

Theory Based Program Project: A Program to Encourage Calm Behavior Among Children Ages

2-5 Based On The Social Learning Theory

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### **Introduction**

This paper explores the influence of the Social Learning Theory and how it is correlated to children ages 2-5 as they are beginning to discover how to remain calm through socialization with peers their age. It is essential for children to learn how to stay calm in various different situations. This behavior is critical in teaching the child to restrain aggression, agitation, and worry. Children ages 2-5 are very impressionable, therefore teaching them to remain calm in various situations can be beneficial to their development during this period.

Reactions can be learned through various social influences. The social learning theory by Albert Bandura analyzes the behaviors, skills, and emotions learned by the influence of others. Children from the ages of 2-5 are influenced by their caregivers and their peers. The emotion of calmness is an emotion that is important as a child navigates it ways through development.

A program to encourage children to exhibit the behavior of calmness can be executed in many different ways. From a theory based perspective from the viewpoint of the social learning theory creating a playgroup of children of similar ages would be the first step. Allowing these children to interact with one another teaches them to learn behaviors off one another. When a child would react negatively, communicating that the behavior was negative and redirecting the individual through gentle teachings would allow the child to mimic the behavior. Through calmness of the caregiver and redirection to promote calmness a child will learn to exhibit this behavior.

### **Literature Review**

Calmness is the behavior of being free from agitation, strong emotion, violence, and disturbances (Oxford 2022). This behavior is important for reactions, as Oxford states this is an emotion that promotes a positive behavior to get through various different situations. From a childhood development standpoint it is important to learn how to stay calm through different situations in order to avoid strong emotions like agitation and violence. For example, if a child witnesses another child taking its toy it will resort to hitting and stealing the toy back, with calmness it would encourage the child to ask for the toy back instead of yanking the toy out of the friend's hand. With this behavior it can teach children to redirect their negative behavior. Children do not know how to regulate themselves when they are overwhelmed so staying calm can help teach them to do so as well in these situations.

Achieving calmness is important in overcoming distress and anxiety. This is a skill that is important to lifespan development but can start in child development. Research states, "Literally, calmness means sleep, rest, comfort, calm, peace, reconciliation, safety, security, rest (Ebadi 2015). The root of the meaning behind calmness as researches state is what individuals seek, including children. Children are seeking comfort, peace, safety, and security as these are traits they cannot maintain on their own. Children are not born with the functions to survive on their own, they must learn certain behaviors and emotions, including how to remain calm (Steinberg 2019).

Children exhibit big emotions that they often cannot regulate. With calmness it teaches children to regulate emotions such as tantrums and outbursts that they often cannot control. Overtime researchers have discovered that teaching children to express their emotions can help

them regulate them (Miller 2022). By getting the child to understand their emotion before they act out on them they are able to feel a sense of control. For example, if a child gets a toy taken from them they can express that they feel angry instead of going straight to retaliation.

Communication is a huge aspect in calmness as well. Children often do not respond well to surprises so having an open line of communication can allow the child to remain calm when things do not go their way (Miller 2022). Teaching children to regulate their emotions can teach the child to redirect from what is causing the distress (Van Dijk 2021). By teaching the child the behavior of calmness they will be able to respond to different situations in a positive way.

Children ranging from the ages of 2-5 will react differently to different situations, teaching emotion regulations will allow them to react in a more kind way to their peers and caregivers and avoid the tantrums and outburst that Miller talked about. Teaching children to regulate their emotions at a young age allows them to develop healthy coping skills, the researcher states, “some people are born with a higher level of emotional sensitivity: they have stronger emotional reactions to things, take longer to get over those intense feelings, and generally deal with a higher level of emotional pain” (Van Dijk 2021). Children by nature respond to situations more extravagant than an adult would.

As teaching calmness among children becomes more prevalent, caregivers, teachers, and other individuals are becoming more aware of its impact on children. Classrooms in preschools, daycares, and elementary schools are adapting the concept of promoting calm behaviors by providing a safe space to allow children to calm down without consequences (Plastino 2021). By providing a calm corner it allows the child quiet time and space away from the problem behavior to try to deescalate the situation. The concept of providing a calming space also teaches children

important strategies to make sure their emotions are in check and they can regulate their emotions (Miller 2022). There are many different strategies in place that are backed up by research to promote this positive behavior as well explain the importance of this behavior.

### **Theoretical Approach**

Social learning theory is a theory proposed by Albert Bandura which proposes that behaviors and skills are learned through watching or imitating others (Bandura 1977). This theory was first proposed in 1977 and is a theory that is widely studied through a lens of childhood development. The social learning theory uses both environmental and cognitive factors and how they interact together to teach behavior (McLeod 2016). Bandura proposed this theory through an experiment with bobo dolls where he observed children and how they reacted by watching their peers be aggressive towards the bobo doll. Certain children were exposed to aggressive behaviors while the other sample was shown non aggressive behavior. The children were exposed to what they were exposed to (Graham 2016). Research suggests that there are influences everywhere like conducted in the bobo doll experiment, “Individuals that are observed are called models. In society, children are surrounded by many influential models, such as parents within the family, characters on children’s TV, friends within their peer group and teachers at school. These models provide examples of behavior to observe and imitate, e.g., masculine and feminine, pro and anti-social, etc.” (McLeod 2016). What children are exposed to they often tend to follow. For example, if a child is exposed to a certain religion they will grow up with those beliefs and behaviors that reflect their religion as opposed to a different religion they are not exposed to. A child in this theory needs to be taught the behaviors rather than nature occurring.

