

Chapter 4

Once again with feeling

Emotions are central to the consideration of behaviour: both the feelings that children have and how they are expressed and also the feelings that adults have in response. Children in the early years are developing a sophisticated appreciation of emotion as they learn more about themselves and other people. This chapter deals with how we can support this developmental journey with the establishment of an emotionally literate environment. This includes a 'sense of belonging' and an 'affective curriculum'. There is a focus on developing and maintaining supportive relationships at all levels. 'Significant relationships' are the basis for positive emotional development and pro-social behaviour.

The UK Advisory Group on Education for Citizenship (1998) talks about 'young children learning from the very beginning socially and morally responsible behaviour both in and beyond the classroom'. In order to do this they need:

- a sense of self awareness;
- a positive self-concept;
- a sense of others;
- a feeling of 'belonging';
- conditions which promote empathy;
- a learning environment which encourages positive self-expression, including the articulation of emotions;
- skills of self management;
- relationship skills;
- conflict resolution strategies.

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This chapter addresses the above as a foundation for pro-social behaviour and in the process models the values of democracy.

THE FEELINGS OF YOUNG CHILDREN

Emotions are an integral part of every day in early years settings – the feelings of the children and the feelings of the adults. One of the delightful aspects of working with little ones is their high level of emotional engagement. Their wide-eyed expressions of awe and wonder, their whole body excitement and surprise and their engaged curiosity can be a highly rewarding part of the job. It is also this unreserved emotional expression that can be most wearing! This ranges from when individuals are simply ‘upset’ and demanding, to when they are hurtful, defiant and destructive. Here we put these events in a broader context in order to help understand them better and respond more effectively.

The chapter brings the affective element of behaviour, in all its aspects, to the fore. In doing so it addresses the following:

- the various elements of what we mean when we talk about ‘emotion’;
- expectations for the emotional development of young children;
- what an ‘emotionally safe’ learning environment looks like;
- relationship building to enhance a sense of ‘belonging’;
- how we might help children to understand and regulate their feelings better;
- how we can help children express their emotions safely;
- the value of play in regulation, expression and exploration of emotion;
- understanding our own feelings in response to certain behaviours;
- what we need to do in ‘listening’ to feelings;
- how to promote the positive for everyone in order to enhance emotional resources and resilience.

WHAT DO WE MEAN WHEN WE TALK ABOUT EMOTION?

Emotions are on a continuum; they encompass positive and gentle feelings of interest, contentment, compassion, comfort, affection and happiness as well as the more overwhelming and disturbing emotions

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such as fear, anxiety, anger, excitement and sadness. The latter receives most attention because it is the expressions of strong feelings that are often at the root of behaviours that are hard to manage.

As overwhelming emotion is integral to the consideration of child behaviour and adult response it is useful to reflect on what we are talking about. There are many books and different views on the subject and it is not possible here to encompass everything in the debate so we have concentrated on what is most useful for early years practitioners in their everyday work. The following brief synopsis includes:

- the physical sensations in emotional arousal;
- what emotions are for;
- understanding the causes of specific emotions;
- emotional expression;
- emotional regulation;
- reading and responding to emotions in others.

Physical sensations

An emotion is a set of physical sensations we experience in response to environmental cues, usually when something changes. These changes are either a distinct event, such as a stranger suddenly appearing; or a developing situation, such as expecting/needing something which doesn't materialize. Although emotions in young infants begin as an automatic response, by the time they are just a few weeks old, cognition within a social context is a highly significant factor. Most of us will have observed a very young baby smiling back at someone. Events are therefore attended to and interpreted (Denham 1998). Emotional responses become increasingly based on judgements, beliefs or expectations that are influenced by the interaction of the following:

- whether or not basic needs, including emotional nurturance, are being met;
- the perception of what is happening or about to happen;
- individuality – especially self-concept, self-esteem, sensitivity to arousal and attention skills;
- what is understood about the world based on experiences so far;
- what our society and culture says is true or important;
- the messages we receive from others, including their emotional states;

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- the support networks available;
- influences such as tiredness and stress on levels of resources;
- the level and complexity of what is happening – the trigger might be something small that happens to be the ‘last straw’.

Powerful emotions can affect our ability to ‘think straight’. Daniel Goleman (1996) refers to this as ‘emotional hijacking’. It is not possible for anyone, let alone a child to ‘see sense’ when their emotions are overwhelming. Sometimes we are not even aware of why we feel so strongly about something because the roots are in early pre-verbal experiences. Emotional memory is increasingly acknowledged as an influential factor in emotional response.

What emotions are for

Emotions are universal and serve many purposes. They are necessary for survival and adaptation, for motivation and for communication and relationship with others (Hyson 1994). Many are culturally dependent. Children learn to be proud or ashamed of what they have been praised or criticized for. Boys who are consistently praised for being ‘brave’ and not crying when they are hurt may be ashamed of breaking down in tears. We know a discourse of ‘belonging’ to a certain group can be used to generate pride but also has the potential to undermine compassion and a sense of responsibility towards ‘outsiders’.

