

Addressing the Emotional/Social Development of Individuals with Multiple Special Needs

An Active Learning Perspective

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 Applied from the works of Dr. Lilli Nielsen



The Core Feature of Emotional Development

A person must have the ability to:

- Identify and understand one's own feelings
- Accurately read and comprehend emotional states in others
- Manage strong emotions and their expressions in a constructive manner
- Regulate one's own behavior
- Develop empathy for others
- And establish and maintain relationships

• Source: The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child

Why is Emotional Development Important

- Influences all other areas of development.
- It provides the foundation for how we feel about ourselves, and how we experience others.

Early Emotional Experiences are Embedded in the Architecture of our Brains

- Emotional experiences occur during periods of interaction with caregivers
- Infants are incapable of modulating overwhelming feelings, have limited ability to control emotions to focus on sustaining attention

Emotional Development Continues throughout Life

- Preschoolers emotional states are more complex.
- Emerging ability to interpret their own experiences and understand what others are thinking
- Interpret the nuances of how others respond
- More capable of managing their feelings (one of the most challenging tasks of childhood)

A Strong Emotional Foundation

- By the end of pre-school, children what have a strong emotional foundations & can
 - Anticipate
 - Talk about
 - Use awareness of feelings (their own & others)
- Manage everyday social interactions

Emotions & Executive Function

- The circuits that regulate emotion are also associated with executive function
- When emotions are not controlled - thinking can be impaired
- Emotions can
 - Support executive function when well regulated
 - Interfere with attention & decision making when poorly controlled

Behaviors are just red flags for what is going on underneath the surface!



Autism Spectrum Disorders

- Many pathways that lead to a common set of symptoms
 - Social communication deficits and social interaction
 - Deficits in non-verbal communication
 - Deficits in social-emotional reciprocity
 - Deficits in developing, maintaining and understanding relationships

Source: Dr. Nicole Beurkens, Ph.D

Autism Spectrum Disorders

- Many pathways that lead to a common set of symptoms
 - Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities
 - Repetitive motor movements
 - Insistence on sameness, inflexible adherence to routines, rigid thinking patterns, etc.
 - Sensory issues

Source: Dr. Nicole Beurkens, Ph.D

Connectivity of the Brain

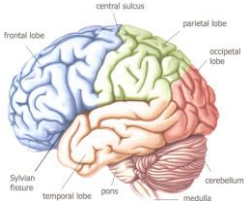
- Autism is a brain based diagnosis – but MRI scans look normal – no structural problems
- What happens when children are engage in an activity under scans – you see problems in connectivity of the brain
 - Under connectivity (in the frontal lobe – emotions)
 - Sparse connections
 - Over connectivity (in the hippocampus – memory)
 - Hyper connectivity, rigid behavior, splinter skills, memorizing
 - Inefficient connectivity
 - Processing issues

A person can have all three types of connectivity

Source: Dr. Nicole Beurkens, Ph.D

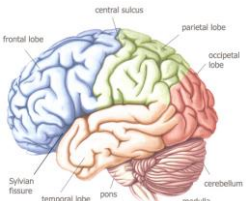
The Human Brain

- Frontal Lobe
 - emotions
- Sensory cortex
 - Sensory info
- Cerebellum
 - Motor planning
- Limbic system
 - memories




The Human Brain

- Corpus Callosum
 - Communication between hemispheres
- Brain Stem
 - Sleep, cardiac, etc.
- Parietal Lobe
 - Taste, temp, touch
- Occipital Lobe
 - Visual cortex
- Temporal Lobe
 - Auditory information



Efficient vs. Inefficient Connectivity



- Shortest, quickest path most efficient
- With connectivity issues, you still get there but frequently breakdowns along the way
- Kids with SOD, corpus callosum problems - similar to Autism

Processing Information

- You take in information
- You make meaning of the information
- You do something
- Individuals with autism and related impairments have difficulty making meaning of input
- Similar to a funnel getting clogged
- Results in the “do something” breaking down = behavioral actions


