

EMOTIONAL Development in Early Childhood



Catherine Korah, CEBM Coordinator

Emotional development in early childhood

Emotional development in the early years focuses on fostering emotional growth and well-being, through:

- Getting to discover one-self in relation to emotions
- Exploring, experiencing and developing the abilities to express, feel and begin to temper emotions
- Recognizing different bodily sensations related to each emotion
- Building comfort and confidence in working through emotions

Emotional development

Being emotionally MATURE means to have the ability to “**temper**” one's emotions. However, before a child can build the capacity for self-regulation, they need to have sustained experiences of emotional co-regulation with a caring adult.



Younger children still need the support of adults around them to develop recognizing, naming, expressing and managing their emotions.

Relationship with caregivers are crucial for this development

- All **caring behaviour** develops in the context of the deep connection between a child and his or her caregiver
- A deep and secure attachment is needed for healthy ***emotional*** development to occur



Defining EMOTION

- **Emotion** means “to be stirred up and to be moved” (happens to us and pushes us around)
- Children’s experience and awareness of emotions will develop as they age **if we provide the right conditions**



Young children's emotions are **BIG** and shift quickly

With an event such as starting school, there will likely be some big emotions that shift quickly

Adult's role:

- Accept child's emotions
- Normalize child's emotions
- Make room for emotions



A child's emotional well-being

It starts with a
**sense of safety
& predictability.**

When a child feels
better, they do
better.

- ✓ Rely on structures and routines to create an environment that is consistent, predictable and reliable.
- ✓ Provide lots of opportunities for exposure and practice, especially with novelty. Give the child access to times when they can experience a comforting and calming feelings through their senses (e.g. play soft music, dim lighting, offer soft, comfy textures and sensory materials, show them calming nature scenes and use comforting scents, etc.)
- ✓ Be generous and patient when being asked for help.
- ✓ Children need downtime/respice, movement, play (both indoor and outdoor) and opportunities for emotional release in order to feel safe.

They are not
little adults

Young Children

and their
SEPARATION
problems

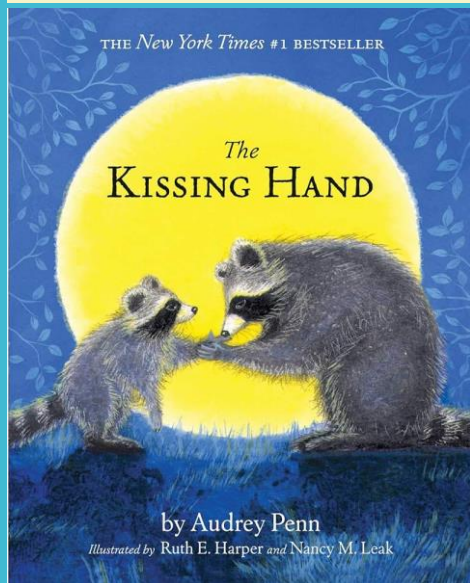
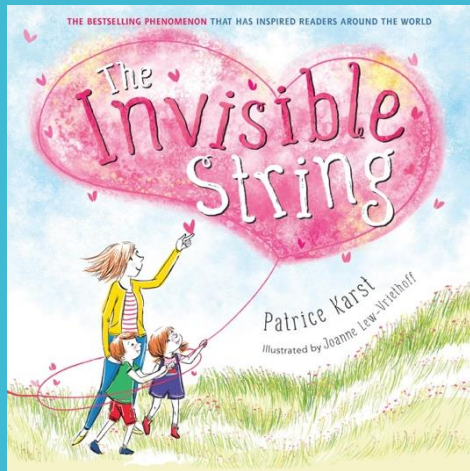
A FEAR OF SEPARATION that can be
overwhelming and crippling.

A HUNGER for CONTACT and CONNECTION
that takes precedence over any other need.



WHY?

Their capacity for relationships is not yet developed enough to enable them to hold on when apart. This is such an important development for humans that the first six years of life are primarily devoted to it.



Nature's solution to not being able to handle separation

MORE ATTACHMENT, not less!

- The more ways a child can form attachments, the less they need contact, closeness, and physical proximity.
- Children do not need to learn how to handle separation, instead they need to develop the ability to hold on when they are apart.

Home-school MATCHMAKING: Building the 'attachment village'



<https://macnamara.ca/infographics/>

Invisible String Lesson

Type of String Needed: Clear Stretchy String



The Invisible String is a must-have book for counselors. It is perfect for students experiencing any type of separation, such as death, divorce, incarceration, deployment, or separation anxiety. The book description states:

<https://confidentcounselors.com/school-counseling-activities-using-string/>

**They are not
little adults**

Young Children

**and their
UNTEMPERED
nature**

They have BIG EMOTIONS!

**1 thought – 1 feeling – at a time
very little filter (brain immaturity)**

All impulses felt are expressed. They cannot do dissonance. They register only one feeling or impulse at a time. All conflicting impulses and thoughts are momentarily eclipsed.



WHY?

This is Nature's way of making it as easy as possible for young children to find their dominant feeling and experience it fully, by removing any confusing elements or complicating signals.