The emotions we experience are filtered through interpretations just as much as the events themselves. Many of the behaviours that stem from difficult emotions are linked to how individuals interpret something as a threat to their ‘sense of self’.

Understanding causes of emotions

Pre-schoolers who have sufficient communication skills can tell you what makes them happy, sad, afraid and angry (Denham and Zoller 1991). Young children do not understand that it is possible to experience conflicting emotions at the same time and may have difficulty discriminating between them. Sadness and anger are often confused, particularly in loss situations. Whereas some children may cry pitifully when their parent leaves, others throw themselves into a rage.

Young pre-schoolers are better able to make connections between events and their own feelings but their ability to tune into others increases

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dramatically between three and five years, especially in a nurturing environment which scaffolds their emotional and social learning.

The expression of emotion

When teachers say they find it difficult to deal with a high level of emotion, they are usually referring to what they consider to be an 'unacceptable' expression of feelings. This is often the crux of 'behaviour management'.

The younger the child, the more of their body is used in the expression of emotion. When they are angry or upset not only is their voice loud, so is the expression on their face! They may use their legs, feet, arms, fists and sometimes their whole body in a passion of rage, despair or frustration. A major temper tantrum is a gripping spectacle.

By the time a child has reached four this behaviour is less likely to occur because most four-year-olds have a broader repertoire of expressions at their disposal and increasingly use language to convey feelings. This of course, is not much use if others are not prepared to listen! A child who is not able to make his feelings heard and acknowledged is therefore more likely to revert to 'louder' forms of expression where people will take notice. When an infant has learnt that, however much they cry and shout for a response, no one takes any notice they may eventually give up. A passive, silent, sad small child may be thought of as 'good' in that they are not demanding but they are just as needy as others, if not more so.

Sometimes we are surprised when someone suddenly 'loses it'. This may be triggered by the 'last straw' that tips over the accumulation of emotionally loaded events. Difficult emotions surface more easily when tiredness or multiple demands undermine resilience and/or basic needs are not being met. The wise adult will take these factors into account to avoid unnecessary distress.

Emotional regulation

This refers to the ability to change what we feel – mostly to reduce high levels of arousal. All of us have ways of doing this, some more successful in the longer term than others. Sometimes, however, we may need to experience the emotion, name and acknowledge it in order to begin to genuinely become more comfortable.

Regulation of emotion is often linked with social factors. Young children will look to their immediate carers to see if they are expressing fear before responding to the sudden appearance of a large dog, for

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instance. An initial reaction of alarm may be soothed by the calm response of significant adults or increased by being near someone who panics. Adult modelling of emotional regulation is valuable in helping children reduce the level of agitation they may experience. Adults can also assist in regulating emotions by changing the child's focus. If, for instance, they can point out that the dog looks like a favourite fluffy toy, or that its tail is wagging in a friendly way then this may shift the focus from the dog's size, growl or slobbering jaws!

Another way of regulating emotion is to change our physical positions (Laird and Apostoleris 1996). We do not only smile when we feel happy, we feel happier when we smile! 'Standing tall' really does boost confidence.

Helping young children regulate a high level of emotion

- Be available – even at a distance.
- Acknowledge the emotion being expressed.
- Model your own emotional regulation by staying calm.
- Move smoothly and talk quietly.
- Show concern for the child – calm does not mean bland.
- Reassure the child that they will be OK.
- Show belief in their ability to calm down themselves/cope with the situation.
- Offer comfort.
- Gently change the focus of their attention.



CASE STUDY

Theo was having a bad day. He didn't get to play with the toy garage because it was Levi's turn and then he tripped up in the playground and got his trousers mucky. He looked very grumpy indeed. Colleen acknowledged his feelings and told him that she was sorry he was having a bad time. Colleen told Theo he had the best example of a grumpy face she'd seen – the eyes were screwed up, the mouth was turned down – she carried out the actions as she talked about them. In no time Theo was laughing at her – and feeling better about his day.

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This interaction incorporated several strategies in one: acknowledgement, paradoxical suggestion, humour and the promotion of emotional regulation. For children who are deeply distressed, however, this more light-hearted response is less appropriate.

Reading and responding to emotional expression in others

Young children become increasingly aware of emotional gestures, expressions and body language and may take action on the basis of their reading of these. They may approach someone who is smiling but hide behind a trusted adult if they hear a raised voice.

A toddler may respond to another child being upset by crying themselves. By the time they are four years old, however, children will understand that one person's emotional experience may be different from their own. They may be both querying the cause and perhaps intervening. The way they do that will depend largely on what they have experienced themselves. It is the child who has experienced nurturance who will offer a distressed child a cuddle or a favourite toy. Denham (1996) cites ways in which young children attempt to change sadness and anger in parents. Tuning into the feelings of caretakers is the first stage in the development of empathy and this awareness is worth encouraging. Children's self efficacy will increase if they know that their strategies are well received.

Enhancing development

Children whose emotional development is progressing optimally have caregivers who are not only tuned into the child's emotional communication and needs but also promote their emotional knowledge by acceptance, example and mediation. Less advantaged children need structured opportunities in pre-school but all children can benefit from a higher focus on developing emotional and social competencies. Some very able and well-loved children can throw their weight around regardless of others. They too, need to develop skills that foster greater self-understanding and more positive relationships.

