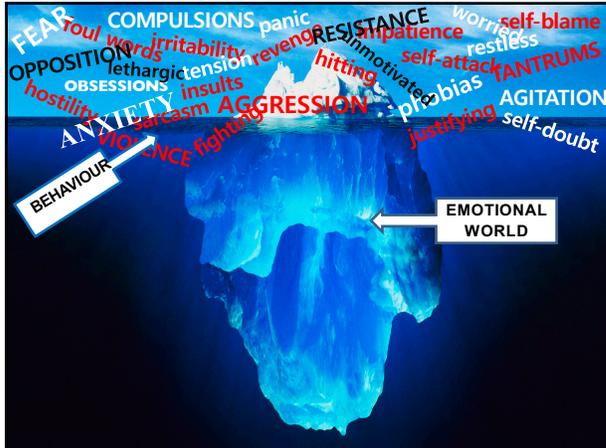


**Understanding How Emotions Impact Play and How Play Can Be a Catalyst To Work Through Emotions**



Martine Demers and Catherine Korah, Behaviour Consultants RSB, CEBM  
 Presentation to K4-K5 Teachers & Support Staff  
 March 21, 2022.

**CEBM** Centre of Excellence for Behaviour Management  
[www.cebm.ca](http://www.cebm.ca)

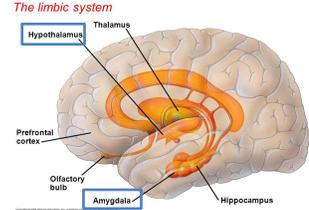


Emotion words: FEAR, COMPULSIONS, panic, RESISTANCE, worries, self-blame, OPPOSITION, lethargy, tension, revenge, hitting, self-attack, ANTRUMS, OBESSIONS, insults, hitting, self-doubt, ANXIETY, no sarcasm, AGGRESSION, hitting, self-doubt, BEHAVIOUR, EMOTIONAL WORLD, ANTRUMS, AGITATION, self-doubt.

**EMOTIONS need to be EXPRESSED to preserve healthy functioning and well-being**

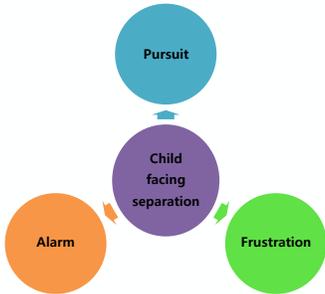
- Emotions are supposed to rise-up and flow through our children.
- Their existence is not a problem, although the way they are expressed may be the cause of problems.
- *Emotions need to flow, for children to grow.*

**Where does EMOTION come from?**



**BRAIN'S ALARM SYSTEM:**  
 Mediated by the **LIMBIC SYSTEM**  
**Amygdala** registers the threat (like a smoke detector)  
**Hypothalamus** orchestrates the response (it links the nervous system to the endocrine system via the pituitary gland)  
 Which triggers the **SYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM**

**Preschoolers are intense, with BIG primal emotions, exactly as nature has intended!**



Pursuit  
 Alarm  
 Frustration  
 Child facing separation

**BIENVENUE à la petite enfance!**  
On fait du bruit et des dégâts parce que nos émotions et nos pensées ont besoin.  
**Nous posons beaucoup de questions et parlons beaucoup**  
parce que nous sommes curieux d'apprendre.  
**Nous ne sommes pas faits pour rester assis**  
parce que nous développons notre motricité.  
**Nous sommes impulsifs, nos émotions changent rapidement**  
parce que notre cerveau en pleine maturation ne peut qu'exprimer un sentiment à la fois.  
**Nous devons jouer**  
parce que le jeu nous aide à apprendre à le faire.  
**JOUER C'EST NOTRE FACON D'APPRENDRE!**

