



Early Years Revised Framework Briefing - July 2021

Issue 11

Developing Emotional Literacy

In the new EYFS Statutory Framework for September 2021 the Educational Programme for Personal, Social and Emotional Development states:

“Children’s personal, social and emotional development (PSED) is crucial for children to lead happy and healthy lives...Strong, warm and supportive relationships with adults enable children to learn how to understand their own feelings and those of others. Children should be supported to manage emotions, develop a positive sense of self...”

This is known as emotional literacy and in this briefing paper we will consider what it is and how you can support its development through practical ideas. We will consider the sequential progression that children generally develop through.



What is Emotional Literacy?



Emotional literacy is a term we use to describe how a child or an adult can understand and express their own emotions and feelings. It involves being aware of your own feelings and being able to manage and express them in appropriate ways. As our emotional literacy develops we start to be able to describe and name our emotions and have a range of ‘tools’ that help us to take control of them rather than be controlled by our emotions e.g. taking deep breathes when we are angry. Over time, as we become more self-aware, we develop the ability to recognise a range of emotions in others and begin to develop empathy.

Young children need adults to help them recognise how they are feeling and give it a name (‘Name it to Tame it!’ – Dr Dan Segal) They need an adult to help them to co-regulate their emotions as they are not yet ready to self-regulate. They need to be taught ways to work through their emotions and how to manage them. They also need adults to help them understand that we can experience a wide range of emotions and feelings and that’s ok.

Children who are struggling to recognise and understand their emotions are unfortunately sometimes described as 'misbehaving' or 'naughty'. However, without being able to recognise, understand, explain or have strategies to manage emotions, the only way to express what you're feeling inside is through your actions on the outside. Emotions can sometimes be overwhelming and scary for little people



In his book 'Emotional Intelligence', Daniel Goleman describes 5 main aspects of emotional intelligence. When developed they lead to children becoming emotionally literate:

1. Knowing Emotions – A child recognises a feeling as it happens
2. Managing Emotions – A child has ways of reassuring themselves when they feel anxious or upset
3. Self-Motivation – A child is in charge of their emotions, rather than controlled by them
4. Empathy – A child is aware of what another person is feeling
5. Handling Relationships – A child is able to build relationships with others



Children can experience many emotions but their ability to regulate them may vary. For example, a child may show empathy when another child is sad but they may not be able to manage the feeling of their own jealousy when they take a toy from someone. Children need to experience and be supported through a range of emotions and they need to know it is ok to feel emotions – it's sometime how we deal with them that is not ok.

*“Children’s **theory of mind** involves the ability to accurately predict the thoughts and feelings of others. Theory of mind skills are essential for children to empathise and communicate effectively.*

Studies show that theory of mind skills at age 4 predict children’s friendships in primary and secondary school.” From: Activities and toys that support caregiver-child interactions in the early years’ September 2019 EIF

The Adults Children Need:

“Strong, warm and supportive relationships with adults enable children to learn how to understand their own feelings and those of others. Children should be supported to manage emotions...”

(Development Matters Sept 2020 Page 26)

“Babies and children experience wellbeing and contentment when their physical and emotional needs are met and their feelings are accepted” (Birth to 5 Matters, March 2021 Page 30)



- Children need adults who understand that all children are displaying behaviours in response to their environment, some behaviours inhibit their learning and development. Children need practitioners who do not judge or label their 'behaviour' but simply see children working through big emotions as another learning step and process.
- They need adults who will show them unconditional regard and professional love.
- Most importantly, children need adults who can keep their own emotions under control.
- They need adults who understand that losing control and being overwhelmed with emotions can be a scary time.

- They need adults who will take time, will be there through the big emotions and who can teach them ways to calm and regain control (this is co-regulation).
- Children need adults who will notice how they are feeling and help them to put a name to it.
- Children need adults who know them well, who know what helps them to overcome emotions and who can adapt and try new things.

Ideas to support the development of Emotional literacy:

The most effective way to support children's emotional literacy is through warm and empathetic relationships throughout all of your practice, responding to children's emotional needs in the moment. Some additional ideas are:

- Stories – what better way to explore emotions than talking about them? There are lots of beautiful storybooks that explore a whole range of emotions. Some examples are:
- *Red-a crayon story by Michael Hall*
- *Giraffes Can't Dance by Giles Andreae and Guy Parker-Rees*
- *Tough Guys Have feelings Too by Keith Negley*
- *The Little White Owl by Tracey Corderoy*
- *Dear Girl by Amy Krouse Rosenthal and Paris Rosenthal*
- *The Dot by Peter H Reynolds*
- *Giraffe Problems by Jory John*
- *Tiny Whale a fishy tail by Joshua George*
- *Don't Feed the WorryBug by Andi Green*
- *The Girl that Never Made Mistakes by Mark Pett and Gary Rubinstein*
- *The Lion inside by Rachel Bright*
- *I Am Human by Susan Verde*
- *What's My Superpower? by Aviaq Johnston*
- *The Way I Feel by Janan Cain*
- *I like myself by Karen Beaumont*
- *Lucy's Blue Day by Chris Duke*
- *The Magic is inside you by Cathy Domoney*
- *The Colour Monster by Anna Llenas*
- *The Invisible string by Patrice Karst*
- *The way i feel by Janan Cain*
- *Only one you by Linda Kranz*
- *In my heart by Jo Witek*
- *The Huge Bag of Worries by Virginia Ironside*
- *Have You Filled a Bucket today by Carol McClod*



- Start the day with an emoji check in – how do you feel today?
- Have photos of different facial expressions available for children and draw their attention to them. How do they think that person feels? Perhaps have a mirror near-by – can they make that face?
- Draw or stick pictures of eyes, noses, mouths on stones and place them on a card head shape – How do you think they are feeling? Can children make a cross face? A scared face? A happy face?
- Have a game of monster (or dinosaur/teddy/animal) face snap! Draw pairs of emotions on some cards and ask the children to find someone else in the group with the same feeling picture as them.

- Have some 'calm down kits' or areas in your provision. Teach children how to use them when they are feeling calm. You could include bubble wands (big deep breaths help to calm the brain), sensory bottles (give them a good shake when you are angry and watch them swirl and settle as your feelings do) and perhaps something to squish when you are feeling angry.
- Have a range of feeling pictures displayed or a tin of pictures on lollipop sticks. If a child can't tell you how they feel perhaps they can show you.
- Introduce an Empathy doll to your setting – it is always easier to explore emotions when they are not directly linked to a child or individual.
- Modelling – explain how you are feeling to the children and why, you could even explain what you are going to do to help you feel better or stay in control e.g. "I'm very excited today as I'm going to see my sister tonight – I will be smiling all day!"



"It would appear that children take more notice of what adults (and other children) *do* rather than what is said to them..." (Penny Tassoni, Understanding Children's Behaviour Learning to be with others in the Early Years, 2018)

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