What happens when emotions are **SUPPRESSED?**

** when emotions are suppressed, they come out as
challenging behaviours*

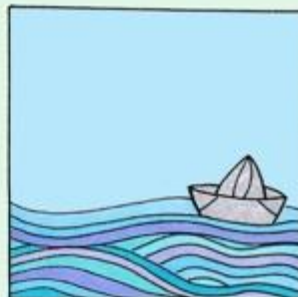
**EMOTIONS NEED TO BE RELEASED
AND EXPRESSED**

Children need ADULTS to grow the capacity to temper their emotions

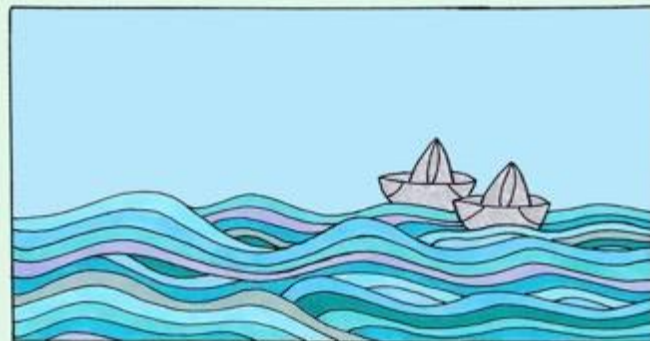
WHEN THEIR STORM



MEETS OUR CALM



CO - REGULATION OCCURS



Emotional support and accompaniment must come first and pave the way towards emotional self-control.

A child's capacity to regulate their emotions

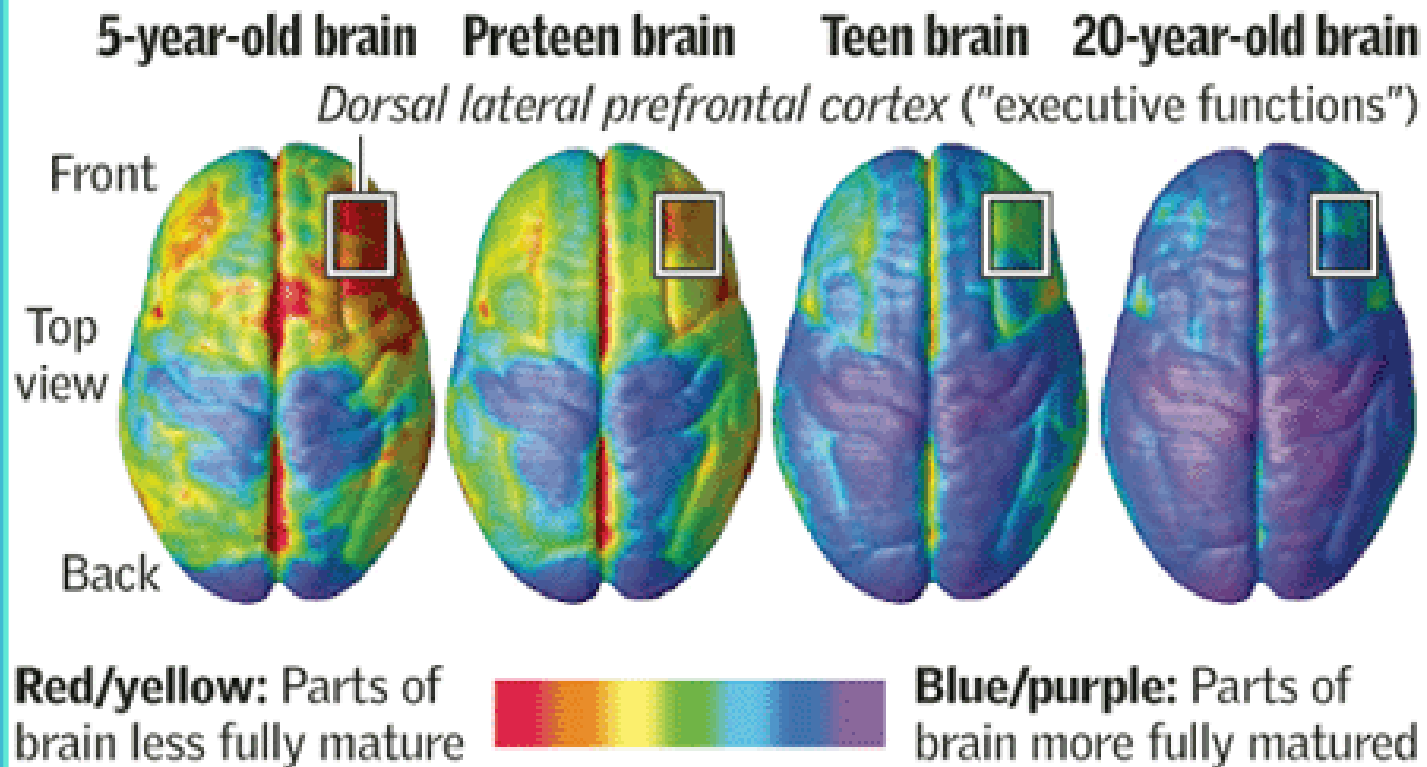
It starts with
co-regulation.

Younger children have no filter and can only do one emotion at a time, which makes 'managing their emotions' quite difficult.

- ✓ Come alongside their big emotions and act as a grounding element for them, modeling ways to manage emotions.
- ✓ Use the proper name of each emotion to show that they are valid. Be careful not to categorize emotions as good or bad.
- ✓ Set up games and engaging/playful activities that will help children express their emotions safely (to make headway, we must work preventatively around incidents).
- ✓ Provide opportunities for emotional development that go beyond the focus of self-regulation (inviting the children to explore and express their emotions).