Processing = Making Meaning

Active Processing (Active Learning) allows a us to make sense of

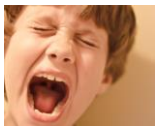
- Ourselves
- Others
- The world around us

Information Overwhelm

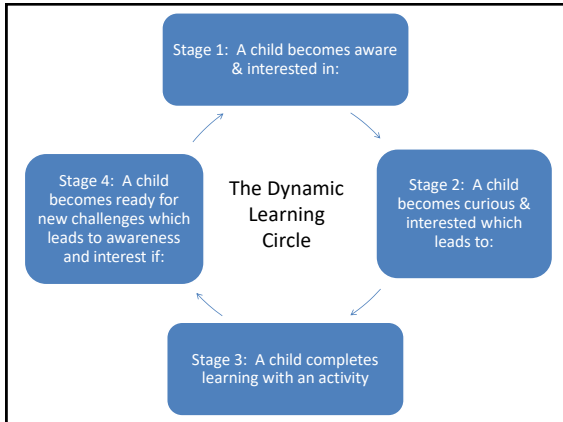
- Too much coming in
- Can't make sense of the world
- Stress response



Internalizer



Externalizer



Emotional & Social Development

In Children Birth to Three Years

Resources: Dr. Lilli Nielsen
Book - Are you Blind?
& Pathways.org

Emotional Development Birth to 3 months

- A child contacts or responds to contact by clutching a finger or some of the hair of the adult, or by clutching some of the adults clothing
- The child contacts or responds to contact by smacking lips, making “grr-grr” sounds and by nodding.

Social Development Birth to 3 months

- Begins to smile to caregivers
- Develops facial & body expressions
- Can briefly calm self (suck thumb)
- Recognizes having fun, may cry when play stops
- Makes eye contact, looks at people when interacting

Emotional Development Birth-3 months of age - Special Needs Child

- If a special needs child's clutch or grasp is too strong, adults may avoid contact, or prevent the child from grasping or clutching.
- If the child succeeds, he may receive negative responses to the behavior.
- The result: the child initiates grasping/clutching his/her own clothing or hair –or engages in attempts to receive negative responses from adults.
- Negative responses become better than no responses.

1-3 months continued

- Some special needs children transfer clutching/grasping to the mouth – they bite.
- Some special needs children use their nails for pinching, instead of biting or grasping.

Emotional Development 4-6 months of age

- The child contacts or responds to contact by babbling or crying consciously.

Social Development 4-6 months

- Usually happy when surrounded by cheerful caregivers
- Responds to and copies some movements & expressions
- Develops an awareness of surrounding & expresses a desire to engage

Emotional Development 4-6 months of age - Special Needs Child

- A special need's child may scream or cry most of the day.
- It is possible that the screaming is a child's attempt at babbling.

Emotional Development 6-8 months

- The child contacts or responds to contact by molding his/her body into the shape of the adults.
- The child snuggles close to the adult.

Social Development 7-9 months

- May show anxiety around others
- Plays social games – Peek a boo
- Learns meaning of work when used consistently
- Enjoys looking in a mirror
- Becomes more clingy when leaving caregiver

Emotional Development 6-8 Month Old - Special Needs Child

- May pull his/her hand away in an effort to hide them
- May shape his/her body in the position he/she wants in certain positions

Emotional Development 10 months of age

- The child contacts the adult by “showing objects.”
- The child wants to share his/her interests with the adult.
- If the adult does not respond, the child may attempt to establish contact by hitting the adult with the object. (banging objects)

Emotional Development 12 months of age

- The child contacts the adult by moving to the adult (pull to standing, walking or crawling). The child acts like he/she wants to sit on the adults lap, but as soon as he/she gets there, the child wants to get down.

Social Development 10-12 months

- Attempts to display independence (crawling to explore, refusing food)
- May show fear around unfamiliar objects or people
- Tries to get attention by repeating sounds and gestures
- Enjoys imitating people in play

Emotional Development 10-12 month old - Special Needs Child

- May engage in banging items all the time
- May engage in hitting him/herself or others
- May make quick contact with the adult then move away

Emotional Development 15 months of age

- This child picks up an object and gives it to the adult with the expectation that the adult will give the object back to the child.
- If an adult will not engage in the game, the child looks for another adult who will engage in the game.

