



# The Emergence of Emotional Intelligence and Self-Regulation in Early Years

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## **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

Early years are important for the emotional intelligence development and self-regulation of young children because of rapid brain development. Early years are time of pretending, blending fact and fiction and learning to think of world using language. There is specific attainment of mainly three components of emotional intelligence during early years of development such as expression, knowledge and regulation of emotions. They have abilities to express social and self-conscious emotions as well as recognize the emotions of other people. Self-regulation has a foundational role in promoting wellbeing across the lifespan, including physical, emotional, social, and economic health and educational achievement. Early harmonious, stimulated and enriched environment serve as driving force for the development of emotional intelligence and self-regulation skills in young children. The reactions and instructions of parents and teachers to emotions of young children are the main socialization tools that enhance the emotional intelligence and skills of self-regulation in young children.

*Keywords: Emotional intelligence; self-regulation; early years.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Emotion can be defined as a complex feeling which leads to physical and psychological changes affecting thought and behavior [1] Emotional Intelligence is the ability of individuals to recognize one's own emotions and those of others, distinguish between different feelings and identify them appropriately, use emotional information for guiding thinking and behaviour, and manage and adjust emotions to adapt to environments or achieve one's goals [2].

Components of Emotional Intelligence are self-awareness, social-awareness, self-management and relationship management. Self-awareness- it is the ability of knowing oneself, understand one's own feelings, to understand one's own strengths and weaknesses, own motivation factors, and how and why one respond to situations in a specific manner . Emotional intelligence includes the following competencies: Emotional Self-Awareness (to be aware of oneself and understand one's own feelings), Accurate Self-Assessment (to understand one's own strengths, weaknesses and their effects) and Self-Confidence (to have faith in oneself and the willingness to put oneself forward).

Social-awareness- it is the ability to hear and understand the emotions, thoughts, and concerns of others, even if partially expressed or not spoken. It is being aware of the needs of others. It includes the following competencies: Empathy (ability to understanding and acknowledging emotions of others), Service Orientation (to be helpful, being a contributor in group effort, and to display good listening skills) and Organizational Awareness (the ability to explain oneself well and to be aware of how people are being understood).

Self-management- It is the degree of effectiveness in managing one's own emotions and how effectively a person controls his responses on encountering new or challenging situations. It includes the following competencies: Emotional Self-Control (to control one's feelings and to express them in the appropriate settings), Achievement (being goal-oriented), Initiative (being self-motivated), Transparency (to be honest and open, to be trustworthy and communicate with integrity), Adaptability (to show resilience and the ability to adjust whenever required) and Optimism (to have a positive outlook and to prepare for success).

Relationship management- It can be defined as the ability to apply emotional understanding while dealing others. It comprises the ability to build rapport and develop relationships. . It includes the following competencies: Inspirational Leadership (to be a good mentor, role model, and authority figure), Influence (to express points in convincing ways that encourage others), Conflict Management (the ability to effectively settle discords, misunderstanding and the skill to effectively manage relationships by negotiating), Change Catalyst (to recognize the need for change, and the motivation to bring the change), Developing others (helping others build their skills and knowledge) and Teamwork and Collaboration (to effectively work with others).

## 2. EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN INFANCY

The emotional development of infants distinguishes between primary emotions and self-conscious emotions. Primary Emotions includes the emotions that appear in first 6 months of human infant's development. It consists of surprise, interest, joy, anger, sadness, fear. Self-conscious emotions require self-awareness that comprises consciousness and the sense of self. It includes jealousy, empathy, embarrassment, pride, shame and grief that appear in second half of first year. Infants express their emotions through crying, smile and fear.

Crying is the first cry is the indication that the infant's lungs have filled with air. Information regarding the central nervous system of the newborn can also be obtained through the cries. There are three types of crying in infants: Basic, anger and pain. Basic cry is a rhythmic pattern that usually consists of cry, followed by brief silence than a shorter whistle that is higher pitch than the main cry and then a brief rest before the next cry. Anger cry is the variation of basic cry with more excess air forced through the vocal cords. Pain cry is a sudden appearance of long, initial loud cry without preliminary moaning.

Smiling is important in order to develop a new social skill and is considered a key social signal. Infants have two types of smiling: reflexive and social. Reflexive smile is that does not occur in response to external stimuli. It happens during the months after birth usually during sleep. Social smile is a smile in response to an external stimulus which early in development is typically a face.