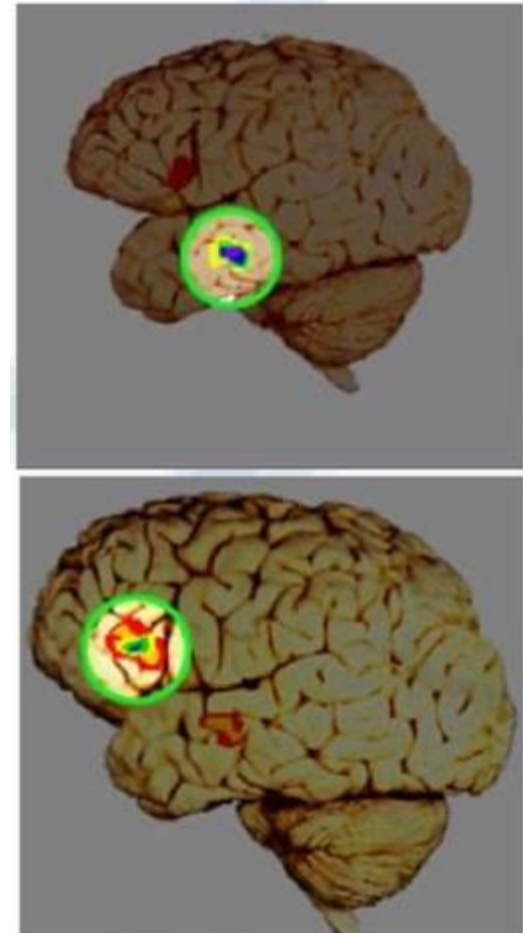
Judgment last to develop

The area of the brain that controls "executive functions" — including weighing long-term consequences and controlling impulses — is among the last to fully mature. Brain development from childhood to adulthood:

