



# Society for Research in Child Development

Office for Policy and Communications

750 First St., NE • Washington, DC 20002-4242

OFFICE: (202) 336-5926 • FAX: (202) 336-6184

## **PRESS RELEASE**

Child Development (March/April 2006)

**EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE ON MARCH 22, 2006 (12:01 AM)**

### Contact Information:

Andrea Browning  
Society for Research in Child Development  
Office for Policy and Communications  
(202) 336-5926  
abrowning@srcd.org

### **Developmentally Delayed Young Children Show Slowed Development in Peer Relations Too**

Children with mild cognitive delays show only modest or no improvement from early childhood to early grade school in their ability to interact with their peers, a worrisome situation given the importance of such relationships and their ability to contribute to other aspects of a child's development. These findings come from researchers at the University of Washington in Seattle and are published in the March/April 2006 issue of the journal *Child Development*.

The researchers examined peer interactions in 63 four-to-six year-old children with mild developmental delays to evaluate their social interactions with other children. They then reevaluated them two years later. The children were observed during play sessions with a group of three children they didn't know who didn't have any developmental problems, but who were the same age and gender as the children with the delay. This task was important, because becoming involved in new groups is especially challenging. It requires many skills, including approaching peers, evaluating the context and resolving any potential conflicts.

The researchers found only very modest improvements in peer interactions for the delayed children over the two-year period. In fact, one subgroup of children showed no increases at all.

"Our findings suggest a clear sense of urgency to develop interventions focusing on this important area of development during the early childhood period for these children," said lead author Michael J. Guralnick, Ph.D., director of the University of Washington's Center on Human Development and Disability and professor of psychology and pediatrics.

The researchers also found that the developmentally delayed children exhibited high levels of stability in their peer interactions over time, which enabled Dr. Guralnick and his co-authors to identify those children at especially high risk for problems with peer interaction. "These children could then be singled out for more intensive intervention," he noted.

Further analysis revealed that less maternal stress and more maternal support from spouses, friends and others was linked with more extensive peer interaction.

"Taken together, these findings provide important directions for interventions to promote the peer relationships of children with mild developmental delays," concluded Dr. Guralnick.

###

Summarized from Child Development, Vol. 77, Issue 2, *Stability, Change, and Correlates of the Peer Relationships of Young Children with Mild Developmental Delays* by Guralnick MJ,

Hammond MA, Connor RT and Neville B (University of Washington, Seattle). Copyright 2006 The Society for Research in Child Development, Inc. All rights reserved.