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# Strategies to Develop Emotional Intelligence in Early Childhood

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## Abstract

Children have many opportunities in early childhood education that support their emotions. These opportunities need to be transformed into learning situations appropriate to their development and developed. Learnings cannot happen independently of emotional intelligence. Social-emotional skills must be developed in education to achieve both academic success and success in life. It is important to support emotional intelligence in early childhood education to enable children to be emotionally healthy, to cope with difficulties, to respect differences, and to gain a social perspective by working in collaboration with others. Emotional intelligence training helps not only children but everyone in the classroom setting, especially educators who are unsure of how to work with a child with an emotional or behavioral problem. Since emotional intelligence can be developed and strengthened by training at all ages, it can be a way of teaching for educators as they regularly include methods and techniques in the program. Based on this, in this section, the emotional intelligence of children, programs methods and strategies will be discussed in terms of supporting emotional intelligence in the early years.

**Keywords:** Emotional intelligence, Early childhood education, Early childhood teacher, Emotions, Socio-emotional learning

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, the difficulties experienced by children are increasing with many rapid changes such as cultural interaction, COVID 19 pandemic, distance education that have come with globalization, and efforts to improve children's emotional intelligence are gaining importance. OECD states that the quality of education must be high for children to be "well-being" and to be effective, responsible, and interactive individuals in a complex and uncertain world [1].

On the other hand, it is emphasized that "life and career" skills such as flexibility, initiative and self-orientation, social and intercultural relations, leadership, and responsibility must be acquired for children to adapt to the economic environment and acquire a profession that can sustain their lives. It is also stated that the development of 21st-century skills is related to the early learning environment [2]. Child development is faster in the first five years and the experiences and interventions acquired during this period can affect children's brain development, personality, and success in life [3, 4]. As well as meeting their basic needs such as nutrition and care, how their emotions are met and what kinds of experiences are offered are determinants of children's emotional intelligence in the early years. This reveals the

need to support emotional intelligence abilities from early years and develop the emotional intelligence of children through social experiences to progress towards their goals unabated despite difficulties [5–9]. Supporting emotional intelligence in the early years contributes to the development of basic competencies such as recognizing, understanding, and managing emotions and achieving permanent gains. It has been determined that children with higher emotional intelligence manage their emotions better, resort to aggression less, have more positive general moods, are more successful academically, move away from negative habits, establish positive social relationships with their family, peers, and social circles, and show social adaptation [7, 10–13]. Emotions are the determinants of the reactions. For example, anger, fear, and disgust increase attention and agility at the moment of danger, astonishment enables focusing on understanding the environment, sadness allows to pause and think and adapt to the situation, and happiness enables to enjoy the moment with relaxation response and move forward to new goals [14]. Individuals can adjust their emotions by improving their emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is a type of intelligence that includes abilities such as recognizing, identifying, expressing, understanding, and regulating the emotions of the individual and others [15]. As the expected correct ratio between IQ level and success could not be achieved under all conditions, it was determined that academic intelligence did not give a privilege to the person in terms of being prepared or adapting to positive or negative changes in life. Researchers emphasize that emotional intelligence has a determining effect on how well an individual can use his or her existing abilities [14].

Emotional intelligence, which affects both the social and academic life of the individual, has been studied in different dimensions by different researchers. Mayer and Salovey define emotional intelligence as perceiving, evaluating, and expressing emotions, using emotion to facilitate thought, thinking with, and understanding them, and managing emotions [15]. Bar-On describes emotional intelligence to be aware of the emotions of oneself and others and to express emotions (personal skills), to understand the feelings of others required for establishing and maintaining relationships (interpersonal skills), solving personal and interpersonal problems, and making correct sense of emotions during the reaction (adaptation), stress management, and the ability to feel positive emotions to oneself and others (general mental health) [16]. Goleman explains emotional intelligence in the dimensions of self-awareness, emotion management/ self-regulation, self-activation/motivation, understanding others' feelings /empathy and conducting relationships/social relations. According to these definitions, emotional intelligence can be interpreted as being aware of emotions and using emotions effectively for personal development, and being able to continue despite the obstacles encountered in life [14].

