

# First aid for children with developmental delays

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## For whom ?

The following information is for parents whose children have initial developmental delays and are waiting for either diagnosis or therapy.

Evidence of developmental delays may be the following problems:

- with the speech
- with movements (difficulty running, painting ...)
- in emotion regulation (e.g., frequent tantrums ...)
- in orientation
- with playing
- retreat into a world of repetitive activities
- with sleeping and / or digesting
- with loud noises, bright light ...
- ...

## What is this information not?

This information is not a substitute for diagnosis and / or therapy!

But the child's development in the early years is so significant that every week it's important.

Therefore, no time should be wasted by long waiting. So use the time to diagnosis or therapy to help your child develop.

If you do first aid with an injured person, you will not become a doctor. And so you will not become a therapist if you implement the following advice.  
Stay parents for your child!

## **What can you do wrong?**

You can not do wrong! Everything mentioned below is useful for ALL children and their development.

But there are some things to consider:

### ***Doing a lot does not help a lot***

Make sure your child has the energy to engage with you and the world. Use the times with sufficient energy - but only these times.

Watch out for the moments when the child tries to get in touch with you - even though it may not suit you right now.

### ***Be patient***

Development is not a straight path, but a tortuous one with progress and setbacks. But detours increase the local knowledge.

So be patient with your child - and yourself.

## **What is the goal?**

Children need to be successfully together with other people for their development. First with the parents and possibly siblings, then with the friends of the family ... The circle of people with whom one comes in contact, is usually expanded more and more.

In this way, the children are familiarized with the respective culture, customs, and the environment. If there is a disruption of the development (see above), then the disturbance of the coexistence (the social interaction) is often the reason.

The aim is to cooperate (better) together again and thus to promote the development of the child.

## **What stands in the way of the goal "promoting development"?**

Children have to get to know this world slowly. Sometimes, however, they are so overwhelmed with the world and the many stimuli that invade them that they withdraw from the seemingly threatening and / or incomprehensible world.

The reasons for this withdrawal are anxiety and stress.

### ***Anxiety***

The world has changed a lot in the last few years. Traditions that have provided orientation for centuries are being replaced by ever faster "innovations". Even adults find it increasingly difficult to find their way around this world.

The more children have problems orienting themselves in this world. If, for example, a deafness, visual impairment, blindness, or the absence of the unconscious imitation of fellow human beings (what we call autism) are added, the world becomes even more incomprehensible for the child.

But what you can not understand and also supposedly can not influence, what overwhelms you, that causes fear. The result is stress.

## **Stress**

Stress can be caused by many things. For example by anxiety, but also by sudden noises, smells ... The body gets into a "flight or fight" condition due to the stress. This condition, which actually serves to survive, becomes a problem as a permanent condition.

For example, in a state of stress, digestion stops and social interaction is no longer possible.

Children in (continuous) stress either withdraw into their own world, or explore their surroundings very intensively - in search of threats.

Both states stand in the way of a relaxed and thus successful cooperation.

## **What can you do?**

It is clear that reducing anxiety and stress should come first. Only then will the children be able to get in touch with other people in a relaxed way.

And even if it does not seem like it with a lot of children - your child orients itself to you. And you are the most important person in your child's life. Even with the children who either withdraw or show aggression. Through it your child gets to know the world and the life.

But you too are oriented towards your child, you want your child to be as good as possible.

So you and your child are in a relationship in which you are mutually oriented to each other.

For good or bad.

If you want to influence the behavior of your child positively - you should first change your own behavior. You are the adult, you have the necessary overview, insight and control that your child still lacks.

Try out how changing your behavior affects the behavior of your child.

## **Reducing anxiety**

In order to restore social coexistence - and thus promote development again, the reduction of anxiety is paramount.

Anxiety leads to an "flight or fight" reaction that hinders social interaction.

## **Help with orientation**

Many guidelines that have existed for centuries have been lost in recent years. In the past, costume and dialect used to last as well as marriages, social norms and so on, but today they have been replaced by frequently changing fashions in all areas. The environment has changed so much through many technical achievements that it is even more difficult for adults to find their way around this world.

