

# School Readiness: Emotional Health and Maturity

by Alka Burman

“Emotional health and maturity” refers to a child’s prosocial behaviour. It is the ability to recognize and express both positive and negative emotions in ways that are healthy, respectful and appropriate to the situation and to empathize with and comfort others. Children who are emotionally healthy and mature show helping behaviours, are comfortable being separated from their parent, and can enjoy learning and take advantage of opportunities within the learning environment. These children are able to control their behaviours and conduct themselves in an appropriate manner. They have healthy ways of dealing with conflict and know how to interact with others. They are not prone to acting impulsively.

## The Importance of Emotional Health and Maturity to School Readiness

Children who are emotionally healthy and who understand how to get along with others know how to deal with problems that arise in the classroom and are better prepared for the challenges of school and life. They can focus their attention on the task at hand and wait their turn when playing a game.

Children learn emotional health and maturity through interactions they have with others around them. As adults provide supportive, caring and nurturing relationships, children learn to trust others and become trustworthy themselves. As children feel different emotions, supportive adults can help them to interpret what they are feeling and to deal with these emotions in an appropriate manner. Children also learn emotional health and maturity through making choices and having limits. Adults need to maintain limits and offer children choices so that they can become comfortable with making decisions. The drive toward independence and self-assertion is an important stage of emotional development.

## Opportunities to Support Emotional Health and Maturity

- Playing games where children have to guess what to do next helps them to focus on decision making.
- Encouraging children to use their words when problems arise will effectively teach them appropriate strategies to solve problems.
- Allowing children to express themselves when they are happy, sad, excited, angry, etc., will give them the appropriate avenues for self expression and help them to be emotionally healthy.
- Giving children a consequence that matches their behaviour when they do something inappropriate will give them predictable limits, help them to manage their behaviour, and develop a balance between fearfulness and impulsiveness.
- Using warnings and giving children a second chance to correct their own behaviour will give them opportunities to self adjust.



- Providing choices where appropriate will build a child's confidence and give them opportunities to make decisions. For example, "Which toy would you like to play with?" "Did you want a big lunch or a little lunch today?" "What would you like to wear?" Facing the consequences of their decisions will also help them to develop skills in this area.
- Encouraging children to empathize with others and giving them an opportunity to put themselves in another's situation will help them to learn a great deal about emotional health and well-being.
- Helping children deal with their own feelings at an age-appropriate level, and labelling a child's feelings helps them to become more emotionally aware.
- Showing children how to deal appropriately with emotions such as anger, sadness or frustration through role modeling, and giving these emotions names will help children to articulate how they are feeling and to become more emotionally intelligent. Caregivers should also remember to respond to children with sensitivity to model appropriate responses to the situation at hand.
- Giving children opportunities to be caring and thoughtful toward others—whether through pretend play, with a sibling, a family member or a stuffed toy—will help them to master these skills. Playing games that involve acting out feelings, or reading a book about different feelings will also help to support this area of development.
- Showing children the importance of helping others, and taking children up on their offers to help is a great way to support the mastering of skills in the area of emotional health and well-being.
- Reinforcing desirable behaviours and providing opportunities for feedback regarding a successful attempt at helping or controlling their emotions will help children to learn these skills. Creating a time in the day for these interactions to take place will also be useful.



**Alka Burman**, Early Literacy Specialist, Parenting Specialist, Childhood Diversity Trainer, Registered Early Childhood Educator with special supports and services provided to programs supporting Home language and English language learning. Alka can be contacted at [burmana@peelregion.ca](mailto:burmana@peelregion.ca).

