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# Preschool Network NETWORK NEWS

<http://cdd.unm.edu/ec/psn>



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*Happy New Year!*

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## **UNDERSTANDING EMOTIONAL BEHAVIORS:**

### ***The First Step to Understanding Challenging Behaviors***

By Pamela Segel

According to Thomasgard and Metz (2004), thoughts represent concrete actions and experiences. Feelings are directly linked to thoughts and these feelings can interfere with the ability to think and therefore affect behavior. When a child is overwhelmed with anger or anxiety, their ability to think clearly is temporarily impaired. This temporary impairment can lead to behaviors that teachers and caregivers consider challenging. In order to understand these challenging behaviors, it is important to first understand the stages of emotional development in children.

Greenspan (2001) describes seven stages of emotional development. In each of these stages, the following elements are considered: (1) the nature of the developmental challenge; (2) the age of the child when the skill is first encountered; and (3) the application of the information.

Stage one, attending and feeling secure, is the basic level of social-emotional development. It is the ability to regulate attention, process sensory

information, and the ability to calm. Attending can be affected by newness or novelty; the sensory system through which the child can best process information (auditory-verbal or visual-spatial); and the child's threshold. For example, if a child has difficulty initiating and controlling body movements (i.e. the child is large for their age or has low muscle tone), more energy than normal is expended and may result in excess strength or fatigue, therefore affecting the child's threshold.

The second stage of development, feeling close to and engaging with others, involves increased ability to adapt successfully to the environment. When the child can successfully regulate their internal feelings or sensations, they become able to develop external relationships. During this period, a child's needs include closeness and positive connections.

Stage three, understanding non-verbal communication, is the ability to connect with another person in a back and forth or two-way system. By approximately eighteen months of age, a child is a good reader of non-verbal cues. Non-verbal gestures are reciprocal. As the cycle of interaction repeats itself (i.e. the caregiver speaks happily and the child smiles), behavior and emotions become connected with a physical consequence such as a hug. A child whose motor system is not operating efficiently (i.e. due to abnormally high or low muscle tone) may have trouble expressing non-verbal communication to others. The child may become fatigued or frustrated when the understanding is not clear. When the caregiver or parent is able to understand the child's communication, things go smoothly.



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The fourth stage of social-emotional development involves that ability to send and receive gestural and verbal messages.

Cognition and sense of self are developing and can be enhanced when adults recognize those

behavioral patterns and respond to them. If the child's expressive and/or receptive language skills are weak, it is important to first strengthen the attachment through non-verbal communication between the caregiver and the child. If a child has challenges in this skill, they may remain closer to their caregiver and not explore the wider environment.

.....  
"It is important to remember that social-emotional development includes periods of regression and disorganization, which occur as either reactions to stress or when a child is ready for a developmental leap."  
.....

During stage five, substituting thought for action, toddlers and preschoolers are beginning to substitute thoughts (i.e. "I'm angry!") for an action (i.e. "hitting or kicking"). Children begin to experience the emotion and the idea of the emotion, which they can put into words or actions. As development continues, a child can use these skills in pretend play.

Stage six is the stage when children begin to make connections between different categories of ideas and feelings that lay the foundation for logical thought. For example: I feel mad because he took my toy!

The seventh stage, connecting present actions to future, is the ability to build bridges between ideas and over time. They may begin to control their impulses and plan for later. For example: "If I don't put the toys away, I won't be able to play with them later." During this point in development, children begin to understand that behaviors have consequences.

This framework of social-emotional development can provide a method of better

understanding young children. The assessment and evaluation tools we often use to measure social-emotional development, portray these skills in a straight-line path. However, Greenspan reminds us that development includes periods of regression and disorganization that occur as either reactions to stress or when a child is ready for a developmental leap.

*References:*

Greenspan, S. & Weider, SW. (2001). Floor time techniques and the DIR model. *Interdisciplinary Council on Developmental and Learning Disorders*.

Thomasgard, M., & Metz, W.P. (2004). Promoting child social-emotional growth in primary care settings: Using a developmental approach. *Clinical Pediatrics*, 43.

*Other resources:*

Emde, R.N.(2001). A developmental psychiatrist looks at infant mental health challenges for early headstart: *Understanding context and overcoming avoidance. Zero to Three*, 22.

DeGangi, G. (2000). *Pediatric disorders of regulation in affect and behavior: A therapist's guide to assessment and treatment*. New York: Academic Press.

