



THE EMOTIONAL NEEDS OF THE UNDER 3S AND GOOD PRACTICE IN THEIR CARE

Contributions from professionals interested in child care issues, attending a discussion group led by Chris Ponsford, Development Director, at the What About The Children? Annual Conference 2006

Emotional Needs of the Under 3s

- To be touched, have frequent cuddles and warm physical attention
- To feel loved
- To have a secure base
- To be able to fully trust
- To receive a high level of responsiveness from adult carers
- To have constant sensitive attention
- To be talked to in an interested attentive manner
- To have total absorbed individual adult attention as much as possible
- To have real communicative eye contact when adults speak to them
- To be allowed to move at their own pace and not be rushed
- To have companionship with both familiar adults and children
- To be allowed to develop peer friendships where they happen naturally
- To have fun
- To experience joy
- To experience no fear
- To receive encouragement and praise
- To receive reassurance
- To experience consistency of care
- To experience continuity of care
- To have a genuine close relationship with their regular care giver
- To be protected from constant changes of care giver
- To have carers who know their experiences and are 'in tune' with them
- To be allowed 'down time', personal 'mooching'
- To be allowed to explore and take a few little risks
- To be valued as pleasurable to be with
- To be known
- To experience respect and acknowledgement of their range of emotions
- To have freedom of movement
- To have activities that are appropriate to their own personal development level
- To be kept informed of what is going on
- To have a level of predictability, as well as flexibility, in the day
- To have realistic expectations for their level of development from adult carers
- To experience the comfort of having their own personal and developmental needs, rather than their age, considered as the benchmark for assessing their emotional and practical requirements, by the adults caring for them

Some Problems for Under 3s and their Carers in Day Nurseries

- Very small children are alarmed at being moved out of a familiar group
- Inadequate staff ratios can cause a lack of sufficient time for the level of individual attention required in the very young age groups
- Too frequent staff changes are a major cause of distress to infants
- Staff can get too tired to give the babies and toddlers the attention required
- Staff who are depressed or demoralised may convey a sad atmosphere
- Staff who feel undervalued can easily become impatient with small children
- Staff who have to work too long hours may lose interest during of the day
- Staff who find caring is a low status job can become half-hearted
- Long hours with small children is simply highly stressful
- Large groups of children are frequently noisy and constantly wearing
- Under-staffing causes considerable stress to children [as well as adults] at the beginning and end of the sessions when infants are at their most vulnerable
- There can be extra problems if staff ratios become stretched when coping with large groups of same age babies

Suggestions for Good Practice and Improvements

- Each child to have the same key person over their whole time in day care and a secondary similar close relationship in case the other is not available; this can be achieved by pairing staff and designing rotas to be child-centred
- Staff require much support, need to feel valued and be paid well
- “Caring for the Carers” needs more thoughtful and practical underpinning
- Good mature leadership is highly important
- Good working conditions in general help staff to be relaxed and happier
- A realistic adult/child ratio is vital for contentment of both staff and infants
- There needs to be an organised reliable system for back-up staff if regular staff are ill or absent. This is vital
- All staff should have some understanding of child development and some knowledge of how certain practices affect brain development as well
- For the children, there needs to be a good welcoming regime and good organisation of helpers at this time or younger ones can get very distressed
- Equally at the end of the day extra help assists smooth hand-overs and reduces stress levels
- Shorter working hours would relieve some of the high stress problems
- Flexible hours reduces staff burn-out, with the opportunity of breaks in routine
- Vertical age grouping, for at least part of the day, tends to be less stressful than a group all of the same age, which is not natural a for the very young; children enjoy mixing and siblings being together
- Large groups are inclined to be too overwhelming; small groups are less threatening and more peaceful for all
- Good genuine ‘listening’ liaison with parents helps carers to know and understand the child
- Time and payment for reflective practice and continuing professional development enhance staff performance and esteem