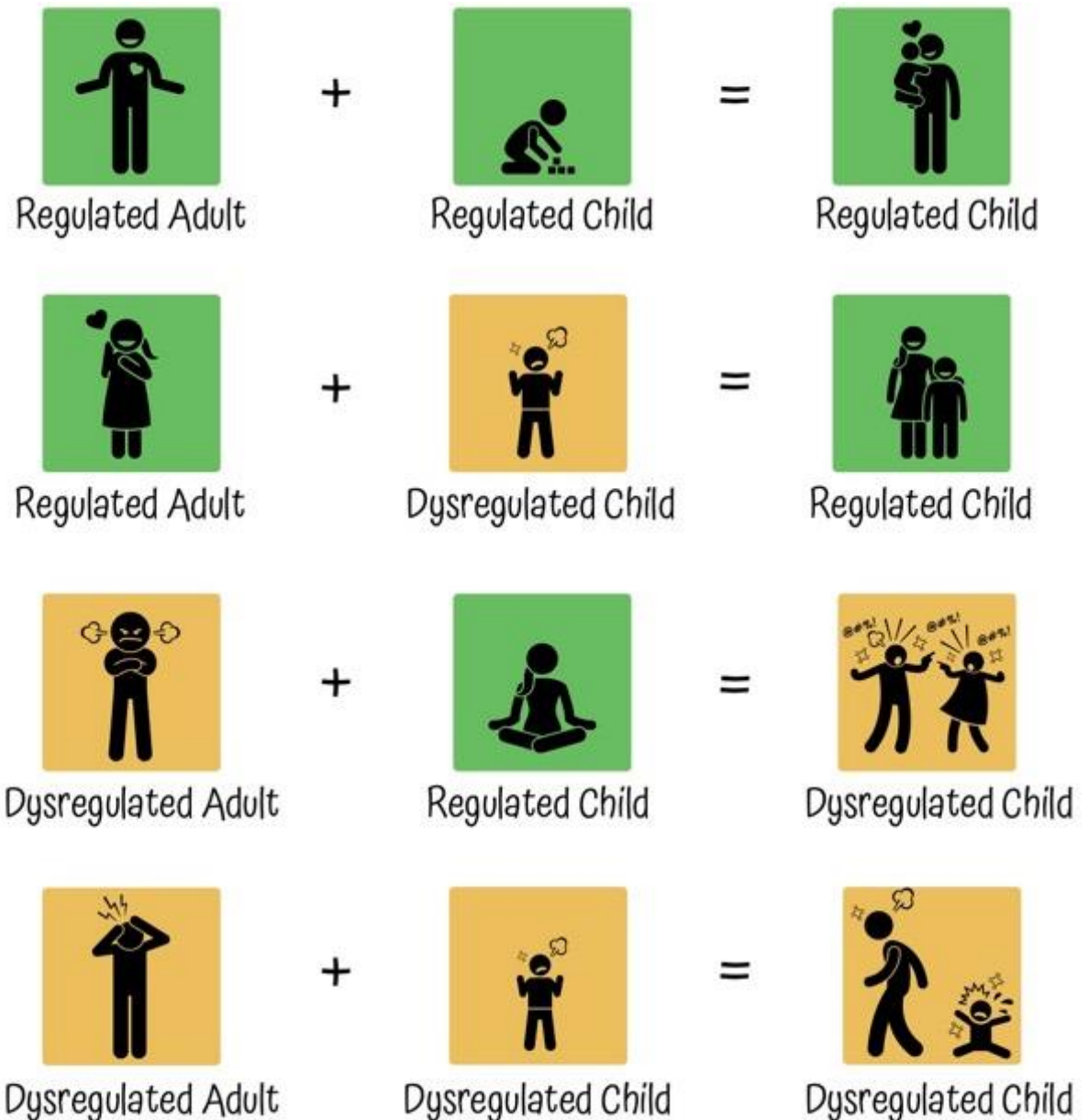


Emotional regulation requires Prefrontal cortex development

- Young children don't yet have a fully developed pre-frontal cortex, which means their emotions cannot be well filtered or slowed down.
- They also don't experience much cognitive dissonance or mixed feelings (ONE thought or emotion at a time).
- They have great difficulty with perspective taking and with reflection, especially when upset.



The importance of adult regulation



Playing out emotions

Play is like a release valve – it allows the emotions to flow through.



A child's self-awareness

It starts with opportunities for exploration in the **play mode** and attempts to try out different identities.

- ✓ Create time and space for play to occur.
- ✓ Provide a variety of materials and props to accompany their play.
- ✓ Ensure to offer tools to help the child discover their body sensations as well (body silhouette, sensory box, etc.)
- ✓ No need to get involved; let play do its thing.

Self-awareness and consciousness



- From ages 5 to 7, a child develops a sense of SELF, as they put up boundaries (what “I” feel, what “I” like, etc.)
- After around age 7, a child begins to be able to mix with others without fusing and “losing” themselves.
- Having a ‘soft heart’ and feeling our emotions is required for this process to unfold.

A child's confidence and positive self-regard

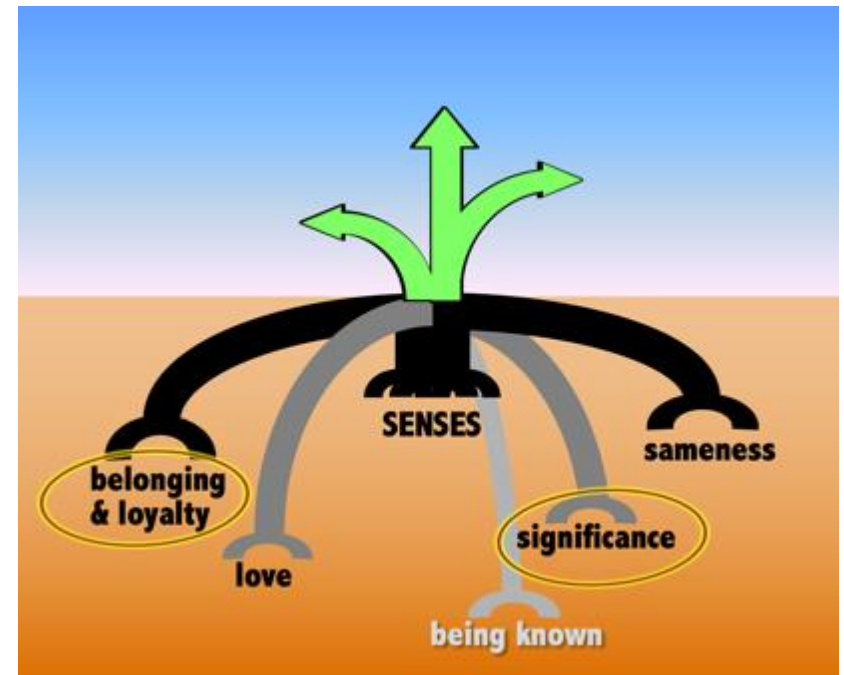
It starts with a sense of **belonging & mattering.**

Support them in feeling cared for, important, included, listened to and understood.

- ✓ Greet each child and show interest by asking them about their loved ones, interests, plans and activities.
- ✓ Encourage them to try new things and highlight their efforts. Introduce the concept of the '*Power of YET*' (help the children visualize that, with practice and determination, they will eventually be able to accomplish what is currently challenging for them).
- ✓ Convey that everyone makes mistakes and that it's okay.
- ✓ Provide opportunities for the child to experience being helpful, such as being the teacher's helper and setting up the calendar, daily schedule, song for the day, today's weather, etc.

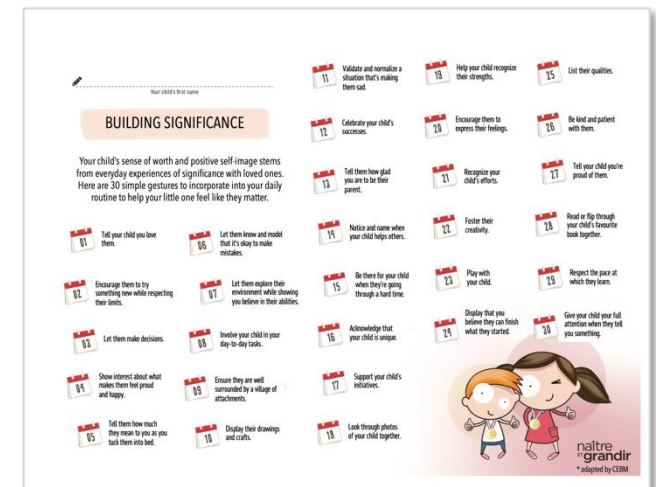
Quest for value through attachment

- Having an accurate self-perception and good self-confidence requires an acceptance of oneself and positive self-worth.
- These fruit stem from a fulfilled sense of **belonging** (feeling welcomed and included) and **significance** (feeling valued and cherished).