**WELCOME to early childhood!**  
We are noisy mess-makers ... because we are explorers and risk-takers.  
**We ask questions and talk a lot**  
... because we are curious about the world and acquiring new vocabulary.  
**We are not built for desk sitting**  
... because we are developing our motor skills and need to be active.  
**We are impulsive, our emotions shift rapidly**  
... because our maturing brain can only hold one thought or feeling at a time.  
**We need to play**  
... because play nurtures creativity and logic.  
**PLAY IS THE WAY WE LEARN!**

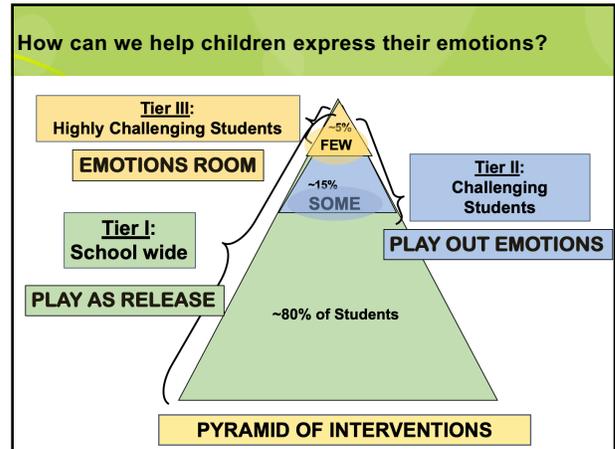
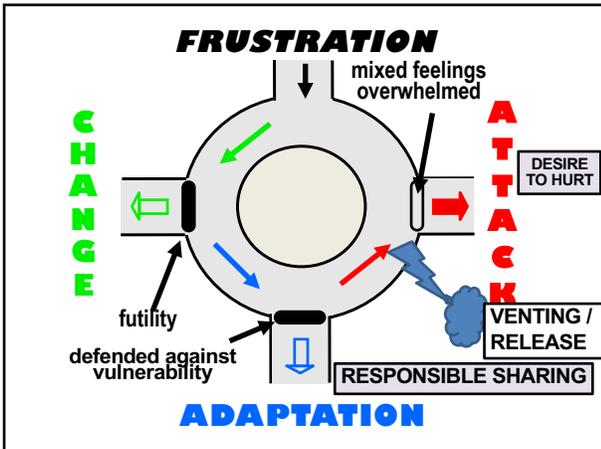


### Emotions need to be expressed BUT...



1. Expression is often MESSY & NOISY, CHAOTIC & UNACCEPTABLE, ALIENATING & WOUNDING
2. It can threaten a child's RELATIONSHIPS.
3. So, the **brain** can suppress or depress emotion to protect its attachments especially if emotional expression is considered to be "unacceptable".

### What happens when emotions are suppressed?

### Emotions at Play

Tier 1 – Group wide support	Classroom layout – clear areas that invite manipulations and moving into the 'play' mode Clear structures & routines –provides safety and consistency	Teacher leads the interventions & support staff assists the group
Tier 2 – Challenging student	Provide targeted periods of time when student is encouraged to use specific areas of the room to help release emotional energy If needed, a student can be accompanied for Brain Breaks outside the classroom	Teacher & support staff Support Staff
Tier 3 – Highly Challenging Student	Bringing student to movement station(s) around the school and/or Emotions Room to help release emotional energy	Support Staff

### TIER 1 GROUP RELEASE ACTIVITIES

Providing a venue for emotional expression

**Set the Stage:**

- Activities can run smoothly, and students are more inclined to follow your lead if you:
  - **Collect them before beginning** the activity
  - Name the cues that will announce the **beginning and end**, as this will help them transition in and out more smoothly
  - Join in, build **a culture of enjoyment!** This will encourage them to join in and follow your lead more readily



**TIER 1**

### FRUSTRATION MONSTER



- Remember a time when you felt really frustrated
- Imagine that your frustration was a monster
- Draw the monster...is it big? Is it bright? What color(s) is it?
- This is not meant to be a nice & neat drawing – leave room for lots of expression!

