

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)

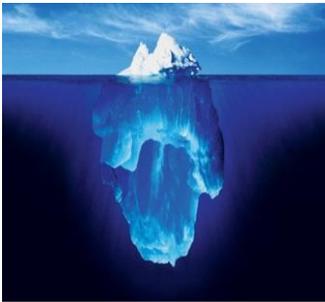
A Strong Emotional Foundation

- 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

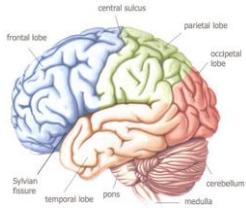
- Autism is a brain based diagnosis – but MRI scans look normal – no structural problems
- What happens when children are engage in an activity under scans – you see problems in connectivity of the brain
 - Under connectivity (in the frontal lobe – emotions)
 - Sparse connections
 - Over connectivity (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

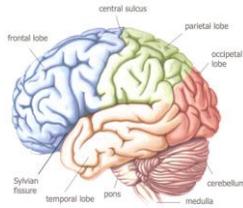
The Human Brain

- 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

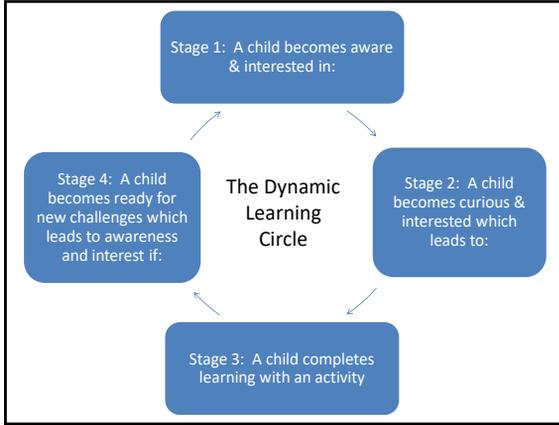
- Too much coming in
- Can't make sense of the world
- Stress response



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

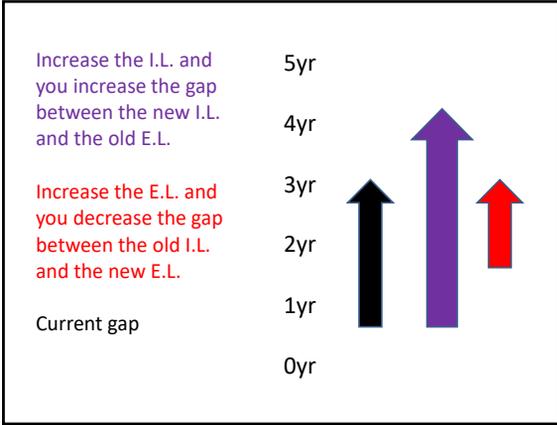
Identify the difference between:

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



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)

<p>Unoccupied Play</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0-3 months • Random movements that are made with no clear purpose. It is the beginning of play 	<p>Solitary Play</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
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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

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
