at Penn State University, set out to study whether watching violence on television led to aggressive behavior among young children in a natural setting, such as a preschool classroom. They concluded the answer was, yes. Television had become not only a vehicle for hawking products to children, but a medium whose careless use instigates pushing, grabbing, easy frustration, and intolerance.

Except for *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*.

Children assigned to watch the quiet PBS program showed none of the aggressiveness that had been observed among many of the children exposed to *Batman* and *Superman* cartoons. But what was exciting was that children who spent time absorbed in Fred Rogers' Neighborhood of Make-Believe showed significantly more positive behavior that required self-control – greater concentration, a willingness to take on more responsibility, and a higher level of patience.

It was television's one shining moment in an otherwise grim report card.

"No one has ever shown

*(**Fred Rogers** continued on Page 2)*

IN THIS ISSUE

15-Year Study Finds

Children Fed A Diet Of TV Violence More Likely To Be Aggressive Adults

The tendency for aggressive behavior and other harmful effects long seen among children who watch a lot of violent television appear to linger into adulthood, according to a 15-year study of adults whose television viewing habits as children were recorded in the 1970s.

Reporting in *Developmental Psychology*, a journal of the American Psychological Association, researchers said children who frequently watched violent television shows were more likely to behave aggressively as adults, hold aggressive attitudes, and be convicted of a crime, regardless of their gender, intellectual abilities or socioeconomic status.

Those interviewed included 329 young adults in their 20s who had been part of a group of children in a 1977 study of the effects of television violence. The television shows they watched as children that were considered especially violent included roadrunner cartoons, "Starsky and Hutch," and "The Six Million Dollar Man."

The study, supported in part by the National Institute of Mental Health, was conducted by two veteran investigators of television violence, L. Rowell Huesmann, Ph.D., and Leonard D. Eron, Ph.D., and their colleagues at the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research.

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(**Fred Rogers** continued from Page 1)

that any other program produces the kind of powerful results we got in terms of the skills children need to have academic success – slowing down, persevering, all of those wonderful things we saw when kids watched the program," said Cofer, Ph.D., now a Professor of Psychology at the University of New Mexico.

As television's gentle friend of children, Fred Rogers showed adults that the medium, for all of its faults, has the remarkable power to promote healthy development when used creatively and thoughtfully in the best interests of young viewers. Few would argue that over his 33 years on the air and 1,700 shows, the calm, soft-spoken man in a cardigan and canvas sneakers set the gold standard for children's television.

Rogers, the *Neighborhood's* creator, host, writer, and chief puppeteer, died February 27. He was 74.

Something 'Horrible' Was On

Fred McFeely Rogers was born in Latrobe, Pa., on March 20, 1928, to Nancy and James H. Rogers, a brick manufacturer. Not surprisingly, his childhood included spending hours with his puppets and playing the piano.

Music and his faith were strong influences. Following his graduation from Latrobe High School in Westmoreland County, he spent one year at Dartmouth College before transferring to Rollins College in Winter Park, Fla., where he graduated magna cum laude in 1951 with a music composition degree.

"From there he intended to study at a seminary," Daniel Lewis wrote in his Feb. 28 obituary of Fred Rogers for the *New York Times*. "But his timetable changed in his senior year when he visited his parents at home and saw something new to him. It was television. Something 'horrible' was on, he remembered – people throwing pies at one another. Still, he understood at once that television was something important for better or worse, and he decided on the spot to be part of it."

He went to New York after graduating and took a job at NBC studios, eventually rising to floor director for shows like "The Kate Smith Evening Hour."

WQED in Pittsburgh, the nation's first community-supported public television station, was a fledgling operation when Rogers arrived in 1953. The following year he brought his puppets to work and began producing and writing "The Children's Corner," a show with Josie Carey. It had a successful seven-year run and set the stage for other endeavors.

In 1966, the Pittsburgh-produced *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* had its premiere in the East. Two years later, PBS stations began showing it across the country. Rogers' straightforward, talky show that favored stories, songs, puppets, and simple sets over animation, loud music, and eye-popping special effects would become the longest-running series in the history of television.

Heart To Heart

Not only did Fred Rogers raise the bar for children's television, he showed everyone how to produce a show that helped children rather than harmed them. Unfortunately, his approach remains the antithesis of commercial television programming for children.

