

PSED: A Time to be Me: Young Children and their Emotions

Facilitated by Penny Vine



A Time to be Me: Young Children and their Emotions

In the hectic busy world we adults navigate, time to simply stand, wonder and be curious is often perceived as a waste of precious time. Yet our youngest children need us to slow down in order to fully attune to their unique and very precious emotional worlds. They need us to slow down so that we can support them in identifying, recognising and regulating their emotions. They need us to accept and understand all their emotions which may at times be overwhelming and scary for them.

This key-note will offer an interactive experience where participants will have an opportunity to:

- Learn about how we can support the full range of children's feelings as they happen around us
- Consider effective and empathic ways of supporting children who may be experiencing distressing feelings such as anger or sadness
- Explore what practitioner qualities help our children to emotionally thrive



**Taking a holistic view
of child development**

6. Works/plays
cooperatively
with peers

5. Ready to explore,
understand and learn

4. Emotional Needs

Need for recognition & appreciation

3. Emotional Needs

Need to belong, love and be loved

2. Physical Needs

Need to be secure and safe and out of danger

1. Physical Needs

Need to satisfy hunger, thirst, sleep etc

*Taken and adapted from Building Better Behaviour in the Early Years,
Chris Dukes and Maggie Smith, 2009, Sage*

"Children will not remember you for the material things you provided but for the feeling that you cherished them."

Children's Feelings

Children have powerful feelings. They need adult help to learn to deal with the strength of their feelings. Feelings are hard to manage – even adults do not always succeed in dealing with how they feel. These strong feelings can quickly overwhelm the child. This can lead to:

- Sobbing and sadness
- Temper tantrums that are full of anger and rage
- Jealousy that makes a child want to hit out
- Joy that makes a child literally jump and leap with a wildness that is unnerving to many adults

The fears children develop

The fears children have are very real to them. Some are afraid that their parent or carer might leave them. Some are afraid of loud noises like thunder, of heights (perhaps they do not like to come down from the climbing frame) or of sudden movements, such as a dog leaping up at them. Going to a strange place, like the clinic, might bring on feelings of fear, and many children are afraid of the dark.

Children's body language

Children need to express their feelings. They do so through:

- **Physical actions:** like stamping with rage, screaming with terror, hitting out, jumping with joy or seeking a cuddle
- **Facial expression:** a pout tells the adult the child is not happy, compared with eyes that are shining with joy
- **The position of the body:** playing alone with the doll's house or hovering on the edge of a cooking session might indicate that the child wants to join in but does not know how; playing boats right in the centre of a group of children tells an adult something quite different
- **Body movements:** children who keep twisting their fingers together are not at ease, compared with children who sit in a relaxed way

Guidelines for dealing with children's fears

- Talking about fearful feelings and showing the child you understand is important
- Later on children can use imaginative play – for example in the home area, doll's house or toy garage – to face and deal with their fears and worries
- Feeling jealous and anxious about the arrival of a new baby at home can be helped by allowing children to take out their aggressive feelings on a soft toy. This channels the aggression, giving the child permission to express their feelings.
- The traditional provision of the early childhood curriculum provides well for children's feelings to be expressed: for example, boisterous outdoor play, bashing lumps of clay, knocking down wooden blocks or working at the woodwork bench allows children to channel their energies.

Putting feelings into words

It helps children to manage their feelings if they can put them into words. The child who can say, "Stop hitting me! That hurts! I don't like it!" has found an appropriate way to deal with an unpleasant situation.

- The cries that babies and young children make are early attempts to "tell" others how they feel
- Early on children may shout a term of abuse in a difficult situation rather than using appropriate words. Adults need to decide whether this is a step forward along the way from physical hitting (via use of unacceptable language) to an appropriate expression of feelings in words.
- It takes time, experience and adult support for young children to express their feelings in words and to negotiate in dialogue with others. It can help to give them examples of rather staccato-sounding words, such as "Stop pit!" so they can take control of situations. Children learn the language of feelings through real situations that hold great meaning and that engage their whole attention.

Supporting Uncomfortable Feelings with Empathy

What EMPATHY is NOT; some of our habitual responses:

- *Advising*
- *One-Upping*
- *Educating*
- *Consoling*
- *Story-telling*
- *Sympathising*
- *Explaining*
- *Correcting*
- *Interrogating*
- *Minimizing*

Empathy

We can give our children empathy when they have strong feelings or when they seem to need understanding. When they are confident that their needs really matter to us, they are more likely to return to a state of well-being. From having their feelings and needs matter they are then eventually able to offer this quality of care to others.



