Study Unit 3 - Chapter 1 - Topic 1
Socioemotional Development in Middle and Late Childhood

Learning Outcomes

At the end of the study topic, you will be able to:

- Discuss the development of emotional intelligence.
- Describe the concept of self-concept and self-esteem.
- Explain the main characteristics of moral development, prosocial behaviour, and altruism.
- Relate the role of life-span development in understanding problems such as bullying in schools, child abuse and family violence and its implication for counseling or social work.
Socioemotional Development in Middle and Late Childhood

1. Emotional and personality development
   i. The self
   ii. Emotional development
   iii. Moral development

2. Social context
   i. Family
   ii. Peers

Emotional and Personality Development: The Self

- What is the nature of the child’s self-understanding and self-esteem during the elementary school years?
- In middle and late childhood, children not only recognise differences between inner and outer states but also are more likely to include subjective inner states in their definition of self.
- Social comparison is also increasingly seen among primary school years. Children at this stage are more likely to distinguish themselves from others in comparative rather than in absolute terms.

For example, an 8-year-old may include in his self-description, “I am smart and I am popular.”

A 10-year-old may say “I am pretty good about not worrying most of the time. I used to lose my temper, but I’m better about that now. I also feel proud when I do well in school.”
Self Esteem and Self Concepts

- Developmentalists have agreed that high self-esteem and a positive self-concept are important characteristics of children's well-being.
- **Self-esteem** refers to global evaluations of the self, which includes self-worth or self-image.
- **Self-concept** refers to domain-specific evaluations of the self; for example, academic, athletic, appearance, and so on.
- One point to note is that self-esteem sometimes reflects perceptions that do not always match reality.
- In other words, a child's self-esteem might reflect a belief about whether he or she is intelligent and attractive, but that belief is not necessarily accurate.
- Thus, high self-esteem may refer to accurate, justified perceptions of one's worth as a person and one's successes and accomplishments but it can also refer to an arrogant, grandiose, unwarranted sense of superiority over others.
- In the same manner, low self-esteem may reflect an accurate perception of one's shortcomings or a distorted, even pathological, insecurity and inferiority.

Self Esteem Self Concepts - Learning Activity

Can you think of some strategies to increase the Self Esteem and Self Concepts of children?
Self Esteem & Self Concepts - Learning Activity (cont.)

- One simple way is to help children achieve.
- Think about Erikson’s eight stages of human development. Can you remember his 4th stage?
  - It is industry versus inferiority.
- The term industry expresses a dominant theme of this period.
- Children become interested in how things are made and how they work.
- Providing these children with opportunities to create and achieve something will help boost their self-esteem.
- By contrast, adults who see these children’s efforts at making things as “mischief” or “making a mess” encourage children’s development of a sense of inferiority.
Children at middle and late childhood show a growing awareness about controlling and managing emotions to meet social standards.

Some important developmental changes during the elementary school years are:

- **Improved emotional understanding.** An increased ability to understand complex emotions such as pride and shame. These emotions become more internalised and integrated with a sense of personal responsibility.

- **An increased understanding that more than one emotion can be experienced in a particular situation.** E.g., a primary school child may realise that achieving something might involve both anxiety and joy.

- **Marked improvements in the ability to suppress or conceal negative emotional reactions.** A primary 5 child has learned to tone down his anger better than he used to when irritated.

- **An increased tendency to take into fuller account the events leading to emotional reactions.** E.g., a primary 3 child may become aware that her sadness today is influenced by her friend moving to another town last week.

- **The use of self-initiated strategies for redirecting feelings.** Children become more reflective about their emotional lives and increasingly use strategies to control emotions.

- **A capacity for genuine empathy.** Able to feel sympathy for a distressed person and experiences vicariously the sadness the distressed person is feeling.

Notice that both Sternberg's and Gardner's views of intelligence include categories of social intelligence.

**Robert Sternberg:** "practical intelligence"

- Visit the following link to read more about Robert Sternberg.
  - [Link 2](#)

**Howard Gardner:** "interpersonal skills"

- Visit the following link to read more about Howard Gardner.
  - [Link 3](#)
  - [Link 4](#)
Emotional and Personality Development – Daniel Goleman

- The concept of emotional intelligence initially was proposed in 1990, then popularised in 1995 as a form of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and action (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Goleman, 1995).
- In Goleman’s view, emotional intelligence involves 4 main areas:
  - Developing emotional self-awareness (such as ability to separate feelings from actions).
  - Managing emotions (such as being able to control anger).
  - Reading emotions (such as taking the perspective of others).
  - Handling relationships (such as the ability to solve relationship problems).
- Helping children to improve their emotional intelligence can contribute to ease coping with stress. As children get older, they are able to more accurately appraise a stressful situation and determine how much control they have over it.
- By 10 years of age, most children are able to appraise a stressful situation and determine how much control they have over it.

