

Understanding and Supporting Your Child's Social Emotional Growth

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Why Are We Talking About Emotional Development?

- It's estimated that one in seven Victorians aged between 4 and 17 has a mental health issue (The Age, 25/10/18)
- RCH National Child Health Poll reported that one in four Australian Parents feel stressed everyday by their child's behaviour (rchpoll.org.au 2018)
- In our clinic we are seeing an increasing number of children who do not have a history of any learning or developmental challenges and are presenting with anxiety in primary school
- Anxiety and other mental health challenges can greatly impact upon a child's capacity to learn and perform to their potential in all areas of their lives

Emotional Milestones

0-5 Years (prior to entering Prep)

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Self Regulation/
Independence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be calm and regulated • Control impulses • Be attentive and focused • Persist with challenges |
| Relationships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relate warmly and pleasurably to parents • Relate to peers individually and in groups • Relate to new adults |
| Reality and
Fantasy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in and enjoy make-believe play, creating story lines with motives and emotions • Be able to distinguish make-believe from reality |
| Communication | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be able to show wants, desires, likes/dislikes and intentions using rich non-verbal communication • Be able to understand and respond to others gestures • Logically communicate two or more ideas (including emotional ideas) at one time |

Adapted from Greenspan and Salmon (1993)

Emotional Milestones

5 Years to 7 Years

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Self Regulation/
Independence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be able to complete self care activities with minimal support (dressing, washing, brushing teeth) • Be able to self-regulate (calm down, focus, process information) with minimal support |
| Relationships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoy and feel secure in relationships with parents • Be able to attempt to play parents off against one another and engage in plotting to get their own agenda met (including with siblings) • Be able to form relationships with peers and play independently of parents at home and at peers homes • Be able to struggle with peers to assert own ideas • Be able to manage with not getting their own way with parents or peers; showing appropriate upset, but being able to move on with time |

Adapted from Greenspan and Salmon (1993)

Emotional Milestones

5 Years to 7 Years

Reality and Fantasy

- Expression of imaginative play may continue to take the form of pretend play, but also extends to writing stories and lengthier and more complex games with peers that are ongoing over days/weeks/months

Emotional Thinking

- Let fears, shyness, worry and conflicts coexist with expectations
- Begin to better understand reasons for limits being set
- By 6yo they are able to understand there are multiple reasons or feelings causing someone to behave in a certain way
- By 6yo when upset with self they initially feel bad, but can then talk about their feelings in a balanced way

Adapted from Greenspan and Salmon (1993)

Emotional Milestones

8 Years to 10 Years

Self Regulation/ Independence

- Be able to concentrate for longer periods (half an hour or more), even on tasks that are hard
- Do at least some assignments and homework on own
- Complete most self care activities without support

Relationships

- Participate fully in peer group
- Be aware of and care about role in peer group
- Use parents in a guidance capacity to handle increasing complexity of peer relationships. Not using parents as a substitute for peer relationships
- Maintain a nurturing relationship with parents
- Be able to learn from parents rather than feeling controlled by parents
- Compete with, but also be close to and supportive of, siblings
- Begin to work out natural tensions with parents

Adapted from Greenspan and Salmon (1993)

Emotional Milestones

8 Years to 10 Years

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Reality and Fantasy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to be able to enjoy fantasy • Be able to follow rules (while also at times being rigid or try to interpret rules to suit themselves) |
| Communication/
Emotional Thinking | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise ideas into logical and more complex communications (including those dealing with emotions) • Order and prioritise emotions • Experience competition without avoiding it or becoming too aggressive, disorganised or compliant • Experience disappointment without withdrawing or becoming aggressive or disorganised |

Adapted from Greenspan and Salmon (1993)

Emotional Milestones

11 Years to 12 Years

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|----------------------------------|--|
| Self Regulation/
Independence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of an internal sense of self <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Able to define self by own ongoing characteristics rather than only by peer group perceptions ▪ Growing internal sense of right and wrong, even if it disagrees with peer group • Be able to concentrate and organise enough to carry out routine homework assignments on own and seek help when needed • Carry out all self care independently |
| Relationships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be able to enjoy one or a few closer friends and be less focused upon position in peer group • Take interest in parents and other adults as role models • Enjoy power struggles with the parent they are most dependent on as a way of becoming more independent |

