Social Emotional Development For Children With Diverse Learning/Medical Needs Including Sensory Loss

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TN Deaf-Blind Project

Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt

Today's Objectives

- Student experiences, their diverse abilities, and school climate in which they learn directly impacts the development of relationships, emotional intelligence, opportunities for social-emotional growth and the development empathy

- Children with diverse learning and medical needs require direct instruction concerning implied social norms and expectations

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Vulnerable Groups with Disparities in Prevalence of Bullying/Mistreatment

- Disabilities
- Weight status
- Sexual orientation and gender identify
- Socio-economic status
- Immigration status
- Minority religious affiliation

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Deficits in social skills are key criteria in defining many disabilities that hinder student's academic progress such learning disabilities, ADHD, intellectual disabilities, physical impairments, ASD, vision and hearing loss.

Gresham, Sugai, and Horner (2001)

Children with diverse learning/medical needs have difficulty responding to traditional forms of social skill acquisition, getting and maintaining relationships, identifying emotions, and have delays in verbal/non-verbal communication.

What are some of the "special needs" teachers see everyday that effect their social and emotional growth…..

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Adverse Childhood Experiences
The effect of stress or trauma mirror many learning challenges such as ADHD, LD, ODD, ASD

- Impairs working memory, attention, self-control

- Disorganized- cannot follow through on plans

- Affects empathy development: cannot relate to the feelings of others

- Losses things, interrupts, doesn't listen/ pay attention

- Inability to recognize comfort or be comforted

- Brain stays in survival mode: fight, flight, freeze

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Learning differences can create

- Impulsivity and externalizing behaviors
- Reduced social competence
- Difficulty interpreting nonverbal cues, communication
- Less well liked
- Difficulty monitoring behavior and emotional responses

Any neurological disorder or sensory loss interrupts the brain/body connection. This interference disrupts meaningful interaction with the environment, people, and objects

This "disconnect" affects self-awareness and social attentiveness, decision making, and relationship skills

Complex Medical/Learning Needs

Students with complex learning/medical needs are largely ignored or ostracized because peers, staff, and teachers are either not accustomed, do not know how or will not slow down to interact or learn the student's methods of communication.

- www.nationaldb.org

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"Blindness separates us from things, but deafness separates us from people."

Helen Keller

Children with Sensory Loss and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

- 88 % of children with autism have been bullied
- Higher rates of peer rejection
- Lack of quality friendships to protect from bullying
- Poor social interaction
- Poor eye contact
- Lower degree of facial recognition
- Higher degree of loneliness

Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorder, Vol. 26, No. 2, 1996

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An inclusive and successful educational setting recognizes all students have "special" needs. A system wide philosophy teaching mindfulness, empathy, and joint attention is essential.

"Not just another program"

School climate and culture affects relationships, empathy, and feeling of well being for every individual inside the building including adults, students, and parents

School climate refers to the character and quality of school life based on patterns of people's experiences during school.

- A school's climate reflects:

  - Norms, goals, values

  - Interpersonal relationships

  - Teaching, learning

  - Leadership practices

  - Organizational structures.

National School Climate Council

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Summary:
School Culture

Norms of Behavior + Shared beliefs + Core Values = Culture

The Way We Do Things Here!

Adults establish the parameters of a school's climate. School culture develops in the context of climate. This is a continuously interactive process.

VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY
MEDICAL CENTER

Components of Positive School Climate

- Emphasis on academic achievement for children of **all** abilities
- Effective administrative leadership
- Positive relationship among students and teachers
- Mutual respect for all
- Fair and consistent discipline
- Attention to safety issues
- Family and community involvement
- Time for celebrations and fun

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High Emotional Intelligence is Equally Valued!

