

Contributions that can
be made by
emotional literacy for
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How can parents and carers, schools and communities aid the social and emotional wellbeing of children? Discuss what contribution can be made by 'emotional literacy'.

For many years, the emphasis on childhood has evolved on the cognitive and physical aspects of child development. Recently, more attention has been given on the emotional and social welfare of children's development.

Children's emotional maturity and immaturity on their personal happiness, performance and behaviour has finally been recognised, as a consequence, this is currently being recognised by schemes such as, 'The Healthy Schools Initiative'.

The Healthy Schools Initiative contributes significantly to emotional health and well-being. All children deserve the opportunity to achieve their full potential. This is set this out in the five 'Every Child Matters' (ECM) outcomes that are 'key' to children and young people's well-being: The five outcomes are:

- * Stay safe
- * Be healthy
- * Enjoy and achieve
- * Make a positive contribution
- * Achieve economic well-being

To achieve ECM, The HM document states 'children need to feel loved and valued, and be supported by a network of reliable and affectionate relationships. If they are denied the opportunity and support they need to

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achieve these outcomes, children are at increased risk not only of an impoverished childhood, but also of disadvantage and social exclusion in adulthood' (HM Government, 2006, pg 32).

In a nutshell, the promotion of positive emotional health and well-being helps young people and children to build their confidences and express their feelings. It embeds the understanding and their capacity to learn effectively.

' Emotional literacy is the ability to understand ourselves and others and to be aware of, understand and to use information about the emotional states of others with competence. It includes the ability to understand, express and manage our own emotions, and respond to the emotions of others, in ways that are helpful to ourselves and others. Developing the Emotionally Literate School' (Weare, 2004)

Emotional Intelligence is linked to ' The Nurturing Programme'. The programme originated in the United States as a result of research undertaken by Dr Stephen J. Bavolek who pioneered in the prevention of child abuse and neglect and the development of family life. The programme aims to enable children to become emotionally literate by exploring ideas which can contribute to learning to manage our emotions. Learning these skills can improve our motivation, help us feel good about ourselves and explores ideas for managing our emotions. Learning these skills can contribute to building self-esteem, which is crucial to provide positive attitude towards living. This is important as it controls how you think, the way you act and more importantly, how you relate to other people.

Consequently, emotional literacy leads to emotional health; this health can have a huge impact on your potential to be successful in every aspect of life.

All ingredients for emotional literacy are reflected in the Nurturing programme. The programme offers an effective way of encouraging co-operative behaviour, which empowers both parent/carer and children. It is also an emotional literacy programme. It is therefore crucial to state, that as a facilitator we need to reflect upon our own level of emotional literacy, as we cannot help others to become more emotionally literate unless we are emotional literate ourselves.

We are all born with emotional intelligence and naturally, wired to our brains. However, how this emotional literacy develops depends on the kind of relationships they have and the adults caring for them.

There are five elements of emotional literacy reflect the key principles of the Nurturing Programme. These are required in order to develop and become emotionally literate.

Family Links quotes these key principles as:

• **‘ Knowing our emotions**

Self-awareness - recognising a feeling as it happens - is the first stage. We can eventually learn to stay aware, simply noticing the emotion rather than being overwhelmed by it, however turbulent we may be feeling at the time. This takes a lot of practice!

• Managing our emotions

Handling our feelings builds on our awareness of them. It's helpful if we have ways of reassuring ourselves when we're feeling anxious, calming down when we're angry, soothing ourselves when we are upset, and so on. Every feeling has its value and significance – they're signposts to what's going on in our lives. The ratio of comfortable to painful feelings determines our emotional well-being.

• Motivating ourselves

Harnessing our emotions to help us identify our goals and reach them helps us to achieve our aims. If we are kindly in charge of our emotions, rather than being overwhelmed by them, we can also take charge of our actions. We can guide our behaviour positively, and also resist the lure of instant gratification – in other words, we develop self-discipline.