Fear is first appears at about 6 months of age and is at peak at about 18 months. Stranger anxiety is the most frequent expression of an infant's fear; it first appears at about 6 months of age in the form of wary reactions and becomes more by the age of 9 months intense with reaching peak at the end of one year, then decreasing thereafter. Furthermore, infants experience separation protest first displayed at 7-8 months and peak at about 15 months [3].

Emotional regulation and coping ability in infants gradually develop the ability to suppress the intensity and duration of emotional reactions during the first year of life [4]. The neurobiological regulations of emotions of infants are influenced by the actions of the caregivers. Caregivers help infants to adjust their emotions and decrease the level of stress hormones by soothing them [5]. By the age of 2, toddlers can use language as a medium to define their feeling states and the context that is upsetting them.

### 3. BIOLOGICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCE ON EMOTIONS

The importance was given to change in baby emotional capacities by the biologists [6]. Some areas of the brain like brain stem, hippocampus and amygdala develop early in life and play a role in distress, excitement and rage and even infants exhibit these emotions. Emotions of infants are regulated by the frontal regions of the cerebral cortex. Emotions act as the first language with which parents and infants communicate. Emotion-linked interchanges, baby cries and parent sensitivity and responsiveness lays the foundation for the parent-child attachment in early years. Social relationships provide the foundation for the development of a rich variety of emotions [4].

### 4. EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

Self-understanding- It can be defined as the cognitive representation of child's self, the substance and content of the child's self conceptions. During early childhood, young children think that the self can be explained in many material characteristics such as size, shape and colour. They distinguish themselves from others with the help of many physical and material attributes. Harter [7] described that children begin to develop self-understanding during early years though the whole of personal identity is not formed but self-understanding

provides its rational underpinnings. Thompson *et al.* [5] portrait that young children of 4 to 5 years of age describe themselves in terms of concrete, observable features, action tendencies, they start including psychological trait and emotional terms for their own self-descriptions as they hear people around them using those terms.

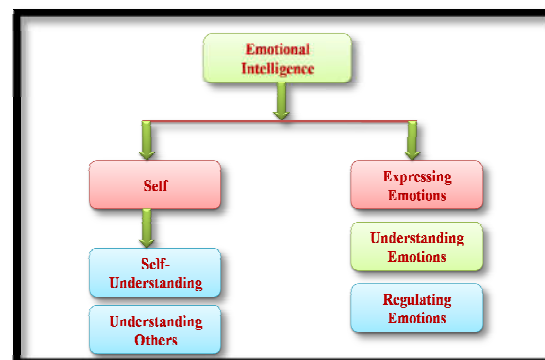


Fig. 1. Emotional intelligence

Understanding Others- During early childhood, there are advances in children's understanding of others and they start realizing that other people have emotions and desires. They start perceiving others in terms of psychological traits at an age of 4 [8]. Gee and Heyman [9] indicated that it is important for children to develop an understanding that people don't always give accurate reports of their beliefs. Pasquini *et al.* [10] depicted that even 4 year old children understand that people may manipulate their statements in order to obtain what they want or to avoid trouble and children mistrusted who made a single error and when they decided whom to trust, children took into account the relative frequency of errors informants made.

Expressing Emotions- pride, shame, embarrassment and guilt are examples of self-conscious emotions. Self-conscious emotions develop after the age of 18 months. Certain emotions like pride and guilt occur frequently during early childhood years. They are especially influenced by parents' responses to children's behaviour Lewis [11]. Denham *et al.* [12] revealed that young children are able to use emotional communication as the mean to express clear nonverbal messages regarding social situations and relationships (Example, stamping feet, giving a hug). They also develop empathic involvement in others' emotions (Example, patting a classmate in pain). In addition, they exhibit complex social and self-

conscious emotions, such as guilt, pride, shame and contempt, in appropriate contexts.

**Understanding Emotions-** During early childhood, an increased understanding of emotions is the most important change in emotional development. During early childhood, young children eventually understand that particular emotions are evoked by certain situations, facial expressions indicate specific emotions, emotions that affect behaviour and emotions can be used to influence the emotions of others Cole *et al.* [13]. Ensor *et al.* [14]. found that prosocial behaviour is associated with the emotional understanding of the young children. From a very young age, children begin to understand that the same event can provoke different feelings in different people. They exhibit an increased awareness that to meet social standards, they need to manage their emotions. Children can precisely determine emotions that arise due to challenging circumstances and describe strategies they might call on to cope with everyday stress. Denham *et al.* [15] revealed that children of age 2 and 4 years of age use several terms to describe emotions and also learn about the causes and consequences of feelings.