In the image-driven, passive medium of television, *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* succeeded in being literate and interactive. Information and themes were conveyed mostly through words. Rogers talked directly and respectfully to children, adding simple songs and wrapping his themes in stories played out by Daniel the Stripped Tiger, King Friday XIII, Lady Elaine Fairchild, and the other puppets and people who inhabited the Neighborhood of Make-Believe.

Topics affecting children were explored every week, even difficult ones, such as divorce and illness, and each was thoroughly examined over the course of several shows. This was by design. Each show was carefully conceived with child development principles in mind. Rogers was not shy about asking for advice from experts in the field, such as Margaret McFarland, a leading child psychologist, who until her death in 1988, was the principal adviser for the

(**Fred Rogers** continued on Page 11)

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*(**TV Violence** continued from Page 1)*

Their findings add to nearly four decades of evidence that underscores the importance of taking steps to blunt the effects of violence in the mass media, including having parents limit their children's exposure to violent television programs and video and computer games.

Early Findings Of Harm

Evidence of the possible harm of watching too much violence on television dates to the mid-1960s. Dr. Huesmann and Dr. Eron, for example, were among the first researchers to report that grade school children exposed to a steady dose of TV violence tended to be the children, teachers, and friends identified as the more aggressive in class.

> Does the level of violence on the screen influence the degree of aggression in children's behavior?

Researchers also reported that television violence tends to influence other characteristics among children, including their levels of patience, and willingness to follow rules.

Among adults, researchers offered findings that included evidence that viewing violence can contribute to a diminished capacity to feel sympathy for victims, and that adults who are fed strong doses of violence can develop an exaggerated sense of danger in the world around them.

As studies matured, behavioral scientists such as Drs. Huesmann, Eron, and others began reporting evidence that suggested an association between high levels of violence watched by children and the aggressive, violent, even criminal behavior they exhibited as adults.

Long-Lasting Effects

Their latest findings are based on surveys of adults who had been part of a 1977 study as young children, police and court records, and interviews with spouses and significant others.

Participants were asked about their favorite TV programs and about their aggressive behaviors. Spouses or friends asked to rate how often the participants engaged in aggressive behavior.

The study reported that children who had the greatest exposure to television violence were more aggressive as adults. The findings were based on how many times they committed aggressive acts such as spousal abuse and physical aggression, and on records of criminal activities.

In every category, children who had viewed the most television violence were more aggressive as adults compared to adults who were low and medium violence viewers as children.

Among men, those who viewed the most TV violence as children were much more likely to have pushed, grabbed, or shoved their spouses as adults; to have responded to an insult by shoving a person; and to have been convicted of a crime. For example, men who viewed the most TV violence as boys were three times more likely to have been convicted of crimes as adults.

Similar patterns were reported among women. Women who were exposed to the most TV violence as children more likely to have thrown something at their spouses; to have responded to someone who made them mad by shoving, punching, beating or choking the person; and to have committed some type of criminal act. For example, women who viewed the most TV violence as children were four times more likely to have reported having punched, beaten or choked another adult than other women.

The study also reported that violent adult behavior is also associated with children strongly identifying with same-sex aggressive characters on television and strongly believing that violent TV shows depict reality.

Watching violence on TV, in films, games, and other media can affect any child from any family, Dr. Huesmann said. "Both girls and boys with a high exposure to TV violence in first to fourth grades were more aggressive as adults, even when we statistically controlled for their childhood aggressiveness, social class, intelligence and many other factors."

*(**TV Violence** continued on Page 10)*

Recent NICHD Study Reports

Bullies And Their Victims More Likely To Fight, Carry Weapons In School

Evidence continues to mount that bullying is a serious behavior with serious consequences that can no longer be dismissed as a normal, if unpleasant, rite of passage through adolescence.

Federal researchers report that those who bully others, as well as the victims of bullies, appear to be at greater risk of engaging in more serious violent behaviors, such as fighting and carrying a weapon to school.

The findings are the latest from a National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) study of bullying among schoolchildren that is based on a random national sample of more than 15,600 public and private school students in grades six through 10.

NICHD researchers reported in 2001 that bullying in U.S. schools is a widespread problem affecting 17% of the nation's schoolchildren.

Bullying is nothing new. But several tragic school shootings and subsequent accounts in the press and in journals that many of the young perpetrators had been bullied by peers has fueled concern about the potential of bullying to inflict serious harm. More published research about bullying in the U.S. and the fact that bullying is something studies suggest schools also help to give bullying a higher public profile.