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Quest for value through attachment



<https://macnamara.ca/infographics/>

<https://naitreetgrandir.com/documentsng/pdf/en/cartes-101gestes-en.pdf>

https://www.cebmmember.ca/_files/ugd/931e65_86889b8234144d93977e5bec47ef4e9c.pdf

Themes in Emotional Development

Attachment,
belonging

Naming,
recognizing
emotion

Range and
intensity of
emotion

Expressing,
releasing
emotion

Grumpiness,
frustration,
upset

Fear, worry,
being brave

Sadness,
loneliness, tears

Emotional
safety, comfort

Bodily
sensations

Knowing and
appreciating
oneself

Hypersensitivity,
neurodiversity

Emotional co-
regulation

<https://www.cebmmember.ca/k4-k5-emotional-development>

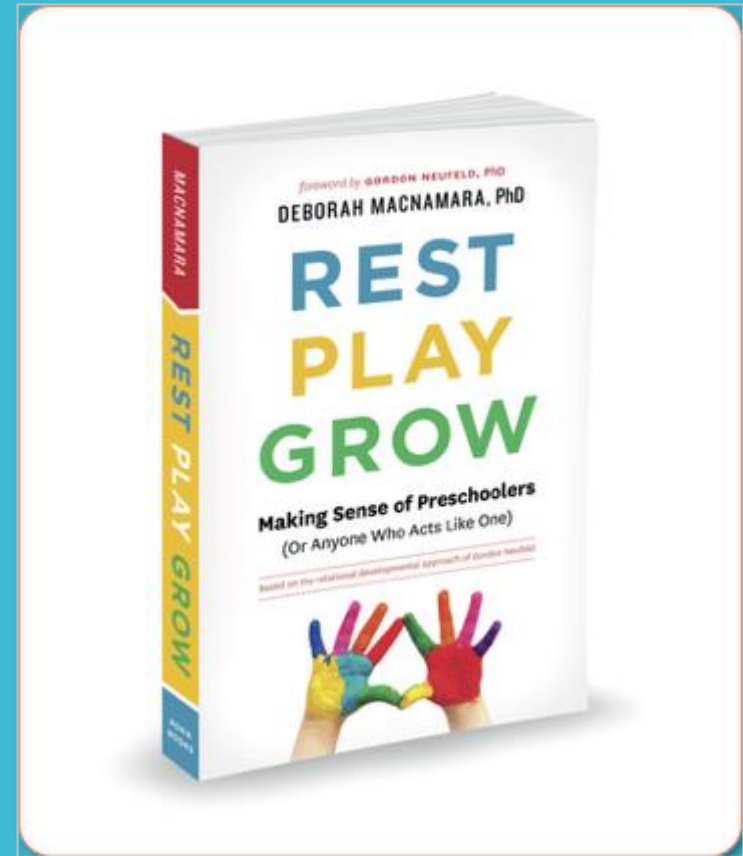
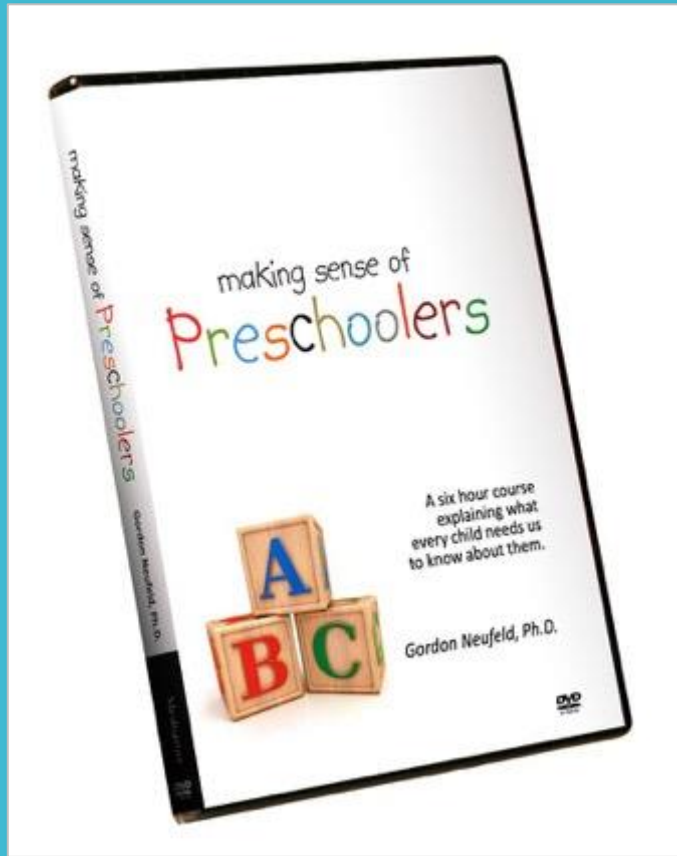
Emotional development practices

- Setting up the context to **accompany emotional development** by using:
 - ✓ children's books and games on emotions
 - ✓ photographs (using real faces to help children read actual facial expressions)
 - ✓ emotional creative art activities, dress-up, puppets, role playing, imaginary play, etc.
- Providing opportunities for **emotional release**
- Offering a variety of tools and materials to discover **body sensations** (body silhouette, sensory box, etc.)