**Regulating Emotions-** During early childhood, emotional regulation is considered as an important aspect of emotional development Kopp [4] Lewis *et al.* (2011) found that while interacting with others, emotion regulation plays a significant role in children's ability to manage the demands and conflicting. The findings of Mayer *et al.* [17] revealed that young children regulate their emotions in productive ways -show awareness of their feelings, monitor and modify them if required, so that emotions aid rather than impede, coping in a variety of situations. Despite being able to understand the most useful regulation strategy, young children still need adult assistance in these efforts quite often.

## **5. REGULATION OF EMOTIONS AND PEER RELATIONS**

Emotions play a very critical role in determining the success of a child's peer relationships. Particularly the ability of modulating one's emotions is an important skill that helps children in their relationships with peers. Children who are moody and have negative emotions are more likely to experience rejection by their peers. On the other hand emotionally positive children are more popular. A study revealed that 4 year olds were better in recognizing and generating

strategies to control their anger than 3 years old children [3].

Shonkoff *et al.* [18] revealed that emotional intelligence as a core emerging capacity in the early childhood years. Children who acquire a strong emotional foundation are capable of anticipating, talk about, and use their awareness of their own and others' feelings to manage their everyday social interactions in a better way. Thompson and Lagattuta [19] found that emotional repertoires expand dramatically in early childhood and include feelings such as pride, shame, guilt, and embarrassment. All these feelings have a significant impact on the way individuals function as contributing members of a society.

Facial expressions have a significant amount of emotional information and the ability to identify them is called emotional recognition. The ability to distinguish this information emerges in the early year of life and continues to develop into adulthood. Tottenham *et al.* [20] indicated that some emotions are more easily discriminated than others: it was easier to recognize scared and happy faces than neutral faces; on the other hand sad faces had the lowest accuracy and longest response times. Maguire *et al.* [21] conducted a gender based study on emotions and revealed that girls were better at discriminating different emotions than boys.

Hashemi [22] revealed that due to lack of systematic training in emotional capacity and competence, fundamental values, social skills and moral reasoning to young children, they generally don't succeed in becoming caring, compassionate, responsible and sympathetic citizens. Soltani *et al.* [23] stated that there is emotional development among young children during early childhood and they enjoy various successes in their education and other social areas. The lack of emotional competencies in children leads to disciplinary problems and unsuccessful academic lives. Apart from social exclusion by their peers, they also suffer from behavioral problems that affect their ability to behave in learning induced way which in turn results into their failure at school. .

Gershon and Pellitteri [24] reported the use of various methods by preschoolers to manage emotions as they found significant correlations between generating and recognizing strategies for anger but not for sadness. 4-year olds were capable of generating more strategies than 3-

year olds for dealing with the anger scenarios. They also suggested the development of emotional regulation with age and different rates of development of emotion-specific strategies as the children of 4 years were capable of generating more strategies than 3 years old children.

## **6. PARENTAL INFLUENCE ON EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE OF CHILDREN**

Denham *et al.* [15] found that emotional and social outcome in children is promoted by positive family environment. In contrast, display of negative emotions by family leads to negative relationships with peers. Mayer *et al.* [25] stated the reaction of parents to the emotions of young children and their direct instruction about emotions as important tools of socialization that support the development of emotional intelligence. Sánchez-Núñez *et al.* [26] revealed the impact of emotional intelligence of parents' on the emotional learning of their children. The family system teaches the children that when and how to express feelings, manage conflict, and negotiate differences, where healthy family environment helps in the development of emotional intelligence traits.

## **7. SELF-REGULATION**

Self-regulation can be defined as the ability to understand and manage the behavior and reactions to feelings and things happening around the people. It includes regulation of reactions to different emotions, to soothe emotions like excitement or upsetting, focus on a task and refocus on a new task and to learn the ability to get along with other people.