"I have seen an increase in adults' awareness about problems associated with bullying over the last several years," said a leading expert on bullying, Sue Limber, Ph.D., of Clemson University. "Although some administrators and parents undoubtedly do still view bullying as a rite of passage, I believe that such perspectives are less common."

Not Just Hitting

Although definitions vary, bullying is increasingly being recognized as a serious behavior that can take several forms other than hitting. "There is growing awareness that it is not just physical," said Deborah Land, Researcher, Center for Social Organization of Schools, Johns Hopkins University. "It can also be verbal, threatening, excluding kids, spreading rumors, things like that." Many researchers also consider repetition an important element of serious bullying.

Earlier NICHD studied reported several dynamics of bullying, such as:

- Bullying happens most often in sixth through eighth grade and the degree to which it does varies little between urban, suburban, and rural schools.

- Boys are more likely to bully others and are more likely to be victims of bullying.

- The most common type of bullying among boys is physical, such as being hit, slapped, or pushed.

- Girls are more often bullied verbally and psychologically, usually through sexual comments or rumors.

Marker For Violent Behavior

The latest NICHD findings suggest bullying is prevalent among all age groups and confirm that boys are much more likely to be involved in bullying and violent behaviors than are girls.

Although the study found that both bullies and their victims were at risk, those who bullied others were much more likely to engage in other violent behaviors.

About 52% of boys who said they had bullied others at least once a week in school reported having carried a weapon in the past month, compared to about 36% of the boys who said they had been the victims of bullies in school every week. About 43% of the self-described bullies said they brought a weapon to school, compared to 29% of those who had been the victims of bullies.

Incidents of fighting followed similar patterns. About 39% of the bullies in school reported having been frequently involved in fighting and about 46% said they had been injured in a fight. Among the boys who were victims of bullies in school, nearly 23% said they had been involved in frequent fighting and nearly 32% said they had been injured in a fight.

These numbers are high compared to boys who had never been bullied in school or had never bullied others. Less than 8% of boys who had never bullied others in school said they had carried a weapon in school, about 8% were involved in frequent fighting, and 16% had been injured in a fight. Among the boys who had never been bullied in school, 12% carried a weapon in school, about 12%

*(**Bullies** continued on Page 12)*

Investing Today for Tomorrow: The Costs and Benefits of Early Childhood Care and Education

Special Report

University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development
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High quality early childhood care and education more than pays for itself when the cost of successful programs are weighed against short-and long-term outcomes that benefit children, families, communities, and taxpayers, available cost-benefit studies suggest.

Early childhood programs deemed "best practices" require a substantial investment. When outcomes among low-income children and families are considered, however, these programs appear to be a bargain, returning $4 to $7 in benefits for every $1 invested in them.

Quality is the key. Favorable cost-benefit ratios are seen only among programs that embrace a high level of quality, which is associated with outcomes such as better school performance, lower rates of crime and delinquency, and higher incomes after children reach adulthood.

Cost Of Early Childhood Services

High quality early childhood care and education is not inexpensive and one of the challenges policymakers face is not being deterred by "sticker shock."

However, the cost of early childhood services can be misleading when compared to other education programs if key characteristics of the programs and the methodology used to calculate the costs are not fully considered.

How costs are calculated varies among studies. Some involve average expenditures by a funding source; some use market prices paid by consumers; others try to estimate the actual costs of delivering the service or program. Different methods of calculating costs make it difficult to compare figures. Some studies lack detail, making comparison even more difficult or impossible.

Such limitations may result in a program appearing more expensive than others, not because it uses more resources but because costs were calculated using a different method.

Most often, costs are expressed as cost per child of the service. It is important to fully understand what such cost estimates reflect, particularly when comparing programs. For example, does a cost estimate include overhead costs, such as facility and insurance costs? If the cost is reported as a per child estimate, how many hours of service does the estimate reflect?

Range Of Reported Costs

A review of eight early childhood programs considered best practices finds costs ranging from a low of $6,083 per child in the Prenatal/Early Infancy Project (PEIP) to $13,612 per child in the Early Childhood Initiative (ECI) in Allegheny County.

Other best practices programs include the Abecedarian Program, Chicago Child-Parent Centers (CPC), Nurse Family Partnership (NFP), Parent-Child Home Program (PCHP), and Improved Child Care Quality – a study of child care quality in 401 centers that served infants, toddlers, and preschool children in California, Colorado, Connecticut, and North Carolina.

