pulse control. **Behavior therapy** with a **mental health** professional can help combat negative behavior patterns and replace them with more functional ones. A counselor or therapist can also help retarded children cope with the low **self-esteem** that often results from the realization that they are different from other children, including siblings. Counseling can also be valuable for the family of a retarded child to help parents cope with painful feelings about the child’s condition, and with the extra time and patience needed for the care and education of a special-needs child. Siblings may need to talk about the pressures they face, such as accepting the extra time and attention their parents must devote to a retarded brother or sister. Sometimes parents have trouble bonding with an infant who is retarded and need professional help and reassurance to establish a close and loving relationship.

Current social and health care policies encourage keeping mentally retarded persons in their own homes or in informal group home settings rather than institutions. The variety of social and mental health services available to the mentally retarded, including pre-vocational and vocational training, are geared toward making this possible.

### Further Reading


### Further Information


Association for Retarded Citizens (ARC). P.O. Box 6109, Arlington, TX 76005, (817) 640-0204.


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### Merrill-Palmer scales of mental tests

**Intelligence test.**

The Merrill-Palmer scales of mental tests are **intelligence** test for children aged 18 months to four years, which can be used to supplement or substitute for the Stanford-Binet test. Its 19 subtests cover language skills, motor skills, manual dexterity, and matching **ability**. They require both oral responses and tasks involving a variety of materials including pegboards, formboards, cubes, Kohs design blocks, buttons, scissors, sticks, and strings. The following comprise about half of the Merrill-Palmer scales: the Color Matching Test; Buttoning Test; Stick and String, and Scissors tests; Language Test; Picture Formboards 1, 2, and 3; Nested Cubes; Copying Test; Pyramid Test; and Little Pink Tower Test. The remaining Merrill-Palmer subtests are the Wallin Pegboards A and B; Mare-Foaal Formboard; Seguin-Goddard Formboard; Pintner-Manikin Test; Decroly Matching Game; Woodworth-Wells Association Test; and the Kohs Block Design Test. Resistance to the testing situation is taken into account in scoring. The test is accompanied by a detailed list of factors that can influence a child’s willingness to cooperate, and refused or omitted items are considered when arriving at the total score, which may then be converted and reported in a variety of ways, including **mental age** and percentile ranking.

### Further Reading


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### Franz Anton Mesmer

**1734-1815**

German physician whose theories and practices led to modern-day hypnotism.

The word “mesmerize” means to hold one’s **attention** as though that person were in a trance. Such was the popularity of Franz Mesmer, whose unorthodox methods of treating illness were highly popular with his patients. Those methods were criticized and ultimately dismissed by his contemporaries, and he lived out his days in obscurity. Yet his initial fame was the result of his successes with patients. Mesmer did not know the concept of psychosomatic illness, but he did recognize the role the mind played in disease. His practices evolved into **hypnosis**, which today is recognized by many as a valid and highly effective means of treating certain conditions.

The son of a forester, Mesmer was born on May 23, 1734, in Iznang, in the German province of Swabia. He did not begin college until he was 25, and when he first enrolled at the University of Vienna he planned to study law. He soon changed his mind and instead worked toward a medical degree, which he received in 1766. It was
in his doctoral dissertation that he described his theory of “animal gravitation,” in which health in humans is affected by the gravitational pull of the various planets. Mesmer also believed that there was a specific though unidentifiable fluid-like substance occurring in nature that channeled this gravity.

**Begins “animal magnetism” studies**

Mesmer concluded that people did not need to rely on planetary gravitational pull; rather, they could manipulate their health through the use of any magnetic force. Today, some advocates of alternative medicine make use of magnets, which, worn or passed over the body, are said to restore balance or harmony and thus thwart disease. Most scientists consider this to be nothing more than quackery, and eighteenth-century Austrians were equally skeptical. Nonetheless, Mesmer attracted a considerable following and his practice became quite lucrative.

By 1775, Mesmer had revised his animal gravitation theory, renaming it “animal magnetism.” He believed that magnets were not necessary after all; the passing of hands over the body were enough to create the necessary magnetic forces.

Other physicians were especially harsh toward Mesmer and his practices, and they actually tried to bring him up on charges of fraud. In addition, while there were patients who had been “cured” by Mesmer, there were many who had not been, and with the encouragement of the established medical profession they began to threaten legal action. Mesmer finally left Vienna in 1778, settling in Paris. There he found many French patients who were willing to engage in “Mesmerism.” In addition to the magnetic forces, Mesmer also developed techniques to put people in trancelike states he called “crises.” Mesmer believed that these crises, whose side effects included convulsion, actually acted as a means of forcing the body fluid back to its proper flow.

**Methods challenged in France**

Mesmer remained popular in France for several years, but the medical establishment there was no more welcoming than the Austrian doctors had been. The controversy eventually reached King Louis XVI, who in 1784 appointed a group of scientists to examine Mesmer’s methods and present their conclusions. The commission included some of the leading scientific minds of the day, including Antoine Lavoisier and Dr. Joseph Guillotin. Also on the commission was an American, Benjamin Franklin. The commission, perhaps not surprisingly, concluded that Mesmer’s techniques could not be backed up with scientific evidence. Mesmer’s following dropped off quickly after that pronouncement, and he left Paris in 1785. He stayed briefly in Versailles, then went to Switzerland, and finally returned to his native Germany.

It is interesting to note that although other scientists and physicians found fault with Mesmer’s methods and theories, they did not discount the idea of mind-over matter treatment of illness. Franklin, in particular, believed that some diseases were more in the mind than in the body; he acknowledged that in those cases the power of suggestion could be enough to “cure” the disease. Also, Mesmer truly believed in his treatment, and his earnestness was no doubt the reason it took so much to discredit him. A common quack would have been discovered years earlier.

Mesmer spent his remaining years quietly. He died in Meersburg, Germany on March 5, 1815.

George A. Milite

**Further Reading**