Before we can begin to focus on the details of teaching and learning, however, we need to look closely at what is involved in establishing and maintaining an emotionally safe environment.

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AN EMOTIONALLY SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Young children who are emotionally vulnerable and/or challenging may have experienced both inconsistency in adult behaviour and environmental instability. They may have moved from one carer to another, in situations where they have not been able to rely on basic nurturing. Some children may no longer have confidence that their needs will be met or that they will be kept safe. What happens at pre-school can either reinforce these expectations or provide an alternative experience.

An emotionally safe environment promotes:

- acceptance, belonging and connectedness
- predictability
- responsiveness
- physical and psychological safety.

Helping children feel they belong

Just *being* somewhere doesn't necessarily mean feeling you belong there. This takes time and requires both active intervention to show that your presence is valued and also becoming familiar with:

- who people are
- where things are
- what happens when
- knowing what to do.

When new children arrive in early years centres they need to be shown where things are and who does what. Pairs of older children can be given the responsibility to introduce them to others, to look after them during their first few days and be there to show them what to do for the following week or so. Asking other children to volunteer as 'play partners' may also be valuable. These simple strategies may relieve anxiety for the newcomer: they also provide children with the opportunity to 'help', to demonstrate care and to be responsible. Expectations should be very clear and an adult on hand to guide where necessary.

Early years centres have many routines. Children may pick these up without structured help but some benefit from being taught what is expected and how to carry it out:

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- gather the children together with those who have most difficulty listening at the front;
- explain carefully and simply what you want them to do;
- tell them how you expect them to do it;
- demonstrate to the children what you have asked them to do;
- ask them to repeat instructions back to you;
- get the children to practice what it is you want them to learn;
- discuss with the children what they have practised, acknowledging success;
- remind the children of expectations each time they carry out this routine;
- withdraw prompts gradually but continually to comment on achievement;
- use the children's knowledge and skills to help a newcomer to the group learn what is expected;
- Always remind children what they should be doing before reprimanding them for not doing it.

(Roffey and O'Reirdan 2001)

It enhances fun, belonging and learning when adults carry out routines with deliberate mistakes and ask children to indicate when they get it wrong and what they should be doing.

Equally important is a sense of connectedness. This includes:

- feeling that you matter;
- knowing things are fair;
- being safe and comfortable;
- feeling special.

A sense of belonging develops when someone is actively welcomed, included and valued. It is easy to like 'good children' and more challenging to feel positive towards those who are not so amenable. But these children are the ones who need acceptance and affection most and for whom the effort will be most worthwhile. There is evidence that, over time, emotionally positive relationships with teachers can, to some extent, compensate for insecure family environments (Pianta 1992). Relationships are critical to the child's sense of belonging and emotional and social development. The development of such 'significant relationships' underpins the success of any intervention or strategy in promoting pro-social behaviour. Pro-active relationship building also provides good models for interactions.

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Demonstrating acceptance and liking

Warmth Looking into a child's eyes and giving them a private smile is a powerful message of interest and warmth. It enhances emotional security. Having a child physically close does the same thing. All children and especially those who are insecure may need to return to a trusted adult over and over again to 'touch base' and adults must expect this to happen.

Appropriate affection Physical affection is also necessary for children's emotional well-being but has been brought into question by well-publicized accounts of inappropriate touching. It is damaging if children who need comfort are refused this but adults should ensure that this always occurs in a public place. Open discussions with families about physical affection and its importance in children's emotional well-being may help to both stem fears and encourage parents to provide this for their children. For some children touching is synonymous with hurting and early years teachers need to tune into the child's preferences and expect ambivalence. Sometimes children will cling and at other times they will push you away. Do not take this personally.

'I' statements Small children believe that when you reprimand them for their behaviour you do not like them. It is therefore helpful if teachers emphasize that it is the behaviour that is unacceptable rather than labelling the child. Use 'I' statements that are general and ensure you let the child know what is wanted, not only what is not, e.g. *Tania, screaming is not allowed here. I do not like anyone screaming. I would like to hear your proper voice, please Tania. Now what is it you wanted to say?*

Separating the person from the problem This is the foundation of narrative approaches. The way you speak to children shows faith and trust in them and refers to how the difficulty they are experiencing is getting in the way of who they really are or what they want: *You seem to be having some trouble with those unkind words again Fanouk. They keep escaping from your mouth and getting you into trouble. What can you do to keep them under control?* Louise Porter (2003) talks to children about their bodies growing up but sometimes their insides haven't caught up yet. Their feelings boss them around and get them into trouble or upset.

Sharing experiences It will help if you go out of your way to make special connection with children you find troubling. Taking the time to talk to them and listen to what they have to say can work towards establishing

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a 'significant relationship'. Find out about things in their lives that are important to them. See if there is anything you have in common – a similar pet, a TV programme. Children are more likely to imitate social behaviours when they can see some similarity between themselves and the model. It is possible to generate similarities even if there are no obvious ones, e.g. *I liked playing on the climbing frame when I was three, too.*

Keep calm and use a quiet voice when issuing a reprimand. Children pay attention to the volume, tone and pitch of the voice not only the words that are spoken. Shouting at children reinforces their belief that you do not like them. This gives them less motivation to take notice of you and may instil fear.

