



Identifying and Bridging the Emotion Development Gap of Autistic Students: An Evidence-based Collaborative Approach

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Lisa Burns and Ebony Kliouisis – Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect)
September, 2022



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Learning Objectives



- Learn about and practice using a new evidence-based assessment tool that can be implemented in your school setting to support the development of emotion skills as part of a student's individual education plan.
- Provide you with an assessment and implementation tool that can be used to identify foundational gaps in emotional development skills of autistic students.
- Introduce you to an evidence-based home and school program that targets emotion-based learning in autistic adolescents with a mild intellectual disability.
- Develop one GAS goal based on the emotion development skills goal.

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Overview

- Partnership with The Sydney Children’s Hospital Network and Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect)
- Social emotional learning in Australia.
- Assessment and evaluation measures of emotional development skills in autistic students.
- Developing meaningful emotion-based goals for your students.
- New directions – The Feelings Program Adolescent Adaptation.



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Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect)

- Australia’s largest service provider for people on the autism spectrum
- One of the world’s largest specialised, evidence-informed schools program, with additional services that include information and advice, diagnostic assessments, behaviour support, parent and family support and adult programs
- Aspect’s designated research centre conducts participatory research to inform practices that support Autistic people and their families and carers to realise their goals and aspirations






Aspect Education

- Over 50 years experience in providing autism-specific schooling in Australia
- 9 independent schools and 113 satellite classes based in mainstream primary and high school settings



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Social emotional learning in Australian schools

Focus areas
Alcohol and other drugs (AD)
Food and nutrition (FN)
Health benefits of physical activity (HBA)
Mental health and wellbeing (MHWB)
Relationships and sexuality (RS)
Safety (S)
Active play and minor games (AP)
Challenge and adventure activities (CA)
Fundamental movement skills (FMS)
Games and sports (GS)
Lifelong physical activities (LLPA)
Rhythmic and expressive activities (RE)

<https://casel.org/>

National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004

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Why Teach Emotion Skills?

- Improving mental health is a priority area within the autistic community.
- Benefits of early intervention and prevention
- Improving the wellbeing of autistic children, adolescents and families.

Fletcher

Cynthia

Aspect's Research Priorities and New Research Directions, 2022: Gardner et al, 2021.
 Building the Social Emotional Competence of Autistic students: The Westmead Feelings Program across stages and settings. Dr Michelle Wong, Anita Gardner, Alyce Elphick: 10:25am Teaching & Learning -Research Focused Stream

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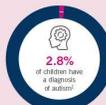
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Measures used in previous pilot study

- Developmental Behaviour Checklist (DBC; Einfeld & Tonge, 2002).
- Childhood Behaviour Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001).
- Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS; Gresham & Elliott, 2008).
- Emotion Regulation Checklist (ERC; Shields & Cicchetti, 1997).
- Emotion Development Questionnaire (EDQ; Wong et al., 2009).

Autistic adolescents: Addressing their emotional needs

Anita Gardner, Dr Michelle Weng, Dr Belinda Ratcliffe, Dr David Dossetor



2.8%
of children have a diagnosis of autism



50%
have an intellectual disability



70%
develop mental health conditions

Why focus on emotional needs?
Emotional competence sets the foundation for improved social skills, more appropriate behaviours and better mental health. Yet many autistic adolescents with mild intellectual disability (ID) struggle across all these areas. A targeted emotions-based program could help make a difference.

We developed and piloted The Feelings Program, an emotion focused program for autistic adolescents with co-occurring mild ID.

Key findings
Autistic adolescents with mild ID:
 • provide a reliable and valuable voice to future research.
 • experience a frequent and intense range of emotions.
 • struggle to self-regulate.
 • could benefit from a targeted emotion-focused skill teaching program.

The Feelings Program adapted for autistic adolescents with co-occurring mild ID:

- 
 Provides autistic adolescents with skills to support emotional competence across contexts.
- 
 Promoting research that The Feelings Program improves social skills, behaviour and mental health of adolescents.
- 
 Provides a sense of belonging for adolescents, parents and families.
- 
 Is feasible in a clinic and school-based setting.
- 
 Is an enjoyable and helpful program.

