Promoting Social and Emotional Wellbeing in Children

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What is Child Development?

**Periods of Development**
- Conception and prenatal
- Infancy
- Early Childhood
- Middle Childhood
- Adolescence

**Dimensions of Development**
- Physiological
- Cognitive
  - Social
  - Emotional
  - Behavioral
What is Child Development?

Quantitative Changes (GROWTH)
- growth in height and weight indicates a quantitative difference.

Qualitative Changes (DEVELOPMENT)
- changes in the way children think, behave, and perceive the world differently as they mature.
What does it mean to be healthy?

*Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity*

The Constitution of the World Health Organization
Indicators of well-being

1. Family and social environment
2. Economic circumstances
3. Education
4. Health care
5. Physical environment and safety
6. Behaviours and risks
7. Subjective wellbeing

Ben-Arieh et al. (2014)
Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006)
Figure from Cengage Learning, 2014
Children’s Mental Health

Influences our capacity to:
- Form relationships
- Feel and think
- Communicate
- Cope with loss and change

Supports:
- Our social functioning
- Productivity
- Wellbeing and health

Dwivedi et al., 2004
Examining our Beliefs

• Beliefs of children can be so ingrained that we are not even aware of them but they surface in everyday behaviours (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2004)

YouTube: [No Kids Allowed](#) and Blog: [Kicking off Against Noisy Kids](#)

• Beliefs can be accurate or false, and can have positive or negative implications.

• It is important to identify & challenge our beliefs...
Examining our Beliefs

How we see, feel, and interpret behaviour

- Asking questions and 4-year-olds
Examining our Beliefs

• Our ideas about how children learn and develop remain largely unexamined or unconscious, and yet they influence the choices we make every day.

• By exploring one's own beliefs about children and learning, rethinking these beliefs, and remaining open to new ideas, one can learn to be more thoughtful about which ideas and approaches are appropriate for different learning situations.
Conceptualizing Children’s Social and Emotional Wellbeing – Foundations

• Brain Biology & Developmental Neuroscience

• Human development depends on both the genetic makeup of the child (nature) and the environment (nurture) – and the complex results of the interactions between the child and environment overtime
from the Early Years Study 3 (2011)
Infants: Social & Emotional Milestones

• Regulation of arousal and sleep and wake cycles
• Responsive interactions with others
• Beginning of anticipation and participation in simple social routines

Bronson (2000)
Toddlers: Social & Emotional Milestones

- Increasing voluntary control and voluntary self-regulation
- Growing ability to comply with environmental demands/requests
- Increasing assertiveness and desire for independent action

Bronson (2000)
Promoting Social and Emotional Wellbeing: Infants

- **Being responsive:** *Respond quickly to infants’ cries to let them know they can depend on you to care for them*

- **Being sensitive:** *Requires awareness of infant’s signals and states (fatigue, hunger, readiness to play)*

- **Paying attention** by giving positive individual attention

- **Engaging in warm positive interactions:**
  - Hold and hug infants
  - Swaddle newborns

- **Being consistent** in sequences of caregiving

*Bronson (2000); Gellen (2013)*
Promoting Social and Emotional Wellbeing: Infants & Toddlers

Specific examples of how to do this:

• Sit toddlers on your lap; face child when you talk
• Read books and make physical contact
• Talk in a soothing voice when diapering, or helping clothe
• Paying attention to individual differences in the need for regularity, novelty, stimulation, etc.
• Provide alternating periods of stimulation and quiet

Gellens (2013)
Promoting Social and Emotional Wellbeing: Infants & Toddlers

*Modeling behaviours desired in toddlers*

Use responsive guidance:
- Use language (verbal and nonverbal) to help facilitate self-control
- Emphasize individual control over behaviour
- Offer limited alternatives/choices (too much choice may be overwhelming)
- Use suggestions rather than commands
- Explain reasons for preferred behaviours (use simple cause and effect reasoning)
- Supervise play with siblings, peers (prevent or resolve conflicts)
- Provide opportunities for beginning pretend play

*Bronson (2000); Gellens (2013)*
Infants & Toddlers: Tantrums
Infants & Toddlers: What else can I try?