In general, the more detailed the examination of costs, the more accurate the picture. This is particularly true when comparing programs that may vary in the range of services provided and in the number of hours families participate.

Expressed as per child costs alone, best practices early childhood programs may seem very expensive. However, such costs reflect the large number of hours during which children and their families participate in the program and the length of the program. Calculated on an hourly basis, the costs appear more modest, ranging from $5.24 for ECI to $11.42 per hour, the cost of the home visiting component of the Perry Preschool Program.

The one exception is the PEIP, which has an hourly cost of $152.09. The highly hourly rate reflects the fact that it was an intensive home visiting intervention delivered by registered nurses.

Comparisons To Public Education

Studies suggest the cost of many high-quality early childhood care and education programs compares favorable to the cost paid for public education.

At $5.24 to $11.42 an hour, many best practices early childhood programs fall within the cost range of public education, which is estimated to be $2.91 to $9.70 an hour. Even the early childhood programs with the highest per child costs fall within or close to public school cost range. For example, ECI's $13,612 per child cost is only slightly over the cost range of public education, estimated to be between $3,932 and $13,096 per child, and public education costs

are for fewer hours per day, fewer months per year, and fewer teachers per child.

Cost Drivers

Certain characteristics of high-quality programs tend to drive up the cost of early childhood services. These include a more highly educated staff, who typically demand higher salaries; more favorable staff-child ratios, which require more staff; and lower turnover, which results in more experienced and expensive staff and higher payrolls.

Other factors also escalate program costs. For example, costs are much higher for providers operating below 100% capacity. Also, buildings and renovations may be needed.

Cost Of Quality

The cost of improving the quality of early childhood care and education ranges from 10% to 30%, depending on how much improvement is necessary.

Specifically, studies find that a cost increase of less than 10% is required to raise the quality level of a program from poor to mediocre. An additional 10% increase is required to improve the quality from mediocre to "good." Improving the quality of a program from good to excellent raises the cost by a little more than 10%.

Features that determine the quality of young children's experiences in child care, preschool, and kindergarten include interactions with caregivers, teachers, and other children; activities, such as language stimulation; and health and safety issues. Other characteristics determine the quality of the context in which early education and care takes place. These include child-adult ratios, class or group size, and the education and training of caregivers.

The level of quality is critical. Studies suggest only high-quality programs are capable of producing the educational gains and other benefits that make early childhood services attractive.

Benefits Of Early Childhood Services

High quality early childhood education and care has been found to help many at-risk children avoid poor outcomes, such as school drop-out and arrest. Although the benefits cross economic and social classes, the most significant gains are almost always reported among children from families with the least formal education and lowest levels of income.

Gains in measures of intellectual performance, at least in the short term, were reported in a RAND Corporation study of nine early childhood programs.[1] The study noted, for example, that IQ scores for early childhood participants were significantly higher than those of students who were not enrolled in the programs. Children who took part in quality early childhood programs were much more likely to perform better in school than those who did not.

A study of the Chicago Child-Parent Centers suggest quality early childhood programs tend to keep children in school. High school graduation rates were higher among students who had been involved in the centers than children who did not have quality early learning experiences.[2]

The extensive High/Scope Perry Preschool Study suggests that early childhood programs influence important social and economic outcomes.[3] For example, fewer arrests were reported among adult men who had participated in the program as children compared to men who had not and 59% of the program participants received welfare assistance as adults compared to 80% of the adults who had no early childhood services.

Studies of ECI in Allegheny County report cognitive gains and improved social and emotional development. At the time they enrolled, 14% of the children met criteria for special education and 18% met criteria for a mental health diagnosis. After three years in the program, they had made significant gains and scored in the "normal range of development."[4]

Cost- Benefit Assessment

A full accounting of early childhood care and education considers program costs and the benefits to children and communities, which in most cases result in savings of tax dollars.

The private and social costs of failing children early in their lives can be high.[5] For example, the lifetime costs associated with a single high school dropout have been estimated as high as $350,000.[6] In such cases, even modest improvements may justify the costs of programs that prevent such outcomes.