Other ways to promote a sense of belonging

Develop a sense of fairness The few rules you establish can be reinforced by reference to fairness: *You can't hit someone in this centre and other people can't hit you.* Put systems in place for the fair distribution of privileges, treats and responsibilities. Lists on the wall is one way, another is names (photos) in a jar that get taken out when that person has had their turn. This not only makes for visible fairness but also is random, showing there are no 'favourites'.

Give each child personal recognition and acknowledgement

Comment regularly on strengths and developing skills: *You can do this now, you have learnt this since last week – well done.*



CASE STUDY

Henry found it very difficult indeed to sit through the fifteen minutes it took to have a drink, a piece of apple and a short story without poking the children around him. The kindergarten teacher was fed up with telling him to keep his hands to himself so she took a different tack. She told him how long he had managed to behave well, 'Henry, today was a personal best for you, you didn't bother anyone for nearly the whole story. It wasn't long before Henry saw himself as someone who could sit 'properly' and soon managed the whole activity to applause from the group.

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Celebrate differences You probably have children in your centre with families from around the world. This can be acknowledged in many ways:

- place a world map with postcards /photographs pinned on the countries represented in your centre;
- have days where children bring in things from home which help tell stories about their community;
- ask parents to tell you about games and songs from their childhood that you can in turn teach the children.

Children may have heard racist comments at home. This clearly needs addressing but simply reprimanding children for repeating these is not as helpful as sensitive questioning that encourages reflection. This could include asking children if they felt upset by getting into trouble for something their brother or sister did. Early years educators also need to actively seek opportunities to model tolerance and respect for diversity. Help children understand that familiar things are comfortable but when something is different people may feel anxious or fearful because it is strange to them. Show children that getting to know more about something or someone often takes away the fear. Make a point of mixing up groups for activities so that children play with a wide range of peers.

Show that each child's presence (and absence) matters Greet children who have been away and let them know they were missed. If a child has been unable to attend a special event for some reason find a way to help them feel included; perhaps getting something relevant from the outing, asking a child to give them a picture or token to make up – even a small wrapped chocolate makes the point. However much you might be tempted avoid saying anything like 'it was nice and quiet without you!' It might be a throwaway light-hearted remark but can deeply undermine a child's sense of safety and belonging.

Ensure each child has their own place and space This is usually routine for early years centres but it may be valuable to emphasize its importance – perhaps with the use of photographs to identify each child's 'special place'. This is a great way of making children feel they are important. Provide a 'treasure box' where children can safely keep anything they bring from home. It helps confirm that this environment is dependable.

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Ensure social inclusion Some children may be excluded by others in play scenarios because they have not developed sufficient cooperative play skills. Early years practitioners will need to scaffold their inclusion by making suggestions and commentary to facilitate a game, perhaps joining in themselves for a while and promoting an inclusive ethos in which everyone gets a go. Older pre-school children can be introduced to the idea of a 'play stop'. This is a particular place, usually in the playground, where children stand if they have not got anyone to play with. It is up to others to 'pick up' such children as they go past so that they can join in with the game.

Some early years centres have introduced a 'You can't say you can't play' rule that addresses the behaviour of the group rather than the behaviour of the isolated child. Vivian Paley (1992) asserts that whereas children may choose their friends at home, school is for everybody and social exclusion not appropriate. She reports some initial complaints from the children but finds that there are positive longer-term outcomes. The process of inclusion is relevant. Children become more accepting in their attitudes towards others when group activities promote awareness, challenge stereotypes, and encourage interaction.

Excluding small children from fun events because their behaviour may be problematic should be the very last resort. How flexible can you be so they can be included?

Providing opportunities for children to help each other It is important that the less able children also have this opportunity rather than always being the recipient. 'Helping' becomes an important aspect of friendship in middle childhood – giving pre-schoolers opportunities to practice stands them in good stead.

Developing a sense of group pride The word 'we' needs to promote togetherness not the exclusion of others. A group collage that includes pictures of all the children and entitled: 'We are the Green Class' or 'We all belong to the Tigers Group' is a visible sign of group identity. 'This class can . . .' or 'likes to . . .' with a collage of activities develops this. Individual pictures could promote inclusion together with the positive, e.g. 'Francine is in our class. She joins in with the singing.' 'Denny belongs in our group. He helps Sarah tidy up'. Children can perhaps choose what is written about themselves.

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Sharing the good times If the whole group can regularly laugh together this will not only generate positive emotions and provide stress relief but also foster connectedness. Early years teachers have access to a wealth of funny poems and group games that are enjoyable to share together. Another idea is to refer back to shared times: 'Remember when . . .' emphasizes a history of belonging together.

The importance of predictability

Vulnerable children often have difficulty with the unexpected. For some, even transitions from one activity to another can present a threat. Predictability means that children will know what is happening, be able to anticipate responses and can depend on people doing what they say they will do.