Emotional Development 18 months of age

- This child will lend an adult his/her most cherished toy.
- This child will also engage in building games as a contact game.

Emotional Development 2 years of age

- This child involves the adult in hiding games and games of searching for each other.
- This child involves the adult in rough and tumble games.
- This child wants to interfere in the activities of an adult.

Social Development 1 -2 years

- Shows defiant behavior to establish independence (tantrums)
- Does not understand what others think or feel and believes everyone thinks as he/she does
- Enjoys being around other children, but not yet able to share
- Can play independently for brief periods of time

Emotional Development 3 years of age

- This child is eager to help with domestic activities.
- This child leans against an adult, places an elbow against an adult, looks at an adult to receive a smile or a comment – and then looks at others who might be present to share with them this emotional experience.

Social Development 2-3 Years

- Copies others in more complex tasks
- Shows affection towards friends
- Shows an increasing variety of emotions
- Upset when there are major changes in routine
- Seems concerned about personal needs

Emotional Development Assessment

- It is not as important to remember to specific age ranges in development (because these will vary slightly)
- It is more important to remember the progression of development of the emotional levels.
- Emotional Development must be assessed equally with all other areas of development

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Goals for this session

- Identify how to assess the intellectual level and the emotional level of an individual
- Relate emotional development to social development
- Learn the five phases of educational treatment and identify which phases to utilize to foster increased development

Identify the difference between:

Emotional Level vs. Intellectual Level

- At what age can a child work a six piece shape sorter?
- At what age does a child bang objects on a table or his/her hand?

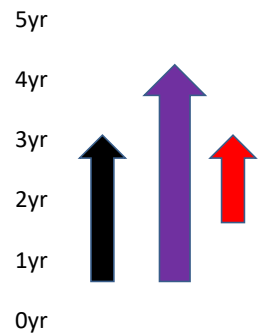
The Conflict

- | | | |
|--|-----|--|
| ▪ Intellectual Level =
3 years of age | Vs. | ▪ Who the teacher or parent believes the child to be |
| ▪ Emotional Level =
6-9 months. | Vs. | ▪ Who the child believes himself to be. |

Increase the I.L. and you increase the gap between the new I.L. and the old E.L.

Increase the E.L. and you decrease the gap between the old I.L. and the new E.L.

Current gap



Reduce the Disparity!

- If you build skills upon the Intellectual Level – you will **increase** the disparity between the Emotional & Intellectual Levels.
- The result - the child is likely to continue to have more emotional outbursts and exhibit greater aggression.

Social Skill Development – Play

Parten, M. "Social Participation among Preschool children." (1932)

Unoccupied Play

- 0-3 months
- Random movements that are made with no clear purpose. It is the beginning of play

Solitary Play

- 3-18 months
- A child start to play on his/her own.
- The child does not seem to notice other children sitting or playing nearby.
- Teaches children how to entertain themselves

Social Skill Development - Play

Onlooker Play

- Begins about 1-2 years
- Common between 2 ½ - 3 ½ years
- A child watches others play.
- The child who is looking may ask questions, but there is no effort to join the play
- Child uses conversations to learn more about game or play.

Parallel Play

- Common between 2 ½ years to 3 ½ years
- A child plays side by side with another child, but there is lack of group involvement amongst them.
- Toys are similar
- Often mimic one another
- Important for social maturity play.

