



Adapting a Calmer and Kinder Approach to Communicating Emotions with Toddlers and Preschoolers



A review of the literature to
inform Early years practice



Background



EARLY CHILDHOOD STUDIES DEGREES NETWORK JOURNAL

VOLUME 2
MAY 2024

OXFORD
BROOKES
UNIVERSITY

VOLUME 1 JANUARY 2023 Page 36



My name is Maya Marina El Khoury. I am a Level 5 student in BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies at Oxford Brookes University. Fully engaged in my practice, I aim at completing and fulfilling the ECSDN competencies to become a professional educator for all children, and provide them with care, support and happiness and ensure their safety and their well-being at their early stages of life.

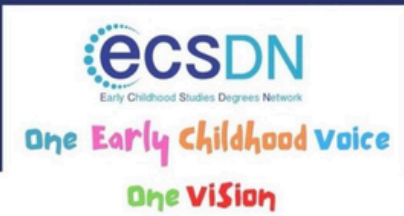
Introduction

Global developmental delay (GDD) is defined as 'a significant delay in two or more domains of development, including activities of daily living' (Habibullah et al, 2019:59). This research will examine a particular trait of GDD, that is the impairments of speech and communication in children from birth to 8 years old. Generally speaking, children's communication progresses through a shared pattern of development. However, if an individual has a delay, the progress is at a slower rate than would be expected for their age (Badawieh et al, 2023). Any investigation will have to make some difficult decisions about research strategies, and about gathering relevant information by professionals. Since the ratification of the UNCRC in 1989, children with disabilities can express their views and share evidence regarding services provided to them. Yet, there used to be a time when these children were considered hard to educate (Borsay, 2012), and as physically, cognitively and emotionally undeveloped, as Kellett puts it: 'adults in waiting' (2005:56) This is still the case in many countries, and including those with those communities with moderate socio-economic status.

This report will be based on a special case study, my own, because I had this factor of disability. The definition of speech and language delay will be detailed through some literature sources and illustrated by my own experience in my literature review that will also include a discussion around the position of early diagnosis between identification and intervention. In the findings, I will share some additional recent resources regarding the understanding of early diagnosis. Finally, the discussion will provide an opinion on how to react to an early diagnosis and on the interest it may represent for parents and practitioners.



ONLINE ECSDN RESEARCH CONFERENCE



24 January, 2025 | 9:30am -1pm

Conference Focus One Early Childhood Voice One Vision

This conference is open to all institutions who offer Early Childhood Studies degrees and particularly welcomes submissions from students and early career researchers.

For further information please visit our dedicated website

www.ecsdn.org



Early Childhood Studies Degree Network Conference 2025

Friday 24 January 2025

Presenter

Maya Marina El Khoury
Student, Oxford Brookes University



Maya Marina El Khoury is a Level 6 undergraduate student in Early Childhood Studies at Oxford Brookes University. In May 2024, she published in the ECSDN student research publication a research article titled "What Are the Main Factors of an Early Diagnosis for Children with Speech and Communication Delays?". This conference provides her with an opportunity to build on that work through an oral presentation linked to her undergraduate dissertation. Maya's presentation will explore the practitioner's role in supporting toddlers' and pre-schoolers' communication and language development, showcasing the theoretical knowledge and practical skills she has developed throughout her studies.

Role of the practitioner in supporting families of young children in communication and language development

Children with the capacity of using language are practising to hear, to understand and to learn how to use language intentionally for other purposes, such as listening to storytelling, looking at picture books, or going on outdoor trips. However, modelling the art of communication in the early years has limits, thus the role of early years educators in supporting children who have communication developmental delays, and supporting their families is complex. The EYFS (DfE, 2024) sets the framework for planning the curriculum and supporting children's learning. Nonetheless, it does not give a full description of the extent of the role of the early years practitioner with strategies in supporting children with special needs. Currently, in England, the Speech and Language UK Organisation (2024) counts 1.9 million children with speech and language disorders, affected by multiple factors and symptoms discussed in-depth within educational and medical research. The role of the early years practitioner is not just in planning the curriculum and meeting their needs. It is to put their knowledge into early identification of speech and language disorders, to implement early intervention strategies. To support this process, partnership with parents is strongly encouraged, for high-quality communication and language development at both home and practice.