EQUAL

=

EQUAL
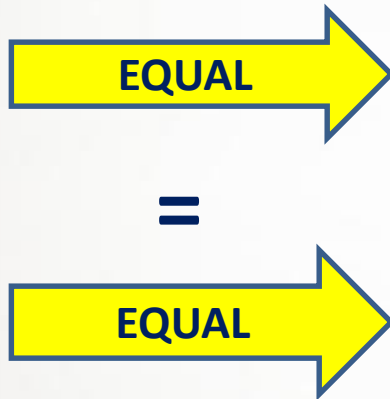
Incorporate the teaching of social emotional competencies/skills

Why EQ/SEL?

Social and Emotional Learning is a process whereby <u>children and adults</u> acquire knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to five core competencies:

Self-Awareness
- Recognize one's own feelings, interests, strengths, and limitations.

Self-Management
- Regulate emotions and manage daily stressors.

Social Awareness
- Take perspective of others and appreciate similarities and differences.

Relationship Skills
- Exhibit prosocial behavior and demonstrate positive social skills in order to develop meaningful relationships.

Responsible Decision Making
- Make ethical decisions, and strengthen the ability to develop appropriate solutions to identified problems.

Links academic achievement with skills necessary for succeeding in school and in life
CASEL's Key Publications
**www.CASEL.org**

Whatever we do... Relationship is the evidence-based practice!

- Engage in positive, trusting relationships

- Provides new experiences with adults that are:
  - ○ Consistent
  - ○ Validating of feelings
  - ○ Protective
  - ○ Unconditional

And …. Empathy is the key … Caring for Others!
Empathy – Compassion - Mindfulness

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Physical and emotional experiences are developed and engaged by non-verbal communication and incidental learning: observation, eye contact, facial express, tone of voice, posture, touch, and timing/pacing
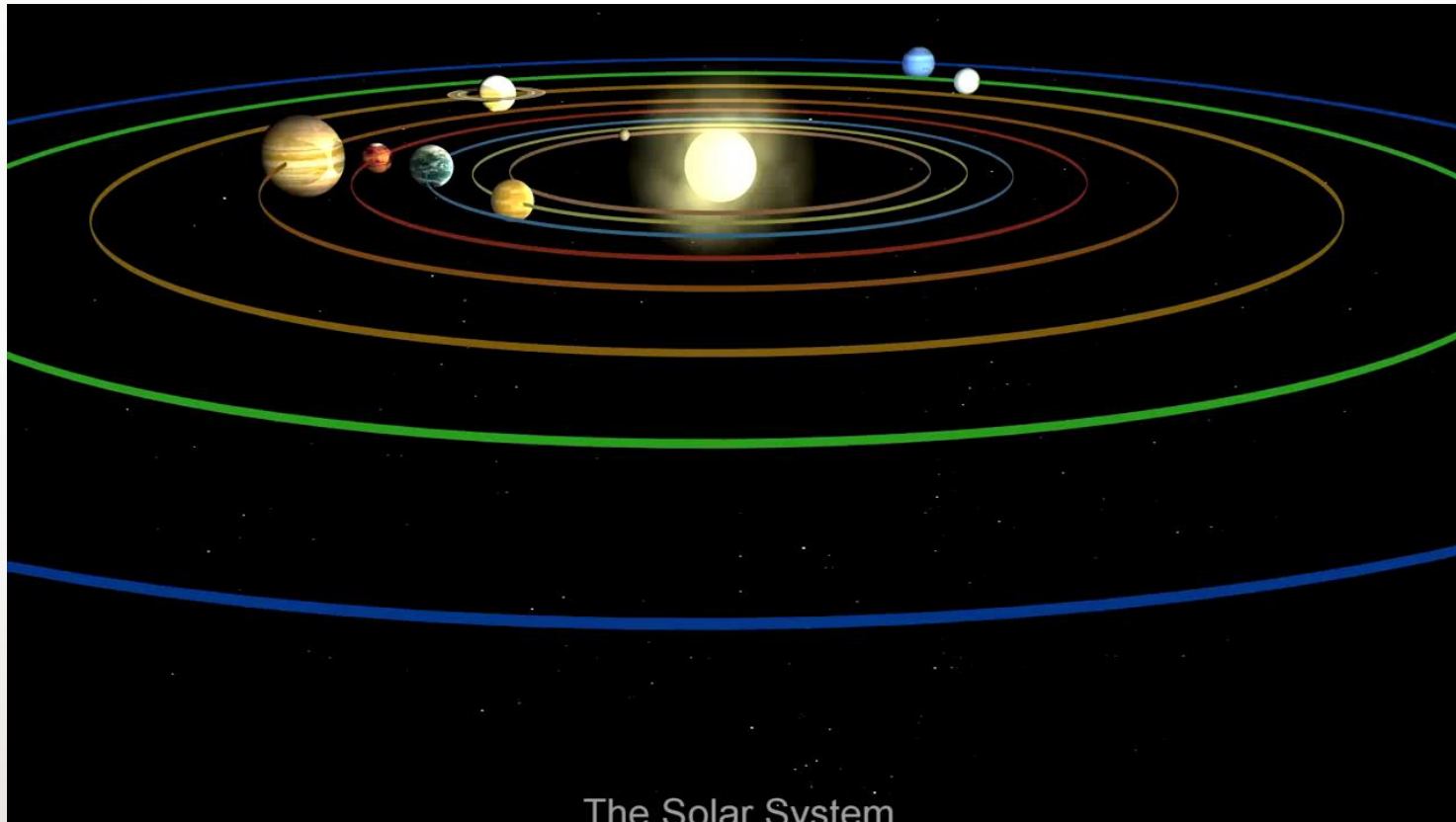
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Learning Zone Strategies