Helping children under emotional stress

When children do not experience warm, loving relationships, they react differently according to their personality. They may:

- Become aggressive
- Be very quiet, watchful and tense
- Begin bedwetting or soil themselves
- Find it difficult to eat
- Return to babyish ways – they may want a bottle again or a comforter; they might want to be held and cuddled, or carried about. They might want help with eating or dressing

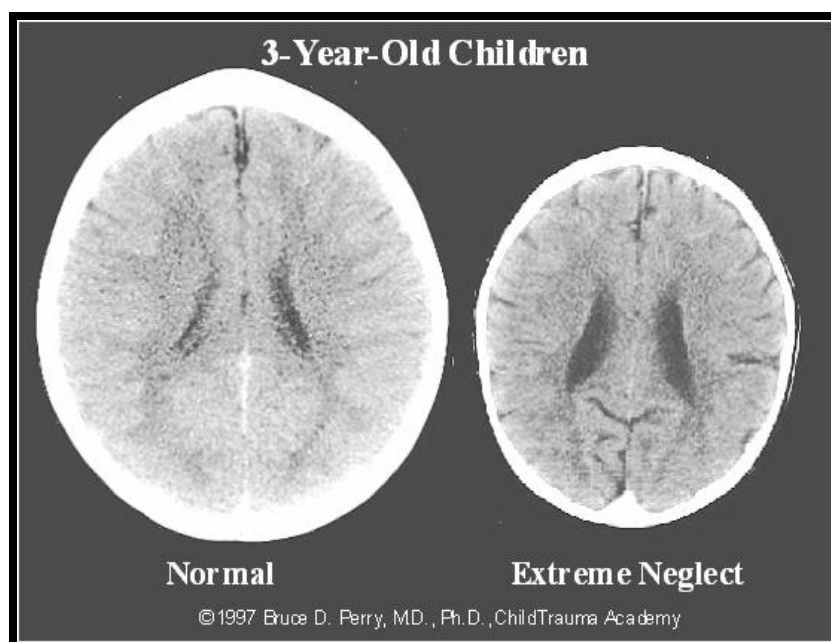
When children are under emotional stress, their behaviour can change quite quickly. It is important, therefore, that early years workers be alert to the changes listed above and that they respond sensitively, with understanding. If you suspect a problem of this kind it is important to talk with your line manager about your observations. The discussion will probably open up to the staff team and the parents. You will all look at the child's progress and agree what steps should be taken, depending on whether the situation is a temporary one for the child or is more likely to be long-term.



The Impact of Stress on the Young Child's Developing Brain

High levels of stress in young children are of particular concern because a range of developing systems are put at risk. For example, the development of neurotransmitters and the still growing pathways in the brain that use them are particularly at risk when exposed to high levels of cortisol (Gerhardt, 2004). Infants are not able to manage their stress alone, and in the early years minimal levels of stress may result in high levels of cortisol. Infants are thus dependent on adults to regulate their stress levels. When this occurs satisfactorily, infants' biological stress management systems develop appropriately. For example, research demonstrates that children who are touched and soothed and who receive responsive care have increased numbers of cortisol receptors in the hippocampus (Gerhardt, 2004). When children do not receive responsive care and their stress levels are not managed appropriately, they experience chronic stress, and the consequences (biologically, behaviourally, socially, and in their health) discussed above are likely to occur.

Thus a key factor in a quality-care environment for young children is the ability of adults to manage children's stress levels. A high-quality early childhood environment is one where children's stress levels are low, and where adults are available to respond appropriately to stress reactions triggered (inevitably) by normal day-to-day events.



Major Sources of Stress for Young Children

Hurts by commission [direct hurts from other people]

- Physical, sexual, verbal, or emotional abuse
- Disrespectful treatment [e.g. being judged, labelled]
- Authoritarian discipline [including all punishment]
- Pressure to learn, compete, or perform
- Unrealistically high adult expectations
- Repression or rejection of painful emotions
- Love or attention conditional on child's behaviour
- Lack of inclusion based on gender, class, race, ability

Hurts by omission [unmet needs]

- Physical or emotional neglect
- Insufficient physical contact [holding]
- Delay or misinterpretation of need fulfilment
- Lack of opportunities to form attachments
- Lack of attention, empathy or sensitive responsiveness
- Lack of stimulation
- Lack of autonomy
- Unfulfilled promises
- Lack of information, unanswered questions