Early childhood settings are emotionally rich environments in which each child reflects their emotions specific to their personality and culture. Children spend most of their time in the school environment after the home environment. When they come to school, they bring their feelings to the classroom. They are in search of trust; they try to understand each other and adjust their feelings by transferring their feelings and experiences. If they can find support for their emotions in this environment, they feel safe, and their adaptation increases over time. The teacher should be able to recognize the child's emotions to respond effectively to the needs of the child [17, 18]. Children may tend to express themselves with different behaviors when their emotions are not understood. This situation can cause difficulties for both teachers and the child. It is necessary to support emotional intelligence abilities with education programs in many aspects such as feeling safe, being happy, and increasing the effect of learning. Supporting emotional intelligence in early childhood education increases the quality of education. High-quality education

also aims to give children positive, safe, and healthy behaviors; contribute to peer groups, families, schools, and communities ethically and responsibly; and teaches to have basic competencies, habits, and values as a foundation for the sensible citizenship [19]. When social–emotional skills are systematically supported in the school programs, academic success will also be provided, as the quality of teacher–student interaction will increase and problematic behaviors will decrease [9, 20]. For this reason, strategies, methods, and techniques that will support emotional intelligence abilities in early childhood settings should be determined and implemented according to the needs of children, educators, and families. In this section, the emotional intelligence abilities of children, programs, strategies to support emotional intelligence will be discussed, and guidance will be provided in terms of supporting emotional intelligence in the early years.

## **2. Emotional intelligence in early childhood**

Emotional intelligence includes three basic competencies such as recognizing, expressing, understanding managing and regulating emotions. These competencies strengthen the child's empathy and social relations with others [7].

The ability of recognizing and expressing emotions involves awareness of the emotional changes of the person himself and then those around him and labeling emotions. This process is revealed through verbal and non-verbal information [21]. Emotions are recognized and expressed by making use of the similarities between situations, after obtaining verbal and non-verbal information through experiences. Emotional recognition and expression have key importance to build and maintain the social relationships [22].

The ability of understanding emotions includes establishing a relationship between emotions and situations and making sense of the changes and expressions of emotions in the body. It helps to carry out interpersonal relationships by interpreting messages from verbal and non-verbal forms of communication [23]. It develops through recognizing the emotions and their reasons, evaluating the environment and the situation, realizing that the same situations both create different effects and emotions in different people and may evoke multiple emotions [24].

The ability of managing and regulating emotions enables the individual to observe and control himself. It includes skills such as managing and expressing emotions with positive results, showing flexibility and adaptation, and delaying pleasure [21]. The intensity of the emotions and the duration of action are adjusted in such a way that the person can proceed following his goals. As socially acceptable behavioral expressions are learned, they emerge as behavior and social competence are provided [25].

When children reach the age of 2–3, they start to realize that others will have different feelings and thoughts from them; In the following years, they learn to put themselves in the shoes of others and find the source of their troubles. With the development of emotional abilities, they begin to make sense of complex emotions such as disappointment and betrayal and to empathize with a wide variety of emotions [26]. Over time, they regulate their emotions and help their peers and those around them in stressful situations to help them relax.

Although emotional intelligence abilities affect each other, the ability to recognize emotions can be considered as the basis of all abilities. When children do not recognize emotions, they cannot be successful at understanding and managing them. For this reason, children should recognize them starting from basic emotions, and social interaction experiences should be allowed to understand and manage emotions.



With social experiences, the child's ability to recognize the emotions of others, to reflect and express the emotion appropriate to the content will improve.

### **3. Emotional intelligence training programs for children**

Children may be vulnerable to emotional difficulties that hinder their academic achievement [27, 28]. Fuller stated that the first years at school are more important than any other stage of school life in developing a child's perception of success. In addition to the perception of success for young children, regulating their emotions and developing basic social skills also increase their primary school readiness and academic skills [29]. Research stated that when children are not socially and emotionally competent, they may experience problems in communication skills, friendship relations, and conflict resolution [27]. Therefore, Stone-McCown et al. emphasized that integrating emotional skills-related programs into the curriculum is an important preventive solution for school problems [30]. Examination of the programs that support emotional intelligence in the early years will guide in developing strategies for children to recognize, understand and manage their emotions [31]. Many of these programs are evidence-based, many studies are supporting their impact on emotional intelligence [32–34]. Below, information about programs and strategies frequently encountered in the literature such as Strong Start, RULER, PATHS are given to guide educators in developing emotion strategies.