Adapted from Greenspan and Salmon (1993)

Emotional Milestones

11 Years to 12 Years

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Reality and Fantasy | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be able to enjoy daydreams and begin to reflect on them• Be able to observe rules flexibly by understanding context |
| Communication/ Emotional Thinking | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be able to observe and to some degree reflect on own communication• Be able to understand and empathise better with other people's feelings• Be able to hold in mind and communicate about two competing feelings |
| Preparation for Puberty | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Take interest in (while often denying) potential romantic relationships• Feel privacy about own body• Have concerns about body and personality related to puberty |

Adapted from Greenspan and Salmon (1993)

Strategies to Support Social Emotional Growth

1. **Attuned Parent-Child Time**
2. **Empathic Limit Setting**
3. **Integrating the Left and Right Brain**
4. **Integrating the Upstairs Brain and the Downstairs Brain**

Attuned Parent-Child Time

- As children enter primary school the amount of time and attention they demand from you reduces
- Often results in parents having a tendency to disconnect from being involved in their children's emotional lives
- Family time needs to be cherished and occur on a daily basis
- One-on-one time is a way to reconnect and stay connected with your child's life

Attuned Parent-Child Time

- Special time (30 minutes a day) that you set aside to spend with your child one on one (turning your phone off for that period)
- Spontaneous, unstructured play or talk where you follow your child's lead and tune into your child on their level, reserving your own ideas for another time and fully exploring theirs
- Goes beyond "quality time" as child determines direction of the play or conversation
- Fully involved with your child – not TV or other passive activities like puzzles, board games or reading a book
- Give the child the sense that you can get down on their level and stay interested in them. This provides them with a strong sense of being cared for, loved, valued, secure and understood
- Creates opportunities for them to share their small concerns before they snowball into big ones

Setting Empathic Limits

- Hardest part is deciding what to limit; depends on your own personal values and attitudes as a parent
- Natural consequences:
 - That are not detrimental to the child's development
 - That relate in some way to the behaviour
 - Should not lack the human traits you are trying to teach
- Negotiate consequences and rewards in advance so they know what punishments and rewards will look like and there are no surprises

Setting Empathic Limits

- Set limits with empathy:
 - Goal is to be absolute in setting limits and enforcing them, but at the same time empathise with the child's plight
 - Fear of a child's discomfort or anger can be a major reason why parents find setting limits challenging
 - Calm yourself down before setting limits, if needed
- Do not let the relationship with your child turn into a power struggle, with you imposing your will on them with sheer force
- When you feel that you are increasing the frequency of limit setting with your child, you need to increase positive time as well

Integrating the Left and Right Brain

- Help your child to use both the logical left brain and the emotional right brain as a team
- **Connect and redirect**
 - When your child is upset, connect first emotionally
 - Once your child is more regulated and receptive, and you are completely calm, bring in the left-brain lessons and discipline
- **Name it to tame it**
 - When big right-brain emotions are raging out of control, help your child to 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

Adapted from Whole Brain Child; Siegel and Bryson 2012

Integrating the Upstairs Brain and the Downstairs Brain

- Watch for ways to help build the sophisticated upstairs brain, which is “under construction” during childhood and adolescence (between 12 and 24) and can be “hijacked” by the downstairs brain, especially in high-emotion situations
- **Engage, don't enrage**
 - In high-stress situations, engage your child's upstairs brain, rather than triggering the downstairs brain. Don't immediately play the “Because I said so” card. Instead, ask questions, request alternatives, even negotiate

Adapted from Whole Brain Child; Siegel and Bryson 2012

Integrating the Upstairs Brain and the Downstairs Brain

- **Use it or lose it**

- Provide lots of opportunities to exercise the upstairs brain. Play “What would you do?” games, and avoid rescuing kids from difficult decisions

- **Move it or lose it**

- When a child has lost touch with their upstairs brain, help them to regain balance by having them move their body

Adapted from Whole Brain Child; Siegel and Bryson 2012

Recommended Reading

Whole Brain Child – Dan Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson

No Drama Discipline – Dan Siegel and Tina Bryson

Brainstorm – Dan Siegel