Social Skill Development - Play

Associative Play

- Begins around ages 3-4 years
- Common 4-5 years +
- Children begin to play with one another
- Not focused toward a common goal
- Children start to be involved in what others are doing around them
- Important for cooperation, problem solving, language development

Cooperative Play

- 4-6 years +
- Play becomes organized into groups
- Teamwork is seen
- Formalized leader
- Brings together all previously learned skills

Five Phases of Education Treatment

Developed by Dr. Lilli Nielsen

Setting Emotional/Social Goals

- Every child should have one activity period per day that focuses on emotional development
- Gather objects and position yourself near the child
- The adult begins to engage in activity hoping the child will join in
- Do not chase a child, or require the child to participate

Phase I – Offering

- Absolutely no demands are placed on the child at all. The only request is that an adult be allowed to play near the child.
- Purpose
 - To promote trust between the child and adult
 - To observe the child's reactions
 - To learn what the child likes/dislikes
 - To learn about a child's emotional level
 - To introduce self activity

Phase II - Imitation

- Purpose:
 - To increase the child's interest in activities nearby
 - To increase the child's ability to initiate
 - To increase the child's belief in him/herself
 - To introduce activities and movements not as yet performed by the child
- Start by imitating the child's activity, even if this is stereotypical.

The Goals of Offering & Imitation

- To help the child to trust the adult and to help him/her to believe in him/herself.
- To give the child the opportunity to achieve new abilities so that he/she has more with which he/she can contribute during the next phase.

Phase III - Interaction

- Purpose:
 - To help the child learn dependency on one or several people
 - To help the child initiate interactions
 - To enhance the child's development of self identity
 - To give the child the basis for social development

Phases I, II, & III

- Phases I, II, and III establish a child's emotional development.
- This is done by establishing an exchange and balance between:
 - interaction and self activity
 - Dependence and independence

Phase IV – Sharing the Work

- Purpose:
 - To increase the child's experience of success
 - To involve the child in new social relationships
 - To increase the child's interest in acquiring new abilities
- The aim is to give the child the opportunity to learn dependence and interdependence; that to be one who does something does not necessarily mean that one has to do everything, or do everything perfectly.

Phase V - Consequence

- This can be introduced once a child has an emotional development of approximately 2 years of age.
- Purpose:
 - To help the child to endure meeting demands
 - To help the child endure changes in life
 - To help the child feel self-confident – which is fundamental to make your own decisions about your life
 - To establish a sense of responsibility

Effects of a Residential Setting

- A child living in a residential setting meets many adults
- It can be difficult to achieve close relationships and promote self identity
- The staff must agree to use the same approach
- The staff must:
 - inform each other about the child's reactions
 - share ideas for activities
 - Organize the day so that every child can spend 1:1 time with an adult

Anxiety & Executive Function

- A massive anxiety cannot be removed by demands or requests to do what you are afraid of.
- It is of no use to tell a special needs child that he/she should not be afraid of what he/she is afraid of. Doing so will only reinforce the child's resistance

Implications for Programs

- All childhood programs must balance their focus on cognition with a significant attention to emotional and social development.
- ED & SD capacities enable children to sit up, pay attention, and get along with other
- Emotional Development supports executive function
- Increasing emotional skills increases a child's ability to developing the coping skills necessary to interact and learn from others, manage conflict and problem solve independently

Just Jump!

- Compare a child's anxiety to someone demanding that you jump out a 4th story window.
 - I would be afraid of doing so
 - If someone tried to grasp me, persuade me to do so – I would use all of my energy to avoid that person and to avoid jumping.
 - While using my energy to resist, I would be unable to learn anything at all

Come On – Just Jump!

- When the demanding person left, I would be afraid that the person would return
- The more often someone tried to get me to jump, the more time I would spend being afraid that person would return, trying to persuade me to jump.
- As time goes by, I may be afraid throughout the day and unable to think of anything else.
- I would be unable to concentrate on anything other than to be afraid.

Stereotyped Behavior

- Stereotyped behavior must be respected as a part of a child's personality. (Self-identity.)
- It can occur for several reasons:
 - Lack of opportunity to move to the next developmental level
 - As a form of communication/protest
- Requests or demands to stop the stereotyped behavior means that the child is requested to alter his/her personality immediately.

Why is Emotional & Social Development Important

- Influences all other areas of development.
- It provides the foundation for how we feel about ourselves, and how we experience others.
- Supports executive function needed for learning

Active Learning Strategies for
Individuals with Special Needs

- www.activelearningspace.org
- www.Penrickton.com
- patty@penrickton.com
- www.lilliworks.org