

7 Reasons We're Seeing More Challenging Behavior in Young Children



**All Are Preventable If We Understand
Child Development!**

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There's no doubt that veteran early childhood professionals are seeing more challenging behavior in their settings these days. And new teachers are feeling quite unprepared – with good reason – to handle the behavior challenges they're experiencing. Both groups struggle with the amount of time wasted on classroom management.



Why is challenging behavior more of an issue these days? I think much of it results from changes to early childhood education. From the emphasis on academics and accountability, and the attempt to accelerate child development.

Following are seven reasons I believe are behind the increase in disruptive behavior.

1. Children Have Almost No Time to Play



Early childhood researcher and professor Nancy Carlsson-Paige calls play “nature’s plan” and “a biological drive.” Experts around the globe agree with this statement.

Can you imagine if we insisted that kittens and puppies and baby goats stay still? If we prevented them from frolicking and playing? The idea is ludicrous – and it should be just as ludicrous when we’re discussing children.

2. Unrealistic Expectations

We are demanding that children accomplish things for which they are in no way developmentally equipped. We insist that three-year-olds sit still, learn to grasp a pencil properly, or memorize the meaning of words like *hypothesis*, which have absolutely no relevance to their lives — because they have to “get ready to be four.” We expect them to read by the end of kindergarten, ready or not.



This puts enormous pressure on young children because they're so anxious to please the adults in their lives. When they continually are unable to comply with adult demands — because the natural course of child development doesn't allow them to — they become frustrated and unhappy.

3. Little to No Downtime



Children get little to no downtime, which is detrimental to their mental health. How are they supposed to enjoy their lives when every moment is scheduled for them? Downtime is essential for everybody's mental health. It also makes free play (child-chosen and child-directed) possible.

4. We Treat Children As Though They Exist from the Neck Up



We behave as though only their brains matter, when the research shows and good sense validates the importance of the mind-body connection.

The failure to acknowledge this connection is the primary reason why play and movement are being eliminated from early childhood classrooms – and why young children are forced to sit for long periods. Not only does the research demonstrate the importance of the mind-body connection; also, it tells us sitting increases fatigue and reduces concentration. Tired children who are unable to concentrate have a tendency to act out!

5. We Stifle Children's Natural Creativity & Love of Learning

1 one apple



Handwriting practice lines consisting of four horizontal lines (top, dashed middle, baseline, and descender line). The first line has a vertical dashed line starting from the top line, going down to the baseline, with a small '1' and a downward arrow indicating the stroke order.

This happens through the use of worksheets, standardized tests and curricula, and an insistence on conformity and rote — as opposed to active, authentic — learning.

Children are born with a love of learning and are naturally creative, active learners. They're not meant to be empty vessels to be filled with useless information. This is boring for them!

6. We Pit Children Against One Another...

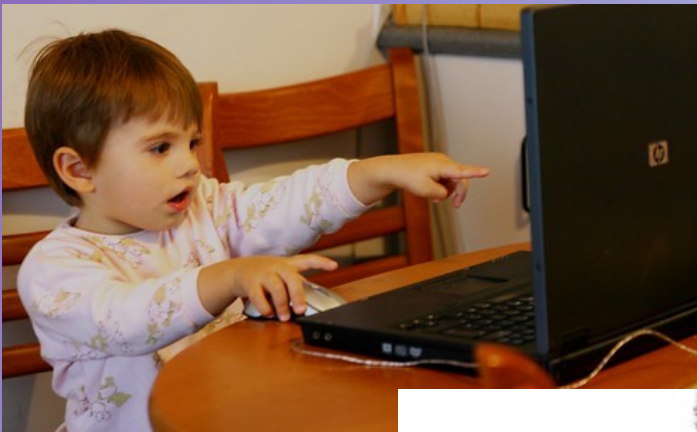


...with our focus on competition and winning. Competition is not developmentally appropriate for young children – who actually prefer *cooperative* activities to competitive ones.

When children are more well-versed in competition than cooperation, the atmosphere in an early childhood setting is not as friendly as it should be. After all, research has shown that competition increases aggression and other antisocial behaviors.

7. Too Much Time Spent with Screens

Too many children spend hours in front of screens, leading sedentary lives (it's the sitting thing again) filled with virtual relationships instead of interacting with real people in real life – when the research clearly shows that social-emotional development is critical in early childhood and that *in-person interactions* are necessary for social-emotional development. Additionally, we have research demonstrating that screen time is creating depression and aggression in children.



8. Trauma

I've included this bonus page because much challenging behavior begins with anxiety, and as the result of a worldwide pandemic, more children than ever have experienced anxiety.