#### **3.1 Strong start**

The Strong Start Program was developed to increase the emotional skills of children aged 3–5 with emotional behavioral disorders [35, 36]. The content of the program is “Exercising Emotions”, “Understanding Emotions”, “Angry Times”, “Happy Times”, “Anxious Times”, “Understanding Others’ Emotions/Empathy”, “Being a Good Friend, Solving People’s Problems”, “It consists of 10 sections, namely “Completing the Task” [37].

Mascot animals are used in the program as an effective technique in developing children's emotional skills and provides ease of application. The mascot animal is determined in line with the interests and desires of the children, and a teddy bear is generally preferred. It is placed in a suitable place in the classroom to help children develop their emotional understanding during the activities and to ensure the permanence of the skills they learn [38].

#### **3.2 RULER**

The preschool RULER Program was developed to increase the emotional skills of children, to regulate the social and emotional climate of the classroom, and to ensure effective teacher-child communication [39]. In the content of the program, activities aimed at increasing children's skills of recognizing emotions (Recognizing), understanding the causes and consequences of emotions (Understanding), labeling emotions with correct words (Labeling), expressing emotions in different situations (Expressing), and regulating (Regulating) emotions effectively [40]. There are also activities to develop the emotional skills of adults and teachers [41]. Tools such as mood meter, blueprint, meta moment were prepared to increase the emotional intelligence of children.

The teacher can use the Mood Meter tool while practicing and after the activity. For example, the teacher can examine the table with the children after a small group activity to create different creative models with blocks in the classroom. He may ask

children questions such as “Vera, how did your activity just make you feel?”, “Tom, which of the colors did you feel like in the process of making mock-ups?” With this tool, children can be made to describe their emotions accurately and express them more concretely with colors (eg yellow when angry, blue when sad, etc.). In addition, children can add similar different emotions to the emotions in Mood Meter besides the existing emotions and increase their emotion vocabulary [42].

The Blueprint enables children to solve the emotional problems they encounter in their lives with the stages of “Recognition and Labeling”, “Understanding”, “Expression Editing” and “Planning” to increase their emotional skills. Children primarily using these stages when they encounter a problem; They can identify what they and others feel and show empathy, understand situations that cause their feelings, organize how they express them to another person, and evaluate their emotions more effectively [43].

Meta-Moment is aimed to prevent children from making instant wrong decisions when they encounter a problem and to give more effective reactions by prolonging the process. This tool consists of 6 steps: the occurrence of the event, the feelings about the event, pause, imagining yourself in the best emotional state, developing a strategy for solving the problem, and achieving it.

### **3.3 The preschool PATHS**

PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies) aims to support social problem-solving skills, emotions, and self-control of children aged 3–5 [44] and to reduce problem behaviors [45]. The content of the program includes activities related to 30 different emotions. When the general framework of the program is examined, it is seen that it meets the structures of self-confidence, understanding emotions, problem-solving, self-control, and interpersonal communication. The program features various stories, the protagonist of which is a young turtle who behaves aggressively towards those around him. In the stories, the young turtle has problems due to his behavior, and he can solve these problems by controlling his emotions by using the emotional strategies he learned from the old and wise turtle. In addition, children are guided to make an “emotion box” so that they can recognize their emotions and control the process, and children fill this box according to their moods during the program. Besides, the “Control Signal Poster” is also used [10].

In the Control Signal Poster, the red light stands for “stop and calm down,” the yellow light represents ‘slow down and think’, the green light represents ‘go and try your plan’. The material also includes the self-evaluation phase of the children at the end of the process. Using this material, children can control themselves gradually in problem situations and evaluate their behaviors [46].