Research aims

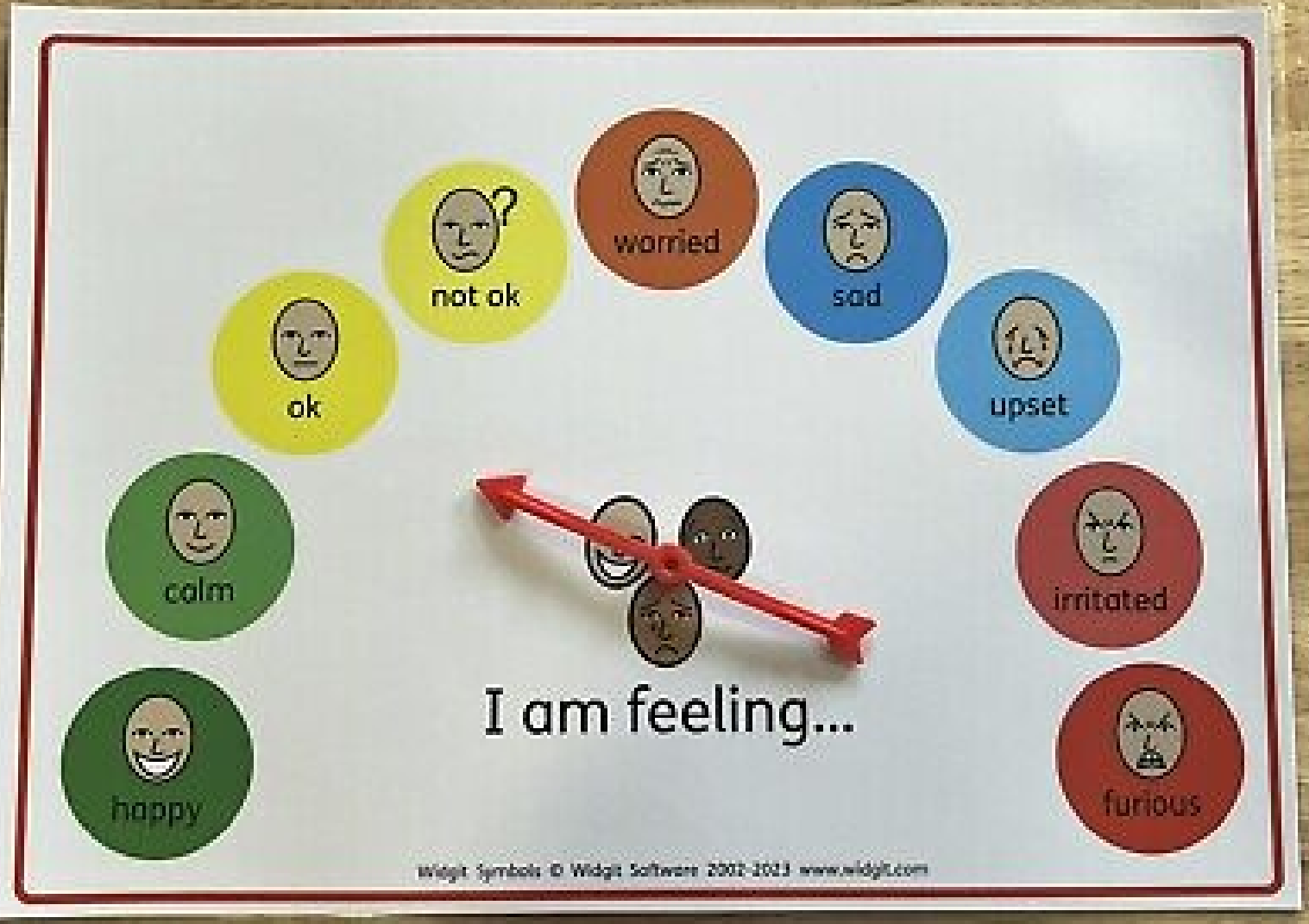
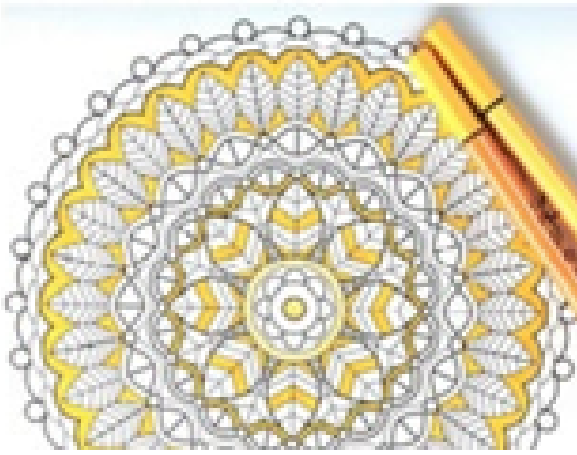
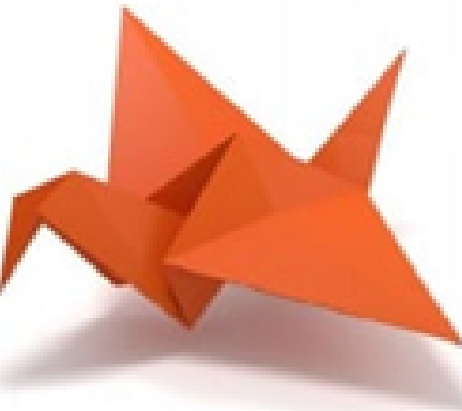
- Understanding of self-regulation and mindfulness approach for personal, social and emotional development
- Importance of adult-children interactions through calm and kinder approach
- Provisional support for communication and emotional development from EYFS to school







