Is This Typical?
Understanding Variations in Child Development

With Dr. Rona Novick
October 23, 2012
Welcome & Conference Etiquette
Below are some tips that will help make this conference call successful:

• PLEASE NOTE: We will be muting phones automatically, but when we open the lines for questions we will want to ensure that those questions can be heard and answered without undue background noise. We will work in time for questions during the presentation.

• Use the right phone - Cell phones can be included in conference calls, but some can also cause static on the lines. Try to use a landline phone if possible. Speakerphones pick up a lot of background noise.

• Participate in a quiet, undisturbed room. – Background noise can be heard through the phone and will disturb others in the conference. If you can’t find a quiet room, use your phone’s mute button until you want to speak – and avoid distracting noises such as humming, scraping chairs, tapping a pencil, etc.

• Never Put a Conference Call on Hold! - Participants will be forced to listen to your on-hold music or they will not know that you have stepped away and may continue to address you while you’re gone.

• Call Waiting - The sound of your call-waiting beep can be disruptive and confusing to conference call participants. Quite often the Call Waiting function can be temporarily suspended by touching *70 prior to the call.

• Identify Yourself - When you ask a question verbally during the designated times please identify yourself by name.

• Respect for privacy- In order to be respectful and to protect the privacy of others, please do not refer to specific teachers or schools by name.

• Chat Room & Question/Answer Box – Those participating on line may use the chat room and question/answer box on the lower right of their screen to enter questions and comments at any time. We will offer regular opportunities for those joining by phone only to participate as well.
Rona Novick, PhD, is the Director of the Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Doctoral Program at the Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration at Yeshiva University and Clinical Professor of Child Psychology at North Shore Long-Island Jewish Medical Center.

Dr. Novick also serves as a Co-Educational Director of Hidden Sparks, providing consultation to day schools and yeshivot. Dr. Novick developed the Alliance for School Mental Health at North-Shore Long Island Jewish Medical Center and served as its director for eight years, authoring the BRAVE bully prevention program for schools. Dr. Novick is the author of the book Helping Your Child Make Friends and editor of the book series Kids Don’t Come With Instruction Manuals.
Overview of the Session

Parents watch, wonder and worry about their children almost constantly. When we see our children do, or not do something that other children are doing, we can become concerned – is this typical?

Why is my child not like the other children I see? Are the differences I am seeing just part of typical development or do they hint at challenges or concerns that need parents’ attention.

Today we will discuss child developmental along a continuum. Some behavioral and learning issues that are outside the pattern of typical development will be explored. We will discuss the developmental tasks usually mastered at particular ages and phases. AND . . . We will consider the best plan of action for parents asking themselves . . . Is this typical?
Session Goals:

1. Understanding of development process
2. Awareness of milestone phenomenon
3. Focus on strengths and growth-supporting parenting
4. Consideration of realistic areas for concern
In your experience . . .

• Think of a time in your childhood when parents, teachers, or others noticed something you did differently, or something you didn’t do that your peers did. Were people asking themselves . . . Is this typical?

• How did it resolve? Is it still an area of concern?
Meet David

When you walk into the den, David is doing some school work. His siblings are spaced around the room, also doing homework. David looks carefully at the work in front of him. He rocks his chair from time to time. He looks over at his sister, then goes to where she is working and grabs a marker. She protests loudly, and says she is calling a parent to “tell on him”. David pulls his chair to the corner of the room and huddles under it, facing away from everyone. He begins speaking to himself.

IS THIS TYPICAL? SHOULD THE PARENTS BE CONCERNED?

WHAT MORE WOULD YOU WANT TO KNOW?
SOME REALITIES OF DEVELOPMENT
No Absolutes

Walking
- Michael – 11 mos.
- Shira – 13 mos.
- Dina – 12½ mos.
- Yossi – 14 mos.

Reading
- Jenny – K.1
- Devorah – K.8
- Marc – 1.1
- Yael – N.8
- Ellie – 1.7
- Dara – 1.9

Sleepaway
- Josh – 10
- Mara – 8
- David – 12
- Ben – never
- Ilana – 11
- Chana – 8
Which best represents the process of development?
Development Process

- Irregular progression
- Unique to each individual
- May include backslides in preparation for forward movement
- Developmental “milestones” are guideposts . . .
  Virtually all developmental skills have a broad range of ages at which they are accomplished
The Same Phenomenon Looks Different at Different Ages

Physical aggression common when frustrated, can include biting, hitting, kicking, hair pulling, pinching, throwing items.