The most important distance for social and communication skills are 3-10 feet away. This distance is too far for children with special needs.

Start with student's body space- use their body to illustrate wanted behaviors or actions

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Direct instruction on effective social interactions begins "within arm's reach" of the students.
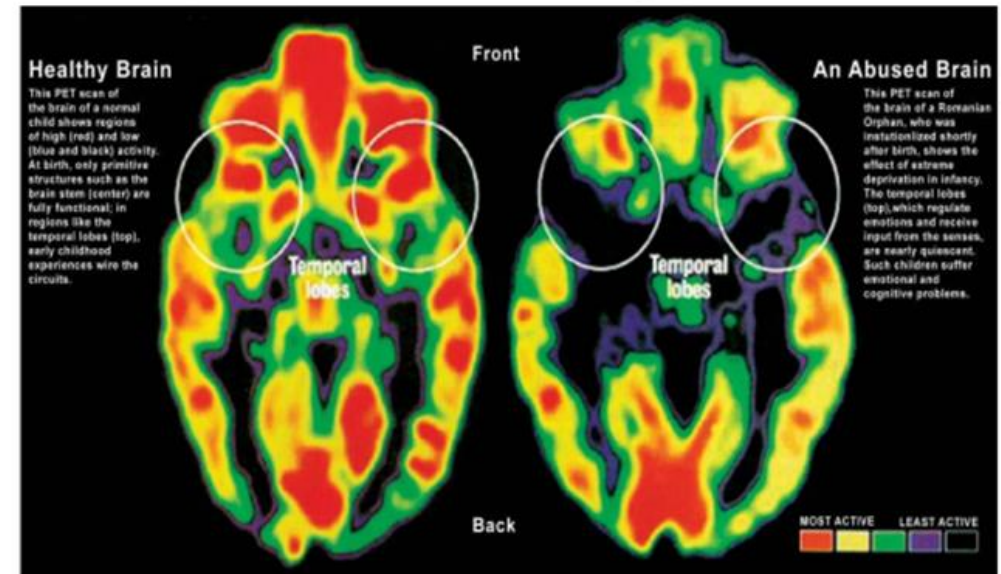
Touch affects development in the temporal lobe

Deficits in the temporal lobe affect word recognition, facial recognition, emotional reactions, understanding language, auditory skills, learning and memory

