

# A LINE ON LIFE

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## What's So Good About "Barney"? \*

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Have you ever seen a singing, purple dinosaur? In the rare possibility that you might not be familiar with him, his name is "*Barney*." Barney was created in 1988 by two women, who were both mothers and teachers. They were upset by the lack of good programs on television. They wanted to create an interactive show that was both educational and fun for preschool children. They made a series of home videos that evolved into a television program – and even more home videos. Barney's popularity has exceeded their wildest dreams. Why is he so popular?

"Barney" isn't the first well-designed show for preschoolers. Most of you know the older favorites like "Sesame Street" and "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood." However, since "Barney" started over two years ago, this program has left the others well behind in the ratings. Even though the other two programs are relatively less popular, they still are effective in improving vocabularies and learning of regular preschool viewers.

In 1993, child psychologists Jerome and Dorothy Singer, co-directors of the Yale University Family Television Research and Consultation Center, decided to investigate the popularity of "Barney and Friends." Using over 100 preschool children, the Singers concluded that the program improved their performance with many thinking and attitudinal abilities. Specifically, the program improved numbers skills, knowledge of colors and shapes, vocabulary, neighborhood locations, manners and knowledge of nature and health.

The Singers found other impressive points. Barney creates positive feelings among preschoolers of all races and cultures.

*"To see as many as 10 or 12 child viewers holding hands, singing and embracing each other at the end of a viewing – without adult coaxing – as occurred in dozens of observations, is a powerful message to us all."*

In the years before school, children need constant support and displays of affection. This "*secure attachment...is so critical to stable growth.*"

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**"Barney empowers kids."**

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According to Dr. Gordon Berry, Professor of Educational Psychology at UCLA –

*"Barney empowers kids. When you are 3 and 4 years old, some adult is always telling you what to do. Barney...speaks directly to kids. They feel as if they have some control over their interactions with Barney."*

This seems to be having some startling results. For example, a 4-year-old girl in Toledo, Ohio, smelled smoke in the middle of the night and alerted her family. When questioned later, she said, "*Barney says, if you smell a fire, you gotta go get your mommy.*"

Another example occurred during the bombing of the World Trade Center. Seventeen kindergartners were trapped in an elevator for five hours. They remained calm by singing Barney's theme song – "*I love you, you love me....*"

With this sort of influence, I don't think I am going to mind see a videotape of "Barney and Friends" for the sixth time with my granddaughter.

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\* Adapted from Gabrielle de Groot's article, "Psychologists explain 'Barney's' power," in the [\*APA Monitor\*](#), June, 1994, page 4.