Early Intervention
Foundation, 2022

CALMING ACTIVITIES

- Puzzles
- Listen to Music
- Draw/Paint
- Origami
- Play-Doh/clay
- Read
- Stack Rocks



ZONES OF REGULATION!

Blue	Green	Yellow	Red
			
Sick Sad Tired Bored Moving Slowly	Happy Calm Good to Go Focused Ready to Learn	Frustrated Worried Silly/Wiggly Anxious Excited	Mad/Angry Mean Yelling/Hitting Out of Control I Need Time and Space

SENSORY TOOLS



Could you have a sensory box at home?

Focus their attention on their own sensations for mindful awareness of complex aspects, observe their thoughts internally as they occur



Eliminate emotional responses by focusing on one's moment-to-moment experiences, involving top-down reflection and practising non-judgement, which produces calmness and well-being; focusing on the present moment instead of ruminating over a recollected source of anxiety

**Mindfulness approach
or emotion coaching
(Zelazo and Lyons, 2012)**



Understanding of childhood wellbeing built around relationships, attachments and friendships potentially



Prodding children to notice what is happening in the current moment in a purposeful and nonreactive way



Promoting social and emotional learning (SEL) (Gilbert, 2024)

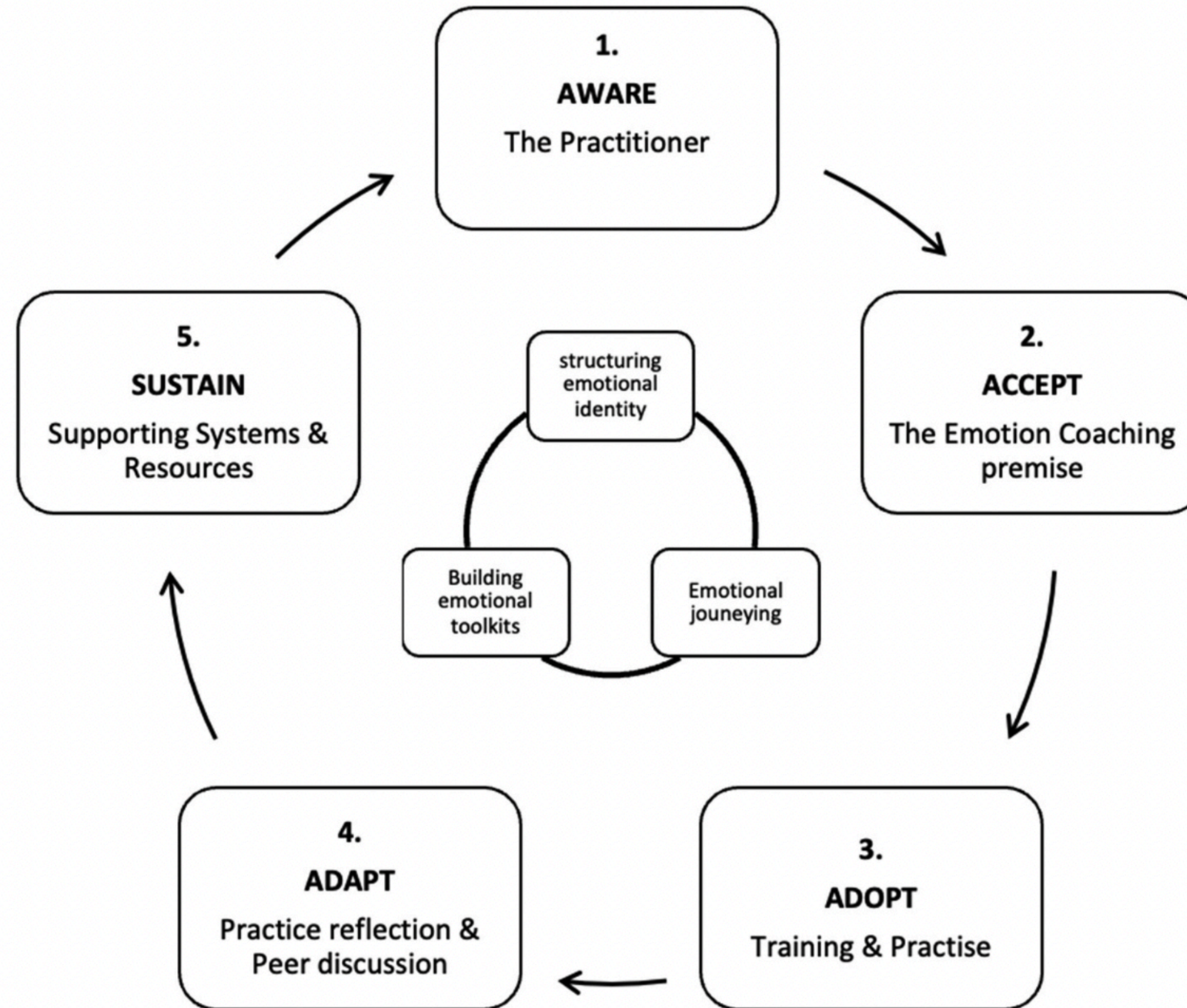


Figure 1. Model of Emotion Coaching practice Engagement.

A reminder of the importance adult-children interactions starting from Early Years

The foundation for lifelong mental health is laid in early childhood, when young children's experiences with parents, family, and the broader environment have considerable influence on young children's rapidly developing brain.