This can manifest itself in children demonstrating everything from clinginess to aggression. Self-regulation is likely to be especially difficult for children who've experienced trauma.





With all of this in mind, it's no wonder there are more challenging behaviors in early childhood settings. That children are

acting out. How could all of these circumstances *not* lead to defiance? Defiance is often the only way young children are able to push back. To express themselves.

Heck, if all of this were being imposed on me, even with my verbal ability, I just might act out too! But as we respect the stages of child development and children's natural ways of learning, the children in your setting will be happier and calmer, and they will respect you in return.



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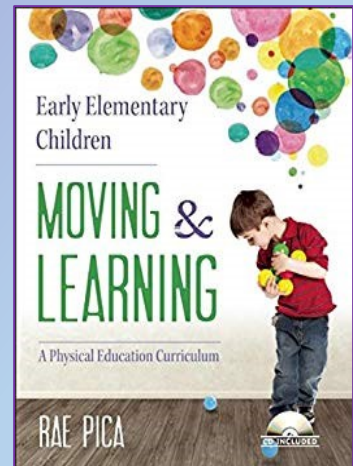
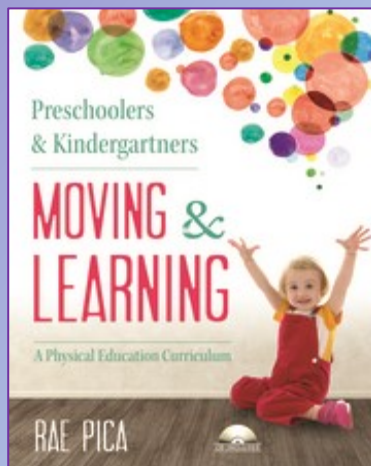
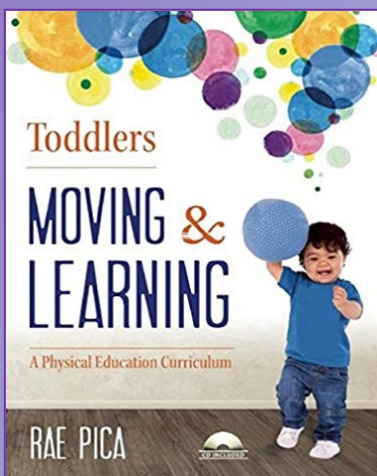
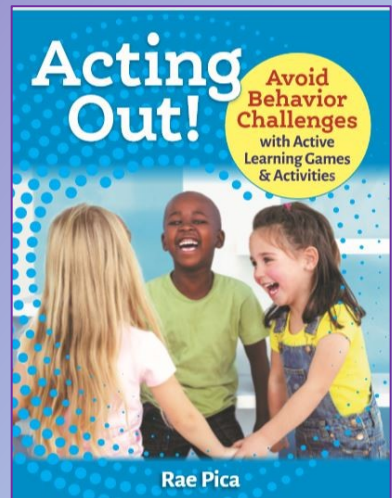
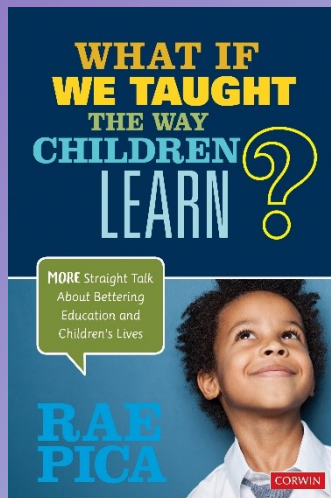
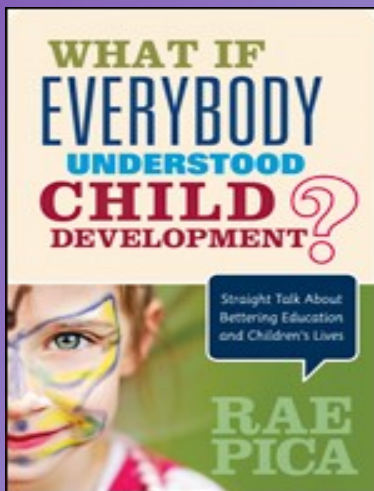
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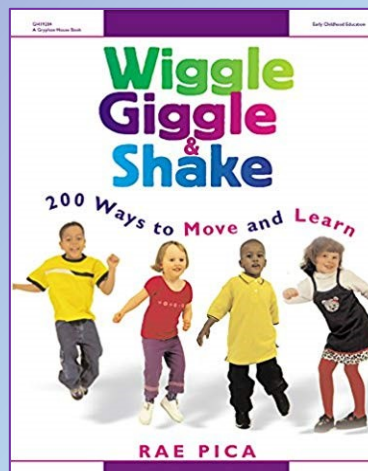
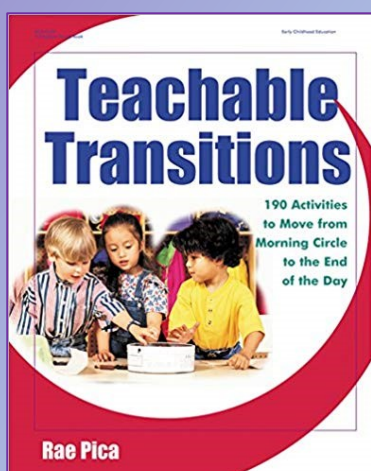
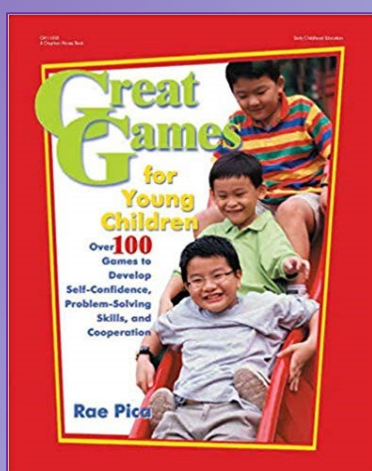
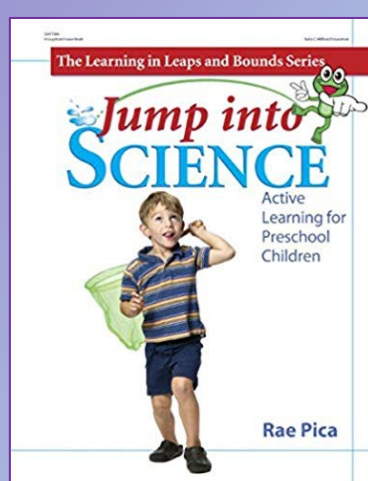
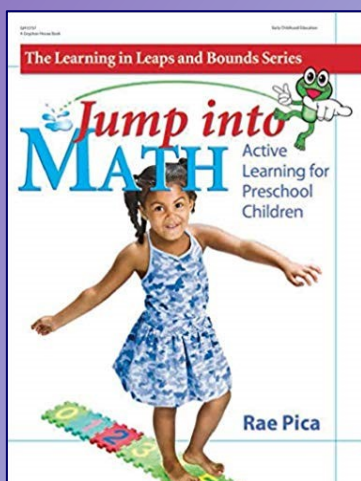
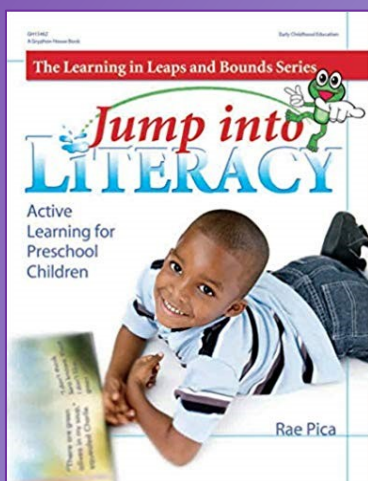
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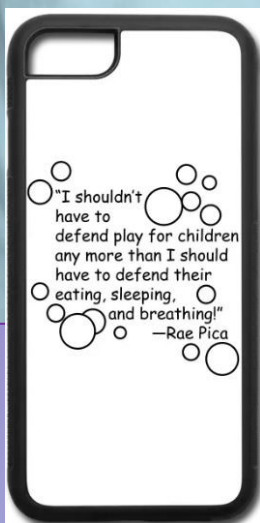


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RAE PICA



Rae Pica has been an early childhood education consultant since 1980. Dedicated to developing and educating the whole child, Rae is the author of 21 books, including the text *Experiences in Movement and Music* (in its 5th edition), and two of her latest books, *What If Everybody Understood Child Development?: Straight Talk About Bettering Education and Children's Lives* and *Acting Out! Avoid Behavior Challenges with Active Learning Games & Activities*.

Rae is a former adjunct instructor for the University of New Hampshire and is currently a blogger, online course creator, and popular presenter, both virtually and live. The National Association for Young Children, the National Association for Family Child Care, state WIC organizations, Eric Jensen's Learning Brain Expo, universities and colleges, and education conferences, resource and referral agencies, and schools in 46 states and Canada are among those who have invited Rae to address their groups.

As a consultant, Rae has shared her expertise with such groups as

- ✓ *Sesame Street* Research Department
- ✓ Head Start Bureau
- ✓ Centers for Disease Control
- ✓ President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports
- ✓ Nickelodeon's *Blue's Clues*
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- ✓ schools, parents, and state health departments throughout the country

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