Understanding that physical aggression is not permitted in certain contexts, limited to revenge and retaliation. Biting is rare.

Physical aggression is largely replaced by verbal/social aggression. Fighting with sibs and peers still occurs.

Outlets for aggression include sports. Sarcasm and other verbal aggression develops.

Physical fights rare in most cultures. Playful use of aggression. May occur in disinhibiting situations i.e. internet.

Infant/toddler K-2 3-5 6-8 HS

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The Role of Temperament
Just as babies are born with their own combination of physical characteristics, behavioral scientists know that each one has patterns of behavior, or temperament, that are also part of their uniqueness.
What Does it Look Like

Sedentary

Non-stop

Calm

High Strung

Needs sameness

Enjoys Novelty

Activity

Intensity

Adaptability

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Why Does Temperament Matter?

Shira

- Very “easy” baby – had regular schedule for eating and sleeping
- Took to everyone quickly
- Loved new things
- Persisted with difficult tasks
- Often calm, and easily soothed
- Seemed happy most of time

Sarah

- Colicky and never slept
- Finicky about who she would let near her
- Feared all things new, tentative in most situations
- Would not try new things, or quickly reject them
- Often upset, fussy, and hard to soothe
- Intense distress reactions frequently

What do you think each girl’s parent saw at their daughter’s 7th birthday party at the bowling alley?
Temperament points to remember

- What is typical for each person relates to temperament.

- Extremes of temperament often appear outside the norm to others.

- Temperament is malleable or avoidable. . . But not without significant effort.

When you think of children who have been challenging . . .

Which temperamental factors were an issue?

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Should We Worry?
Returning to David

David’s dad comes into the room and encourages him to go back to his homework. He asks David about his science book, and David jumps around his dad, giggles and flaps his arms while describing the gravity experiment they did. When Dad asks questions David interrupts virtually every sentence with facts about the solar system and universe.

IS THIS TYPICAL?

WHAT WOULD YOU NEED TO KNOW TO ANSWER THE QUESTION?

ARE YOU CONCERNED ABOUT DAVID?
• Miriam cries when she does not get her way. She frequently crumples up her work saying “I’m stupid” or “This is terrible”. She asks many clarifying questions about each request or direction. She is very close to her sister Sarah and is rarely seen without her.

• Jonathan gets very angry when asked to stop doing things he enjoys, or to engage in tasks that are challenging for him. He has frequent arguments at home, at recess, and at least once each week is called out of recess because he has hit or punched someone.
Contributing Factors – Is it typical?

- Age
- Local Norms
- Temperament
Other Important Considerations in “Typical” vs. Not

- Individual differences must be examined in the context of
  - Tasks – what are we expecting children to do
  - Normative transitions – what changes have just occurred
  - Broader ecological risks – what stressors/supports are available in child’s life

- All development is complex and connected to many factors
Areas for Parents to Consider

- Academic
- Social
- Affect/Mood
- Behavior
Academics

- Skills
  - Content specific
  - Generic
- Learning curve/process
- Patterns of strengths and challenges
Social

Strengths:
- Friendships
- Social skills
- Social problem solving

Concerns:
- Withdrawal
- Aggression
- Very specific and unusual likes
- Clinginess/struggles with separation

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Affect/Mood

- Moodiness – justification (consider biology)
- Depression – justification – may be more irritable than sad
- Anxiety/avoidance/shutting down - justification
Behavior

- Aggression
- Rituals
- Tantrums
- Low motivation/responsiveness
• Comparison – beware of looking at what other children can do, but use some knowledge of what is typical for ages to judge
• Worry/Panic – concern promotes action – panic paralyzes
• Temperamental mismatch – empathic failure

• If it is atypical – parents are in best position to offer loving problem solving, support, and unconditional love and acceptance to their child
Conclusions

• No one factor determines typicality
• Understanding the whole child is critical
• When concerns emerge, try providing support and encouragement.
• Worry is contagious – exude calm
• Be hopeful – “the developmental approach”
• If concerned, consider consultation to appropriate professional
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday 11/20/12</td>
<td>Help Your Child Get Organized!</td>
<td>Dr. Jane Gertler</td>
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<td>Tuesday 4/9/13</td>
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For more information visit: www.hiddensparks.org
Contacting Hidden Sparks

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