(National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007)



A WAY OF THINKING,
FEELING,
COMMUNICATING
AND BEHAVING



PLAYFULNESS
PLAYFUL
PARENTING



ACCEPTANCE
OF THE CHILD'S
INNER WORLD



CURIOSITY
ABOUT THE MEANING
UNDERNEATH THE
BEHAVIOUR



EMPATHY
FOR THE CHILD'S
EMOTIONAL STATE

Dr . Dan Hughes, 2006

Relationships with caregivers and families:

- for a **holistic family support** (Shonkoff & Fisher, 2013)
- *In-the-Moment Feedback* to increase **attunement and positive caregiver-child interactions**
- Strengths-based approaches in families and children
- Interdisciplinary field where other disciplines and settings interact to support families and children's well-being

From an Early Childhood perspective:

- 'engaging family members and other important adults in early identification and treatment of social, emotional, and behavioral challenges is essential to promoting positive mental health outcomes for children over the lifespan' (p. 23)
- 'an ecological lens that recognizes the influence of parent-child relationships, family, and broader developmental contexts on the social and emotional well-being of preschool children' (p.24)

Strategies to improve engagement with families for Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers (Molina, 2023)

the continuum of services, from promotion to prevention to treatment, needed to support young children's development, prevent mental health problems from emerging, and address social and emotional challenges before they become more serious disorders (Zero to Three, 2017, 2023).