Social components influence development through the lense of social learning theory. Without an individual exposing the behavior, skill, mindset, ect to a child this theory suggests that it cannot be obtained. By watching someone else do something, the confidence in the child is built to do the same (Mclead 2016). The three components of this theory are observation, imitation, and modeling (Kurt 2020).. Through these three traits children are able to reflect on the behavior and adapt their own skills. Behavior, personal factors, and environmental factors are all aspects of cognitive development. Bandura also suggested that individuals can learn from their pride looking for a sense of satisfaction to feel accomplished (Kurt 2020). There are many different influences on learning that Bandura has proposed.

Observational learning is the foundation of Bandura's theory. Steinberg (2019) states, ‘Social learning approaches to adolescence have been very influential in explaining how adolescents learn by watching the behavior of those around them, espe- cially parents, peers, and figures in the mass media, like celebrities” (p.10). Although this applies to adolescent development it can be said to be true for childhood development. In our society today this theory has evolved as there are more influences. CHildren at younger ages are being exposed to media and television and are learning through them. Children are learning basic skills from certain learning programs as well as picking up trends to their individuality from movies that have peers their age. There are many influences of the world and Bandura's theory proposes that children can learn from these influences as the social learning theory states.

## **Program**

### **Rationale**

The program I propose to promote calmness to children is a peer based playgroup with children of similar age. In this program children will be taught how to redirect their negative reaction to a specific behavior in order to remain calm and avoid outbursts. With this program children will learn how to regulate their emotions and learn how to avoid agitation, aggression, and stress and redirect their emotions to form healthy coping skills. The behavior being addressed is calmness and it is needed to teach children to manage their reactions.

### **Population**

The population being addressed is children ages two to five. This is the target age for this program because children at these ages are very impressionable. Children at this age are also at the stage in development where they are seeking autonomy and taking initiative in regards to Eriksons 8 stages of cognitive development. This is important to the population because it is the first time children are becoming independent and want to find a purpose for their actions. While they are seeking this purpose and will for their fractions they must learn to maintain their reactions when things do not go as planned. The last reason this population was selected for the program is to develop healthy coping skills early in development to carry with them as they navigate their way through adolescence and into adulthood.

### **Program Components**

The goal of this program is to allow the child to seek calmness in situations where that is not the option they would normally seek. By teaching the child through the lens of social learning theory the child will be able to watch children who have already gained the

understanding of the behavior and be able to make the decision themselves. In this program there will be a specific space in the room with calming music, books, toys, and ultimately a quiet place for them to calm down. In the room, it will be set up like a classroom setting, there will be a large amount of toys throughout the room. Various different activities will be held that allow the children to have fun. In the playgroup ½ of the children will be educated on calmness prior to the program by watching educational videos that show the purpose of the quiet corner. The other ½ will have no prior understanding. When play time begins the supervisor will walk over, take the toy out of the child's hands, and walk away. This will be repeated with both population samples until the goal is maintained. This exercise will be beneficial in a daycare or classroom setting where it aloud a space for the child to learn how to exhibit calm behavior in stressful situations. The program will accomplish this by running a program based off of the social learning theory like the bobo doll experiment but use it to exhibit the behavior of calmness.

**Feasibility**

In order to set up this program you have to be able to designate an area that can be the quiet corner. Preferably keeping a safe and calm environment. Providing items like books, other toys, soft music, and blankets could be beneficial. It is important to make this area a positive space. This is not a disciplinary corner where a child goes to get in trouble, it is a space where a child can navigate to when they need to debrief and can calm down to learn how to react in certain situations. Like stated above this program would be run in a daycare, preschool, or early elementary school. An adult or caregiver will need to be present to direct children and be able to take the toy away to teach the behavior. By having the adult or caregiver present the children will be able to learn off of their reactions as well be supervised at all times. The caregiver can also



communicate with the child about calmness as well as help resolve issues and conflicts between children.

### **Evaluation Method**

While conducting this program to evaluate if it is a positive program you must observe the reactions of the individuals. Ideally, when the toy is taken away the children who have been educated will go to the quiet corner when they feel upset by the action that has just taken place. They will divert their negative behavior response by going straight to the quiet corner to reflect on what had happened before going to address the situation with the teacher or other child. The children who were not educated are expected to fight back for the toy, cry, yell, or throw a tantrum. These children will not receive a reaction from the teacher unless getting redirected to the quiet corner to calm down. These children will also watch the other sample go straight there and teach themselves to go to the quiet corner to be able to calm down. By redirecting them they can learn to exhibit calm behavior. To tell if this program is successful the more toys that are taken the reaction will be less. The children will learn that they have an option to calm down in the quiet corner or to communicate their needs. Managing efficiency can be done by seeing how many children take to this behavior and how long it takes them. All children are different but this is a skill that can be learned.

### **Conclusion**

By watching children make the choice to calm down in situations that warrant a negative response, children are learning to regulate their emotions. Calmness is an important behavior that researchers state is being free from agitation, strong emotion, violence, and disturbances (Oxford

2022). Calmness is a behavior that many parents try to instill in their children to avoid stress, outbursts, and tantrums. But many parents wonder how this can be taught.

Through the social learning theory, a theory proposed by Albert Bandura. Individuals can learn behaviors and skills through watching others, initiating them, or even mimicking them. By seeing what happens in one's environment or seeing what one is exposed to a child is able to learn through those behaviors. For example, in the program developed in this proposal, a child will watch others calm down in a special place and decide themselves to calm down there as well.

Emotions and reactions are something that some individuals are more sensitive to than others. A child is one of the most vulnerable populations in making these reactions. A child does not fully comprehend right for wrong or why things cannot go their way (McLeod 2016).

Teaching a child to maintain emotional control when things do not go their way are life long skills that the child will carry with them through all of the different stages of development.

Overall Calmness is a behavior that is encouraged in children so following the steps created in the program can help teach this behavior.

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