

---

**BEHAVIOURAL SKILLS – A PREREQUISITE FOR THE SUCCESSFUL  
ADAPTATION TO THE CONDITIONS IN THE KINDERGARTEN**

---

**Krasimira Stefanova Petrova**

Pedagogical Faculty, St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo

Republic of Bulgaria, [krasipetrova@abv.bg](mailto:krasipetrova@abv.bg)

**Abstract:** The educational changes imposed by the present day are oriented both towards the child and the pedagogical practice. Childhood is a sensitive period that sets the foundations of value-oriented models that are considered the most stable and lasting. They remain unchanged throughout life. One of the current issues for every 3-4 year-old child is related to the preparation for admission to the kindergarten and the ability to respond adequately to social situations that can be either everyday and recurring, or new and unusual. Adaptation is a multi-factor and continuous process and needs to be carried out in time in order to avoid negative changes in the child's organism and behavior.

The child's adaptation to the conditions in the kindergarten is of interest to various scientific fields. From the point of view of psychology, this is a problem related to the psychological development of the child. From a medical perspective, it pertains to protecting and ensuring the child's health, and from pedagogical - to education, training and socialization. All viewpoints are to be taken into account. The process of child adaptation is also delicate for the family. It is necessary that the family is involved as a collaborator in searching for and finding adequate and effective solutions for overcoming stress in children. A priority task for teachers and parents is the formation of behavioral skills for successful social adaptation to the conditions in the kindergarten, as well as value orientation. This presupposes that children, through active interaction with adults and peers, consciously acquire ready-made forms and methods of social life and gain social experience of their own.

A prerequisite for dealing with this difficult task is the availability of qualified pedagogical and non-pedagogical kindergarten staff that creatively implement both traditional and innovative methods and means of work at any time. The structure of the socio-cultural and educational space is also of essential importance. It needs to be open to the individual needs of 3-4-year-olds, to stimulate their activity, and to facilitate their adaptation to the conditions of the kindergarten.

**Key words:** children, pre-school age, behavioral skills, adaptation

**1. INTRODUCTION**

A child's joining a kindergarten group is an important and memorable event. These first steps leave lasting personal memories and are often decisive for the motivation to willingly attend the kindergarten. At this point, assistance is needed for successful adaptation. This is a multifactor and prolonged process that requires pre-training of the child. Unexpected events have been found to cause stress with much greater force than predicted. What is to be taken into consideration is whether a stressor acts once or stays for a longer time and leads to an increasing load. The uncontrolled adaptation process can lead to severe emotional and behavioral breakdowns in the young child. A combination of individual knowledge, skills and norms of behavior in the new social group is necessary in order to ensure that the child successfully adapts to changing the family or the nursery environment for the conditions of the kindergarten.

**2. ADAPTATION TO THE KINDERGARTEN GROUP**

The current legislation on pre-school education of the Ministry of Education and Science in the Republic of Bulgaria (Ordinance No 5 of 03.06.2016) sets forth the standards on knowledge, skills and attitudes as levels in the direct educational interaction. Both educators and parents bear the responsibility to create a new vision for childhood education, to transform the practical and theoretical experience under the conditions of the interpersonal relationship in the children's group.

**The aim of the present study** is to identify the basic behavioral skills of 3-4 year olds, which are a prerequisite for successful adaptation to the conditions of the children's group.

In order for this aim to be achieved, the following **tasks** have been specified:

1. Defining the basic characteristics of the concepts of "behavior", "behavioral skills" and "adaptation".
2. Establishing the behavioral skills that children have already acquired prior to joining the kindergarten and that have a strong impact on their adapting to the conditions of the children's group.
3. Identifying productive educational policy decisions for parents as partners in the interaction process.

4. Specifying the key competences that teachers need to possess in order to ensure the successful adaptation of 3-4-year-olds.

**The subject** of the study is the process of adaptation of the 3-4-year-olds to the conditions of the kindergarten.

**The objective** of the study is to establish the condition of the adaptation process of 3-4-year-old children and to highlight opportunities for its improvement.

The study was conducted from 2013 to 2018 in three kindergartens in the town of Veliko Tarnovo.

When clarifying the concept of behavior, we refer to various sources.

The Complete Dictionary of Psychology defines behavior as a "generic term that encompasses the activity, actions, reactions, movements, processes and operations, that is, everything hidden and explicitly expressed which can be observed and measured in animals and people" [9].