Only a limited number of programs have undergone cost-benefit analysis. Even the more rigorous assessments have shortcomings. Several fail to take into account all of the program's outcomes that might influence cost-benefit ratios. For example, the study of the Chicago Child-Parent Centers did not consider child health outcomes, and the assessment of the Perry Preschool Program did not consider how the program affected the caregivers' education, parenting skills, well-being, and health.

Evidence of how cost effective high quality early childhood programs can be is found among several programs that are considered best practices and have undergone thorough evaluation.

The Abecedarian Project

The Abecedarian Project, one of the longest running and most carefully controlled early childhood studies, involved 111 low-income children in Chapel Hill, N.C. who were considered to be at risk of poor intellectual and social

development. About half of the group were randomly assigned to a high quality childcare setting and the other half were placed in a child care setting, but did not receive the same intervention.

The center-based preschool program had teacher/child ratios ranging from 1:3 for infants and toddlers to 1:6 for older children. The center was open five days a week. The curriculum, emphasized language development and addressed the needs of children in all developmental domains, including social, emotional, and cognitive development. Children in the program also received medical and nutritional services.

At the age of 21, cognitive functioning, academic skills, educational attainment, employment, parenthood, and social adjustment of 104 of the original 111 infants were measured. Participants scored significantly higher on mental test scores than the control group. Their reading and math achievement scores were consistently higher. More than twice as many of the participants – 35% – had graduated from or were attending a four-year college at the age of 21.

Such outcomes contributed significant savings of school funds due to a diminished need for special education services, and higher lifetime earnings among program participants.

Program Cost: about $13,000 per child in 2002 dollars.

Estimated Cost-Benefit Ratio: about $4 in benefits for every $1 invested.

Perry Preschool Program

Low-income, 3-4 year-old African-American children from Ypsilanti, MI, and their families participated in this program. The study, which was experimental in design and used random assignment, followed participating children through age 27.

The intervention included 2 ½ hours of preschool, five days per week for three-quarters of the year and weekly 90-minute home visits by preschool teachers. Most children were in the program for two years.

Outcomes included gains in children's cognitive development, education, and well-being. For example, higher IQs were seen in the short term. Participating children were less likely to need special education and they had higher rates of high school graduation. The program did not effect teen pregnancy. At age 27, participants had decreased crime and delinquency rates and lower welfare participation. They also had higher income levels than non-program participants.

Program Costs: about $12,100 per child in 1996 dollars; $11.09 an hour for center-based care; $11.42 an hour for home visitation component.

Estimated Cost-Benefit Ratio: about $4 in benefits for every $1 invested.

Prenatal / Early Infancy Project (PEIP)

First-time, high-risk mothers and their children from Elmira, N.Y. were enrolled in this project before their 30th week of pregnancy. The study design was experimental with random assignment.

Home visiting by a registered nurse was the main element of the intervention. The nurse paid visits to the home until the children were 2 years old.

Reported child outcomes include decreased emergency room visits and mixed crime and delinquency results. Outcomes among mothers included fewer incidents of child abuse, lower rates of criminal activity, and decreased substance abuse.

Program Costs: about $6,100 per child in 1996 dollars.

Estimated Cost-Benefit Ratio: about $5 in benefits for every $1 invested when the participants were high risk mothers and children.

Chicago Child-Parent Centers (CPC)

The Child-Parent Center (CPC) Program, the oldest federally funded program after Head Start, has been in the Chicago public school system since 1966.

Children who are enrolled can participate in up to six years of comprehensive language-based intervention; one-two years of preschool, kindergarten, and up to three years of extended services in elementary school. The program includes family support. CPCs encourage parent involvement and sites have a parent room and a full-time parent-community representative.

Those children who participated enjoyed a range of favorable outcomes. They had much better language, listening, word analysis, vocabulary, and math skills than a comparison group of children in alternative early childhood programs. Children in CPCs had higher reading and math achievement from 6-15 years of age, and lower rates of grade retention and special education placement. They scored higher on a life skills competency test at age 14, were less likely to drop out of school, and were less likely to be involved in the juvenile justice system.[7,8]

Program Costs: about $9,700 per child in 1998 dollars. The total represents about $6,700 a year for children in the preschool program and in the half-day kindergarten program, and about $3,000 per year above the cost of the regular school program for follow-on services.

Cost-Benefit Ratio: about $7 in benefits for every $1 invested.

Conclusions

High quality early childhood care and education is associated with many of the outcomes parents as well as

policymakers desire – improved school readiness, better school performance, higher graduation rates, lower crime and delinquency, and decreased welfare dependency.