### **3.4 Zippy’s friends**

Zippy’s Friends Program is designed to increase the emotional skills of children aged 5–7 and acquire the skills to solve the problems they encounter [47]. In this program, strategies to cope with emotional problems in children at an early age were taught to prevent them from getting harmed when they encounter problems in adolescence and adulthood [48, 49]. The content of the program includes modules such as “recognizing emotions”, “communication”, “establishing and ending relationships”, “problem-solving”, “dealing with change and loss”, “using strategies to cope with problems” [49].

Zippy’s Friends Program features a bug named Zippy and his friends, who are young children. The sessions in the program consist of stories in which Zippy

experienced emotional conflicts and friendship problems that children may encounter throughout their lives. Children think about these problems and perform role-playing activities to gain skills to cope with their emotions [47]. Also, the stories in the program have a certain chronological order and are related to the previous story. In addition, the problems experienced are prepared for the current events that the child may encounter in his life [48].

### **3.5 Roots of empathy/Roe**

Empathy skill is the basis of the Roots of Empathy Program [50] as well as crying, care, and planning, emotions (including bullying), sleep, and communication [51]. It is important to increase children's awareness of infant development [52]. In the program, emotions are integrated with life by visiting the baby and their parents throughout the year [51]. By interacting with this baby, children can learn about the baby's needs. Children ask questions to their parents about the emotional state of the baby and get information about the reasons that make up the emotional state. When they return to the classroom, they can make animations on this subject and express themselves about how they feel when they are in a similar emotional state [51, 52].

### **3.6 The self-science approach**

The self-science approach underlines children's discovery of emotions, understanding themselves, expressing themselves, establishing healthy relationships, and managing conflict [30]. The program includes three stages: "Know Yourself", "Choose Yourself" and "Give Yourself". In the "Know yourself" stage, children are provided to recognize emotions, create meaning and personal awareness [28]. In the "choose yourself" phase, children's emotion regulation skills, emotional competence, and responsibility skills are strengthened. In the "give yourself" stage, children are encouraged to show empathy [30].

During the implementation of the program, the day starts with the 'Rating Scale'. The teacher and the children say an emotional word, express this feeling with metaphors or by grading themselves between 1 and 10. This practice continues until all children express their feelings. This way, children become aware of their own emotions, their friends' and teachers' emotions. Then, a specific subject is introduced by drawing attention to it, and activities prepared for acting and experiencing this issue are realized. In the next stage, all stages are completed by talking with children about the emotions that occur during the application and closing [30].

## **4. Teaching strategies for emotional intelligence of children**

The teaching strategies that support the emotional intelligence of children include the integration of methods, techniques, and approaches that improve the ability to recognize, understand and manage emotions. Emotional intelligence training can be done not only when children need it but at every moment of learning. Emotions arise or emotional interaction is made with children in many activities. For example, welcoming the child who comes to the class with a smiling face or a special greeting gesture, saying "I miss you" to the child who has not been to the classroom for a few days, moments of emotion sharing in the form of "what did you experience and feel at the weekend" during the circle time, facial expressions drawn on numbers or figures in mathematics, astonishments during the science experiment excitement of the play, sharing the feelings of the

hero during the story. Although routines and coincidences carry many messages about emotions, a concrete, gradual and systematic path must be followed for the emotional intelligence development of children. In this way, it is necessary to answer many questions such as which emotions to start, which situations to be associated with, which type of activity to benefit from, which tools, methods, and techniques to use, which approaches to take during implementation.

Above all, teachers should have positive perceptions with emotional intelligence training and be open to self-improvement. When teachers are open to developing emotional competence in themselves, they can find numerous strategies to support emotional intelligence in the classroom. Plays, analogies, stories, or many images can be used to support emotional intelligence. However, the fact that the strategies that will support emotional intelligence are suitable for children's experiences and more creative and fun, far from monotony [53, 54]. Another point is that the visual materials to be used do not contain the emotional abuse of children. Sometimes children may be too sensitive to content that is normal for adults. Children may have critical periods, effective observations can be made to develop appropriate methods and strategies in terms of time, content, and frequency [14]. While applying the strategies, children's comprehension can be facilitated by following a step progressing from their own emotions to those of others [54]. Children differ in the difficulties they experience, the skills they have, and their interests. Therefore, the choice of method and strategy to be used can be adjusted according to individual differences [5, 55].

