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*Child Psychology  
& Development*

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***Child Psychology  
& Development***  
FOR  
**DUMMIES®**

**by Laura L. Smith, PhD,  
and Charles H. Elliott, PhD**



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# About the Authors



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**Laura L. Smith, PhD, and Charles Elliott, PhD,** are co-authors of *Overcoming Anxiety For Dummies*, 2nd Edition, *Borderline Personality Disorder For Dummies*, *Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder For Dummies*, *Seasonal Affective Disorder For Dummies*, *Anxiety & Depression Workbook For Dummies*, and *Depression For Dummies* (all from Wiley Publishing, Inc.); *Hollow Kids: Recapturing the Soul of a Generation Lost to the Self-Esteem Myth* (Prima); and *Why Can't I Be the Parent I Want to Be?* (New Harbinger Publications). They are members of the board of directors of the New Mexico Psychological Association and affiliated training faculty at the Cognitive Behavioral Institute of Albuquerque. Their work has been featured in various periodicals, including *Family Circle*, *Parents*, *Child*, and *Better Homes and Gardens*, as well as popular publications such as the *New York Post*, *Washington Times*, *Daily Telegraph* (London), and *The Christian Science Monitor*.

They have been invited speakers at conferences including: the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI), the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies, the International Association for Cognitive Psychotherapy, and the National Association of School Psychologists. They have appeared on television networks such as CNN and Canada AM. They have also been featured as experts on various National Public Radio programs, as well as "You The Owner's Manual," "Doctor Radio," "The Frankie Boyer Show," and "The Four Seasons Radio Show." They have committed their professional lives to making the science of psychology relevant and accessible to the public.

Laura is a clinical and a school psychologist. Previously, she was a special-education teacher, an educational diagnostician, a psychologist at a juvenile detention center, a child psychologist in private practice, a clinical supervisor at various rural school districts, and a consultant to Head Start programs. Throughout these years, she has raised three kids and enjoyed her four grandchildren. She is often asked to provide consultations to attorneys, school districts, and government agencies.

Chuck is a clinical psychologist and a founding fellow of the Academy of Cognitive Therapy. He has written many professional articles and book chapters on the topic of cognitive behavior therapies and pediatric psychology. He has been a director of mental health consultation-liaison at Children's Memorial Hospital in Oklahoma City, a faculty member at the University of New Mexico School of Medicine (programs for children), a clinical psychologist in private practice, and a faculty member at Fielding Graduate University (psychology).

Drs. Smith and Elliott are available for speaking engagements, expert interviews, and workshops. You may contact either or both of them at [www.psychology4people.com](http://www.psychology4people.com).



# *Dedication*

To children everywhere and those who care for them.

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# Introduction

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**W**e love kids. Fact is, we used to be kids. We've had kids, and they've had kids. Also, we've devoted much of our professional lives to assessing, teaching, and treating kids. We've worked with kids in the classroom, in the hospital, and our offices. We've seen kids of all ages from infancy through young adulthood. We've helped kids deal with learning problems, anxiety, depression, autism, deficits in attention, and behavior problems.

So when the editors of the *For Dummies* series asked us to consider writing *Child Psychology & Development For Dummies*, we were delighted. We soon engaged in lengthy discussions and a few sleepless nights about the content and organization of this book. Take a look at most any college textbook on either child psychology or development, and you may find it daunting. Frankly, much of the material is esoteric and as difficult to follow as twisting country roads before Google Maps.

In collaboration with our editors, we took some time deciding on an approach to this book. We realized that most people who are interested in this topic are probably teachers, parents, child-care providers, grandparents, and others who are interested in kids. Thus, you'll discover that we don't follow a textbook approach to *Child Psychology & Development For Dummies*. Rather, like most books in the *For Dummies* series, this book takes complicated theories and ideas and turns them into practical information that can be applied to the real world of children and those who care about them.

We could have filled these pages with endless details about theorists such as Sigmund Freud, Erik Erikson, Lawrence Kohlberg, Jean Piaget, B. F. Skinner, Albert Bandura, Lev Vygotsky, John Bowlby, and Mary Ainsworth (among many others). Instead, we took a different tack, weaving science, theory, and our own clinical experience into a sensible look at child psychology and development.