**Harriet's Corner...**Notes from Harriet Forman, Preschool Consultant, Special Education Bureau, New Mexico Public Education Department

The Special Education Bureau has moved!  
Their new physical and mailing address is:  
*New Mexico Public Education Department  
Special Education Bureau  
120 South Federal Place, Room 206  
Santa Fe, NM 87501*

Their email addresses will remain the same.

**CHECK IT OUT... Online Early and Emergent Literacy Course**

The Preschool Network's online Early and Emergent Literacy Course begins January 13th. Register now for either credit (Graduate or Undergraduate) or for certificate . The late registration deadline is January 18th so act now!!!

Visit the course online to register or for more information:

**<http://cdd.unm.edu/EELC>**

## Book Review

### The Child with Special Needs

Greenspan, Stanley I., M.D.  
Weider, Serena, PhD. (1998).  
Perseus Books. Reading,  
Massachusetts.



This book provides a detailed explanation and exploration of the individual-difference, relationship-based, developmental approach to intervention. It's a complete resource for parents and professionals working with children with disabilities. It addresses an array of disabilities including, autism, PDD, language and speech problems, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy and ADD.

The book is divided into three parts. In Part 1, the authors explore how to look at the unique profile – both strengths and problems – of the individual child. They focus on moving beyond labels, and using “the six milestones” as a framework for social-emotional development of the child. Part 2 demonstrates how to take the child's individual profile and apply techniques of the developmental approach. It shows how using Greenspan's well-known “Floor-time” approach helps parents and professionals interact with the child in ways that promote development of the six emotional milestones. Part 3 describes ways in which the individual-difference model can be used to organize the efforts of the child's intervention team and school. It also discusses challenges that families with children with special needs commonly face.

Though this is not the most recent work produced by Greenspan, it is a comprehensive guide for those who wish to expand their knowledge of emotional development in children with special needs.

## Classroom Activity

### My Feelings

Here are two classroom activities that will facilitate a child's emotional awareness and the connection between thoughts, feelings and physical expression.

#### 1. Materials needed:

- Cassettes or CDs of music (classical)
- Cassette or CD player

Invite the children to think of ways they can make their bodies show the following feelings: happy, excited, proud, angry, afraid, and sad. Play slow classical music (sad), upbeat classical music (happy), lively marches (excited or proud), and music in a minor key (angry). Encourage the children to move their bodies to the music they hear. Ask them questions about how the music makes them feel. Accept all their ideas about feelings.

#### 2. Materials needed:

- Paper plates
- Magazines
- Scissors
- Glue or paste
- Wire clothes hangers



Assist the children in making “Feelings” mobiles. Provide magazines from which the children can cut or tear out pictures depicting various emotions. Set out glue or paste for them to use to secure the pictures on both sides of the paper plates. Some children may want to separate the pictures they use by putting all happy feelings on one side and all sad feelings on another. Others may include a variety of feelings on both sides. Help the children string the plates onto clothes hangers. Display the mobiles around the room and talk about the feelings they depict throughout the day.

*From A Planning Guide to the Preschool Curriculum, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition*

## Professional Development Opportunities

Check out the early childhood training calendar on the CDD Early Childhood Division website at:  
<http://cdd.unm.edu/ec/calendar.html>

**Early and Emergent Literacy Online Course.** January 13th through May 2nd, 2005. Offered for both certificate and credit through NMSU (either Graduate or Undergraduate). For more information visit: <http://cdd.unm.edu/EELC>

**Internet Chat— Creating Home/Program Partnerships that Work: Supporting Children with Problem Behavior** January 26, 2005 6– 7 pm MST. For more information visit: <http://csefel.uiuc.edu/chat.html>

**Project SET Seminar: Diagnosis, Ongoing Assessment and Environmental Organization for Young Children with ASD.** January 12, 2005, 9—12 AM at various locations broadcast via teleconferencing. For more information call (505) 272-3012.

**Project SET Seminar: Intervention and Educational Services for Young Children with ASD, Part 1.** February 2, 2005, 9—12 AM at various locations broadcast via teleconferencing. For more information call (505) 272-3012.

**CYFD, Childcare Resource & Training Project—Focused Portfolio Assessment: Documenting Children's Progress.** February 23, 2005, 6—8 PM, Las Vegas, NM. For more information call (505) 454-2539.

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