

Emotional development through the lens of affective social competence

Linda A Camras¹ and Amy G Halberstadt²

Emotion competence, particularly as manifested within social interaction (i.e., affective social competence) is an important contributor to children's optimal social and psychological functioning. In this article we highlight advances in understanding three processes involved in affective social competence: first, experiencing emotions, second, effectively communicating one's emotions, and third, understanding others' emotions. Experiencing emotion is increasingly understood to include becoming aware of, accepting, and managing one's emotions. Effective communication of emotion involves multimodal signaling rather than reliance on a single modality such as facial expressions. Emotion understanding includes both recognizing others' emotion signals and inferring probable causes and consequences of their emotions. Parents play an important role in modeling and teaching children all three of these skills, and interventions are available to aid in their development.

Addresses

¹ Department of Psychology, DePaul University, Chicago, IL 60614, USA

² Department of Psychology, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC 27695, USA

Corresponding author: Camras, Linda A (lcamras@depaul.edu)

Current Opinion in Psychology 2017, 17:113–117

This review comes from a themed issue on **Emotion**

Edited by **Batja Gomes de Mesquita** and **Lisa Feldman Barrett**

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2017.07.003>

2352-250/© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

A key concern among contemporary developmental scholars is children's emotion competence particularly as manifested in the context of social interactions (i.e., affective social competence). Although several different models have been proposed (e.g., [1,2]), they share a common emphasis on three important processes, i.e., responding appropriately to one's emotional experiences, communicating one's emotions effectively, and understanding others' emotions. These processes take place within one's continuous dynamic transactions with the environment. They are influenced by (and indeed, often contribute to) socialization experiences (e.g., parents' and peers' behaviors), self-characteristics (e.g., temperament)

and the cultural context within which one is operating. In this article, we identify recent advances and innovative studies related to these processes. Reflecting developmentalists' current emphasis on facilitating optimal development, we also review school-based and home-based intervention programs designed to improve affective social competence in children.

Experiencing emotions

Individual differences in one's tendency to experience emotions in response to environmental input provide the foundation for developing competence in handling one's emotions. Such differences have long been investigated under several topic headings (e.g., infant temperament, children's emotional reactivity). A variety of influences on one's emotional reactions have been identified and noteworthy research continues in areas including genetics [3] epigenetics [4*,5] neurophysiological responding [6], parental socialization [7], and cultural context [8*]. In addition, the indirect effects of environmental stressors (e.g., poverty, family conflict, child maltreatment) have become increasingly apparent in recent years. For example, through their effects on parenting, such stressors may lead to neurobiological changes that influence children's emotional reactivity (e.g., make them wary and vigilant and less able to regulate their emotions) [9]. A growing trend in studies of emotional reactivity (especially the development of emotional problems) involves exploring several models of gene $\times$ environment interaction. These models describe how individuals with different genetic makeups may respond differently to the same environmental circumstances or how an individual with a particular genetic makeup may respond differently to different environmental circumstances [10*]. Consistent with an emphasis on psychological well-being, a number of recent studies focus on the experience of positive emotions including gratitude [11,12] pride [13], and self-compassion [14].

In the development of emotion competence, becoming aware of *what* one is feeling is an important first step. Socialization efforts that emphasize increasing awareness of emotions have positive effects on children's social relationships and psychological well-being [15,16]. The emergence of emotion awareness is tied to the emergence of consciousness which occurs at around 18 months of age [17]. Subsequent development involves awareness of the circumstances surrounding one's emotions, awareness of experiencing multiple emotions and awareness that one's emotions or emotional expressions may lead to desirable

or undesirable consequences depending on the situational context [18].

