

Book Reviews

Promoting healthy childhood development today

James R. Harris, Jr., Ph.D.

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£17.00.

Promoting healthy childhood development today, by James R. Harris, Jr., Ph.D., serves as a useful introduction to those working with children and young people in many different capacities, including parents, foster carers and residential child care practitioners, among others. The book tasks itself as a jargon free and practical guide for people working with young people. As the author explains in his introduction, 'the text aims to provide adults with information and strategies to help them address child-rearing issues' (p. XIV). It applies theory to practical examples in a meaningful way, helping people who work with or care for children to understand behaviour as part of a child's development.

The book has eight main chapters, with an introduction, relevant references and appendix. The opening chapters discuss topics such as society, modern families and different types of carers. They are followed by an introduction to child development. The author has chosen to focus on the basic principles of Erikson, Piaget and Vygotsky's theories, covering psychosocial, cognitive and finally Vygotsky, 'because his works build upon some of the premises of Erikson and Piaget' (p.17). The application of these principles is then shown through practical examples.

Following on from this, the book looks at gaining awareness of common childhood behaviours and addressing issues of adolescence, leading into effective communication and promoting desirable behaviours. The final chapters look at stress and anger, both in carers and children, and the causes of, and potential future stressors, within family life.

The chapter on effective communication with children will be a point of reference that I would recommend to staff teams and parents alike. When experiencing a period of stress, talking about difficult issues or keeping up with the high pace of modern living, it is all too easy to react rather than respond. This chapter can be used as a tool to 'check-in' on how we approach communicating with children and young people in our lives. '...effective adult – child communication is being able to hear and talk to youth, letting them express their concern and helping them to resolve their problems' (p. 57), and



the book is a useful aid in achieving this.

I asked the staff team with which I work to read the book and give feedback. It was felt that the short chapters in the book lend themselves to a useful and quick reference. While the book gave good practical advice and strategies, it lacked depth. However, the author makes it clear that this was his intention and indicates that the references provided within the book will point to more in-depth text in relation to the topics dealt with in each chapter. As such the book could be used to introduce topics and to stimulate learning within a staff team. It was also pointed out that because the book is relatively jargon free and has relatively short chapters, it could also make a useful resource when working with families of the children and young people with whom we work.

At seventy nine pages, the book covers a wide range of topics. It sets out to provide an introduction to key theory and related working strategies, and is successful in doing so.

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