Emotional development practices

- Creating the context to help the children ‘experience’ a **comforting and calming feeling** through the senses (e.g. play soft music, dim lighting, soft comfy textures, sensory materials, calming nature scenes, comforting scents, etc.)
- Providing measures to allow for **play, movement, respite**, and time **outdoors**, which helps with emotional support
- Being careful with categorizing emotions, which may bring out guilt and/or shame around their expression – all emotions are important and play a key role
- Providing opportunities for emotional development, which goes beyond the focus of self-regulation (inviting the children to explore and express their emotions)

A neurodevelopmental approach based on play and attachment



<https://www.neufeldinstitute.org>

<https://macnamara.ca>

Resources for parents on emotional development



CEBM K4-K5 toolkit for emotional and social development

YouTube read aloud weblinks

EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT (in alphabetical order)

- All We Need is Love: <https://youtu.be/9ENMofRF0RY?si=CdFi-UiCm-GYETep>
- Charlie's Balloons: No link available
- Giraffes Can't Dance: https://youtu.be/1a2Smau__Dk?si=SKye9yXJ7tnDZly6
- Happy: <https://youtu.be/EKI9QpNzBDs?si=mMuqT426Kb-HyPv->
- I am One: https://youtu.be/mZ2_0ni0Td4?si=ZXxoYM7r9KxTnymK
- I Like Myself: <https://youtu.be/HVp8DtaWUvO?si=hrTW8CgynMikgFQ>
- I've Lost My Cat: <https://youtu.be/kLax5J5FWcl?si=ceGmMGk31FM65Ck>
- Marvin Gets Mad: <https://youtu.be/QTZOtmNgT0?si=2fMw3fEkaAF6vulG>
- My Brain is a Race car: https://youtu.be/145U_4ZdHls?si=WT5OJ1oYvUvB_WHZ
- My Shadow is Purple: <https://youtu.be/JDLvFOk7E2Q?si=Ii5oXNh0lcNCB7ld>
- Our Class is a Family: <https://youtu.be/rw9NstM1Q4E>
- Ravi's Roar: https://youtu.be/0dJLs7wWrdY?si=dSeYaPMhL50wt2_A
- Ruby Finds a Worry: <https://youtu.be/VCyilH2SJU?si=zuwGRnu7yh0fBkdS>
- The Bad Mood and the Stick: https://youtu.be/NjryYgc_eAQ?si=Yp9hJlnZFdQlxsKp
- The Branch: <https://youtu.be/3roTrrgjsG?si=2GOa2aYWhps7fxcm>
- The Invisible Boy: <https://youtu.be/9f17dBpzDG8?si=nY-Kv17By3zkmtl>
- The Invisible String: https://youtu.be/xm7syTd9xSs?si=eJ4UWl_blnzMKrUd
- The Kissing Hand: <https://youtu.be/C5XMX5GCCe4?si=4AR87Dv1POXFvB08>
- The Lion and The Bird: <https://youtu.be/BBt4A-iiWU?si=x8N2fujnpYwNEvL>
- The Nowhere Box: <https://youtu.be/PC3UB3oz02M?si=aHuZXbkqXkop-UyF>
- The Rabbit Listened: <https://youtu.be/rBjAWkog9n0?si=F3sH30EmxEL1dCU1>
- Why Do You Cry: <https://youtu.be/XYB6jRCFrgw?si=LoZSPohFqjNwuh2L>

1



CEBM K4-K5 toolkit for emotional and social development

ADULT RESOURCES – Articles by theme

EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Attachment, safety, belonging

<https://www.cebmmember.ca/post/answering-a-child-s-hunger-for-connection-why-relationships-matter>
<https://www.cebmmember.ca/post/why-kids-don-t-need-attention-but-an-invitation-for-relationship>
<https://macnamara.ca/portfolio/can-a-child-be-too-attached-to-their-parent/>
<https://hannahbeach.ca/when-drop-offs-are-hard-helping-kids-feel-safe/>
<https://macnamara.ca/portfolio/5-things-parents-say-to-kids-that-can-turn-the-tables-on-their-relationship/>

Naming and recognizing emotion

<https://naitreetgrandir.com/en/feature/our-children-s-emotions/>
<https://macnamara.ca/portfolio/five-things-you-might-not-know-about-human-emotion/>
<https://www.cebmmember.ca/post/the-emotional-lives-of-young-children>

Expressing, releasing and regulating emotion

<https://www.cebmmember.ca/post/challenging-behaviors-why-we-shouldn-t-expect-kids-to-self-regulate-too-soon>
<https://hannahbeach.ca/kids-need-a-safe-space-to-feel/>
<https://macnamara.ca/portfolio/freedom-of-expression-guiding-kids-emotions-into-maturity/>
<https://hannahbeach.ca/emotional-safety/>
<https://macnamara.ca/portfolio/true-play-why-kids-need-play-sanctuaries-for-their-emotions/>