The Children's Hospital at Westmead are leading the way in developing an evidence-based program that supports the emotional needs of autistic adolescents with co-occurring mild ID.

For more information about The Feelings Program or participating in future research contact anita.gardner@sha.nsw.gov.au

References: *Wong et al (2009) PLoS one, 4(10):e6868. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0068688; Ratcliffe, et al. (2019) J Lab. et al. (2019). *Gardner, et al. (2005).

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Emotional Competence

What do we mean by 'Emotional Competence'?

<div style="background-color: #e91e63; color: white; padding: 10px; margin-bottom: 10px;">Recognition</div>  <div style="background-color: #009688; color: white; padding: 10px; margin-top: 10px;">Regulation</div>	<p>Self awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies a range of feelings. • Aware of own feelings. • Communicates to others about their feelings. 	<p>Others: Social awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognises feelings in others. • Reads others body language. • Picks up on the mood of others.
	<p>Self management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses a range of calming strategies • Uses problem solving to address social or emotional problems. • Flexible problem solving approach. 	<p>Others: Relationship management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gets along well with others. • Manages conflict • Provide emotional support to others • Changes own behaviour to impact how others feel.

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Targeting foundation emotional competence skills

Emotion Development Questionnaire

Self awareness

Does your student talk to you about their good feelings (e.g. happy, excited)?

Is your student able to talk to you about why they feel not so good feelings?

Social awareness

Does your student talk to you about how other people are feeling?

Can your student tell what other people are feeling just by looking at their body language?

Self Regulation

Can your student work out whether the solution to a problem was effective or not?

How often can your student choose an appropriate strategy to manage their feelings?

Relationship Management

Does your student change their behaviour, based on understanding that people can have different thoughts and feelings to their own?



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The Feelings Program – Aspect Study

Identifying emotion skill gaps.

Aspect SES School

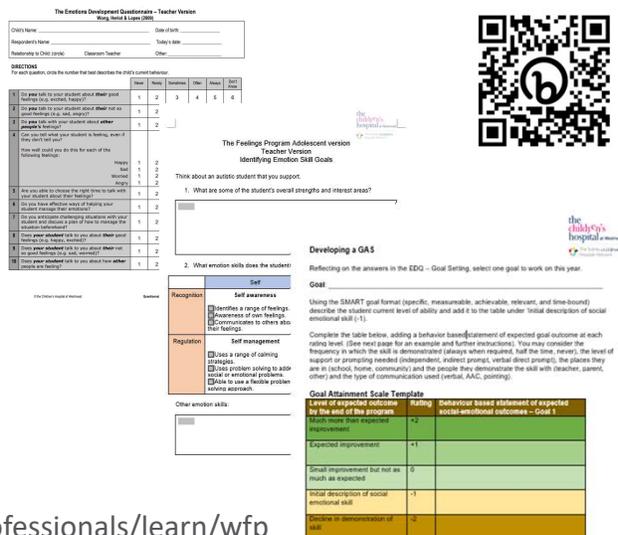
Lisa Burns, Steve Harris and Hannah Spencer

17 students; 12-16 years old
11 study participants

Aspect Port Macquarie School

Ebony Kliouis and Tanisha Walker

17 students; 12-17 years old
10 study participants



<https://www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/professionals/learn/wfp>

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Identifying Emotion Skill Goals Worksheet

Think about an autistic adolescent you have recently supported.

- Strengths and interests
- Existing emotion skills
- Emotion skills to learn
- Identify a priority goal

Scan the QR code to download the worksheet.



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The Feelings Program Adolescent version
Teacher Version
Identifying Emotion Skill Goals

Think about an autistic student that you support.

1. What are some of the student's overall strengths and interest areas?

2. What emotion skills does the student currently use?

	Self	Other
Recognition	Self awareness <input type="checkbox"/> Identifies a range of feelings. <input type="checkbox"/> Awareness of own feelings. <input type="checkbox"/> Communicates to others about their feelings.	Social awareness <input type="checkbox"/> Recognise feelings in others. <input type="checkbox"/> Reads others body language. <input type="checkbox"/> Picks up on the mood of others.
Regulation	Self management <input type="checkbox"/> Uses a range of calming strategies. <input type="checkbox"/> Uses problem solving to address social or emotional problems. <input type="checkbox"/> Able to use a flexible problem solving approach.	Relationship management <input type="checkbox"/> Gets along well with others. <input type="checkbox"/> Manages conflict. <input type="checkbox"/> Provide emotional support to others. <input type="checkbox"/> Changes own behaviour to impact how others feel.

