What is the Nurturing Program?
The Nurturing Programme is a well-established 10-week program for parents and for children in schools. The Nurturing Programme develops communication and social skills, reduces abuse and neglect and encourages relationships that give children an emotionally healthy springboard for their lives and their learning. It does this by offering simple, yet very effective, tools for managing and understanding emotions and behaviour. It is based on four key ideas, arising out of research undertaken in the 1970s by psychologist Dr. Stephen J. Bavolek, a pioneer in the development of family education in the United States. Family Links provides training courses in the Nurturing Programme for multi-agency professionals across the UK who want to introduce the Programme in their area.

What is Emotional Literacy?
There are five main aspects of emotional intelligence to develop in order to become emotionally literate. These were identified by Daniel Goleman in his book Emotional Intelligence, and they relate closely to the ideas in the Nurturing Programme. They are:

- **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.
Emotional literacy and the Nurturing Programme

These five elements of emotional literacy reflect the key principles of the Nurturing Programme. Self-awareness and empathy are two of the Four Constructs, the building blocks of the Nurturing Programme. The Programme explores many ideas for managing our emotions; learning these skills improves our motivation and helps us to feel good about ourselves - building self-esteem, which is another of the Four Constructs. All of these have a positive effect on relationships.

The Nurturing Programme promotes emotional health in adults and in children. Everyone is born with emotional intelligence - it's a capacity wired into the brain. How this capacity develops is a person's emotional literacy, and this depends on the kind of relationships they have, initially with the adults caring for them. Emotional literacy leads to emotional health; emotional health helps us fulfil our potential in every aspect of life.

The Four Constructs provide the building blocks of the Nurturing Programme. All the approaches, strategies and ideas in the Programme are based on these four key concepts

**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 and fear; it is stressful for everyone.

**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.
What is the Impact of the Nurturing Programme?

The Nurturing Programme supports positive behaviour in children, and goes much further than that by exploring the emotional needs behind their behaviour. Research, particularly in the neurosciences, has shown that adults help to shape children's brains: empathic relationships in childhood have a radical effect on the developing brain, most crucially on the way we learn to manage our emotions and to become sensitive in the way we relate to others - both key factors in the way we behave, and an important contributor to lifelong health and well-being.

Benefits of the Nurturing Programme

The Programme benefits both adults and children by:

- promoting emotional literacy and emotional health
- raising self-esteem
- developing communication and social skills
- teaching positive ways to resolve conflict
- providing effective strategies to encourage co-operative, responsible behaviour and managing challenging behaviour in children
- offering insights into the influence of feelings on behaviour
- encouraging adults to take time to look after themselves

For research and evidence of the impact and benefits of the Nurture Program see [http://www.familylinks.org.uk/nurturing/research.htm](http://www.familylinks.org.uk/nurturing/research.htm)

The Parenting Puzzle

*The Parenting Puzzle* is an illustrated, easy-to-use guide to the Nurturing Programme.

The book encourages parents and carers to enjoy bringing up children and get the best out of family life. It helps us understand how emotions influence our actions, and offers many positive, practical ways of guiding children so they learn to handle both their feelings and their behaviour. It suggests ways of helping us feel good - boosting self-esteem in ourselves and in our children.

Nurturing Program/ Parenting Puzzle Topics

- **Week 1**
  - Introducing the Nurturing Programme
  - Building Blocks: The Four Constructs
  - Giving Praise
Training for Parent Group Leaders
The Family Links training for parent group leaders offers a thorough introduction to the principles and practice of the Nurturing Programme for anyone working with parents and carers. The approach particularly emphasises the importance of facilitative approaches, both in group work and one-to-one support.

The 4-day training is designed for community professionals such as health visitors, social workers, school staff, youth offending teams, Sure Start teams, Children's Centre staff, etc.

The training demonstrates the Four Constructs in action in the way trainers facilitate, as well as exploring Programme topics and approaches. Staff in schools enhance their skills by adopting these same principles in their work with children, and parents are encouraged to do the same. The Programme benefits both adults and children in many ways.

The aims of the facilitators training are:
- to introduce trainees to the principles and practice of the Nurturing Programme
- to link the Programme to the development of emotional literacy and emotional health
to offer experience of the Programme at a personal and professional level

• to share expertise and experience
• to encourage a reflective approach
• to demonstrate supportive facilitation and the role of process as well as content
• to build confidence in using the Programme effectively and enjoyable
• to offer practice in facilitating the training
• to ensure that trainees meet Family Links’ authorisation criteria
• to familiarise trainees with Programme resources

Nurturing Programme sessions are carefully designed to reflect different learning styles. They are structured so that each session is both self-contained and links to other sessions to produce a coherent whole. Detailed handbooks and other resources support the work of trainers, staff and other facilitators.

For more information about training staff to run the Nurture Program (for adults or for children) see [http://www.familylinks.org.uk/training/index.htm](http://www.familylinks.org.uk/training/index.htm)

**Policy initiatives and the Nurturing Programme**

The Nurturing Programme reflects many of the aims in government policy and initiatives for children and families. These include the provisions of the 2004 Children Act, the National Service Framework for Children, the public health white paper Choosing Health, and the Primary National Strategy for Attendance and Behaviour. Recent policy documents with links to our work include NICE Guidance Extended Schools Prospectus, Parenting Support Know How Booklet for Extended Schools, SEAL Guidance, Communities that Care, Sure Start and more. For further information on policy initiatives see [http://www.familylinks.org.uk/nurturing/policy.htm](http://www.familylinks.org.uk/nurturing/policy.htm)

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