Grumpiness, upset, frustration, tantrums

<https://macnamara.ca/portfolio/when-push-comes-to-shove-the-answer-to-childrens-aggression/>
<https://macnamara.ca/portfolio/what-our-kids-need-us-to-understand-about-aggression/>
<https://macnamara.ca/portfolio/ten-things-not-to-do-when-a-child-is-frustrated-or-having-a-tantrum/>
<https://hannahbeach.ca/frustrating-play/>

Worry, fear, being brave

<https://macnamara.ca/portfolio/what-kids-worry-and-fear-at-different-ages/>
<https://macnamara.ca/portfolio/when-the-worry-bugs-are-in-your-tummy-helping-a-child-with-anxiety/>
<https://macnamara.ca/portfolio/taming-bedtime-monsters-when-sleepy-time-is-scary/>
<https://www.cebmmember.ca/post/separation-anxiety-when-saying-good-bye-is-hard>
<https://www.cebmmember.ca/post/starting-school-four-strategies-for-helping-with-separation-anxiety-and-settling-in>
<https://hannahbeach.ca/when-drop-offs-are-hard-helping-kids-feel-safe/>
<https://macnamara.ca/portfolio/helping-kids-bounce-back-the-keys-to-resiliency/>
<https://naitreetgrandir.com/en/feature/common-childhood-fears-and-how-to-deal-with-them/>

Sadness, loneliness, tears

<https://macnamara.ca/portfolio/how-tears-cultivate-resiliency-in-kids/>
<https://hannahbeach.ca/why-we-cry-over-small-things/>
<https://monadelahooks.com/when-a-child-cries-ignore-the-experts-not-the-tears/>

Knowing and appreciating oneself, accepting making mistakes

<https://www.cebmmember.ca/post/cultivating-self-worth-in-kids-what-it-means-to-matter>
<https://macnamara.ca/portfolio/5-ways-to-grow-confident-kids/>
<https://neufeldinstitute.org/editorials/in-praise-of-limiting-praise/>
<https://hannahbeach.ca/paralyzed-by-perfection-the-power-of-emotional-safety/>
<https://childmind.org/article/12-tips-raising-confident-kids/>

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<https://www.cebmmember.ca/k4-k5-emotional-development>

Resources for parents on emotional development

Emotional Development

Suggestions for PARENTS

- Support your child in feeling **CARED FOR**, important, and included. Show interest in their likes, plans and activities. Set up regular family activities without screens. *A child's well-being starts with them feeling like they MATTER and BELONG.*
- Come alongside their big **EMOTIONS**. Focus on naming them and making room for their expression even when it's uncomfortable. *Self-regulation starts with CO-REGULATION.*
- Create time and space for **PLAY** and let it do its thing. Opportunities to explore through play facilitate the process for children to develop their sense of self. *Self-awareness starts in the PLAY mode.*
- Be **PATIENT** when your child makes a mistake. Convey that it's okay and that mistakes happen to all of us. Encourage trying new things and highlight efforts. *Self-appreciation and confidence starts with a strong sense of SIGNIFICANCE.*
- Provide what your child **NEEDS** to thrive. Rest, play and emotional release are key for children to feel safe. *When a child FEELS BETTER, they do better.*

Younger children have no filter and can only do 1 emotion at a time, which makes managing their emotions quite difficult. The fruit of development follows.

Centre of Excellence for Behavioural Research

BINGO

THE MOOD STATIONS

Materials needed

- Soccer balls (balls), a soccer or hockey field
- Long pieces of bubble wrap
- Toy microphones
- Bin with lots of tennis balls
- Two balloons filled with water, plastic glasses
- Hoops to set up a jumping sequence

MOOD Stations – Setting up different stations outside for the children to explore, moving from one to another. Each station should have a different focus:

- Kicking station** – large bin containing numerous soccer balls that can be kicked into a bin. A goal is not necessary as the objective is to kick out as much energy as possible.
- Snooping station** – laying out long pieces of bubble wrap for the children to stomp on.
- creaming station** – providing toy microphones for the children to scream into. It is recommended that this station is set up furthest from the classroom windows.
- Throwing station** – a large bin filled with tennis balls to throw against the school wall.
- Running station** – placing water buckets at opposite ends with small plastic glasses for the children to fill from the starting point. They should then run to the end point and pour what's left in their glass into the bucket.
- Jumping station** – setting up a row of consecutive hula hoops, leaving a small distance in between.

NOTE: Numerous other stations can be set up to create a circuit for children to move through and burn off plenty of energy.

Feeling Wheel

7 MINUTE HIIT WORKOUT FOR KIDS

DO AS MANY OF EACH MOVE AS YOU CAN IN 15 SECONDS. TAKE A 15 SECOND BREAK IN BETWEEN.

- FROG JUMP** – Jump up and down like a frog.
- BEAR WALK** – With your hands and feet on the floor, hop high with left leg.
- GORILLA WALK** – In a crouch, support your hands on the floor, hop high with left leg.
- STARFISH JUMPS** – Jump up and down with arms and legs spread wide (up and down).
- CHEETAH RUN** – Run in place, crouch down, and hop high with left leg.
- CRAB WALK** – On your hands and knees, walk forward, backward, and side to side.
- ELEPHANT STOMPS** – Walk in place, stomping your feet as hard as you can.

EXTRAORDINARY
YOU'RE BEING AN EXTRAORDINARY KID!

FEELING EMOTIONS

Children between the ages of 2 and 5 cannot manage their emotions alone. Your role is to allow them to experience and express all of their emotions.

