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Prevention Program Improves Antisocial Behavior in Children

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Reviewed by John M. Grohol, Psy.D. on October 8, 2010

A new program piloted at the University of Granada shows promise for helping to prevent [antisocial behavior](#) in the early years extending into adulthood.

Researchers have pioneered an intervention program aimed at 3-year-old children called *Aprender a convivir* (learning to live together).

Findings of the pilot study revealed that 90 percent of the children who participated in the program interacted more actively with other children, and that 86 percent experienced a reduction in [anxiety](#), [depression](#), shyness or social isolation.

Funded by the Spanish Ministry of Education and Science, researchers took a sample of 131 children aged three. A control group of 53 children was identified alongside an experimental group of 78.

The experimental group was trained with the Aprender program for three months, and evaluations were taken before and after the intervention.

Based on interaction with puppets, the program was divided into four blocks with a duration of three weeks respectively. Two 1.5 hour-sessions were held per week.

The first half of the session entailed three puppets explaining to the children the contents of the session. Following the introduction, different activities were developed and deployed in small group settings.

The results revealed that participants in the *Aprender a convivir* program had improved social interactions and self management. Specifically, they were more independent, complied with established rules, shared their things, respected others' feelings, expressed their own feelings better, helped their peers and teachers, paid attention, apologized, thanked others and showed less aggressive and violent behavior.

Researchers believe the intervention program shows promise for improving academic performance. After participating in the program, the percentage of children scoring high in Social Competence increased from 7.8 percent to 47.8 percent.

The program was also successful in reducing the percentage of children with behavior disorders from 27.8 percent to 11.9 percent. In addition, 60 percent of participants experienced an improvement in their attention-deficit and hyperactivity, which will have a positive impact on their academic and learning performance, researchers noted.

The study was conducted by María Fernández Cabezas, Department of Evolutionary and Education Psychology, University of Granada, and coordinated by professors Fernando Justicia, Carmen Pichardo Martínez and Trinidad García Berbén.

The research project is a five-year effort aimed at studying the effects of training on social competences from early childhood for reducing behavior disorders.

After completion of this research, the authors concluded that it is necessary to offer social and emotional education in primary schools through a systematic and rigorous way, and that the results obtained are assessed.

"Therefore, it would be positive that this program was implemented in the future by primary teachers, and that the results obtained were extended to other environments such as families," said Cabezas.

Behavior disorders are commonly defined by consistent patterns of behaviors that break the rules. Both biological and environmental causes have been connected to behavior disorders.

Specifically, children most at risk for oppositional defiant and conduct disorders are those who have low birth weight, neurological damage or [Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder](#). Risk has also been associated with rejection by their mothers following a baby's birth, separation from [parents](#), poor foster care, physical or sexual abuse and poverty.

Source: [University of Grenada](#)

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