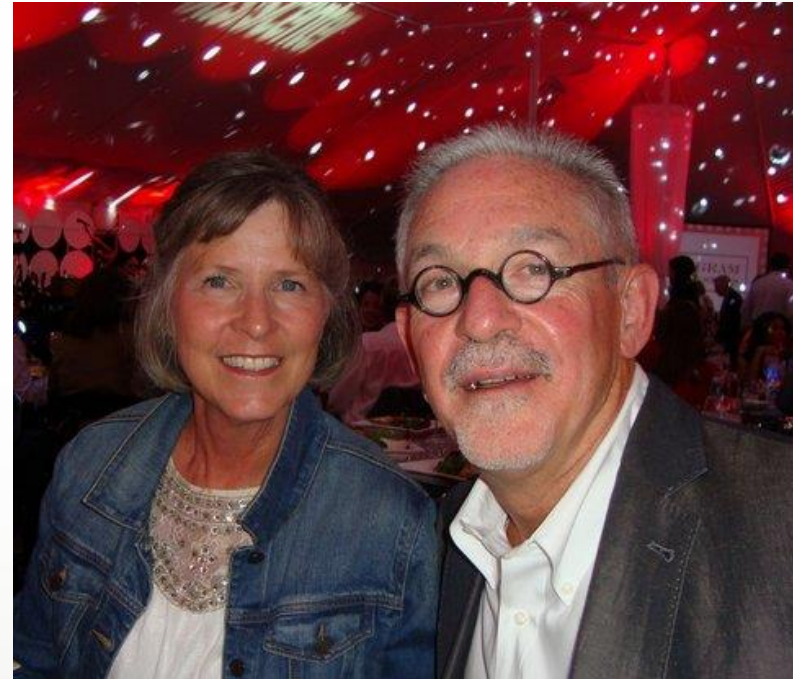
The Importance of Being Touched
Brain Scans Image

Source Linden, 2015, p.4

Power of Touch

Touch of a "new" relationship increases blood pressure and excites

Touch of an "old" establish relationship reduces blood pressure and relaxes

Meaningful Touch

- Students "read" our emotions from our touch

- Individuals need consistent, protective, positive touch

- Touch can validate feelings

- Touch and our memory of touch can trigger intense emotions
  - both positive and negative

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"Touch" Cues

- Social Cues: How to enter communication circle, "yawn" cue, "wait" cue, "string" distance

- "Sloppy Body Language" "elbow to wrist" distance

- Calming Techniques with a "chill" touch or "stop" signal

STRATEGIES TO BUILD EMPATHY & RELATIONSHIPS

- Recognizing and labeling emotions

- Meaningful interactions

- Opportunities to problem solve

- "Real" friends

- Unconditional Interventions

- Structure the environment

- Building resilience

Sensory loss, learning disabilities and medical challenges affect the ability to identify and label emotion in themselves and others.

This difficulty slows the ability to respond to the emotions of ourselves or others and impedes the development of empathy.

http://www.healingresources.info/trauma_attachment_stress_disorders.htm

Recognizing facial features and expressions is socially more important than recognition of letters and numbers.

Recognizing Emotions in Others

- At the very least, empathy requires being **able to read** another's emotions.

- At a higher level, it entails sensing and **responding to a person's unspoken concerns** or feelings.

- At the highest levels, empathy is **understanding the issues or concerns that lie behind** another's feelings.

Goleman, D. (2005). Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ. Bantam Books, NY.

Emotional Literacy

- Identifying and naming emotions-fluency
- Ability to talk about our experiences and how you feel
- Emotional literacy is a prerequisite for empathy

FLIP IT Approach
Labeling Abstract Emotions & Redirecting Behavior

- **Feelings** (label, empathize)

- **Limits** (state limits kindly)

- **Inquiry** (what would help you?)

- **Prompts** (problem solve ways to manage feelings)

Sperry, R. W. (2011) *FLIP It: Transforming Challenging Behavior*
www.centerforresilientchildren.org/flip-it

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Develop Problem Solving Skills and Resolving Conflict

- Very little growth occurs without chaos or dissonance

- Opportunity for learning to repair, reconnect, compromise, and deepen a relationship.