The price of such outcomes tends to give pause when program costs alone are considered. Programs considered best practices, for example, range in cost from about $6,000 per child per year to more than $13,000 per child – about twice the cost of Head Start.

Such cost reporting can be misleading, however.

The way costs are expressed is important. This is particularly true when comparing early childhood programs to other services. The more detailed assessment of costs, the more accurate the financial picture. For example:

- Comparing per child costs alone may not take into account significant cost drivers such as the number of hours during which children and their families participate in the program, and the length of the program.
- Calculated on an hourly basis, the costs of best practices early childhood programs appear more modest, ranging from about $5 an hour to $11 an hour.
- In fact, studies suggest the cost of many high quality early childhood care and education programs fall within the cost range of public education, which is estimated between about $3 an hour to nearly $10 an hour.

Only through cost-benefit analysis can the net benefit of early childhood programs be completely understood. This type of analysis measures costs against short-and long-term outcomes that benefit children, families, communities, and likely result in savings in public spending for schools, human services, criminal justice, and other services.

- When cost-benefit ratios are calculated, best practices early childhood programs return $4 to $7 in benefits to families and communities for every $1 that was invested in them.

Such benefits are reported mostly among low-income children and families and are only produced by high quality programs, which typically have highly educated and experienced staff, favorable staff-child ratios, higher payrolls, and lower teacher turnover.

Studies suggest that mediocre and poor quality early childhood services have little or no effect on cognitive and social development, health, school success, crime and delinquency, and other key child outcomes.

The economics of early care and education is a complicated, developing field of study that requires a true accounting of program cost, careful comparisons with other education services, and estimates of the dollar value of outcomes that will not be realized for several years. Few programs have undergone such rigorous analysis.

High quality early childhood programs that have been carefully studied demonstrate that both children and taxpayers stand to gain when communities have the foresight and will to invest in tomorrow's benefits today.

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This Special Report, written by Jeffery Fraser, is based on the above-referenced report. It is not intended to be an original work, but a summary for the convenience of our readers. References noted in the text follow:

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University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development, a program of the University Center for Social and Urban Research, 121 University Place, Second Floor, Pittsburgh, PA 15260 (412)624-7426. Internet: www.pitt.edu/~ocdweb/.

Announcements . . .

Parenting Guide Series Available From OCD

The University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development is offering a series of easy-to-use parenting guides offering information and advice on 50 parenting topics. These guides are available free of charge to parents and organizations, agencies and professionals who work with children and families.

The You & Your Child parenting guide series, written and edited by the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development, covers topics ranging from how to deal with children's fears, finicky eating habits, and aggressive behavior to getting a child ready to read, setting rules, and coping with grief.

Each guide is based on current parenting literature and has been reviewed by a panel of child development experts and practitioners. The series is made possible by the Frank and Theresa Caplan Fund for Early Childhood Development and Parenting Education.

To receive a printed set of all 50 guides by mail, send a request along with your name, organization, mailing address and telephone number to:

Parenting Guides
University of Pittsburgh
Office of Child Development
400 North Lexington Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15208.

The You & Your Child parenting guides are also available on the Internet for downloading as portable document files at: www.pitt.edu/~ocdweb/guides.htm ■

Free Background Reports Cover Children's Issues

University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development offers background reports on current topics important to children and families free of charge.

The series of reports, *Children, Youth & Family Background*, is updated with new topics throughout the year.

The reports, originally produced to keep journalists and policymakers up to date on children's issues, are available free of charge to anyone interested in concise overviews of what is known about topics such as early childhood education, resilient children, school transition, and juvenile crime. The reports are written, edited, and reviewed by the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development.

All *Children, Youth & Family Background* reports are available as portable document files (.pdf) for viewing and downloading on the Internet at the following address: www.pitt.edu/~ocdweb/background.htm. ■

Free OCD Parenting Columns Well Suited For Newsletters

Dispensing parenting advice, long the domain of grandmothers and other family relations, is drawing more attention from policymakers and others looking for ways to strengthen families and communities – and for good reason. Studies show effective parenting improves a child's chances of healthy development.

Sound parenting advice on more than 50 topics is now available free of charge in a series columns written by Robert B. McCall, Ph.D., Co-Director of the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development and former columnist for *Parents* magazine.