Although the conceptual distinction between emotion and emotion regulation has been widely debated in the literature, most developmentalists subscribe to Thompson's definition of emotion regulation as 'the extrinsic and intrinsic processes responsible for monitoring, evaluating and modifying one's emotional reactions, especially their intensive and temporal features, to accomplish one's goals' [[19]: pp. 27-28]. Emotion regulation is influenced by a range of factors similar to those that influence emotionality itself (e.g., temperament [20], environmental risk [21], neurophysiological development [22], and cultural environment [23]). Somewhat surprisingly, parents' critical or punishing reactions to children's emotions or their own difficulties in regulating emotions has often been found to negatively impact children's emotion regulation more than supportive reactions or warm parenting has been found to have a positive impact [7,24-28]. Interestingly, positive family expressiveness (e.g., expressions of excitement, affection, joy, gratitude) has been found to mediate relationships between maternal regulation and child regulation in both China [29] and the United States [30].

Recent studies document the relationship between emotion regulation and children's social functioning and mental health. For example, emotion regulation abilities at age 5 are related to social skills at age 7 and both friendship quality and general peer acceptance at age 10 [31]. Reappraisal (an often-recommended regulation strategy that involves changing one's thinking about an emotion-inducing situation) can be used by school-aged children and is related to more adaptive behavioral coping [32] and lesser anxiety [33]. Interestingly, the effects of emotion regulation can sometimes be mixed. For example, high levels of anger regulation have been found to lessen the link between peer victimization and physical aggression but increase the relationship between peer victimization and relational aggression [34].

Communicating emotion

Due to its important role in the history of emotion research, facial expression has often been considered the primary means of emotion communication for children and especially for preverbal infants. However, recent research suggests that emotion communication may not rely on the production of prototypical emotional facial expressions as much as previously believed. For example, prototypic facial expressions corresponding to children's self-reported negative emotions were not often observed in mother-child conversations about their conflicts (e.g., household responsibilities) [35]. Still, naïve observers were generally able to accurately identify the children's self-reported emotions, presumably based on nonfacial cues such as posture, body movement, and the content

and intonation of children's verbal statements. This study points to the importance of considering multiple channels and using multi-channel coding systems in research on emotion communication, especially in observational studies of children's natural social interactions (e.g., [36]).

Emotion communication is influenced by social norms regarding the regulation of emotional expression. For example, children as young as preschool age are capable of disguising disappointment when receiving an undesirable present with girls sometimes (but not always) doing so more successfully than boys [18]. Individual differences in children's expressive regulation are related to their understanding of the consequences of displaying or disguising one's emotions, family expressiveness, and culture [37]. In younger children, individual differences also have been associated with children's understanding of the difference between emotion itself and emotional expression [38].

The influence of social norms on emotion communication is apparent in recent studies of cultural differences in mother-infant social interaction. Emotional expressivity is valued and encouraged more in Western cultures than in at least some non-Western societies (e.g., Korea, Cameroon) [8*,39,40]. Correspondingly, Western mothers and infants are substantially more expressive than mothers and infants in those non-Western cultures. For example, German mothers smile more at their infants overall and engage in more mutual/reciprocal smiling than do Nso mothers in Cameroon. Correspondingly, German infants smile more than Nso infants. Somewhat surprisingly, cultural comparisons of older children's expressive behavior in relation to differing cultural norms have not yet been conducted. This would provide a valuable direction for future research.

Understanding others' emotions

Recent frameworks for conceptualizing emotion understanding are facilitating rapid growth in this domain [41,42*,43]. Critical to advancement in the field is the distinction between emotion recognition and emotion knowledge, and further differentiation between the specific components that comprise these two domains [42*].

Emotion recognition

Emotion recognition skills include: an awareness that someone is sending an emotion-related communication, appropriately labeling both prototypical and non-prototypical emotional expressions, and successfully utilizing contextual cues (or ignoring these when appropriate) in order to better understand the communicated emotion [42*]. Previous work has indicated a general developmental trend in emotion recognition involving progressive differentiation from broad distinctions based on valence (i.e., feels good versus bad) to more fine-grained distinctions among discrete emotions [37,44]. Recent studies

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5033420>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5033420>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)