Emotional and Personality Development: Moral Development – Piaget

- In the topic on socioemotional development in early childhood, we discussed Piaget’s views on moral development.
- He proposed that older children consider the intentions of the individual, believe that rules are subject to change, and are aware that punishment does not always follow a wrongdoing.
Emotional and Personality Development:
Prosocial Behaviour and Altruism

- Prosocial behaviour is the positive aspects of moral behaviour, such as showing empathy, to someone or behaving altruistically.
- Altruism is an unselfish interest in helping someone else.
- William Damon (1988) described a developmental sequence of children’s altruism, especially of sharing.
  - Most sharing during the first 3 years of life is done not for reasons of empathy but for the fun of the social play ritual or out of mere imitation.
  - Then, at about 4 years of age, a combination of empathic awareness and adult encouragement produces a sense of obligation on the part of the child to share with others.
  - By the start of the elementary school years, children genuinely begin to express more objective ideas about fairness. By mid to late elementary school years, children also believe that equity means special treatment for those who deserve it.

Moral Identity, Character & Exemplars

- Beyond the development of moral reasoning and specific moral feelings and prosocial behaviour, do children also develop a pattern of moral characteristics that is distinctively their own?
- 3 other possible components of moral personality (Santrock, 2013):
  - Moral Identity
    - Individuals have a moral identity when moral notions and moral commitments are central in their lives. Violating their moral commitment would place the integrity of their self at risk.
  - Moral Character
    - A person with moral character has the willpower, desires, and integrity to stand up to pressure, overcome distractions and disappointments, and behave morally. A person of good moral character displays moral virtues such as honesty, truthfulness, and trustworthiness, as well as those of care, compassion, thoughtfulness, and considerateness.
  - Moral Exemplars
    - They are people who have lived exemplary moral lives. Their moral personality, identity, character, and set of virtues reflect moral excellence and commitment.

- Moral development is a multifaceted and complex concept. We cannot just look at moral reasoning, but also feelings, behaviour, and other aspects of one’s personality.
Reflective Questions

Moral development is one of the most crucial elements of personality development. This is because, if one has a good moral character, the person tends to be more competent in his or her social relations and interaction.

• Reflect on the development of moral reasoning within yourself. Do you agree with Kohlberg?
• Can you think of some examples of cultural differences in terms of moral values/reasoning?

Social Context

As children move into middle and late childhood years, parents spend considerably less time with them. Despite this fact, parents continue to be the extremely important socialising agents in their children’s lives.
Social Context: Family – Parent Child Issues

- From early childhood through late childhood, parent-child interaction changes from setting up a routine for the child to allowing the child for more independence and self-regulation.
- For example, by middle and late childhood, new issues will include whether children should be made to perform chores and, if so, whether they should be paid for them; how to help children learn to entertain themselves, rather than rely on parents for everything; and how to monitor children's lives outside the family in school and peer settings.
- Discipline during middle and late childhood is often easier for parents than it was during early childhood; it may also be easier than during adolescence.
- It may be due to the fact that, during this stage, children's cognitive development has matured to the point where it is possible for parents to reason about resisting deviation and controlling their behaviour.
- During middle and late childhood, some control is transferred from parents to child, although the process is gradual and involves “co-regulation” rather than control by either the child or the parent alone.

Social Context: Family - Societal Changes in Families 1

- With an increase in the number of parents who both work outside of the home, a soaring divorce rate, and a rise in single-parent families, the environment faced by children passing through middle and late childhood in the 21st century is very different from the one prior generations faced.
- Think about children who have to live with stepparents, and children who are in the care of grandparents and/or maids.
- These situations are getting more common in the local context.
Social Context: Family - Societal Changes in Families 2

- In the cases of divorces and/or remarriages, three common types of stepfamily structure are:
  - stepfather
  - stepmother
  - blended or complex families.
- Researchers have found that children’s relationships with custodial parents (mothers in stepfather families, fathers in stepmother families) often are better than with stepparents (Santrock, Sitterle, & Warshak, 1988).
- Also, children in simple families (stepmother, stepfather) often show better adjustment than their counterparts in complex (blended) families (Anderson & others, 1999).