Give your child the opportunity to orient themselves in this unknown world. For example through clear structures and processes as well as clear communication. Say what you mean. And do what you say.

## **Make the world understandable**

Your child must first grow into the world and adapt to the world. By exploring the world, the child not only gets to know them, but also the cultural behaviors etc.

However, this can only succeed if the steps of getting to know each other are not too great and the child does not feel overwhelmed.

Take your child with many small steps in the exploration, rather than too big, which overwhelms your child. It should be a jointly approach to this often disturbing world.

## **Reducing stress**

Stress is the physical consequence, for example, of anxiety.

The body gets ready for flight or fight.

What makes sense in the short term and is life-sustaining, however, is harmful in the long term. The consequences of ongoing stress can be, among others:

- Problems with digestion. Because the body stops this under stress.
- broken teeth, because you grate with tension with your teeth
- Skin problems caused by the stress hormone cortisol
- Headache and migraine due to tension in the shoulder and neck muscles
- ...

Stress as a permanent condition makes you sick. And stress also stands in the way of relaxed togetherness.

## **Stress through sensory impressions**

But strong sensory impressions can also lead to stress. Hypersensitive children, for example, may be stressed by loud noises, intense smells or too many visual impressions. Each child must first learn to understand their own sensory impressions, for example, whether they are threatening or harmless. Again, it takes little steps to make this learning process possible. If the world is too loud from the beginning, too strong smelling or too bright, flickering, ..., then the child withdraws into his own world due to fear and stress.

The often observed uniform behaviors occur, in which the child always does the same. For example, turning a plate or a bottle ... always performing the same rituals. Thus, the child creates his own, controllable and understandable world. Several behaviors that seem senseless and disturbing to an adult are important to the child and make sense in his view!

So watch out for the sensory stimuli in your child's environment. Do not overdo it with too many sounds, smells and visual impressions such as flickering light.

And pay attention to the state of recovery of your child. A rested child can do much more than one who is at the end of his power.

## **Stress is contagious**

Several studies show that the stress in parents is similar to that of children with developmental disorders. Stress is contagious. And can also increase each other.

So the most important step in reducing your child's stress is reducing your own stress! It often helps to become aware of the stress at all. And not always respond to everything immediately. Get the pace out of your reactions.

## **Development needs togetherness in games**

Social togetherness is only learned through one thing - through social interaction.

And the most important form of social interaction in childhood is the game.

In the game, behaviors are tested and skills developed.

The play of the children does not have the claim of adults to fulfill - but the needs of the children.

Therefore, it is important, at least at the beginning, to engage in the games of the child, which may seem strange to an adult, to participate in them.

- Take your time.
  - Make sure that your child has enough energy.
  - Be patient.
  - If possible, play with your child in a non-distracting environment, ie. without many stimuli for eye, ear and nose.
  - Try different things. Nobody is perfect or has to be right from the beginning.
- Look forward to progress! And do not be discouraged by setbacks.

## **What you should not do / try**

There are "therapies" that want to teach the children social behaviors such as "looking into the eyes", "shaking hands", "talking" ... and unlearn "offending" unwanted behavior through conditioning.

But social behavior is not learned through dressage - but through social interaction.  
And dressage is not a social interaction - it even stands in the way of it.

Even the idea that dieting would help is just as wrong as it is widespread.  
Stress is a cause of both a developmental disorder and indigestion.  
And not the indigestion is the cause of the developmental disorder.

Furthermore, miracle remedies are repeatedly advertised that supposedly heal your child. But those do not do that - often they are even harmful.

## **Summary**

- 1.) This is NOT a replacement for a diagnosis or therapy. Keep pursuing them!
- 2.) YOU are the most important caregiver for your child - even if that does not always seem like it.
- 3.) Development needs SOCIAL TOGETHERNESS. If it comes to a disturbance of the cooperation, then it comes in the consequence to a disturbance of the development.
- 4.) ANXIETY and STRESS are the biggest obstacles to social interaction. That's why reducing anxiety and stress is paramount.