

PARENT OR TEACHER RESPONSIBILITY?

by Sally Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

I was immediately concerned when I saw an article on the Internet by Melissa Slager titled "Kicked out of preschool?" It referred to preschoolers being expelled for such behaviors as hitting, biting, refusing to take instruction and running away from class. My alarm was not primarily about the kids' behavior so much as the comments by parents and the conclusions reached in the article.

A 4 year-old preschooler refused to take instruction and was also seen hitting other children. The preschool director called the mother after several months of this negative behavior and the parent responded with, "They couldn't handle him, or didn't want to. They just seemed kind of intolerant." That indicated to me that the teachers had been tolerating this behavior for quite a while before approaching the parent, who then took no responsibility for the child's behavior. She blamed the teachers for not being able to effectively manage him. Parents of a 3 year-old were asked to remove their child from preschool because, apart from other negative behavior, he kept running away from the class. His mother said, "He wasn't hitting anyone and he wasn't aggressive. He just didn't like being told what to do. He's 3 years old you know!" Hmm.

I agree that children are on a very steep learning curve especially at preschool age. As toddlers they have very little concept of anything beyond themselves and it takes consistent training to teach them how to play peacefully with others and to obey instructions. Biting, hitting and throwing tantrums are common responses that children resort to, to express their frustration or anger *when they do not know* how else to make their point. The perspective on biting often depends on who bites and who gets bitten. The parent of a biter might say, "He didn't mean it. He just doesn't know how to express himself yet. He'll grow out of it. Give him a chance." The injured child's parent might well say, "Get whoever bit my child out of preschool until he learns to stop biting or I'm taking my little Jenny out of here!" Daycare personnel will use diversion as a means to de-escalate situations, but it is up to parents to teach their kids appropriate behavior, especially when they are over 3 years of age. By then they have developed a clearer understanding of what is and is not appropriate. It is definitely not the teacher or the caregiver's sole responsibility to teach a child appropriate behaviors.

The second point the article brought out is that kids are affected when they are expelled from school. It seems that more and more preschool kids are being expelled for negative behavior. Yale researcher Walter S. Gilliam observed that when preschoolers are expelled, they can continue the pattern and be expelled from future schooling. It may be that when behavior is not corrected early, a child will continue to be rejected or ejected. When a child is not accepted he usually won't like himself either and, unless averted, his life could easily spiral

down to a sense of hopelessness and helplessness. No one wants his or her child to become a drop out.

Is there an answer? Slager's says , "Giving teachers the support they need and including social skills lessons along with ABC's is the key." I disagree. Teachers are finding themselves spending more and more time teaching character education like good manners, respectfulness, honesty, and integrity that now some parents assume it is the schools' responsibility to teach their kids positive behaviors. We wonder why our kids seem to be learning less and less curricular studies. This could well be the reason.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.