Situational hurts [indirect hurts, caused by life circumstances]

- Prenatal or birth trauma
- Illness, injuries, medical procedures
- Permanent loss of attachments [e.g. *separation or death*], short separations [depends on age of child]
- Over-stimulation
- Development fears and frustrations
- Inevitable restrictions
- Major changes and transitions [e.g. new siblings, new home, new setting, new school], parental stress [e.g. anxiety, grief, anger, illness]
- Parental disputes, separation, or divorce
- Parental alcoholism or drug misuse
- Natural disasters [e.g. floods, fires, earthquakes]
- Exposure to violence [war, domestic violence, media, real life]
- Over-frightening events
- Disputes with other siblings or older children

[Taken from Tears and Tantrums, Aletha J. Solter, PH.D, ISBN 0-9613073-6-6 p 9]

The External Emotional Environment

The quality of human interactions can never be substituted for by the provision of external resources e.g. resources, books, puppets. Primarily attention needs to be given to the internal emotional environment – the quality of human interactions between everybody in the setting.

However, resources can provide a stimulus for young children's social and emotional development. The suggestions below are not exhaustive!

- Set up 'emotion corners', e.g. in an angry corner there may be books showing different aspects of anger, feeling faces showing anger and puppets for children to act out stories.
- There are some wonderful books exploring emotions and you may choose to have one shelf reserved for books about emotions.
- A puppet area is a must-have for young children to act out the issues in their lives. www.PuppetsbyPost.com have a wonderful selection.
- Opportunities to explore an emotion can enable children to really 'get to know' that emotion. Use colour and other media for children to represent their emotions. Clay is an excellent material for children to use to express emotion.
- Music is another opportunity for children to express their emotions. Provide scarves and materials for children to add to their movement.
- Provide a quiet area for when children want somewhere to calm down or be alone...when some children have been overwhelmed with sadness or anger they often require a calming down space where they can gather themselves without being the focus of attention.
- Consider using signs for the basic emotions: fear, sadness, anger and happiness. Many young children hit out because they cannot express their emotions. This way they can sign and we can receive their feelings so they have a sense of being accepted and understood.
- Keep a group feeling book in which you are included. A child may draw a picture of when she was sad because her friend couldn't come to nursery. You might include a picture showing you feeling nervous before a driving test and then disappointed when you didn't pass the test. You could add others showing the different emotions you experienced before you passed the test.

What are you doing to help children develop emotional literacy?

Early years professionals have recommended the following strategies for practitioners to use in helping children appropriately regulate their expressions of emotions;

- I make it a priority to establish a loving, secure relationship with each child in my setting.
- I help children learn about feelings, their own and others'.
- I try to serve as a model for genuine, appropriate expressions of emotion.
- I create a positive climate in my setting – children are happy and relaxed most of the time.
- I openly acknowledge children's feelings through reference to their inner worlds. I include **all** feelings, not just positive ones.
- I help children to use emotion words as part of their overall language development.
- I help children see how to change their own emotional responses or help others feel better, thus giving them a greater sense of efficacy or control.
- I direct children's attention to other's feelings and needs.
- I create many opportunities for peer play where children learn to regulate their emotions to keep the play going.
- I promote close friendships among children, because it is easier to begin to regulate emotions with people you care deeply about.
- I offer many activities that allow children to represent their feelings acceptably through pretend play, art, writing, movement and other media.