Hannah Beach

**TIER 1**

### Drumming



- Have everyone sit in a circle and hold their drums.
- You are in the centre of the circle and are the "conductor" of the drumming experience
- You set the tempo and speed for the drumming. Slowly, quickly, ..... very very quickly! Alternate speeds and modify the tempo up and down while your students follow you.
- Every once in a while, you can even freeze your hands so that the students know to stop drumming. . . and then start waving your hands suddenly and quickly!

Hannah Beach

**TIER 1**

### SQUEEZE AWAY



- Free style water-color painting
- Banner paper
- Spray bottle for each student
- Paint & water
- Can be done to music
- Can be done on snow in the winter!!

Hannah Beach

### Emotions Room

A PLACE TO LET IT ALL OUT UNTIL THE TEARS CAN FLOW



**EMOTIONS ROOM SUPPLIES:** Different kinds of expression

- Throwing:
  - a) Stuffed animals/puppets
  - b) Soft balls
  - c) Velcro balls
  - d) Magic mitt
- Kicking/stomping:
  - a) Gym mats
  - b) Bubble wrap
- Hitting:
  - a) Pillows
  - b) Pool noodles
  - c) Balloons
  - d) Punching bag
  - e) Exercise ball
- Other:
  - a) White Board for scribbling
  - b) Paper/thick cardboard for ripping

**TO HELP THE TEARS TO FLOW**

### Play and emotional well-being

- When children are "stirred up" emotionally, their PLAY can reflect themes they are struggling with.
- PLAY is how they naturally make sense of all the emotions they are experiencing.
- In PLAY, pictures are drawn, structures are made, and games are engaged in to ALLOW EMOTIONS TO COME OUT in a way that feels "safer".

### Taking frustration into play

Playing out the impulses to make things work



- Constructing and crafts
- Building – LEGO, blocks, mazes, etc.
- Making things perfect – puzzles
- Organizing & orchestrating

### Taking frustration into play

Playing out the impulses to ATTACK or DESTROY



- Destroying and demolishing
- Hitting and throwing
- Kicking & screaming
- War games, attacking games
- Play fighting

• reduces levels of frustration  
• decreases aggression and violence in real life

### What about 'rough' play?

Should we allow it?



How do we keep it safe?



Are there benefits?



When do we 'put the breaks on'?



### Difference between *violence* and *symbolic play*




- Use of props – a character, plays a role, dress-up, change in voice & demeanor
- Start/finish to the play
  - Cue the 'play time' with music beginning, when it stops the game stops
- Make a big space available (preferably out side) for this type of physical play – removing this from the classroom helps to shift the brain from 'real and not real.'
  - Sets the parameters for 'safe' expression
- There needs to be rules – it's NOT 'free' play
- There needs to be active supervision

### Guns, swords and other weapons

Developmentally, preschoolers have not yet grown the integrative capacity to form intentions with the objects they manipulate.

Items used in PLAY

vs

How these items are perceived in 'real' life

Finger

Pool noodle

Banana

LEGO structure

Other...

### Setting parameters

**Phase 1 : Adult leads**  
Set-up for success – CLEAR, EXPLICIT, MODEL  
Use targeted games to set the stage

- Red light, green light
- Simon Says

**Phase 2 : Adult is scripting appropriate behaviors**  
Games in one direction

- Obstacle courses
- Tobogganing
- Target throwing on the wall

Safety is mapped out

- Turn taking
- Following cues for beginning/end of game

**Phase 3: Other games are permitted when parameters are well integrated:**

- Fencing with pool noodles
- Pool noodle tag
- Tag games
- Ball sharing games

**NOTE:** Games in the 'rough & tumble' category can be allowed when students understand and respond to the adult cues for beginning & stopping a game. A clear signal needs to be provided to maintain safety, ex. Double-whistle blow.