According to L. Desev, behavior is presented as "a way of existence and behaviour determined by the conditions of the environment and the peculiarities of the individual, in which a particular subject seeks situations or an object at a certain time in order to overcome tensions and satisfy their needs; a way of existence of a living organism, reacting to external stimuli and tensions that arise in itself. Behavior is an organized system of actions or behavioral acts that connects the organism with the surrounding world; ... a functional activity linked to the individual's value orientations towards different objects, goals and means" [2].

The Glossary of Psychology states that behaviors are "the way a subject behaves in a particular environment at a particular time" [10].

In order to outline the theoretical foundations of this study, it is necessary to analyze some of the concepts of an individual's behavior in skill formation.

There are many theories in science that deal with different aspects of behavior, which is reflected in the elucidation of its content and structure. As a biological phenomenon, behavior can be generally defined as "the body's reaction to the sum of external and internal stimuli, in which a sequence of actions are directed at satisfying basic vital needs and at adapting of the individual to certain environmental conditions" [6].

In the context of the issue under consideration, what is of importance is that behavioral psychology defines behaviour as follows:

- reaction of organisms to the environment or to internal causes;
- form of external monitoring of the organisms' behavior;
- the conditions and procedures under which organisms function.

For people, the factors of the social environment, together with their peculiarities - historical, cultural, family and others - are particularly important for behavior. For example, behaviourists claim that behavior is the result of past experience and is a combination of multiple stimuli and response variations and, to a lesser extent, of the genetic heritage of the individual. In their view, the combination of these factors is stable and difficult to change. Knowledge of the basic brain structures for the motivations and emotions that shape the cognitive flow is a necessary condition for a more comprehensive understanding of the diversity of people's behaviour.

As a result of long-standing scientific research, K.K. Platonov identifies four substructures in the personality structure. The psychological properties (temperament, sex and age properties) define the first substructure. The psychological processes of will, feelings, perception, senses, thinking, emotions and memory are included in the second substructure. The third one includes experience - habits, skills, and knowledge. He defines as a paramount substructure the one that includes beliefs, ideals, aspirations, interests and desires. In accordance with the proposed structure, Platonov determines the leading mechanisms for personality formation - training, exercise, upbringing and education, respectively [7].

Sigmund Freud creates his own personality model and the factors that influence its behavior. External factors from the surrounding environment have an impact on individual life and on the upbringing of the individual [12].

In general, it can be noted that behavior is the way we behave. It is built up of interconnected components that correspond to intellectual, emotional, social and physical abilities. In the process of pedagogical interaction in the kindergarten, the overall character of the behavior expected to be acquired by the 3-7-year-olds is taken into account.

In relation to determining behavioral skills, we assume that they include the following:

- ability to behave adequately in order to achieve a particular goal in a particular situation;
- a system of abilities (rational, affective, pragmatic), guaranteeing successful behavior in a particular situation [8].

In modern literature, "adjustment" is terminologically related to "adaptation" and finds widespread application in various areas. In Pedagogy it is mainly used in terms of observing de-adaptation, of the children's inability to adjust to the conditions of the crèches, the kindergarten or the school. According to the "Dictionary of Psychology", these are "slight delays, disorders or deficiencies of sensory, motor, mental, affective, or social character, which are obviously not very serious, and in which early intervention can be decisive" [10].

In the present paper, we assume that if pedagogical and psychological work is purposefully carried out with 3-4-year-old children in order to form behavioral skills, it will be easier for them to adapt to the new conditions of the children's group.

According to A.D. Andreeva, the adaptation of a person goes through the following:

1. The set of adaptive responses of the human society as a whole to its natural environment;
2. The adaptive responses of the individual to changes in the surrounding social environment;
3. The individuals' assumption of different social roles, i.e. in terms of social adaptation [1].

The physiological aspect of the child's adapting to the conditions of the new social environment can be found in I.P. Pavlov's theory about the dynamic stereotype which represents a certain complexity and difficulty for the nervous system [5]. The repetition of the same external influences with relative persistence and certain consistency relieves a person in their activity. The daily stay in the kindergarten forms a relatively stable dynamic stereotype which leads to a certain adaptability to the new social environment. Behavioral skills and attitudes towards the environment and themselves are formed in the child, which skills are strengthened in the process of repetition under certain conditions and which build up confidence.

Another view of the dynamic stereotype theory is offered by P. S. Simonov, who outlines it as a system containing sufficient information about the environment in which the individual lives. According to him, the disruption of the stereotype caused by changes in the environment is related to the occurrence of information deficiency and the need to search for new information in order to fill the initial gap [11]. This means that the adaptation process can be managed by systematically feeding in information about the unknown environment.