Springer Series on Child and Family Studies
Series Editor: Nirbhay N. Singh

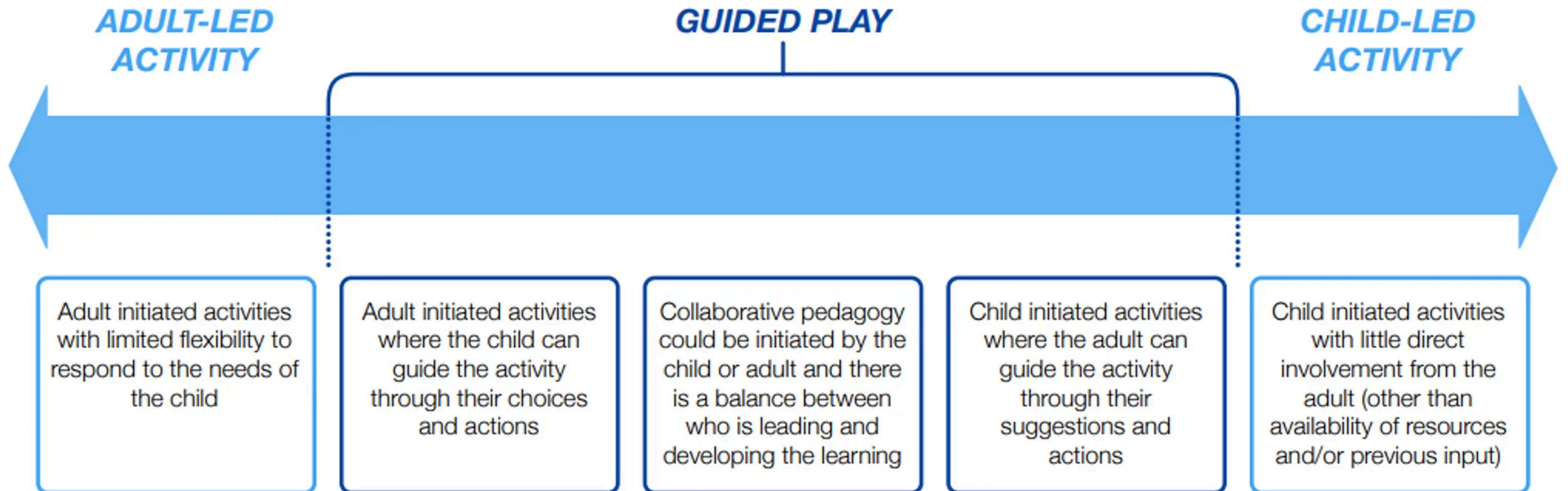
Laura Nabors
Jessica Dym Bartlett Editors

Family Engagement in Mental Health Interventions for Young Children

As children spend significant amount of times in classrooms at each educational development per year, teachers are encouraged to find ways to nurture well-being in the learning environment

(Rempel, 2012).

The Early Years Pedagogical Continuum, EEF (2024) to support communication & language, and PSED



‘No amount of high-quality of provision can take the place of early childhood educators who respond with sensitivity and skill to the individual needs of children for whom they are responsible’

(Fisher, 2024:93).

Based on the EYFS Statutory Framework (DfE, 2025)

EEF (2026) 'Supporting Personal Social and Emotional Development'



01
Teaching Awareness
of Emotions and
Feelings



02
Teaching and
Modelling Managing
Emotions and Feelings



03
Teaching and Modelling
Social Communication



04
Teaching
Relationship Skills



05
Teaching How to
Sustain Positive
Relationships



06
Promoting Self-Care

EEF (2026) 'Supporting Self-Regulation and Executive Function'