Every child needs to find an effective way to reveal their emotions. In the beginning, children may hesitate to express their emotions. If they do not know effective ways to regulate emotions they might response ineffective ways of expressing emotions such as avoiding (I'm fine, really!), denying (no, nothing), justifying (he's right, I should not have been like that), worrying (what if ... very angry) [56]. For this reason, in the educational environment, it can be ensured that children express their emotions directly or indirectly by using many methods and techniques that will improve their ability to express, understand and adjust their emotions. Below are examples of some methods for recognizing, understanding, and managing emotions, and then approaches supporting emotional intelligence are explained.

#### 4.1 Methods for recognizing emotions

Emotion recognition methods are effective for making sense of emotional clues and labeling emotions. In this way, the child can observe facial expressions and gestures and match them with emotions.

*Observation and Discussion:* It is a strategy where others and self-monitoring practices are made. It includes analysis and interpretation activities such as about the instant emotions of the characters in cartoons and books, analyzing the clues that enable the child to understand emotions, and allowing the child to experience and watch his emotions in front of the mirror.

*Emotion Diary:* It is a method that records the time of emotion, the situation that reveals the emotion, and the changes it creates in the body [57]. This method can be worked with children in a certain period (for example, two weeks) by specializing in an emotion. The child can record these situations through pictures or video recording. This technique allows the child to recognize the event that causes the emotion and the changes caused by the emotion.

*Body Scan:* It is a method applied by directing attention to each part of the body with eyes closed to notice the changes caused by emotions in the body [57]. When applying with a child, it may be beneficial for them to understand the term



“combing” to make concreteness primarily with the action of combing the hair. Then, when there are emotional changes, the child should scan/listen to his body by closing his eyes, tension or relaxation in his muscles, pain or discomfort, butterfly flutter, relief, difficulty in breathing or relaxation, weakness, etc. It can be encouraged to notice the changes and find the emotion that caused them.

In addition, emotion membranes, emotion thermometer, emotion graphics and posters (showing the name and degree/amount of emotion), emotion cards, game tools for emotions (bingo, matching card, puzzle, etc.), puppets, greeting and meeting cards, children’s picture books and videos might also be used [58–60].

## **4.2 Methods for understanding emotions**

Children should be able to define, make sense and express emotions correctly to exhibit appropriate social behaviors [61]. Emotions are one of the factors that determine the quality of life. Different emotions can be used in personal environments, family, friendships, and many areas of life, or they can arise in different contexts for the same emotions. Various theories explain understanding emotions. In the behavioral theory, emotions are accepted as four basic emotions and the physiological mechanisms of emotions are emphasized. The physiological theory states that emotions have the basis of biology. According to the social constructivism theory, the schemas created from social life form the basis for the emotional reactions of the person. Accordingly, there are two groups of emotions: basic emotions such as pleasure and fear, and complex emotions such as shame and guilt. In the etiology theory, it is emphasized that emotions enable individuals to survive and reproduce [62].

Methods and techniques used to support emotion understanding enable the child to notice the changes they create, and to establish a cause-effect relationship between events and emotions. Collecting affectionate words, interactive book reading, using puppets, interpreting visual material are among these methods.

*Collecting Affectionate Words:* Children are asked to collect pictures of love words used in their families for a week by drawing or representing them with pictures cut from newspapers or magazines. At the end of the week, an evaluation is made about which word of love they encounter the most and in what situations [54].

*Interactive Book Reading:* Emotional storybooks enable children to interact with the characters in the story [63]. In interactive reading, the child is tried to be included in the fiction as much as possible. While reading a book, children are asked about the feelings of the heroes (“how did they feel”, “why are they so sad”, “how are they showing their feelings?”) or the problems they are experiencing. It is ensured that children take the perspective of the heroes in the story, try to understand their emotions, but develop appropriate emotion management strategies for themselves. Thus, children can understand the emotions of the individuals in their daily life, based on the emotional states of the characters in the story.