P. K. Anohin and I. P. Simonov regard adaptation as a process of compensation when the environment changes and there is insufficient information about it. According to V. M. Myasishev and M. S. Lebedinskii, the compensation and adaptation mechanisms blend into one another to some extent. Due to the compensatory capabilities, it is possible to achieve some recovery of lost or reduced body functions, and through the adaptation ones - to organize the activity and behavior under changed external and internal conditions.

One of the basic principles of education is the formation of a high degree of adaptability in adolescents. In this case, it is an active process of changing the nature of the personality. According to E. Fromm, adaptation must lead to a change in the character of the personality, to the adoption of a "new habit", that is to pass through the self of the individual, to be internalized and personified. Adaptation affects deeply the person, their emotional and behavioral manifestations [13].

The connection of the person to the environment in which they live has two sides - cognitive (intellectual) and emotional-social. When starting to attend kindergarten, the child has insufficient information about the changed environment, which is why they are worried and afraid of what is new. The more unknown factors there are, the slower the compensatory-adaptation mechanisms are and the more difficult the adaptation.

The formation of behavioral skills in the 3-4-year-olds determines the nature of cognitive activity and prevents a number of difficulties and stressful situations regarding their adaptation to the new environment, requirements and the people who educate them. This variety specifies the social needs and necessary social competences of the child in the first group in the kindergarten, taking into account the age and the opportunities - getting to know the self, the others and the adults with whom they spend time daily; sympathy for companions; mastering certain role positions in games; solving problematic situations.

Upon joining the kindergarten, children find themselves in a developing new environment where biological and social adaptation takes place. The physiological side of adaptation is based on I. P. Pavlov's theory about the dynamic stereotype.

The formation of skills in the 3-4-year-olds is directly dependent on the personality traits of the participants in the interaction process - peers and adults. From them the child masters social skills and knowledge that are supported and interpreted by the educator. Besides being a teacher, the educator is also a partner and, after the parents, the adult who the children trust from their first moments in the kindergarten. The educator's role in the process of familiarization with the social environment is to develop the cognitive interaction through a variety of forms, methods, techniques and means while taking into account the principle of activity.

Tracking the level of social adaptation to the conditions of kindergarten for 3-4-year-olds is a lengthy and complicated process due to the diversity and dynamics of their behavioral manifestations. For this purpose, surveys

were carried out among the parents regarding the adaptation period of their children [Appendix 1]. After an in-depth analysis of these surveys, the following conclusions were made:

1. The adaptation process is easier for children who have attended a nursery. Those who have been raised by adults other than family members also manage to adapt more painlessly. The most difficult and long-lasting is the adaptation of the children who have been raised by the mother.

2. Children who have a positive attitude towards the new situation, towards their peers in the group and the adults have had extensive experience in communicating from the previous years spent in a nursery.

3. A significant factor for the success of adaptation is the number of children in the family. Children who have older siblings in the family are motivated to attend kindergarten and do so in a good mood. Those who are the only children in the family have varying behaviors, especially during the separation in the morning. Also, adaptation is noted to be more difficult for boys, although the profession is completely feminized.

4. It is imperative to synchronize the requirements to the child at home and in the kindergarten. According to the parents' responses in the survey, almost all children have the self-care habits needed for a successful stay and adaptation to the regime in the kindergarten. However, they are honest that at home, because of lack of sufficient time and patience, they do not let the children eat, dress, wash their hands or go to the toilet on their own. This is a major cause of difficulties in adaptation.

5. It is necessary to develop the children's habits related to maintaining order, eating at the table and not in front of a television set, arranging personal belongings, observing rules. It is important for the children to develop the right idea of the world, of their own actions and those of others. The range of behavioral skills of children when joining kindergarten is not limited to self-service habits. Solving problem situations also helps to acquire skills and discover unique qualities and merit in every child, to develop individual abilities in a way that contributes to the adoption of a flexible and mobile system of moral norms and standards, where some norms become priorities at the expense of others.

6. An important precondition for acquiring behavioral skills for successful adaptation is also the time that parents spend together with their child. Activities such as walks in the countryside, sports activities, reading fairy tales, and the like, create the child's confidence that parents love them and that after the work day finishes they will return and the child will not be left behind. Establishing separation routines evokes the feeling of security and has a soothing effect.

7. During the daily games, children are encouraged to engage in activities, they are assigned responsibilities, and all of them entertain together. Thus, being a part of a kindergarten group becomes the onset of developing their social relations, respect and sympathy for the partner and for the group. The pedagogist finds a way for children to participate and contribute to everyday life.