Well-defined and clearly communicated routines are useful. If these are depicted visually this is even better (see Chapter 5). When children know what is happening they can begin to explore from this secure base. It is unnecessary to stick rigidly to a routine but important to be aware of what deviations may mean for some children. Giving forewarning when changes might be expected may deflect any potential upset. Small children do need challenges and new experiences but introducing these carefully with an element of familiarity can inhibit feelings of insecurity.

Children need to rely on what adults say. Some individuals will have learnt to take minimal notice of what they hear, both positive and negative, because they can never rely on it. Early years professionals have to be scrupulous in coming up with the goods and take great care about what they say in the first place!

Minimizing a sense of failure

Some children become very fearful of making mistakes if they have been punished or belittled for getting things wrong – or they might just be perfectionists; many children are. Accepting mistakes as part of learning is fundamental to an emotionally safe environment. Children can be asked: *How might you do that differently next time?* or *Is there anything else you could have done?*

When early years practitioners model acceptance of failure for themselves this can have a powerful impact. This includes:

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- saying on occasions that you could have done something better;
- making mistakes sometimes and letting children 'help' get it right;
- apologizing sometimes;
- problem-solving out loud to show there are alternatives to many things and it is often not a question of 'right or wrong' but working out what is a better option;
- commenting on what you have learnt from something that didn't go right.

Addressing bullying

An emotionally safe environment will pro-actively address the issue of bullying. This includes name-calling, exclusion, intimidation and/or physical attack regularly perpetrated by one person or group onto an individual. It is common for children who bully to target those who are obviously different from others or in some way less able to defend themselves. It is not helpful for children to be labelled either as a bully or as a victim, but bullying behaviour requires a high profile for several reasons:

- children who are bullied become fearful and miserable or learn to bully others;
- it reduces self-esteem and self-efficacy;
- allowing such behaviour to go unchecked reinforces it;
- there are poor long term outcomes for everyone involved;
- it is an issue of social justice.

An early years centre that is successfully addressing bullying will:

- have discussed what is meant by bullying behaviour;
- acknowledge that bullying behaviour is unacceptable;
- have clear expectations for behaviour;
- actively promote positive behaviour;
- provide opportunities for children to talk about what they might do to make sure that children don't hurt each other and what this means;
- make clear to children and families that physical, verbal and psychological aggression will always be taken seriously;
- have consistent responses from staff when children report bullying behaviour;

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- supervise all areas where bullying might take place;
- have staff who model emotionally literate interactions including in their responses to bullying behaviour;
- have a policy in place that is regularly monitored and reviewed.

Teaching children how to sort out bullying themselves in the first instance empowers them and teaches appropriate assertiveness.

**CASE STUDY**

One early years centre teaches children three statements. They are expected to use each in turn, before going to an adult. At statement two the situation is considered to be one of bullying and a teacher will intervene if the behaviour does not stop after statement three. It works well.

- 1 I don't like you doing that.
- 2 I need you to (e.g. leave me alone).
- 3 If you don't stop I will get someone to help me.

Another centre teaches the younger children to put up a hand in front of them and just say 'stop'. This simple assertive gesture can be very empowering.

The 'no-blame' approach to bullying is worth trying before bullying behaviour is entrenched. Children are not blamed and details of incidents not discussed. The small group involved (or the perpetrator and a few others) is told that someone is very unhappy at the moment and needs some help to feel better. The conversation can perhaps be supported by drawings that the child has done about feeling sad or lonely. The group is asked what they could do to help. Each individual child says what he or she will do, if necessary with ideas prompted by the teacher. The child who has been bullied is then invited in to hear and comment on the things that each person is offering to help them feel happier. The intervention is checked and monitored daily in the first instance and then less regularly. The children are all given positive feedback for their kindness and helpfulness (Maines and Robinson 1992).

THE DEVELOPMENT OF EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL COMPETENCE IN YOUNG CHILDREN

An emotionally safe environment supports children in processing emotions rather than being overwhelmed by them. This allows for the optimal development of emotional understanding and skills.

The domains of social and emotional development are interdependent. The development of emotional competencies in the early years is crucial for the ability to develop positive social relationships and the quality of children's relationships is central to their emotional development and well-being. These relationships are complex and multi-dimensional including 'connectedness, shared humour, balance of control, intimacy and shared positive emotions' (Dunn 1993: 113). Children need to both tune into and regulate the emotions experienced in interactions in order to establish and maintain relationships with their peers. It is the emotionally aware and skilled child who makes friends easily in pre-school. This includes being positive, inclusive, empathic and confident (Rubin 1980).

An 'emotional curriculum' includes:

- helping children develop awareness of feelings;
- learning how to talk about feelings and promoting an 'emotion' vocabulary;
- guiding children in ways to regulate their feelings;
- promoting positive feelings;
- helping children work out difficult feelings;
- developing empathy.

The processes to put this in place are:

- modelling of good emotional management;
- emotional commentary and 'coaching';
- talking about emotions;
- opportunities for interactions with others;
- access to play opportunities, especially 'pretend play';
- appropriate responses to children's expressed emotions;
- scaffolding of emotional 'problem-solving'.