**Fun in the Snow!**

**Being prepared and organized**

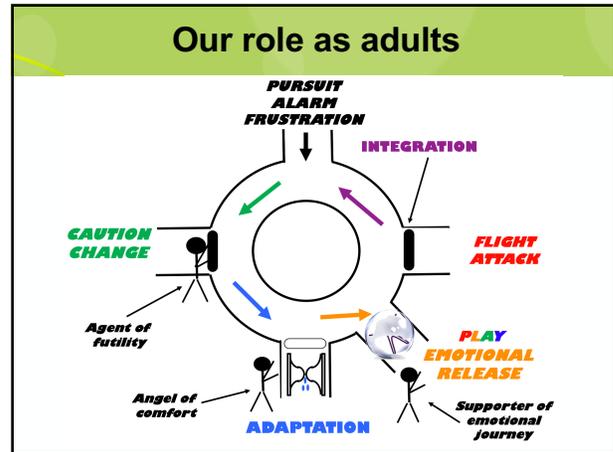
- Review Winter Rules on the Playground
- Set-up game areas with supervision
- Delineate areas in the playground with cones - share the 'map' of play areas with groups to ensure clear communication
- Assign 'helpers' to take out and set-up equipment in the different areas (this helps them to respect the rules)

**Playground 'TRAFFIC SIGNS'**

- Use posts with arrows to show the traffic direction!
- Use cones to delineate sliding area
- Have adults on duty at the top and bottom of the snow hill

**Snowball Targets**

**We LOVE playing in the snow!**



### Information to relay to parents

- Inform parents of the rules and parameters being taught and coached with the students.
- School is a 'terrain' to practice and learn 'hands on' whether they are doing crafts, building structures or playing out their emotions.
- Children can get hurt doing all kinds of things...not necessarily because of 'rough play.'
- Help parents understand that 'rough' symbolic play, when well orchestrated and supervised is not violence.

### CEBM website

[www.cebm.ca](http://www.cebm.ca)

The screenshot shows the CEBM website interface. At the top, there is a navigation menu with links for ABOUT US, PROJECTS, THEMES, RESOURCES, ARTICLES, LIBRARY, EVENTS, and MEMBERS. Below the menu, there is a section for 'Resources' and 'Infographics'. The infographic section displays several colorful infographics on topics such as 'THE PRESCHOOLER', 'WHY PLAY MATTERS', 'WHY DOES A GOOD ATTACHMENT', 'TALKING YEARS AND PRESCHOOLERS', 'SAY SOMETHING YOU MEAN IT', and 'SHYNESS'.

### CEBM website

[www.cebmmember.ca](http://www.cebmmember.ca)

Password: CEBMmembers

**CEBM FRAMEWORK FOR STUDENT SUPPORT**  
Members Section

PHILOSOPHY | THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK | CHALLENGES | PRACTICES | MATERIALS | IMPLEMENTATION SPACE

**Theoretical Framework**  
PLAY AND EXPRESSION

There is now a body of work that confirms the pivotal role of play in the healthy development of children. It is the context in which the brain grows, especially in the early years when the right hemisphere of the brain is in rapid development. The right hemisphere requires experiences, not information to grow, and so play is what children need most in order to develop a brain that can later be used for "higher learning". The erosion of play time has been documented. Concurrently it has been noted that there is a significant increase in the diagnosis of mental health disorders and ADHD. There are concluding that there is a link between the two. This is because play also provides an outlet for the expression of emotion. Emotional health is all about emotional movement. In play, children are shown, shared and re-acted, have an arena, frustration is vented, and games are engaged in to allow emotions to come out.

**WEBINAR: Why Play Matters**  
Eva de Gooijer

Why do children play and why do they need to play? We are now learning that play is more important than we ever thought both in terms of brain development and also for emotional well-being. Join us to find out about why play is so important, about different kinds of play and about how you can support your playful child.

[To date available in download format](#)

**Interview: Dr Gordon Neufeld on the topic of Play**  
Dr Gordon Neufeld

"Play - at least the kind that builds brains, forwards development, and serves our children - is becoming an endangered activity among those who need to engage in