Adapted from The Emotional Development of Young Children by Marilou Hyson



Questions for Reflection

Making Relationships	
Questions to ask of myself	Questions to ask ourselves as a team
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How comfortable am I in making relationships? - How do I model social interactions for children as I interact each day with them, their parents and other adults within my setting? - How tuned in am I to non-verbal communication? - What enables / inhibits me in social interactions? – What can I learn from this in the work that I do? - How do I use daily routines to get to know children's unique ways of communicating? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do we as a team model social interaction? - Do we recognise, encourage and support children's early social friendships? - How do we gain feedback from visitors to our setting in how included and welcomed they feel? - How do we build relationships and trust with parents, especially those with EAL? - How do we build our relationships as staff? - Do we feel safe enough to say to each other "I really don't know" or "Would you help me?" or "I've made a big mistake?" or "I'm uncomfortable when you say..." or "When you shouted at Kirsty our new student I felt really upset and I'd like us to try and work out how to make things better with her...she's scared of you when you shout."
Self-confidence and self-awareness	
Questions to ask of myself	Questions to ask ourselves as a team
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What does being confident and self-aware mean to me? - Am I confident and willing to try out new ideas and experiences? - Do I recognise and support colleagues who are less confident than me? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do we understand the principles that promote and hinder confidence and self-awareness in children and adults? - Do we make the emotional space available for children to talk about new experiences? - Do we model genuineness, respect and empathy with children, parents and each other?
Managing feelings and behaviour	
Questions to ask of myself	Questions to ask ourselves as a team
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do I model the expression of feelings and needs? - How do I cope with feelings such as anger, irritation or impatience? - Am I able to accept and empathise with children's feelings of anger, rage and distress? - Am I able to ask for help from my colleagues when I am angry, distressed or overwhelmed? - Am I emotionally available to receive children or are my thoughts and feelings focused elsewhere? - Am I able to perceive children's 'unacceptable behaviours' as mistakes? - How do I approach children when they are in conflict, e.g. am I in judge and jury role or am I able to create a calm and neutral climate? - Do I consider how my body language and spoken language can affect small children, e.g. pursed lip or an abrupt tone can scare and confuse children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do we recognise the diverse ways children may express their feelings, particularly those with EAL? - Have we discussed as a setting what it means to express needs and feelings in an "appropriate" way? - <u>Are we able to really attend to a child or family members' feelings without jumping in and trying to fix them, e.g. Tommy says, "I feel sad when Mummy goes," and the practitioner immediately responds, "She'll be back soon" instead of empathising with him.</u> - Are we promoting an ethos where the full range of feelings and needs can be expressed and accepted? - Do we give children time and space to process their feelings? - What support do we offer to main carers who may become distressed when leaving their children? - What meaningful rituals are in place to support those children who may experience separation anxiety? - Do we have a problem-solving approach to be used with young children / with adults? - How do we support each other's emotional well-being?

A Relationship Based Approach to Working with Young Children

Where did we ever get the crazy idea that in order to make children do better, first we have to make them feel worse?

Jane Nelson

	Clip 1.
How does the practitioner help the children learn about feelings and needs – their own and others’?	
What support did the practitioner offer the children in identifying, naming, coping with and regulating their emotions?	
Making Relationships	
Playing and exploring – engagement	

Early Years Foundation Stage [birth - 3]: Taken from: Daniel Siegel, *The Whole-Brain Child*

TYPE OF INTEGRATION	WHOLE-BRAIN STRATEGY	APPLICATIONS OF THE STRATEGY
Integrating the Left and Right Brain	<p>#1: <u>Connect and redirect:</u> When your child is upset, connect first emotionally, right brain to right brain. Then, once your child is more in control and receptive, bring in the left-brain with words and suggestions.</p>	<p>Now is the time, as early as possible, to begin teaching children about emotions. Mirror feelings and use nonverbal (like hugs and empathetic facial expressions) to show that you understand: <i>Are you frustrated?</i> Then, once you've connected, set the limit: <i>Biting hurts. Please be gentle. Look like this.</i> Finally, focus on an alternative: <i>Do you want this to chew on or this? Or move on to something else: Hey, there's bear, I haven't seen him in a long time.</i></p>
	<p>#2: <u>Name it to tame it:</u> When big, right-brain emotions are raging out of control, help your children tell the story about what's upsetting them, so their left brain can help make sense of their experience and they can feel more in control.</p>	<p>Even at this young age, make it a habit to acknowledge and name feelings: <i>Are you sad? That really hurt, didn't it?</i> Then tell the story. With small children, you'll need to be the primary narrator. Use your words and even act out the fall or the bump, possibly using humour, and watch your child's fascination. It can be helpful to make a homemade book with pictures or photos to retell an upsetting story, or to prepare your child for a transition, like a new bedtime routine or starting preschool.</p>
Integrating the Upstairs and the Downstairs	<p>#3: <u>Engage, don't enrage:</u> in high-stress situations, engage your child's upstairs brain by asking her to consider and plan and choose, rather than triggering her downstairs brain, which is less about thinking and more about reacting.</p>	<p>Nobody likes to be told no, and it's an especially ineffective strategy to use too often with toddlers. When possible, avoid outright power struggles with your little one. Save your no for when you really need it. The next time you hear yourself beginning to forbid her from hitting the mirror with a stick, stop. Instead, engage her upstairs brain: <i>Let's go outside; what could you do with that stick in the yard?</i></p>