*Using puppets:* Puppets are effective learning tools in terms of both containing humor and being interactive. Children’s emotional understanding can be supported by using puppets that reflect different emotions. Children perceive puppets as a friend, and when they are made to speak with content appropriate to their development, they spontaneously tend to understand, interpret and comfort the puppet’s emotional state.

*Interpreting visual materials:* books, newspapers, and magazines contain many visual stimuli including emotions or emotional context. These stimuli give children various messages about understanding and managing. As with reading interactive books, visuals suitable for children (which do not reflect emotional abuse) can be selected, and interpretation can be made with many questions such as what they

see in the visual, which emotion is reflected, why this emotion is felt, how it might behave from now on. Moreover, emotions can be examined and visual and emotional literacy can be increased by ensuring their use during the event.

### 4.3 Methods for emotion management

Emotion management methods help to recognize the intensity and effects of emotions, coping with these effects, managing them, and relaxing. Exercise, breathing, cat awakening, self-talk, self-compassion, safety point are among them.

*Exercise:* Exercise helps the body return to its normal balance by releasing natural chemicals and hormones [57]. Therefore, exercises can be used as effective strategies in dealing with emotions. Nature walks, garden games and sports should be included in the child's daily routine at school and home.

*Cat Awakening:* Using the observations made with cats or videos of cats waking up, and stretching their bodies, it is aimed that children imitate these states of the cat and calm down by applying it when they encounter intense emotions [64].

*Breathing exercises:* Taking diaphragmatic breathing reduces stress and provides emotional relief by reducing heart rhythm and blood pressure by providing carbon dioxide gas release and oxygen gas intake [57]. For this reason, teaching children to take proper diaphragmatic breathing, including various breathing exercises during the day, and encouraging them to use breathing in moments when they need relaxation help the child to have an effective strategy in managing their emotions.

*Positive and realistic self-talk:* Children may be asked to talk about their emotions by going in front of the mirror, develop ways to cope with this by expressing their feelings, and giving a self-motivated speech [59]. This way allows the child to increase his self awareness and to motivate himself to manage his emotions.

*Self-compassion:* It is a method that allows a person to approach him/her in a gentle, loving way in the face of mistakes or negative emotions, to characterize what happened as a situation that can happen to the whole of humanity, and to accept the self and emotion as it is without underestimating or exaggerating with conscious awareness [65].

*Safety point:* A point of the body is taken as a reference point to cope with negative emotions such as stress and insecurity, and relaxation is aimed at stimulating the nerves with moves as touch and massage. The point is optional and can be used for various ways like finger rubbing, palms touching, etc. It can also be applied as assigning emotion to each finger [64].

*Spatial reference/Safe Area:* It is a technique based on the use of indoor or outdoor spaces that the child can use to rest, stay alone and calm down. This area need to be peaceful for the child, comforts him/her with favorite sight, sound (stream, bird, etc.), fragrance (strawberry, cinnamon, tree, etc.), and taste (fruit, cake, etc.) [57, 64].

*Expressing Emotion:* This method ensure that children express themselves not only verbally but also various ways of expression (dance, music, painting, sculpture, drama, sports, etc.)

*Focus Change:* It involves moving away from the present moment by imagining a special / beautiful moment in which positive emotions are experienced or a place one loves, listening to music or singing, reading a book, exercising, and forgetting the negative thoughts for a moment. It is also known as TV channel switching. To facilitate this change, the person can produce a motivational sentence (I am good, I am safe and calm, I can overcome it, etc.) [57]. Changing the channel can make it easier to practice with children by allowing concretizing the name.

*Turtle Technique:* When the child feels a negative emotion, the first step is to notice it, then stop and think about this emotion, then shrink, self-hug, turn inward

and calm down with breathing, and focus on the solution by leaving the shell when calmed. It can be embodied with images of the turtle [66].

*Stairs:* This is an imaginary activity. In this technique children descend ten ladder steps by breathing and counting down each ladder. While the children pretend to descend from the stairs, they are asked questions (E.g. You have come to a very special place for you, where have you come?” ) to help them imagine and relax. Moving through each step can also be implemented by adapting it as saying a word of love to yourself [67].