01
Creating and
Navigating Challenge



02
Teaching Self-
Monitoring and Self-
Awareness



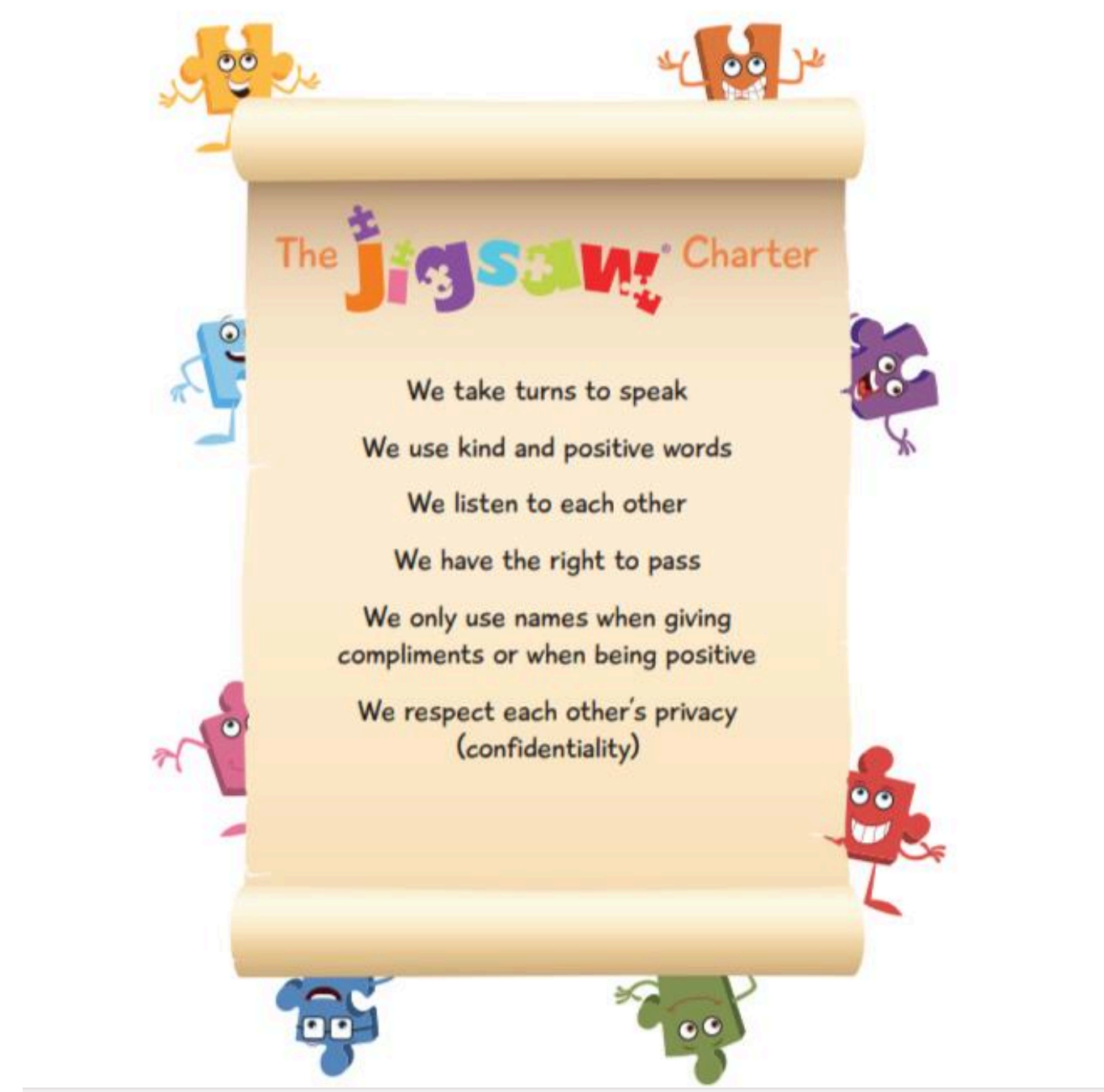
03
Creating a Community
of Collaborative
Learners



04
Promoting Physical
Activity



05
Promoting Talk about
Learning



Both teachers and children must deal with their own emotions, as well as those of others, in their everyday school lives.

Teachers must not only regulate their own emotions but also support children in regulating theirs as children are still developing their emotion regulation skills