Over time children come to understand that everyone has emotions, that these are linked to different situations and that there is more than one reason to have certain feelings. They also learn that emotions are

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communicated by gestures, expressions and words and that there are different ways of showing feelings. Children learn that not everyone is the same and that their peers may be happy or upset by different things and also comforted by different things.

The everyday interactions in the early years environment are where concepts are developed and emotional strategies practised. An 'emotional curriculum' is not the provision of formal targeted activities but an integrated experience that builds children's understanding of themselves and others.

'Emotional modelling' needs to occur throughout the day. Emotions are contagious. If a teacher is enthusiastic the children are more likely to be, if she is angry and irritable they will be more upset. Adults who demonstrate concern provide models for caring behaviour. What early years practitioners do and say, the ways they respond to their own feelings and those of others and the conversations they have are the most influential component of an emotional curriculum.

Although clear direction is often important, simply telling children what to do does not establish the inner knowledge nor the motivation to develop emotional skills. It is 'wondering' rather than interrogative questioning and 'reflective commentary' that help connect thinking, feeling and action. The type of conversations that early years professionals have with children are central. These conversations need to provide opportunities for children to:

- reflect
- consider alternatives
- problem-solve
- enhance their imaginative thinking
- take responsibility.

Early years professionals who ask searching but age appropriate questions will find that even very small children can make thoughtful decisions given the chance.

The following presents some of the opportunities in a pre-school setting for focusing on how children feel and developing their social and emotional understanding and competence.

Adult labelling of emotions, modelling of regulation and expression and request for help Evidence suggests that this is the most effective way of helping children develop empathy (Denham *et al.* 1993)

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and other social/emotional competencies. The words said need to be accompanied by the appropriate facial expressions and gestures. Children with limited vocabulary may rely on this form of communication and it reinforces language for able children.

Puppets

Puppets can be used to express emotions that are more difficult to do in person. The narratives in puppetry are controlled by the adult but the indirect nature of this interaction can open up imaginative pathways for children. Puppets should not be used by adults to show fighting and aggression but used to help with problem-solving.

- Puppet 1: *I have hurt myself in a fight and it is sore. I don't want to feel hurt.*
- Puppet 2: *I was in the fight and I got hurt too. I don't want to get hurt.*
- Puppet 1: *I thought it was your fault, but then I thought it was my fault too. We both got into the fight.*
- Puppet 2: *Do the children get into fights? I wonder what they fight about?*

Children contribute:

- Puppet 1: *Do you get hurt too? That's not nice for you.*
- Puppet 2: *Let's pretend we did something else and we didn't get hurt.*
- Puppet 1: *What do you think children? What shall we pretend?*

And so on – the possibilities are endless.

Pictures and books

Young children are, of course, very visual. There are now many useful books targeted for young children that focus either on feelings or on emotionally challenging situations. There are also cards such as the Bear Cards, which depict feelings and relationships. All of these can be used as prompts for conversations and reflective thinking. A resource list is given at the end of this chapter.

Young children also have opportunities to express emotional and emotionally laden situations in drawings and paintings. Simple commentary

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RAISING AWARENESS OF FEELINGS FOR CHILDREN

'You enjoyed that funny little poem didn't you. Would it make you happy if I read it again?'

'Brendan is angry that his painting is spoilt. Would you be angry if it was your painting?'

'Chi, was it exciting to go to the circus?'

'Mel is hanging her head. She is sad that she didn't win the race.'

'This is a picture of Isa. She used to live in another country but because there was a lot of fighting, it wasn't safe there. She had to leave with her mum and dad. What do you think she might be feeling?'

COMMENTARY ON THE EMOTIONAL COMPONENT OF EXPERIENCES

'Please be careful when you run around, it hurt when you ran into me.'

'My cat is sick today and I am sad that she is not feeling well.'

'I saw someone fall off his bike today and I was relieved when he stood up again and was all right.'

'Sebastian, you took turns in that game this morning very nicely. I am so happy you were able to do that.' (Do you feel pleased with yourself too?)

COMMENTARY ON FINDING WAYS TO FEEL BETTER

'I was so upset that my team lost the match that I went out for a long walk – and I kicked all the leaves on the ground and didn't feel so bad after that.'

'I missed my bus last night and was cold and tired and miserable when I got home – so I made myself a cup of tea and had a hot bath and felt much better.'

'I was cross that this picture kept falling off the wall – but when I tacked it up with staples rather than with tape it was OK. I was really pleased I found something that worked.'

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'There was a big spider in my bath which made me scared because I don't like spiders. But I was quite brave and went and got a glass, put it over the spider like this, slid a piece of cardboard under it like this and then took it outside and let it go. I felt proud of myself and I won't be scared next time because I know what to do.'

REQUEST FOR HELP

'I am worn out picking up all this paper. Who could help me?'

'I am sorry but you can't play with that – it's too dangerous. I am scared you will hurt yourself. I need you to put it down and find something else. Now, what would be a safer thing to play with?'