Handling temper tantrums

- Stay close, keep calm,** and have them feel safe.
- Name their emotions** – "You look angry because you don't like the way you were treated."
- Talk things out when they've calmed down** – "What can we do to make you feel better?"
- Accept your child's emotions without judgment** – "What's going on, sweetheart?"
- Listen to your child** – and look them in the eye when they talk to you.
- Help them get past their outburst** – "You were angry because you were hungry."

Are words not working? Try giving your child a hug or making one of their stuffed animals talk. If your child is sulking, it's probably because they don't know how else to respond to the emotion. Be there for them. "I'll be there for you. Come see me when you're ready."

Quebec

MANAGING STRESS

Stress is a normal part of life. Your role is to support your 3 to 5-year-old when dealing with it.

Help your child

- Acknowledge their emotions** – "You feel sad because we left your doggie at home yesterday."
- Find time to play and laugh** – When you're together, pretend you're playing with a new toy.
- Encourage discovery** – Make time to try a new game or activity.
- Give them some free time** – Allow them to explore and play without your help.
- Help them overcome challenges** – "You can do it! Your children and I help you."
- Slow down** – Take time to spend some time at work, spend a few minutes doing a craft project, or take a break to do something else.

Moving a routine that allows for physical activity, proper sleep, and a balanced, varied diet helps to minimize stress.

Quebec

LOVING

Spending time with your 3 to 5-year-old will help the love of your bond. Your role is to make intentional moments.

With your child

- Show them love by respecting their boundaries** – "I understand you don't want to play with me right now."
- Find ways to make them smile** – "I love you because you are so smart."
- Arguing is normal. When you lose your temper, try the following:**
 - Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths.
 - Take a break if you need to. Don't go back to your child until you feel calm.
 - Express your emotions. "I'm frustrated because I'm having a hard time."
 - Provide solutions. "You can do this together. I'll help you with this step and you'll help me with this step."

Sometimes, you may lose your temper and yell. Try saying "I'm sorry for yelling. I was tired of repeating myself."

Quebec

PLAYING

Play is important for your 3 to 5-year-old's development. Your role is to allow them to play a variety of age-appropriate games.

With your child

- Moving develops:**
 - their brain
 - their balance
 - their muscles
- Playing with others teaches:**
 - how to share, resolve conflicts, and negotiate.
- Expressing their ideas during play develops their language skills.**
- Encourage play**
 - Schedule time to play with your child and make sure they get to play with their toys.
 - Show interest in what they're doing: "You are so good at building a castle!"
 - Give them access to a variety of toys, such as blocks, beads, string, and glue.
 - Take them to different places to play, such as the park, the library, the beach, or the store, so they can explore.

When you let your child play with dolls or trucks, or let them pick out their own costumes, they develop their curiosity and discover their preferences.

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BUILDING SIGNIFICANCE

Your child's sense of worth and positive self-image stems from everyday experiences of significance with loved ones. Here are 30 simple gestures to incorporate into your daily routine to help your little one feel like they matter.

1. Validate and normalize a situation that's making them sad.
2. Calculate your child's successes.
3. Tell them how glad you are to be their parent.
4. Have a quiet time to sit and play with them.
5. Have a quiet time to sit and play with them.
6. Be there for your child when they're going through a hard time.
7. Acknowledge that your child is unique.
8. Support your child's decisions.
9. Look through photos of your child together.
10. Tell them how much they mean to you and how much you love them.
11. Display their drawings and crafts.
12. Celebrate their achievements.
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26. Display their drawings and crafts.
27. Celebrate their achievements.
28. Tell them how much they mean to you and how much you love them.
29. Display their drawings and crafts.
30. Celebrate their achievements.

Quebec

Resources for Parent Night

Video capsule



Emotional Development

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*Self-awareness starts in the **PLAY** mode*
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*Self-appreciation and confidence starts with a strong sense of **SIGNIFICANCE***
- Provide what your child **NEEDS** to thrive. Rest, play and emotional release are key for children to feel safe.
*When a child **FEELS BETTER**, they do better*

Teenager children have no filter and can only do 1 emotion at a time, which makes 'managing their emotions' quite difficult.
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Social Development

Suggestions for PARENTS

- Make the **RELATIONSHIP** with your child a priority. Be mindful of your own reactions, as they have an impact on your child. Allow them to lean on you when they need help.
*Having a caring child starts by being **CARED FOR***
- Use **PLAY** to guide and direct your child. It will help minimize resistance. This can be done through games, stories, songs and chants.
*Engage their **DESIRE** to follow your lead*
- Be **PATIENT** when your child struggles with sharing. This is to be expected developmentally given their limited ability to consider others. Assist challenging situations by finding work arounds.
***HELP THEM OUT** instead of correcting them*
- Convey **UNDERSTANDING** when your child gets into conflicts. Young children get easily triggered emotionally. Don't force apologies until feeling sorry.
*A child's success in managing conflict starts with **ADULT SUPPORT** and **MODELING***
- Provide what your child **NEEDS** to do their best. Structure, predictability, opportunities for movement and respite are key for children to succeed.
*When a child has the '**RIGHT**' **CONDITIONS**, they do better*

Teenager children's brains are immature and still under construction, which makes the transition to school and 'getting along' quite difficult.
The fruit of development takes time.

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