• Recognising emotions in others

Empathy, the ability to be sensitively aware of what another person is feeling, is the most important 'people skill' of all, and essential for satisfying relationships. Children who are treated with empathy and respect will grow up to be empathic and respectful towards others.

*** Handling relationships**

Building on empathy, the art of relationships is based on skill in coping with emotions in others while also managing and expressing our own effectively – having good communication skills. Emotionally skilled people are great to be with because we enjoy their rapport. People who have these skills are easy to trust with our feelings, and learning these skills ourselves enhances all our relationships.' (Family Links, 2004)

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Contained in the Nurture programme are four constructs, which fundamentally become the programmes building blocks. All the approaches, strategies and ideas in the Nurturing Programme are based on these four key concepts as outlined by Family Links:

- **Self-awareness and self-esteem**

The art of self-awareness is to know ourselves well – what we do and don't like, what our needs are, how we feel. If we are sensitive towards ourselves, it's easier to look after our needs. Nurturing ourselves by meeting our own needs helps to boost our self-esteem, making it easier for us to nurture others and particularly to help children develop their self-awareness and a healthy, positive self-esteem.

- **Appropriate expectations**

Children grow up in different ways: physically, intellectually, socially and emotionally. We need to match our expectations to what they can actually do. They learn all the thousands of skills at different rates. What one child finds easy another child of the same age might find hard. If we expect too much or too little of them, children tend to become rebellious, frustrated and angry, or to give up in despair. It is helpful to them if we recognise each small step in their learning.

- **Positive discipline**

All children need discipline to learn what behaviour is OK and what is not. Positive discipline focuses on praise, rewarding their efforts, giving choices, negotiating and awarding responsibility. There are also fair penalties for poor behaviour. It makes life more enjoyable for adults and children, and helps to build self-esteem. Negative discipline, on the other hand, uses punishment
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and fear; it is stressful for everyone. There is convincing evidence to suggest that developing the social and emotional competence of children and young people leads to improved well-being, self-esteem, pro-social behaviour and higher achievement.

• **Empathy**

This is the cornerstone of the Nurturing Programme. Empathy is the ability to sense how someone else is feeling, to tune in to their emotional point of view. We don't have to agree with what the other person thinks – just to be sensitive to the way they feel, and to accept it. An empathic response to a child's inner world, to their excitement, frustrations and fears, fosters a close, trusting relationship, and helps them learn to respond sensitively towards others ' (Family Links, 2004)

The author works with children weekly within the school environment. The work centres on supporting the development of children's personal, social, emotional and behavioural growth. The aim is to:

- * Raise children's self awareness
- * Develop healthy self esteem and confidence
- * Help children to manage their emotions and behaviour/social difficulties
- * Improve motivation and improve learning opportunities in and out of school

The children work on individual targets, and sessions help them practice the skills they require to meet these targets both within class and all areas of their lives. A balance of role models promote group dynamics and peer

support. A wide range of techniques are used within the session which includes:

- * Art focused work
- * Structured play
- * Drama
- * Counselling approaches
- * Relaxation, visualisation and reflection exercises
- * Circle time discussions
- * Reflection exercises

Parent/carers play a huge role in their child's social and emotional well-being. It is important in its own right, simply because it can affect their physical health for both the child and parent/carer and can have a detrimental effect on how well the child does at school. Therefore, good social, emotional and psychological health protects children from emotional and behavioral problems, misuse of drugs and alcohol, for example.

Therefore, it is equally important to pay attention to the social and emotional skills that children develop in their earliest years, as it will enable them to succeed through the transition from primary to secondary school and into adulthood. In a nutshell, responsibility for school readiness lies not with the child, but with the parent/carers who care for them and the educational systems in place to support them.

Critically, intervention may not be successful with all children and families, especially those with Special Educational Needs (SEN), English as an Additional Language (EAL) and a withdrawn and shy child. One must take into account the dynamics of the group and these must be taken into account when actively planning intervention. Therefore, group work may not be the appropriate solution, therefore one to one teaching may be a useful strategy in order to provide intervention.