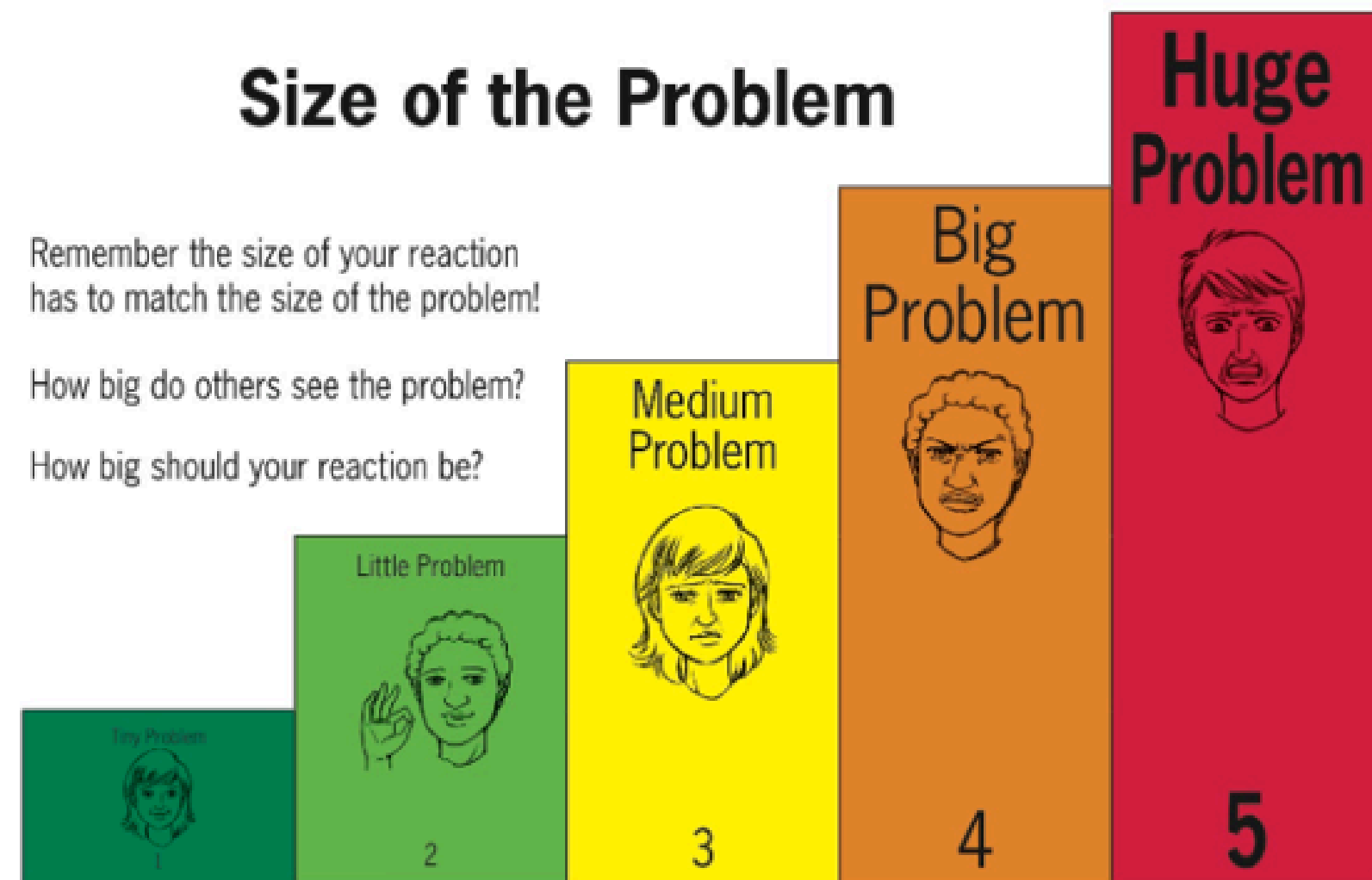
(Kostøl and Mänty, 2024:1)

Size of the Problem

Remember the size of your reaction has to match the size of the problem!

How big do others see the problem?

How big should your reaction be?



THE
ZONES
OF REGULATION

2010-2026 BY LEAH KUYPERS

REFLECTION SHEET

Name: _____ Date: _____

How do I feel?



What happened?

I was not being:



Safe



Responsible



Kind



Respectful

Next time I will...



Ask for help



Use my words



Be kind



Take a break



Go to a reflection table



Be safe



Breathe





Be respectful

What can I do to make it right?

How do I feel now?



Green Zone

Happy
Calm
Ready to learn
Focused

Blue Zone

Sad
Tired
Sick
Bored

When I am in the Green Zone I can...

- Listen
- Learn
- Work Hard
- Be a positive role model

When I am in the Blue Zone I can...

- Ask for a break
- Take 3 deep breaths
- Stand and stretch
- Ask for a fidget or a hug

Yellow Zone

Nervous
Silly
Worried
Annoyed

Red Zone

Angry
Not Ready
Out of control
Upset

When I am in the Yellow Zone I can...

- Ask for a fidget
- Count to 10
- Take 3 deep breaths
- Talk to an adult

When I am in the Red Zone I can...

- Ask for a break
- Take 5 deep breaths
- Go for a walk
- Talk to an adult

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Conclusion

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Future Citizens



Mindful



Communicators



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