The columns, well-suited for newsletters and community newspapers, provide clear, concise and accurate information on topics such as dealing with a child's lying, how to toilet train, what to do about nightmares, discipline and finicky eaters, and how to recognize and address grief in children.

OCD offers the columns free of charge as Microsoft Word documents, which can be viewed and downloaded from the Internet at: www.pitt.edu/~ocdweb/columns.htm

The public service initiative is made possible by the Frank and Theresa Caplan Fund for Early Childhood Development and Parenting Education, whose contributions support production of the columns and other Office of Child Development projects. ■

*(**TV Violence** continued from Page 3)*

Preventive Measures Urged

Such findings, again, signal the urgency of taking action to reduce the effects of the violence children are exposed to on television and elsewhere.

The study suggests the responsibilities of doing so rest primarily with parents, given the entertainment industry's historical reluctance to effectively curb violent content on its own.

Perhaps the most effective approach for parents is to watch the programs with their children and comment on what is on the screen. Studies suggest this helps to limit a child's identification with the character doing the violent act, reduce the child's perception that the violence is real, and lessen the likelihood that a child will act out the violent act in fantasy or play immediately after seeing it on TV.

Parents also need to understand the effects of watching violent programming.

The study, for example, points out that the violent scenes children are most likely to model their behavior after are ones in which they identify with the perpetrator of the violence, the perpetrator is rewarded for the violence, and in which children believe the scene as telling about life as it really is. "Thus, a violent act by someone like Dirty Harry that results in a criminal being eliminated and brings glory to Harry is of more concern than a bloodier murder by a despicable criminal who is brought to justice," the researchers said.

Other methods of softening the impact of violence children see on television have also shown some promise.

The V-chip technology might help, but only if "a content-based rating system is used that would actually allow parents to make judgements on the basis of violent content instead of the age guideline rating system used for many programs," the study states.

And some school-based interventions help young children understand that violence on television does not tell about the world as it is and should not be imitated.

"I think it is fair to say that it has been clear that exposure to television violence effects short-term behavior changes in kids," said Edward P. Mulvey, Ph.D., a Professor of Psychiatry in the University of Pittsburgh's Law and Psychiatry Program. "The value of this [study] is that they are reporting a long-lasting effect."

Some questions remain, he said. Among them is whether there is a "multiplier effect." Does the level of violence on the screen influence the degree of aggression in children's behavior? In other words, will children who watch the more graphically violent fare available today on television and in movies and electronic games become even more aggressive as adults than the children of the Seventies whose taste of violence was limited to relatively tamer programs such as roadrunner cartoons and the "Six Million Dollar Man?"

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE STUDY, see: Huesmann, L.R., Moise-Titus, J., Podolski, C., & Eron, L.D. (2003). Longitudinal relations between children's exposure to TV violence and their aggressive and violent behavior in young adulthood: 1977 – 1992. *Developmental Psychology*, ***39*** (2), pp. 201-221. The American Psychological Association.

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(**Fred Rogers** *continued from Page 2)*

show.

"That's one of the really striking features of Fred's programs," Dr. Cofer said. "He and Margaret had such a deep sense of knowledge of children and importance of timing, so the same theme was presented from so many different perspectives."

How the show managed to hold children's attention with the spoken word and a gentle song had a lot to do about Rogers rapport with his young audience.

"It is fair to say that developmentally, he really understood the kinds of things children are fearful of and are joyous about, and he understood it at their level," said Margaret M. Kimmel, Ph.D., Professor in the Department of Library and Information Science at the University of Pittsburgh, where the *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* archives are housed.

On every show, Rogers effortlessly did what few adults are comfortable doing – he spoke directly to children.

"He once said, that if it is part of the human experience, you can talk about it. I think that may be one of his greatest contributions, because adults don't talk to kids," said Emie Titnich, a Child Development Specialist with the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development. "The way Fred talked to kids – heart to heart like they mattered, never talking down to them, always respecting them – is rare."

Rogers, who earned a divinity degree from the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in 1962, was also able to add a spiritual dimension to the *Neighborhood* without promoting a particular religion or denomination. "He used the spiritual being within him to speak to that spiritual being within kids," said Titnich. "He spoke to their heart and soul, not just their mind."

Just as important, Rogers shunned what had become the staples of children's commercial television programming – content rife with violent acts and numerous interrupts to accommodate advertisements. "It breaks my heart. Violence sells! But, we must do all we can to put a stop to it wherever we find it," Rogers said in a 1993 speech to the National Association for the Education of Young Children in Los Angeles, CA.