## About This Book

This book is about kids from A to Z. We start with the big picture of what makes kids tick and reveal the four major goals of a successful childhood. We also discuss how development proceeds normally with respect to each of those goals at different ages. We describe how families, schools, and communities can optimally support child development.

We also take a look at what can go wrong during childhood. We describe the most common childhood disorders and disabilities. Fortunately, much can be done about these problems, and we tell you about the treatments and interventions that work.



This book is meant to provide lots of information about child development and the problems kids encounter. If you have concerns about a child, we recommend checking with either the child's pediatrician or a mental-health professional. Don't attempt to diagnose or try your own treatment ideas without guidance from professionals.

## *What Not to Read*

Most books are intended to be read from cover to cover. If you like doing that, by all means feel free to do so. But you can actually approach this book in almost any way that you want. You can use the comprehensive table of contents to choose what you want to read and in what order.

If you're looking for text to skip, we recommend that you don't read the sidebars (text within those gray-shaded boxes) or any paragraph attached to a Technical Stuff icon. Although both items are interesting, skipping them won't take away from the practical knowledge you gain from the rest of the book.

## *Conventions Used in this Book*

Throughout the book, we use the following conventions:

- ✔ We use case examples to illustrate our points from time to time. Please realize that these examples represent composites of children and their caregivers confronting all sorts of issues. None of these children actually exists as described. Any resemblance to a particular person is entirely coincidental. We boldface the names of people in our examples to indicate that a case example is starting.
- ✔ We do our best to avoid using technical jargon. But when we resort to using a term that you may find unfamiliar, we usually italicize the word and give you a brief definition. We try to keep technical terms to a minimum.
- ✔ All Web addresses are set in `monofont` to help them stand out. Also, if a Web address had to break across two lines, we didn't add any extra characters (such as a hyphen) to indicate the break. Just type the address as you see it on the page, ignoring the line break.



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## ***Foolish Assumptions***

We're going to go out on a limb here and assume that if you've picked up this book, you probably have an interest in kids. Or maybe you're curious about children because you're expecting or you have a brand-new grandchild. Perhaps you're a teacher, parent, counselor, or other type of child-care provider. Maybe you're looking for ideas about how to manage or discipline kids, or you want to know about a certain type of disability or disorder. It's also possible that you want to know what types of treatments are available for various kinds of childhood problems.

In other words, if you want to know something about kids, you've found the right book. Enjoy.

## ***How This Book Is Organized***

*Child Psychology & Development For Dummies* is organized in 6 parts and 22 chapters. Here's a quick overview of each part.

### ***Part I: Understanding Children: The Big Picture***

In this part, we introduce the topic of child psychology and development. Chapter 1 provides a broad-brushstrokes overview. Chapter 2 tells you what goes into the soup of kids' development, including biology, psychology, learning, environment, and culture. Chapter 3 lays out the four major goals of childhood — what kids need to master to become well-functioning adults.

### ***Part II: Watching Kids Grow***

In Part II, we describe what normal childhood development looks like. Chapter 4 starts with what happens before a kid becomes a kid — at conception — and then describes birth and the rapid developments during the first year of life. In Chapter 5, we discuss the preschool years, ages 1 through 4. Then, in Chapter 6, we review what happens during the middle-childhood years, ages 5 through 12 — years that revolve around making friends, acquiring skills, and developing better self-control. During adolescence, described in Chapter 7, kids go through tremendous changes. Their bodies develop, their sense of who they are matures, they learn to think abstractly, and the importance of peers increases. For parents and teens alike, surviving adolescence is quite an accomplishment.

## ***Part III: Growing Great Kids***

This part reviews how parents, families, schools, and communities can give kids the best chance to grow up successfully. In Chapter 8, we describe ways that families can optimize kids' development. Next, in Chapter 9, we review what schools and teachers can do to help kids achieve their highest potential, as well as show parents some of the various day-care and educational options available to them. Finally, in Chapter 10, we discuss the role that communities can play in helping kids reach adulthood intact.

## ***Part IV: Spotting Troubled Development***

Sometimes, troubles pop up in spite of everyone's best intentions. Kids can be born with problems or develop them over time. This part alerts you to early signs of problems that could lie on the horizon so help can be sought early.