- Give upset infants a warm bath (or gently rub a warm washcloth on their skin) to help calm them
- Convey delight in each young child with smiles - *message you matter*
- React positively when children attempt new skills whether they succeed or fail
- Help them feel good about taking risks
- Use words that let children know you care

*Bronson (2000); Gellens (2013)*
Preschoolers: Social & Emotional Milestones

- More capable of controlling emotions, abiding by rules, and refraining from sanctioned behaviors
- More capable of using language to regulate own behaviors
- Increased interest in peers
- Capable of cooperative interactions
- Can learn more effective interaction strategies
- Can engage in dramatic play

Bronson (2000); Underwood & Rosen (2011)
Promoting Social and Emotional Wellbeing: Preschoolers

- Discuss topics that are upsetting (yes, you read correctly)
- Compare emotions (contrast with others by labeling, not judging)
- Model emotional control
- Play games that promote understanding of body language
- Read books about characters that experience a range of feelings
- Teach empathy

Bronson (2000); Gellens (2013)
Skills children learn from playing and doing:

- Focus
- Independence
- Enhancing self-regulation
- Enhancing self-esteem
- Feeling successful (competency)
- Trial and error
- Risk-taking
- Delayed gratification

_Gellens (2013); Rathus & Rinaldi (2009)_
Learning through opportunities

Some calming strategies
- Provide materials (art or toys)
- Use appropriate labeling words
- Have child state reasons for emotional experience
- Provide water play

Stress Busters
- Stretching exercises (physical)
- Deep breathing (physical)
- Music & singing (physical, cognitive)
- Running and jogging (physical)
- Outdoor free play (physical, cognitive, social)
- Quiet reflection (cognitive, physical)

Gellens (2013)
Speaking of delayed gratification....

The Marshmallow Experiment
Promoting Social and Emotional Wellbeing: Preschoolers

- Be responsive to preschoolers’ requests
- Make physical contact often
- Keep noise levels low
- Allow for comfort objects (blankets, doll)
- Need for physical contact continues (e.g., Hold and provide appropriate physical contact to show approval)
- The power of language (e.g., use words that communicate care and interest in thoughts and feelings)
- Empathize with children

Gellens (2013)
Promoting Social and Emotional Wellbeing: 

*I always feel like somebody’s watching me*

Function as models, resources and guides for:
- Social interaction styles & strategies
- Self-control strategies
- Value & attitudes

Use responsive guidance techniques that:
- Use language to assist self-control
- Empathize individual control over behavior
- Support developing inner controls
- Give reasons for desired behaviors
- Suggest appropriate strategies in context

Supervise play with peers
School-Age Children: Social & Emotional Milestones

- Capable of conscious self-control
- Can reliably abide by rules
- Capable of using language to regulate behaviour and influence others
- High peer interest and involvement
- Capable of cooperative interactions with others
- Can use problem-focused rather than emotion-focused strategies
- Can learn from discussions
- Can play games with rules

Bronson (2000); Crowther (2006)
Adults (parents, caregivers, educators) continue to function as models, resources and guides but focus shifts to open and frequent communication about attitudes and values.

Bronson (2000); Denham et al. (2011); Grusec (2011); Maughan (2011)
Promoting Social and Emotional Wellbeing: School-age Children

Try guidance techniques that:
• Use problem solving techniques
• Involve discussion about issues
• Emphasize individual control/responsibility
• Involve general principles and standards
• Suggest appropriate strategies in context

Supervision changes – less direct supervision, but still monitoring of child’s interests, peers, involvement, media influences, technology, and other activities outside family and school

Bronson (2000)
Promoting Social and Emotional Wellbeing: School-age Children

ENVIRONMENT

- Presence of a trusted adult to support independence and self control
- Contains clear guidelines responsibilities, opportunities and expectations and consequences
- Provides opportunities for supervised interactions with peers
- Contains materials that support constructive peer interactions
- Minimizes exposure to negative behaviour and attitudes

Baumrind (2013); Chan & Koo (2011); Maughan (2011); Underwood & Rosen (2011)
Activities & Strategies Built Around:

- Grounding
- Mindful awareness
- Tracking sensations
- Self awareness
- Social awareness
- Self management
- Responsible decision-making
- Relationship skills

Tollison et al. (2011)
Promoting Social and Emotional Wellbeing: School-age Children

Activities & Strategies Examples
Promoting Social and Emotional Wellbeing: A lifelong commitment
Conclusions

- Appreciating the integrative nature of the different domains of development
- Adults matter
- Foundations are important
- Lifelong (social and emotional) wellbeing is important
- Strategies are all around us
Promoting Social and Emotional Wellbeing: Question Period

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