"Fred, himself, didn't want to be a promoter for any product whatsoever," said Bill Isler, president of Rogers' production company, Family Communications, Inc. "That's one of the reasons he liked commercial-free public television. His philosophy was that we shouldn't be selling to kids. We should be encouraging them, talking with them."

Rogers was emphatic on that point. "Those of us in the broadcasting business need to offer images of healthy possibilities, and commercialism needs to monitor itself for the public good and get rid of messages which convey, 'You have to have something outside yourself to get along. You have to have a pill for a headache, or a smoke to feel cool, or a drink to cope, or a fancy toy to play. Your own inner resources really aren't enough so be sure to buy, buy, buy,'" he said in 1992 as part of his keynote address to the Fourth Annual National Dropout Prevention Conference.

"Our children are being raised on messages like this, yet all the while they are longing for the conviction that by their own energetic striving they can create something of worth. Isn't that what we all long for … to be able to make something of value out of what's been placed inside of us?"

In the Pennsylvania State University study of the behaviors of children exposed to cartoons with violence and the behaviors of children assigned to watch *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, Drs. Cofer and Huston reported that children who watched the *Neighborhood* showed increased concentration when working on projects, greater ability to carry out responsibility without adult intervention in tasks such as helping with cleanup, and a higher level of patience waiting to take their turn or to be served at juice time. Significant changes were also reported among low-income children, including increased cooperation, a higher ability to express their feelings, and greater sympathy for others. "When we did that first research, a lot of people were worried we weren't going to get anything good, that the show and the message were way over kids' heads," Dr. Cofer said. "They were dead wrong."

FOR MORE ON FRED ROGERS, see *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood: Children, Television, And Fred Rogers*, M. Collins & M.M. Kimmel (Eds.). Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.

(**Bullies** *continued from Page 4)*

were involved in frequent fighting, and 18% were injured in a fight.

Away from school, bullying tended to be more severe, perhaps because there is less adult supervision, researchers said. For example, more than 70% of the boys who said they bullied others away from school reported having carried a weapon; 58% said they had carried a weapon in school; and nearly 45% fought frequently. Only 14% of boys who had never bullied others away from school reported having carried a gun in the past month; only 8% had carried a weapon in school; and less than 9% said they fought frequently.

"Findings from this study suggest that programs designed to reduce violent behaviors should address less severe forms of aggressive behavior, particularly bullying," the report states. "Bullying, as a behavior that is inflicted with the desire to harm another, seems to be an important marker for violence-related behaviors."

Stopping The Bullies

Several interventions outside the U.S. have reported success in curbing bullying in schools. These programs take a variety of approaches, but generally attempt to limit opportunities to bully others, reduce the rewards of bullying, and change attitudes and behaviors. "There are far more programs than there are evidence to support what really works," Land said. We really need to be evaluating more of them."

The best known and most thoroughly evaluated intervention is the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program developed in Norway in the mid-1980 and refined over the years. It is considered a model program by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the U.S. Department of Justice. U.S. researchers who have evaluated the program include Dr. Limber and Gary Melton, Ph.D., also of Clemson University, who reported success using the program in South Carolina schools.

The program recruits school staff, students, and parents to buy into a strategy to increase awareness of bullying, tighten teacher and parent supervision, set clear anti-bullying rules, and protect and support those bullied. In school, students are more closely supervised during breaks and they discuss bullying in schoolwide assemblies and in classrooms. Rules prohibiting bullying are enforced. Parents are asked to not tolerate bullying. And teachers and school officials intervene with bullies, victims, and their parents to ensure that the bullying stops.

Studies suggest the program is highly effective among students in elementary, middle, and junior high schools. In Norway, for example, outcomes in schools include a 64% decrease in reports of bullying others among girls ages 11-12 years, a 45% reduction in reports of bullying others among boys, reductions in antisocial behaviors such as fighting and vandalism, and more positive attitudes toward schoolwork and school in general.

A public information campaign on bullying currently is being readied for the Fall by HHS.

FOR MORE INFORMATION about the NICHD bullying study, see: Nansel, T.R., Overpeck, M.D., Haynie, D.L., Ruan, W.J., & Scheidt, P.C. (2003). **Relationships between bullying and violence among us youth.** *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine, **157***, pp. 348-353.

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