The Emotionate Child

The importance of early relationships

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1922-1923

Founding of the Vienna Psychological Institute

"Golden age in psychology"

Charlotte Bühler

Founding of developmental psychology at the University of Vienna

"to view development from the perspectives of biological function and cultural value, of society and the individual"
The emotional child
The emotionate child

**Emotionate**  (i-ˈmō-shə-nət):

1. characterized by emotional apperception, sensitivity, and/or insight *(an emotionate side to his nature)*

2. behaviors reflecting emotional insight or understanding *(her sympathetic response showed that she was an emotionate child)*
early experience (security of attachment) → representations of people and relationships ("internal working models") → social and emotional competence; self-concept
Secure attachment with Mother
age 3

Social problem solving
Number / variety of positive solutions to social problems (e.g., how to make friends with another child)

Loneliness
Children’s responses to short interview questions (e.g., “Is it easy for you to make new friends?”)

Negative attribution bias
Belief that others have negative intentions in uncertain situations (e.g., a block tower falls over when another child runs by)


Mother’s stress / depressive symptoms
age 4

Positive self-concept
age 5

Secure attachment with mother
age 4


$R^2 = .46, p < .001$

$ps < .05$ to $0.1$

$4 \frac{1}{2}$ yrs

1st grade

Elements of mother-child emotion conversation:

- causes
- linking events
- outcomes
- requests for information
- total emotion references
- definitions

It’s hard when you feel so angry. You’re going “AAAH, he’s bouncing my guy off there!” Right?

How did the other kids feel when you shut off the game?

It makes you sad thinking about it, doesn’t it?

After you stopped the game, the other guys said, “You know, Joey wasn’t really doing so bad.” You thought you were losing, but you weren’t.

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Security of attachment is significantly associated with the combination of these measures of conversation quality

Talking about the consequences of actions

Talking about people’s emotions

Moral evaluative statements (“good girl!”)

Compromising or bargaining

Justification and reasoning / Low use of threats, teasing or insistence

Conscience Development age 3

\[ R^2 = .37, p < .01 \]


Prosocial measures . . .

- Helping (neutral experimenter)
- Helping (sad experimenter)
- Sharing
- Empathy (repair)
Are there reliable individual differences in prosocial responding by toddlers?

How is prosocial behavior associated with children’s sympathetic concern and personal distress?

for Personal Distress: F (2,80) = 4.78, p < .05
for Sympathetic Concern: F (2,75) = 8.08, p < .001
What characteristics of children, mothers, and their relationship are associated with differences in prosocial behavior?

- Maternal personality characteristics
- Toddler's emotion understanding
- Toddler temperamental self-regulation
- Maternal sensitivity
- Mother's mind-mindedness
- Picturebook reading: emotional references to child
- Prosocial behavior (combined) 18 months

Do preschoolers show reliable differences in prosocial responding at age 4½?

Prosocial groups at 6 years of age
Mother-child conversation about helping and not helping

- References to emotions, needs, and desires – of the (potential) help recipient or the child -- were frequent for each conversation type, along with positive or negative moral evaluative statements.

- Conversations about not helping at age 4 ½ were shorter but were more strongly associated with prosocial behavior at age 6, particularly in mothers’ use of positive moral evaluatives (“That was nice to do”)

- Shared positive affect between mothers and children at age 4 ½ was also a significant predictor of prosocial behavior at age 6.

- Maternal rule-based justifications were never associated with children’s prosocial behavior at any age.

Development of the emotionate child

- An emotional connection to another’s experience develops early and contributes, more than rules and sanctions, to emergent conscience, helping and sharing, and empathy-related actions.

- The content and quality of mother-child conversation enlists this emotional capacity into representations of people, relationships, and the self that also support constructive social conduct.

- Early relational experience provides a context of safety and security that buffers stress, strengthens positive self-regard, and enhances young children’s positive orientation toward others.

- Both what is said and how it is said is important: positive, emotion-focused discourse in the context of relational warmth provide young children with the experience of sensitivity to their own feelings as they become sensitive to others’ emotions.
Thanks!

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Any Psychological Disorder

Prevalence (%)

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<th>Children and Youth (5-17 yrs)</th>
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Toddler & Preschool (2-5 yrs)

Children and Youth (5-17 yrs)

Adult

Prevalence (%)
Toddler helping in experimental and control conditions