'I have a bit of a headache today, so I need you to practice your little voices if you can. Who can remember to do that?'

CONSIDERATIONS CAN BE ELICITED BY THE ADULT**(a) MAKING THEIR OWN NEEDS CLEAR AND
(b) OFFERING AN INCENTIVE**

'I need two children to wash out all the paint brushes for me – who can do this carefully and be my "paint pot stars" for today?'

'I want to watch the last of this programme. Would you like to cuddle up here while I do that?' You may want to be even more generous to ensure a positive outcome; 'Then perhaps we will go to the playground for half an hour.'

SCAFFOLDING PROBLEM-SOLVING

'Now you can't find your coat. I can see you are upset. What do you think we might do? Let's think where you saw it last. If it isn't there perhaps someone has tidied it away. Where would they put something away? Could you go and look in all those places. Is it there? Well done. Next time you will know what to do before you get upset.'

'You don't like it when Angel pushes into your game. It makes you angry. What could you do instead of punching her? What could you say? Perhaps just saying "I am playing this game, you have to ask to join in."'

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may provide children with the opportunity to explore and experiment with their feelings and perhaps problem-solve in an indirect way: *This little girl is sitting by herself. Is she OK? What do you think she would like to happen next?*

Another excellent way of encouraging emotional awareness and providing a context for talking about feelings is to play different kinds of music while children use creative materials. Ask them to draw a picture that makes them feel like the music.

Cooperative interactions

The early years environment provides a powerful incentive to regulate and safely express emotions because many children will avoid others whose outbursts they find alarming. In order to engage in cooperative play children need to learn to modify displays of anger, distress and uncontrolled excitement. Early years professionals may help them to do this by:

- Pointing out their desire to play with others and what they need to do to facilitate this: *You want to play with George but George doesn't like it when you jump on him like that.*
- Ask what they would want if they were the other children: *What could you do so George will want to play with you?*
- Explore what they might do to express feelings safely: *If you feel like jumping up and down where's a good place to do it?*

Pretend play

Children in early childhood often use dramatic and symbolic play scenarios to work out emotions and explore ways of managing them. Play scenarios give children the chance to control their environment. They can experiment and imagine and practice many ways of dealing with situations and experiencing emotions. All they need is a few symbolic play props and the opportunity to interact with others. Although early years professionals can scaffold situations, it is important to be child-led here. Giving children too much input limits their own imaginative development.

Acting out violence

Sometimes pretend play includes scenarios that are difficult for teachers to tolerate. Rather than directly stopping these, it may be better to provide commentary and where possible develop a non-judgemental,

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problem-solving conversation: *The daddy is smacking the baby. Is the baby upset? The baby is crying. Will smacking stop the baby crying? What could we do instead to stop the baby crying? What would help you to stop crying? A cuddle? Let's try that.*

If children are involving others in violent play and they are getting hurt this is unacceptable and undermines the safety of the centre. The phrase: *You are not allowed to hurt anyone here, no one is allowed to hurt you* is appropriate.

Guns and superheroes

Children, especially boys, often want to be 'superman' or 'special-forces fighter'. What do you do if you don't approve of guns, even toy ones? There are different views about this. Penny Holland (2003) has explored this dilemma and discovered that 'zero tolerance' of such fantasy play was not necessarily the best way to go. Children are presented with violent media images in the news and may need opportunities to respond to these and to experiment with feeling powerful in the face of potential fear. Accepting elements of such games can provide opportunities for early years professionals to mediate this fantasy play without simply making hard and fast moral judgements. Practitioners may also want to encourage girls to participate in games where they have the chance to role-play powerful characters.

Play that is simply repetitive of violent themes does not offer an opportunity for reflection and is best limited or re-directed. It is also useful to restrict superhero games to certain places or within certain times so that they do not become dominant in the centre. Get children to practice some game moves carefully, pretending they are 'stunt' actors (Gronlund 1992). This reinforces that this is fantasy and that people are not to get hurt for real. There are simple picture books (e.g. Popov 1995) which enable educators to bring another measure of reflection into war games.

Role-play

Most children love doing this. There are several different kinds. One is an extension of pretend play when children can try out being different people. Providing 'dressing up' clothes and accessories may be all they need to act out their own narratives.

Teachers can help structure role-play for children by getting them to act out stories either from books or ones that they develop with the

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children. This provides the choice of characters that children might otherwise not consider developing.

Another, more structured, activity is to give children opportunities to carry out activities and/or express their emotions 'the silly way' and then the 'right way'. Children find it very funny to see the adults act like 'naughty' children. This, together with role-playing the 'correct' way, reinforces what is acceptable, making it an excellent learning tool.

'Use your words'

This simple phrase bears frequent repetition in the early years setting. Children need to learn to express their emotions and what they want with words, not with fists, grabbing and shoving. Questions to reinforce this practice can include: *what do you need?*; *what did you tell him?*; *how did he know?*

Other imaginative scenarios

Young children's imagination is often an untapped source of possibilities, including for regulating emotion. An adult can respond to a request from a child for something with a mime and many children will join in with the game.