*Pros and cons list:* Children are asked to draw and concretize the positive and negative features of the situation by dividing cardboard into two to choose the appropriate option in cases where they are unsure [59].

*Trust Walk:* Children are told to choose a partner. Then the eyes of one of the partners are closed. The blindfolded child is the eye of his partner and helps the blindfolded friend navigate the classroom safely.

*Draw and portray:* Children are asked to draw an event that they experienced on the day they were most unhappy in the classroom. The completed pictures are collected and distributed to other children in a mixed way. Children who take the pictures are asked to animate the event in the picture.

In addition to these techniques, emotion analysis posters (What do I feel?, Why do I feel this feeling?, How can I cope with the emotion?, Who can support Nan?, which is the most appropriate option?), Problem-solving cards, empathy cards, relaxation bag (through senses) might be used. Children can regulate their emotions and behaviors by using tools such as paints and pencils that will provide expression, breathing exercise cards, favorite scents, exercise cards, photos of a favorite environment or person, list of things they like to do, sponge or stress ball to be pressed [37, 58, 59].

## **5. Approaches to support children’s emotional intelligence**

Children need adult understanding and guidance to acquire skills such as recognizing, understanding, and expressing their emotions. The fact that emotional intelligence can be supported and developed with childhood experiences and education, teachers, and parents who provide basic experience and opportunities to the child, impose an important role in the process.

When teachers and parents have enthusiasm, patience, flexibility, respect for differences, creativity, humor, cooperation, empathy, effective communication, openness to innovations, they achieve more successful results in supporting children’s emotional intelligence skills [18, 68]. Approaches that support the emotional intelligence of children are discussed under the subtitles as recognition and acceptance of the child, active listening, emotional literacy in the classroom, being a model, emotion talks, emotion coaching.

### **5.1 Recognition and acceptance of the child**

Children are a whole with all their developmental characteristics, positive and negative emotions, and they need to be recognized and accepted as they are. It is important to develop expectations appropriate to the developmental characteristics of the child and to satisfy the interests and needs of the child. Developmental characteristics will determine the amount and type of emotional support children need individually [69].

Accepting the child is important in terms of the development of self-esteem, self-acceptance, expressing and managing their feelings, and reaching social and

emotional competence. Behaviors such as rejection, blaming, criticizing, threatening, embarrassing, mocking cause the child to think that he is not accepted. The child avoids expressing his feelings with insufficiency anxiety and shame. Children who cannot express their emotions start to show inward or outward-oriented behaviors and their social relationships deteriorate [17, 70].

When children feel accepted, they will be open to accepting others, showing respect and tolerance. Planning activities appropriate to the characteristics of children, allowing them to make decisions, criticize, and evaluate will make the child feel valued.

## **5.2 Emotional literacy in the classroom**

The classroom environment, which includes elements such as the layout, equipment, and classroom management methods of the classroom, conveys the messages about belonging to the child and whether it is safe [18]. Emotion graphics, diaries, children's pictures, and products enable the child to recognize himself. Emotion and behavior regulation tools should provide the child's intrinsic motivation. Self-regulation should be achieved through respect and empathy through relationships based on love and trust; strategies based on the reward-punishment system should be avoided. The behavior of the reward causes the child to be realized with extrinsic motivation rather than intrinsic motivation and damages the permanence of the behavior. Rather than the consequences of children's behavior, it would be more effective to draw attention to feelings, the process, and the reflections of behaviors on themselves and society.

Considering the developmental characteristics of children while organizing behavior, discussing the causes and consequences of the limits with the child, determining the limits/rules together, giving consistent responses to behaviors, graphics, etc. and visualization, are strategies that provide motivation and experience for the child to adopt social norms, regulate their emotions and express them appropriately [59].

## **5.3 Active listening**

Expressing what the child says as it is by reflecting it without comment is called mirroring, and children feel understood when faced with this type of active listening. Feeling that the child is understood helps him to know and accept himself, to express himself, to increase his self-confidence, and to be motivated for solutions [4]. When the child is unable to control his emotions, the teacher telling that he understands his emotions, waiting for the appropriate time and not being compelling, showing closeness, using a loving tone, making eye contact, giving reflective and positive feedback to the child, and being a guide are basic strategies in communication with the child [71, 72]. Sometimes there are emotional ups and downs in the classroom, empathetic listening can help children calm down. This style of communication prevents the development of feelings of shame and guilt caused by negative behaviors in the child, enables the child to feel accepted, to accept himself, to express himself comfortably, to make self-regulation by receiving feedback.