Social Context: Family - Societal Changes in Families 3

- Is it better for one parent (typically the mother) to stay home with the children? What are your thoughts?
- It was concluded in the previous section that having parents work outside the home does not necessarily have negative outcomes for their children.
- The good adjustment of children whose mothers and fathers both work relates to the psychological adjustment of the parents, especially mothers.
- In general, women who are satisfied with their lives tend to be more nurturing with their children. When work provides a high level of satisfaction, then, mothers who work outside of the home may be more psychologically supportive of their children.
Social Context: Family - Societal Changes in Families

• Thus, it is not so much a question of whether a mother chooses to work full-time, to stay at home, or to arrange some combination of the two. What matters is how satisfied she is with the choices she has made (Gilbert, 1994).
• However, a certain subset of children from dual-earner families deserves further scrutiny.
  ➢ These children typically do not see their parents from the time they leave for school in the morning until about 6 or 7 in the evening. They are sometimes called the "latchkey" kids. Such children are largely unsupervised for two to four hours a day during each school week. During the school holidays, they might be unsupervised for entire day, five days a week. These unsupervised children may be vulnerable to problems, including delinquency, drug and alcohol use, and other school problems.
Functions of Friendship

- This is a period where children are interested in specific peers. They will develop best friends with whom they can share everything. Friendships at this stage serve six functions (Gottman & Parker, 1987):
  - **Companionship:** Friendship provides children with a familiar partner and playmate, someone who is willing to spend time with them and join in collaborative activities.
  - **Stimulation:** Friendship provides children with interesting information, encouragement, and amusement.
  - **Physical support:** Friendship provides time, resources, and assistance.
  - **Ego support:** Friendship provides the expectation of support, encouragement, and feedback, which helps children maintain an impression of themselves as competent, attractive, and worthwhile individuals.
  - **Social comparison:** Friendship provides information about where the child stand vis-à-vis others and whether the child is doing okay.
  - **Intimacy and affection:** Friendship provides children with a warm, close, trusting relationship with another individual in which self-disclosure takes place.

Peer Statuses

- Do you notice that some children are very popular among peers and others are disliked?
- The term sociometric status is used to describe the extent to which children are liked or disliked by their peer group.
- Developmentalists have distinguished 5 types of peer statuses (Wentzel & Asher, 1995).

1. **Popular children**
   - Frequently nominated as best friend are rarely disliked by their peers.

2. **Average Children**
   - Receive an average number of both positive and negative nominations from their peers.

3. **Neglected Children**
   - Infrequently nominated as someone’s best friend but are not actively disliked by their peers.

4. **Rejected Children**
   - Infrequently nominated as someone’s best friend and are actively disliked by their peers.

5. **Controversial Children**
   - Frequently nominated both as someone’s best friend and as being disliked.

Can you guess what are some of the implications for these different peer statuses?

- Social cognition involves thoughts about social matters (Lewis & Carpendale, 2004).
- Children's social cognition about their peers becomes increasingly important for understanding peer relationships in middle and late childhood.
  - For instance, a boy accidentally trips and knocks a peer’s soft drink out of his hand. The peer misinterprets the encounter as hostile, which leads him to retaliate aggressively against the boy.
- Through repeated encounters of this kind, other peers come to perceive the aggressive boy as habitually acting in inappropriate ways.
- Kenneth Dodge (1983) argues that children go through 5 steps in processing information about their social world. They decode social cues, interpret, search for a response, select an optimal response, and enact.
- Dodge has found that aggressive boys are more likely to perceive another child's actions as hostile when the child’s intention is ambiguous.
- And, when aggressive boys search for cues to determine a peer's intention, they respond more rapidly, less efficiently, and less reflectively than do nonaggressive children.
- These are among the social cognitive factors believed to be involved in the nature of children's conflicts.

Social Context: Peers - Bullying

- Bullying is defined as verbal or physical behaviour intended to disturb someone less powerful.
- One recent study found that victims of bullies had parents who were intrusive, demanding, and unresponsive with their children (Ladd & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2002).
- The study also concluded that overly close and emotionally intense relationships between parents and sons might not foster assertiveness and independence but rather promote self-doubts and worries that are perceived as weakness when expressed in male peer groups.
- Victims of bullies can suffer both short-term and long-term effects.
  - For the short-term, they can become depressed, lose interest in schoolwork, or even avoid going to school.
  - One longitudinal study of male victims who were bullied during childhood found that in their early twenties they were more depressed and had lower self-esteem than their counterparts who had not been bullied in childhood (Olweus, 1993).
Middle and late childhood is a stage of life where children are more aware of their abstract self (as compared to their physical self).

Children are in the industry vs inferiority stage (Erikson); and the issues of self esteem and self concept become more prominent.

Children’s emotional understanding also increased to the extent that they become more able to empathise with another person.

Peers become a more important form of social support while parents remain an important guide.

Some children are naturally more popular, and so attention needs to be given to those who fall into other statuses in order to avoid being bullied.
References and Additional Learning Resources

- Note: All references not listed here are based on the text in Santrock (2013).