Other emotion skills:

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Identifying a GAS Goal

- Goal Attainment Scale.
- How we used GAS goals in the current study.
- Step out the GAS for an emotion skill goal.

Scan the QR code to download the worksheet.



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Emotion Development Questionnaire - Goal Setting
Teacher Version

Directions
The below table indicates the typical development of emotion skills. Early foundation skills, such as identifying that a person is experiencing an emotion, needs to be developed before one can self-manage their emotions. Use the table below to help to indicate what foundation skills your student might benefit from developing. Once three items have a score of emerging (2) and/or yet to learn (1), stop completing the questionnaire and review your answers. Which of the skills that are emerging or not yet learnt might be most appropriate to focus on in the development of an EP or development of an individual goal?
The development of the GAS is outlined on page 4.

Skill area	Yet to learn	Emerging	Demonstrated	Mastery
1. Recognise when they are feeling pleasant feelings (happy, excited)	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
2. Recognise when they are feeling angry feelings (Emerging rating if only able to recognise when very angry, mastery required ability to recognise when also a little angry)	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
3. Recognise when they are feeling sad or worried (Emerging rating if only able to recognise when very sad or worried, mastery required ability to recognise when also a little sad and worried)	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
4. Communicate to others about how they feeling (Emerging rating if only able to communicate one level of angry, sad or worried, mastery required ability to communicate a range of different feelings and intensity of feelings, including a little and very)	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
5. Understands that they have different thoughts and feelings depending on the situation?	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
6. Can identify who to talk to when feeling an unpleasant feeling in an identifying situation	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
7. Shares with teachers about why they are feeling pleasant feelings <i>For example, I feel happy because I'm visiting my friends.</i>	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
8. Shares with teachers about why they feel not so good feelings? <i>For example, I feel worried because I have a test.</i>	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
9. Understands that all feelings (pleasant and unpleasant) are a normal experience and okay	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>

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Developing a GAS

Reflecting on the answers in the EDQ - Goal Setting, select one goal to work on this year:

Goal: _____

Using the SMART goal format (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) describe the student current level of ability and add to the table under: Initial description of social emotional skill (-1).

Complete the table below, adding a behavior based statement of expected goal outcome at each rating level. (See next page for an example and further instructions). You may consider the frequency in which the skill is demonstrated (observed when required, half the time, never), the level of support or prompting needed (independent, indirect prompt, verbal direct prompt), the places they are in (school, home, community) and the people they demonstrate the skill with (teacher, parent, other) and the type of communication used (verbal, AAC, pointing).

Goal Attainment Scale Template	Level of expected outcomes by the end of the program	Rating	Behavioral based statement of expected social emotional outcomes - Goal 1
Mastery (mastery level)	Expected improvement	+2	
Small improvement but not as much as expected	Expected improvement	+1	
Initial description of social emotional skill specified in demonstration of skill	Expected improvement	0	
	Initial description of social emotional skill	-1	
	Specified in demonstration of skill	-2	

Date: _____
These individual goals have been identified for (student's name) _____
They have been developed with the support of: _____
(list names of people & their relationship to the student / role at school)

Name: _____ Relationship: _____
Name: _____ Relationship: _____

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Structure of The Feelings Program – Adolescent Version

Module 1
Understanding feelings.

Module 2
Problem solving and perspective taking.

Module 3
Managing feelings.



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Additional References

Mazefsky, Yu, White, Siegel & Pilkonis, 2018
 Ratcliffe, Wong, Dossetor & Hayes, 2015; Berkovits et al, 2017
 Aspect's Research Priorities and New Research Directions, 2022.

Thank you

Contact

If you would like any further information about The Feelings Program or research at The Children's Hospital at Westmead, please contact Anita Gardner

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<https://moodle.feelingsprogram.com/>

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