

Emotional Development

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial will cover the topic of emotional development, through the definition and discussion of:

1. Importance of Emotional Development
2. Key Points in Early Emotional Development
3. The Eight Basic Emotions
4. Mirror Neurons

1. Importance of Emotional Development

Emotional development is another aspect of the early development of people. It is important on a number of different levels, because of its impact upon:

- **Social development:** Emotional development is important to social development because emotion is a sort of social cue.

↪ **EXAMPLE** Facial expressions are one way that people communicate with each other. In this manner, you can tell what each other are thinking or feeling without necessarily saying anything.

- **Biological development:** Emotional development is also important biologically, in that it links directly to one's physical arousal. It has certain ties to adaptive behaviors that help a person to survive.

↪ **EXAMPLE** When you feel fear, then you start to have a physical arousal and a rush of adrenaline, which helps you to realize that it's time to run, or to fly. On the other hand, when you're angry, you may have similar feelings of arousal, but it might signal a time that you want to fight, versus flight. As you can see, those biological connections help you to perform certain kinds of useful behaviors.

- **Evolutionary development:** Lastly, emotional development is important in an evolutionary sense, because there's a certain hereditary basis for emotions that are passed on from person to person. This is why, as you'll see, there's a certain regular development in people over time, throughout emotional development.

IN CONTEXT

Emotional development is particularly important evolutionarily to infants, because certain emotions,

like happiness or smiling, help babies to survive, by making them appear more appealing. The parents may be more likely to pay attention to a smiling baby than they would a non-smiling baby.

Conversely, though, a crying baby may elicit feelings of annoyance or unhappiness in an adult, which in turn may encourage that adult to come to the aid of the child. Therefore, both emotions--smiling and crying--can help a person to survive, and overall, help the species to survive.



TERM TO KNOW

Emotional Development

Important aspect of development, tied closely with maturation, important in social interaction with others, and survival

2. Key Points in Early Emotional Development

At the beginning of a child's life, from 0 to 8 months of age, an infant is only really able to show interest or excitement. Infants aren't actually able to show any different kinds of emotions, because essentially, these emotions are not biologically programmed in the infant. Therefore, any kind of displays of emotions during this time are generally not genuine in any way.

🔗 **EXAMPLE** When a child smiles during this time, it's probably not because he or she is actually intending to show an emotion of happiness; rather, it's probably related to some physiological trigger, such as the child having gas.

It isn't until 8 to 12 months that a child develops what is called a social smile. A social smile is a genuine social response to something that's occurring within the environment. It's also during this time that a child begins to develop his or her range of emotions. Within that first year of life, a child is able to express things like joy, anger, and sadness. These emotions develop relatively quickly.

3. The Eight Basic Emotions

A psychologist named Robert Plutchik refined an idea that there are eight basic emotions that all people have and that all people are able to express and generally recognize:

1. Fear
2. Surprise
3. Sadness
4. Disgust
5. Anger
6. Anticipation
7. Joy
8. Trust or Acceptance

These can vary in intensity to produce all the other kinds of emotions that you have.

➞ **EXAMPLE** For example, if someone feels anger, he or she can also feel a lesser degree of annoyance, or a greater degree of rage.

These eight basic emotions are almost all universally recognized. This means that, while there is a degree of cultural variation in how they're expressed, generally when people see the facial expressions related to emotions like disgust, anger, surprise, or happiness, then they're able to recognize it, regardless of their culture or the culture of the person who is expressing it.



DID YOU KNOW

The smile is likely the most universally recognized symbol of emotion.

4. Mirror Neurons

Another important element in emotional development stems from the biological side of psychology, and it is known as a mirror neuron. A mirror neuron is a brain cell that becomes activated, either when a person performs an action or when another person is observed performing the same action. Essentially, it represents the concept of "monkey see, monkey do."

However, there's a psychological basis for this. It helps children to mimic different actions that they see others performing and to learn those kinds of behaviors. This doesn't necessarily mean the child has to perform them in order to recognize them. In fact, mirror neurons will fire when a child sees an action, even if the child isn't performing it himself or herself. This helps children in later childhood development, to develop empathy, which is an understanding of others. In this manner, they are able to sense what other people are thinking and feeling.



HINT

The psychologist Ramachandran says that this idea of mirror neurons linked to empathy can also help children to develop self-awareness later on in life, meaning that they realize that they are a separate person that thinks and feels, apart from other kinds of people.

Therefore, mirror neurons, biologically, are able to help in a person's social and emotional development, especially in early childhood.



SUMMARY

Today you learned about an aspect of early development known as **emotional development** and its important impact upon a person's **social, biological and evolutionary development**. You learned about the **key points in early emotional development**, as well as how to define **the eight basic emotions** that all people have. Lastly, you learned about **mirror neurons**, and their function in helping children to mimic different actions that they see others performing, and to learn those kinds of behaviors, which in turn helps them to learn empathy and self-awareness.

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Erick Taggart.



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