This work complements existing national initiatives to promote social and emotional well-being. It should be considered in the context of the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programme and related community-based initiatives. These initiatives stress the importance of such programmes to enable children to participate fully in the development to ensure their views are heard.

To conclude, we are now beginning to understand that by providing these enriched environments children and young people are more able to develop emotional intelligence and maturity far more effectively than they used to. Many schools, like mine, is putting so much emphasis into the development, simply because it leads to so many benefits. Therefore, schools are finding ways to explicitly place emotional literacy at the heart of the curriculum with their approach to learning, teaching, delivery, behaviour and well-being. Staff are being specifically training and coaching enable them to put the theory into practice.

It is important to stress, virtually all the interventions described, only work if they are embedded in the whole community. Those efforts can promote

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resilience and build the strengths that already exist in the family and the community.

References

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Family Links The Nurturing Programme Handbook for Parent Group Leaders, 2004

Weare, K, ' Developing the Emotionally Literate School', London: Paul Chapman Publishing, 2004

Knowledge and understanding of:

* 1. 2 the emotional, physical, intellectual, social and moral lives of children aged 0-12 as they develop and experience transitions in their lives.

Cognitive skills:

* 2. 4 identify and reflect on own values and positions and those of others, and assess their relationships to policy and practice.

Practical and professional skills:

* 4. 3 develop communication and engagement skills that could be applied to work with children

* 4. 4 understand the importance of sharing information and developing critical analytical practice that will contribute to a) listening to children b) promoting children's wellbeing and c) multi-agency working with children and families.

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After many years of emphasis on the cognitive and physical aspects of childhood development, recently more attention has been focused on the social and emotional developmental cycles of children. The impact of a child's relative emotional maturity or immaturity on their behaviour, performance and personal happiness is finally being recognised.

Furthermore, the issue of mental (emotional) health has been acknowledged as part of schemes such as 'The Healthy Schools Initiative'.

Against a background of increasing social exclusion, a worrying trend in diminishing self-esteem in teenage boys, and increasing numbers of children being recognised as having 'additional learning needs' or presenting challenging behaviour, there is a growing pressure to find solutions. A child's capacity to learn and grow depends to a very significant extent on their ability to manage personal and social tasks. Without the ability to be aware of their emotional states and self-management skills to contain and handle these, their work will suffer. Without the ability to be aware of others, what they are feeling and to practise relationship management skills, their friendships and social support will vanish.

There has also been a steady rise in recognition of the importance of sound self-esteem for children. This recognition has emerged through psychological studies into the aetiology of behaviour disorders, learning difficulties and other disturbances to the steady development and maturation of children. This has coincided with research into human Emotional Intelligence and the development of emotional literacy training programmes. Emotional Intelligence is now known to play a very significant part in achieving goals set, as well as being the foundation for personal satisfaction.

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Many gifted educators and child-care workers have already developed excellent emotional literacy programmes to support and develop children at every level of need. These enable children to learn the skills and abilities to give them greater emotional awareness, more emotional control and strong relationship building skills. This in turn leads to higher emotional intelligence, and usually, sound self-esteem. <http://www.schoolofemotional-literacy.com/content.asp?ArticleCode=147>

We now understand that by providing these environments, together with specific training and coaching in personal and social skills, we can enable children and young people to develop emotional maturity far more effectively than we could before. Many schools believe that emotional intelligence can and must be developed because it leads to so many benefits. They are therefore finding ways to explicitly place emotional literacy at the heart of their approach to learning, teaching, achieving, behaviour change and well-being.

The environments that encourage emotional and social competence are:

- * an enriched physical environment

- * an enriched emotional environment.

Aspects of emotional literacy

The various aspects of emotional literacy as described by Katherine Weare in her book 'Developing the Emotionally Literate School' are outlined here.