Early Years Foundation Stage [3-6]: Taken from: Daniel Siegel, The Whole-Brain Child, 2011 pages 157 – 160

Type of Integration	Whole-Brain Strategy	Applications of the Strategy
Integrating the Left and Right Brain	#1. Connect and redirect: When a child is upset, connect first emotionally, right brain to right brain. Then, once s/he is more in control and receptive, bring in the left-brain.	First, hear what's upset a child. Comfort them and repeat back to them what you've heard with nurturing nonverbal communication: <i>You're really disappointed that Molly can't come over?</i> Then, once you've connected, help direct her toward problem-solving <i>I know you're upset. Do you have another idea for playing?</i>
Integrating the Left and Right Brain	#2. Name it to tame it: When big, right-brain emotions are raging out of control, help children tell the story about what's upsetting them. In doing so, they will use their left brain to make sense of their experiences and feel more in control.	Whether it's a "small t" or a "big T" trauma, you can start the story-telling process almost right away (once you've connected right brain to right). At this age, children need you to take the lead: <i>You know what I saw? I saw you running, and when your foot hit that slippery spot, you fell. Is that what happened?</i> If he continues the story, great. But if needed, you can continue: <i>So then you started crying, and I ran over to you and...</i> It can be helpful to make a book with drawings or photos to help re-tell an upsetting story, or to prepare a child for a transition, or starting school.
Integrating the Upstairs and Downstairs	#3. Engage, don't enrage: In high-stress situations, engage a child's upstairs brain by asking her to consider and plan and choose, rather than triggering her downstairs brain, which is less about thinking and more about reacting.	Setting clear boundaries is important, but we often say no more than we need to. When children are upset, be creative. Instead of saying, <i>We don't act that way</i> , ask, <i>What's another way you could handle that?</i> Instead of <i>I don't like the way you're talking</i> , try, <i>Can you think of another way to say that, one that will be more polite?</i> Then recognise their efforts when they use their upstairs brain to come up with alternatives. A great question to help avoid power struggles is, <i>Can you come up with an idea for how we can both get what we want?</i>

Resources

- *Batmanghelidjh, Camilla. [2006] *Shattered Lives* Jessica Kingsley Publishers [Main focus the impact of trauma on young people's lives but offers the reader a profound insight into the lives of children up to 19]
- Bayley, Ros [2006] *More than Happy and Sad – Young Children and their Emotions* The British Association for Early Childhood Education
- Dowling, M. [2005] *Young Children's Personal, Social and Emotional Development* Paul Chapman Publishing [All ages]
- *Early Intervention: The Next Steps An Independent Report to Her Majesty's Government, Graham Allen MP [[All ages]
- Evans, B. [2002] *You Can't Come to My Birthday Party* High/Scope Press [All ages]
- *Gerhardt, S. [2004] *Why Love Matters: How Affection Shapes a Baby's Brain*. Brunner-Routledge [Main focus babies but a must read for anyone wanting to learn more about the brain]
- Hyson, M [2004] *The Emotional Development of Young Children* [Second Edition] Teachers College Press [This book is focused on American children and their care givers but is illuminating for all]
- Laevers, F [2005] Sics [Zico] *Well-being and Involvement in Care: A process orientated self-evaluation instrument for settings* [Research for Experiential Education Leuven University](#) [To access simply type Sics [Zico] into Google [All ages]
- *Mathieson, Kay, [2013] *I am Two! Working effectively with two year olds and their families* The British Association for Early Education [For our two-year olds]
- Gillespie, Linda and Siebel, Nancy [2006] *Self Regulation: A Cornerstone of Early Childhood*
- *Siegel, Daniel and Hartzell, Mary [Parenting from the Inside Out: How a Deeper Self-understanding Can Help You Raise Children Who Thrive](#) (Paperback - 1 Feb 2005)[Main focus US!!! Helps parents and practitioners to understand themselves which, from Siegel's perspective is the key to raising emotionally literate and confident children]
- *Siegel, Daniel and Bryson Payne, Tina [2011]*The Whole-Brain Child* Delacorte [All ages]
- <http://www.foundationyears.org.uk> – Go to the library area to find resources related to two-year-olds

Internet Resources

- Groves, Linda and Siebel, Nancy *Self-Regulation: A Cornerstone of Early Childhood Development*