- Teaches self-regulation

- Natural results being in a relationship: connect, listen, and reengage

Peer Connections: "Real" Friends

- Ghost and Guests-child with special needs is invisible or viewed as outsider

- Inclusion Kids/Different Friend-viewed as different/benign

- "I'll Help"-adopt manner/voice of teacher of adult helper

- "Just Another" Kid- same expectations (or parallel with modifications)

- "Regular" Kids- not best friends, but in the Circle of friends or just 'outside' the circle

- Best Friend- Inner Circle

Meyers et all, 1998

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Physical Pain … More Painful?

- **Physical pain and intense feeling of social rejection "hurt" in the same way, a new study shows.** The same regions of the brain that became active in response to painful sensory experiences are activated during intense experiences of social rejection.

- These results give new meaning to the idea that **social rejection "hurts."**

Ethan Kross, University of Michigan, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

The Essential Building Blocks of Resilience

Positive Youth Development

CARING · CONFIDENCE · CONTRIBUTION · CHARACTER · COMPETENCE · CONNECTION

Colorado Department of Health and Environment

Mindfulness ➡ **Compassion** ➡ **Empathy**

1. "Empathy is the gateway to compassion … It's understanding how someone feels, trying to imagine how that might make you feel … it's a mode or relating."

2. "Compassion takes it further … it's feeling what that person is feeling, holding it, accepting it, and taking some kind of action … And the actions don't have to big events."

Lori Chandler, Writer and comedian, Brooklyn New York.
From an article in the *New York Times*

SOLUTIONS:
The Compassionate School

1. Focus on culture and climate in the school and community. (Define – Structure and Support)

2. Train and support all staff regarding trauma and learning.

3. Encourage and sustain open and regular communication for all.

4. Develop a strengths based approach in working with students and peers.

5. Ensure discipline policies are both compassionate and effective (Restorative Practices).

Based on *The Heart of Learning: Compassion, Resiliency, and Academic Success*

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The Compassionate School (cont'd)

6. Weave compassionate strategies into school improvement planning.

7. Provide **tiered support** for all students based on what they need.

8. Create flexible accommodations for diverse learners.

9. Provide access, voice, and ownership for staff, students and community.

10. Use data to:

   - Identify vulnerable students

   - Determine outcomes and strategies for continuous quality improvement.

What Can We Do About Bullying?

Comprehensive approaches:

School-wide, classroom & individual levels (WHOLE SCHOOL)

[Tiered approaches](#)

Trauma Resilient School Systems

- # A trauma resilient school:

  - Acknowledges the prevalence of traumatic occurrences in students' lives and recognizes the **impact of trauma on learning and behavior**

  - Is sensitive to unique needs of students

  - Uses a multi-tiered approach for providing universal, targeted, and individualized supports

  - **Stresses the management of the adult' own reactions and emotions**

  - Incorporates teaching specific social skills for managing and coping with emotions

Empathy and Relationships begins with touch and joint attention.

An adult takes time with the student, makes eye contact, interacts with the student using a communication system the child understands, uses touch if appropriate, and establishes a shared focus.

This interaction allows both individual's internal state to shift and resonate with the inner world of another. This is the heart of a meaningful connection between people.

Providing meaningful interactions

"You need opportunity to develop ability."

Norm Kunc
"Rethinking Disability"

Unconditional Intervention

- Unconditional attention to teach social/emotional skills
- Don't have to create a problem to get attention
- Put "likes" of a student into their schedule- don't earn or take away because it is a needed intervention
- Makes them "more available"
- Can't earn social time when you don't have it
- Put in situations to use social skills- don't make social situations a "privilege"

Opportunities

- People who know me, my form of communication

- Multiple opportunities for learning and social interaction to occur

- Classroom equipment that enables me to participate with my peers

Structured Environments

- Surroundings need to be anticipatory, calming and provide communication

- Classroom needs order, organization, predictability consistency, non-distracting

- Defined spaces
  - Duct tape (desk tape, tape on rug, rug to stand in back of class
  - Color code
  - Landmarks within building

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Defined Areas

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Tennessee DeafBlind Project