## **5.4 Being a model**

Children learn by observing their social environment. The adults' reactions, gestures, and behaviours give them information about the nature of emotion, when and how to express it. The child tries to reveal what he learned through imitation in similar situations. Through trial and error, they learn to use the most appropriate



emotional skill for the situation. Modeling the right behaviors and a positive environment increases the likelihood of children adjusting their emotions and behaviors [18, 70, 71]. Studies show that the reactions of children to emotions are related to the reactions of adults.; It has been revealed that children who grow up in a positive environment reflect positive communication in the games, when they are given stress, tense, and punitive reactions to their emotions, and they have difficulty in managing their emotions and behaviors [73, 74]. Therefore, educators should provide children with a positive, calm, and safe model, especially in terms of managing emotions.

### **5.5 Emotion conversations**

Emotional conversations are talks based on evaluation, understanding, and interpretation beyond the speech that includes actions such as examining the emotional indicators of both themselves and others, making statements about emotions, interpreting feelings, evaluating causes and consequences between adults and children [70, 75, 76].

Such emotion-sensitive discussions enable children to recognize, understand, and express their emotions, and thus initiate and maintain healthy social relationships and empathize [74, 76–78]. Emotion discussions prevent the child from developing internalizing behavior and provide conscious development [79, 80]. For this reason, it is necessary to listen to the emotional speeches of children, to review the process while telling, and to make them feel the reasons or consequences of the reactions. While speaking relaxes the child, it enables the educator to understand the child's point of view.

### **5.6 Emotion coaching**

Emotion coaching consist of communicative strategies such as explaining the observed event and emotion, managing the child's attention with emotional clues, helping the child to understand his feelings and behaviors, analyzing social interactions, and providing guidance. Educators who are emotion coaches recognize the child's negative emotions and see this as an opportunity to support the child's emotional development. The process starts with accepting all emotions of the child, recognizing and distinguishing complex emotions, naming emotions, giving information about emotions and their effects, encouraging the child for emotional expression, developing strategies together to manage and express negative emotions, to solve problems encountered at the end of negative emotions. It continues with conversation and encouragement for the social relationships. Teachers see the child as a subject and keep themselves in a helper position, pay attention to using a descriptive and solution-server language instead of the routing language [71, 80].

Emotion coaching improves the child's ability to express his emotions, prevents him from showing inward or outward-oriented behaviors as a result of his negative emotions, enables him to develop social communication, and increases success by improving attention skills [4, 17]. Educators and parents give positive feedback to children about their positive behavior, encourage them to participate in various activities, appreciate their efforts, encourage behaviors such as taking responsibility, planning, leading, sharing, and helping, emphasizing the importance of togetherness and friendship, self-knowledge. They can support by directing them to share emotions with their friends and to establish sincere social relationships [77].

Although educators work with a team spirit and try to support children's emotion and behavior regulation as a coach, there may be situations where the expected changes are not achieved (for example, self harming harming animals, etc.). Such

situations can reduce educators' determination to support emotional intelligence. In such cases, the child's emotions and behaviors are observed, and recorded. It may be necessary to follow up with frequency forms as well as tools, and follow-up of the child with a psychological counselor [81].

## 6. Conclusion

Early childhood is a critical period for the development of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence can be developed through experiences and education. The development of emotional intelligence abilities contributes to the psychological and physical well-being, social relations, and academic achievements of the individual both in childhood and adulthood. Teachers can use methods and techniques suitable for children's developmental characteristics to strengthen children's emotional intelligence. Concrete, systematic, and continuous support of emotional intelligence ensures effective results. Acceptance of children, active listening, emotion conversations, and emotion coaching can help children control their emotions. Emotional intelligence training reduces children's emotional and behavioral problems and makes learning more enjoyable.


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