8. When the child joins the kindergarten, it is crucial that parents trust the teachers to whom they entrust the care for and education of their children.

The organization of admission to kindergarten during adaptation is of the utmost importance. During the first days, teachers need to find a special time for each child. Being embraced in the arms of the teacher is a unique way for the child to overcome the stress caused by parting with the mother. The individual attitude creates the feeling of security and helps for faster adjustment. Tolerance towards the new and unusual issues for the children, the appreciation and support of creative thinking, the establishment of a creative atmosphere in the children's group, the encouragement and appreciation of children's initiative and ensuring conditions for the complete use of the opportunities provided through children's ideas or situations, as well as encouraging new learning in different situations are conditions conducive to a better emotional attitude towards the conditions of the kindergarten. Allowing the child to bring a favorite toy or object gives them the freedom to move in the new setting, the ability to smoothly overcome the clash with the new conditions.

Despite the teachers' efforts of to make the environment in the kindergarten similar to the environment at home, it is impossible for children to adapt without parents trusting their children more when it comes to their ability to perform basic routine self care activities.

It is advisable that a teacher-parent meeting is organized in advance in order for the teachers and parents to get to know each other, to present the educational environment in which children's life will take place in the coming years, to outline the requirements for the necessary skills that it is important for children to possess, and for the parents to specify their expectations from the kindergarten institution. Where necessary, the kindergarten offers psychological support for adaptation.

The daily interaction between parents and teachers is easy. Offering common themes for discussion, organizing a "school for parents" is an important factor for ensuring the successful adaptation of children to the conditions of the kindergarten.

### 3. CONCLUSION

The child's adaptation to the conditions of the kindergarten is a psychological and social problem that relates to their socialization, the initial formation of communication skills, understanding and compliance with the group norms. In the implementation of the educational content, teachers purposefully apply pedagogical techniques in their practice, aiming to educate the child so that they develop the social ability of "adaptability", the ability to understand interactions by cooperating with peers and adults.

#### Appendix 1: Parent Survey

**Dear parents, this survey aims to gain an insight into your child's attitudes to attending the kindergarten.**

**Thank you for your truthful answers!**

1. Where has the child been raised prior to joining the kindergarten?
2. What us the child's predominant mood when attending the kindergarten and what are the reasons for that?
3. How many children are there in the family (at the time of joining the kindergarten)?
4. Does the child possess the basic habits for servicing themselves at the time of joining the kindergarten?
5. How does the child feel about the afternoon nap?
6. Does the child eat on their own at home?
7. Are there foods that the child does not like and that you do not want that the child is served in the kindergarten?
8. Does the child have intolerance to foods which are to be strictly excluded from his menu?
9. As a parent, what do you do together with your child at the weekend and in the evenings after they return from kindergarten?
10. Do you use ant incentives for your child? What?
11. Do you impose punishments or prohibitions on your child? What?
12. Who is responsible for raising and bringing up your child?
13. Are you ready to join any joint activity in the kindergarten (in your child's group)?
14. What are your expectations from the kindergarten as an institution in regard to your child?
15. What are your expectations from the pedagogical staff in regard to your child?

### REFERENCES

- [1] Andreeva, A. D. On the Concept of Adaptation. Man and Society. Academic Notes, LSU, issue XIII, 1973.
- [2] Desev, L. (2003). Dictionary of Psychology. Sofia.
- [3] Preschool and School Education Act. SG: issue 79/13.10.2015.
- [4] Ordinance No 5 on pre-school education, SG: issue 46 /17.06.2016.
- [5] Pavlov, P. I. The Complete Works. T.3, Moscow, 1951.
- [6] Piriyova, B. (2011). Neurobiological Basis of Human Behavior. Sofia: New Bulgarian University.
- [7] Platonov, K. (1986). Personality Structure and Development. Moscow, 138.
- [8] Rasheva-Merdzhanova, Y. (2005). The Multisensor Principle in Education and in Life. General and Specific aspects. Sofia: St. K. Ohridski University Publishing, 60.
- [9] Reber, A. (2003). Complete Dictionary of Psychology. Moscow.
- [10] Silami, N. (1996). Dictionary of Psychology. Pleven: EA Publishing.
- [11] Simonov, P. V. What Are Emotions. Moscow, 1965.
- [12] Freud, S. (1990). Introduction to Psychoanalysis. Sofia.
- [13] Fromm, E. To Have or To Be. Sociology of the Personality. S., 1990.