THE POWER OF THE POSITIVE

There is increasing evidence that a focus on the positive supports emotional regulation and enhances resilience. The ability to 'bounce



CASE STUDY

Saffron had waited long enough for the little car in the playground. She came up for the third time and said 'I want a go, when is it my turn?'. Dom, the early years teacher, knew that there were two others in line before Saffron. He said 'Hey, here's another one while you wait' and mimed getting into a car and holding the steering wheel and squealing round corners. When he said 'Do you want to get in and drive?' Saffron was quite willing and even involved another child as a passenger in the pretend car.

PROMOTING THE POSITIVE

Asking children to focus on their feelings when things are going well:

You feel good inside when you are stroking the rabbit, Josh is that right?

Helping children to remember good feelings:

Remember when we went to the zoo. Everyone was so excited.

Helping children to focus on the good feelings linked with positive behaviours:

We were all excited but we also felt safe because we held hands to stay together.

You were really happy playing that game together once you had worked out the rules.

Asking children, with appropriate prompts, what they have learnt from a negative experience:

You were scared but the car missed you and you did not get run over.

What did you learn here to keep you safe next time?

back' from or cope with stressful situations is linked with being able to identify what is positive (Frederickson *et al.* 2000). This can be a learning outcome, an opportunity or a new way of seeing something. Whereas negative emotions limit creativity, positive emotions broaden the exploration of coping strategies and build personal resources (Frederickson and Tugade 2004). Helping young children to begin to develop the ability to focus on the positive is therefore worthwhile.

Positive emotions can also be elicited by using humour, relaxation techniques and optimistic thinking.

CIRCLE TIME

The children sit in a circle with the early years teacher acting as facilitator. The younger the children, the shorter and more frequent the sessions need to be. Circle time is a democratic and inclusive forum to raise self-esteem, promote belonging and develop emotional and social understanding and skills. It lasts 1–20 minutes, depending on the children's ability to participate. Children may need time to get used to circle time

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but persistence pays off. Those children who initially pass will eventually join in. Circle time has three rules:

- listen if someone else is speaking (use a soft toy or wand to indicate whose turn it is – some children feel easier speaking through a puppet);
- only saying good things about people – (no put-downs);
- you can pass if you don't want to join in when it is your turn.

A circle time session on the theme of 'feeling happy' might look like this in the box:

Introductory activity

Verbal: e.g. say your name/your friend's name/the name of brothers or sisters.

Non-verbal: e.g. pass a smile around the circle – or a hand squeeze.

Sentence completion activity

Each child completes the sentence in turn e.g. 'I am happy when ...!'

Mix-up game

The idea is that children communicate with all the children in their group not just the same few. There are hundreds of ways of doing this; e.g. all those who like chocolate ice-cream change places. Give children animal names and ask the animals to change places.

Share pair

With the person next to you, find out e.g. two things that make you happy. Each child feeds back one thing to the circle.

Game

A physical, fun activity using positive energy, e.g. teacher gives each child a part in a story – this can include characters and inanimate objects. The teacher tells the story and every time she mentions a character or object that person stands up, turns round and sits down. When she says: ... *and everyone was very happy* all the children change places.

A calming activity

A short quiet story, relaxation activity, quiet music with 'mind pictures' or a quiet game.

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Collins and McGaha (2002) suggest that even with toddlers circle time can be beneficial. This study stresses that the process of getting it going in the early years requires flexibility and needs to be child led. Children who are too absorbed in other activities should be left to continue with them. They are likely to choose to join in once they see that others are having a good time. One adult needs to stay with the circle while another supports children in their efforts to make the transition or in their other choices. Smooth continuous activity in the circle is maintained if children who are unwilling or unable to participate are given the option to be self-directed. Once circle time becomes a power struggle with continual stoppages or criticisms it loses purpose and value.

Children are likely to want to touch materials that are brought into circle time – it will help their participation if they are encouraged to do so – especially if there are several items. This can also help when children are waiting for their turn.

RESOURCES FOR AN EMOTIONAL LITERACY CURRICULUM IN THE EARLY YEARS

I Can Monsters

Bear Cards

Stones Too Have Feelings

All the above are picture cards published by St Lukes Innovative Resources. They also have a selection of other useful materials: www.innovativeresources.org.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children has books and multi-media training kits such as *What do you do with the mad that you feel*: www.naeyc.org.

Nikolai Popov is the artist for the picture book *Why?* published in the US by North-South Books. This powerfully illustrates how conflict escalates and why this is in no one's interest. This is also available from Peoplemaking in Australia 03 9813 2533.

Margaret Collins's book *Circle Time for the Very Young* published by Lucky Duck has lots of ideas for circle time activities: www.lucky-duck.co.uk.

There has not been sufficient space here to discuss gender issues in the development of emotional literacy. Don Kindlon and Michael Thompson's book *Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys* published by Penguin is well worth reading, especially the first two chapters.

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SUMMARY

Small children are on a steep learning curve, discovering many things about themselves and about each other. Supporting and enhancing their social and emotional understanding and competencies within an emotionally safe environment will impact on their behaviour and their ability to establish good relationships with others. This is the beginning of the upward spiral to social inclusion.

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