Self-understanding:

- * having an accurate and positive view of ourselves

- * having a sense of optimism about the world and ourselves
- * having a coherent and continuous life story.

Understanding and managing emotions:

- * experiencing the whole range of emotions
- * understanding the causes of our emotions
- * expressing our emotions appropriately
- * managing our responses to our emotions effectively: for example, managing our anger, controlling our impulses
- * knowing how to feel good more often and for longer
- * using information about emotions to plan and solve problems
- * resilience: processing, and bouncing back from, difficult experiences.

Understanding social situations and making relationships:

- * forming attachments to other people
- * experiencing empathy for others
- * communicating with others and responding effectively
- * managing our relationships effectively
- * being autonomous, independent and self-reliant.

Every parent, every politician, and every teacher want young children to enter kindergarten ready to succeed. Often the focus is on cognitive skills,

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early literacy, or early math, and indeed there are exciting new developments in early education. But it is equally important to pay attention to the social and emotional skills that young children develop in their earliest years. These skills-how children manage their feelings, follow directions, concentrate, relate to other children and to teachers, and approach learning-will enable them to succeed as they transition to kindergarten and first grade.

. Importantly, virtually all the interventions described here work best if they are embedded in a larger community effort to promote resilience and build on the strengths that exist in families and communities.

Four core assumptions shaped the guide:

- * The family plays the most important role in a young child's life.
- * Responsibility for school readiness lies not with children, but with the adults who care for them and the systems that support them.
- * The first 5 years of life are a critical developmental period.
- * Child development occurs across equally important and interrelated domains-physical and motor, social and emotional, language, and cognitive.

The guide is intended to be especially useful for:

- * Child care providers, preschool and kindergarten teachers, and others who work directly with young children and their families.
- * Families and school readiness coordinators and administrators involved in organizing early childhood school readiness and early literacy campaigns.

- * Family support advocates and others who provide support to parents and other caregivers (e. g., grandparents and foster parents) of young children.
- * Community leaders and coalitions who understand the importance of reaching out to young children and families to ensure early school success.
- * Mental health and other professionals who want to do more to ensure that young children and families get help when they need it.

Section I answers frequently asked questions about why it is important to pay attention to social and emotional development as part of school readiness. Section II provides examples of the resources that are available to help programs and community planners as they seek, intentionally, to promote social and emotional school readiness. It is organized in three parts:

- * Resources to Help Parents describes resources and strategies that can help parents, particularly low-income parents and others raising young children, promote healthy emotional development in young children.
- * Resources to Help Child Care Providers and Teachers describes resources and strategies that can help child care providers and teachers promote healthy social and emotional development and school readiness.
- * Resources to Help Young Children and Families Facing Special Stresses describes resources and strategies that can promote resilience in the most stressed young children and families so that these children, too, can enter school ready to succeed.

Each part provides examples of specific resources that can be embedded into and adapted to particular program and community circumstances.

Section II of this guide highlights several informal and community-based approaches that bring families and community leaders together to develop preventive strategies, connect existing resources better, and take action around high-priority challenges to promote early school success for all young children in the community.

The guide concludes in Section III with a set of questions to guide community action and 10 principles to guide action. This guide complements *Spending Smarter: A Funding Guide for Policymakers and Advocates to Promote Social and Emotional Health and School Readiness*, as well as a series of issue briefs that the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) has developed over the past several years. (For more information, see Appendix B or www.nccp.org.) Both documents recognize that for every young child to enter school ready to succeed, focusing solely on supporting the early physical, emotional, and cognitive development of young children is not enough. There must also be powerful and sustained attention to ensuring that families can earn enough to support their children, to improving the overall quality of child care and early learning experiences, and especially to ensuring that when young children enter schools, the schools are “ready for them.”

However, the guide also recognizes that for some young children and families, without intentional strategies that are focused on social and

emotional well-being, even “ ready” schools and “ ready” communities may not be enough.

http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_648.html