### **7.1 Self-Regulation in Early Years**

There is a considerable shift in self-regulation skills and capacity change over the first five years of life, based in part on cognitive and motor skill development. Here are examples of self-regulation skills that children might be ready for, by developmental age group: In infancy: shifting attention when overwhelmed, self-soothing by sucking fingers or a pacifier to reduce distress. In toddlerhood: focusing attention for short periods, adjusting behavior to achieve goals, beginning to label feelings, briefly delaying gratification, turning to adults for help with strong feelings. In preschool-aged children: recognizing a growing array of feelings in self and others, identifying

solutions to simple problems, with support, using strategies like deep breaths and self-talk to calm down, focusing attention and persisting on difficult tasks for increased lengths of time and perspective-taking and early empathy ([27].

Montroy *et al.* [28] reported that self-regulation is rapidly developed in majority of children during early childhood and it is often considered an early life marker for later life successes. Liman and Tepeli [29] found that environmental and biological factors are important to shape the self-regulation during early years. Self-regulation skills comprise concepts like adaptation, inhibiting inappropriate behaviors, having control over attention and emotions and regulation of behaviors and delaying impulsiveness. Dan [30] revealed that the development of self-regulation is an internal differentiated graduated process, dependent on the interaction between the individual's observation and society. A child needs to have a combination of internal natural abilities and assistant of a significant adult in life. The latter should be the one who provide efficient mediation and reflection to the child about their behavior so that the child can successfully take part in society.

## **8. PARENTAL INFLUENCE ON SELF-REGULATION OF EMOTIONS IN EARLY YEARS**

Frankel *et al.* [31] stated that right from the beginning of infancy continuing till early childhood, the response of parents to child's emotions plays a key role in shaping children's self-regulation of emotions. The parents' acceptance of positive and negative emotions by parents is important for optimal development of emotional expression and emotional regulation because children with accepting parents feel free to express their emotions according to the situation. Piernas and Popkin [32] revealed that parents who participate in "emotion coaching" are highly aware of the emotions of their children's and accepting of both negative and positive emotions. They also guide them in the proper understanding of their emotions and expressing their emotions in socially appropriate manner.

Morris *et al.* [33] found that authoritative parents provide optimal environment to foster self-regulation in children. Parents with authoritative parenting respond socially appropriate in frustrating situations than other parents. Whereas, authoritarian parents are more likely than other parents to model under controlled,

angry emotions in frustrating situations and to respond in a punitive way to their children's expression of negative emotions. Rhee [34] observed the underlying link between poor emotional regulations of young children with permissive parenting. He further stated that sensitive responsiveness is not the only factor responsible for the development of optimal emotional regulation. Permissive parents may be less likely to scaffold healthy emotional regulation of their children by modeling appropriate emotional expressivity and providing "emotion-coaching than authoritarian parents.

## 9. CONCLUSION

Early years are an important phase to develop emotional intelligence in young children. They possess the abilities to identify and label their own and others' emotions precisely in particular the discrete emotions of happiness, sadness, anger and fear, are emerging. They display complex social and self-conscious emotions, such as guilt, pride, shame and contempt, in appropriate contexts.

Unpredictable or erratic caregiver interaction styles can confuse the children make them angry or helpless and undermine the development of inner control in social situations. The environment mediates the growing understanding of acceptable behavior. An array of complex mental capacities is included in self-regulation which includes impulse and emotional control, self-guidance of thought and behavior planning, self-reliance and socially responsible behavior. The children construct schemas through interaction with the environment and develop cognitive self-regulation. It enables the child to bring consistency to their experience.

## 10. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Parents can enhance the emotional intelligence of through labelling their emotions, by showing empathy towards their children and by using socially appropriate way to express their emotions.
- Parents should teach the healthy coping skills to their children. Children learn to effectively deal with their emotions once they understand them. Emotional intelligence should be an ongoing goal for the parents. Parents should develop better problem solving skills in their

children as it is an important component of emotional intelligence.

- Significant adults have important impact on children's life and they can aid young children in developing the self-regulation skills who exhibit difficulties in developing self-regulatory behavior.
- Strategies like providing opportunities to make decisions and choices and attributing inner control to the child support self-regulation, since they increase the awareness of the child regarding the decision-making process and the results of their behavior.
- The order and predictability should be provided in the environment as they contribute to develop the ability of effectively focusing attention and engaging in self-exploratory play while learning how to master activities. Such order also provides opportunities to children to feel competent and exercise more control, especially when they know where to find things, what comes next and how to participate.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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