In this part, we discuss common physical challenges, problems that may affect school achievement, emotional disorders, the autism spectrum, and behavioral disorders. We also review the sometimes-horrific effects of child abuse, trauma, and accidental injuries. Our intention is to help those who care about children understand the nature of childhood difficulties.

## ***Part V: Getting the Right Therapies***

Perhaps you have or know a child who has one or more of the problems discussed in Part IV. If so, this part reviews the kinds of therapies and interventions that can help. These interventions have been studied and shown to be effective. We don't want you to waste your time and money on miracle cures that don't work.

We also discuss how parents, teachers, and professionals can collaborate for even better outcomes. We tell those who care for kids how to communicate effectively. Finally, we tell parents how to work with and assist the efforts of treatment providers.

## ***Part VI: The Part of Tens***

If you're looking for a quick reference, take a look at these helpful lists. Read about ten ways to calm kids, ten signs of gifted kids, and ten signs that a kid needs help.

## The Appendix

The Appendix provides a quick overview of major milestones of child development, showing what kids generally should be doing at various ages.

## Icons Used in This Book



This icon is intended to grab your attention. It indicates something that we think you'll find important and want to remember.



The Tip icon alerts you to specific useful actions you can take or interesting insights for your consideration.



These icons appear when you need to be on the lookout for a potential problem.



Not everyone wants to know everything about every topic. This icon indicates material that you may want to delve into further, but you really don't have to read it.

## Where to Go from Here

*Child Psychology & Development For Dummies* offers you the best, most-up-to-date information we have on what makes kids tick and how normal development usually proceeds. It discusses the problems children encounter and how everyone can help them do better.

Reading this book will help you understand kids better. If a child you care about has a specific problem, however, we encourage you to seek professional guidance from a pediatrician or other health-care provider or a mental-health professional.

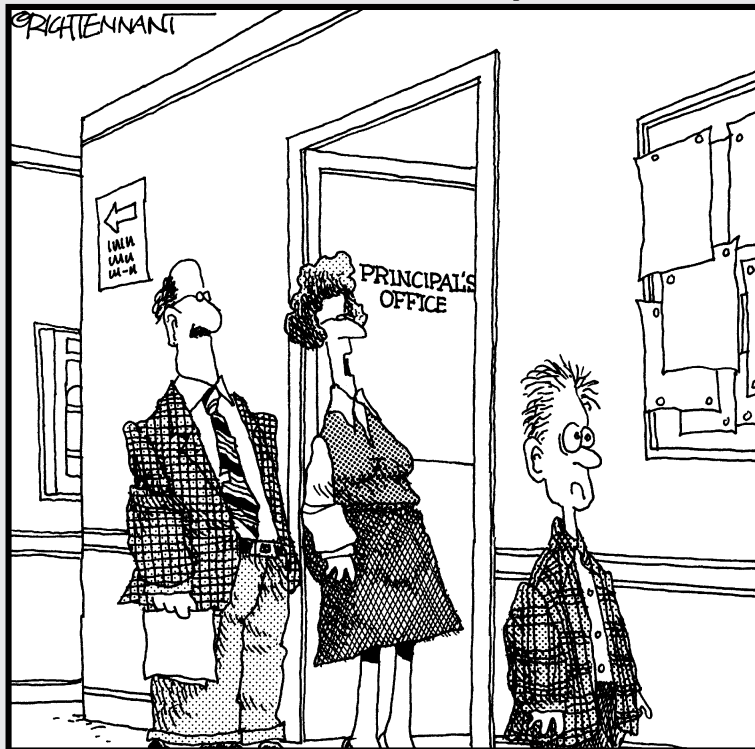


# Part I

# Understanding Children: The Big Picture

**The 5<sup>th</sup> Wave**

By Rich Tennant



"He should be all right now. I made him spend two and a half hours on a prisoners' chat line."

***W*** *In this part . . .*

we look at why child psychology matters. We tell you why anyone who's interested in kids needs to know something about child psychology. We explain how biology mixes with the environment, culture, and experiences to determine how kids turn out.

We also discuss the four goals all kids must master to do well in life. Specifically, they must learn how to relate to others; they need to figure out how to control their emotions and impulses; they need to develop a healthy view of themselves; and they must find the motivation to learn and achieve.