

Social Emotional Well-Being and Friendships for Children and Young People with a Visual Impairment

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Aims

- To develop our understanding of:
 - How social emotional well-being and friendships impact on learning
 - how CYP with VI develop these skills and what the implications are
 - Why bullying of CYP with SEN can occur
 - how professionals can support CYP by developing strategies, supporting schools/educational settings

Children with vision impairment

- Every child is an individual
- Wide range of situations
 - Different eye conditions and implications
 - Different personalities
 - Different family styles / cultures / values
 - Different contexts, socio economic status, etc
- We will learn from each case but need to be careful not to over generalise

Part 1 - Early Social Development

- Children need healthy social emotional development to be prepared and ready to learn
- There is a dynamic interaction between social emotional development and academic achievement

Risks

Children who do not learn the skills that are required to develop social emotional competence are at risk of falling behind academically, and are more likely to experience behavioural, emotional, academic and social developmental problems.

Social Processes of Cognitive Development

- innate potential + circumstances in which learning takes place
- children's thinking and development is embedded in social relationships

Adult's role in Children's Learning

- Learning is a social process,
- Adults have an important role in extending the learning potential of an activity

Guided Participation

- Providing bridges
- Selecting activities and materials
- Transferring responsibility

Scaffolding

- Supportive involvement of the adult that promotes a child's learning
 - Sensitivity,
 - Right level
 - Promotes active learning
- Working in the Zone of proximal development

Early social development

- Babies are totally dependent on their caregivers
- It is through social interaction with others that babies learn about themselves and the world around them.
- Babies present behaviours that are interpreted by adults as intentional social signals and eventually this helps them becoming meaningful (and vice versa)

The role of vision in early interaction

- Eye contact
- Eye gaze - enables adults to identify interests and comment and/or introduce objects

Nature of Early Social Interaction

- Cycles of interaction / Play dialogues
 - use of eye contact to initiate and finish interaction - control over their environment
 - Established routine and repetition
- Shared attention
- Joint reference - triangle of reference

Early Social Development and VI

- The presence of a vision impairment changes the conditions and dynamics of social interaction
- Baby smiling can give parents pleasure and an incentive to continue interacting with their baby - emotional issues
- Baby stilling may not give the same incentive

Attachment and self

- Interacting with others and acting on the world helps babies see themselves as a separate entity
- Attachment - selective emotional responsiveness to individual people
- Particularly in children with very severe VI there can be a slow understanding of caregiver as a continuously existing entity.

Developmental emergency

- Sonksen (1997) described the presence of the most severe levels of vision impairment as a developmental emergency
- “The development disadvantage of lack of vision is increased in the early months by the psychosocial impact on parents of an infant’s altered responsiveness.” (Sonksen, Dale, 2002)
- The development of social communication and understanding is a priority area for intervention (setback)

QTVI support and intervention 1

- Working with families - developing their understanding and ability to promote the development of their child (every family will be different - sensitivity)
- Family interaction styles - routines and cycles of interaction - good quality and enough opportunities
- Developmental journal - Social emotional development area
- Importance of exploring the outside world - physical and social
- Hands-on practical experiences - e.g. exploring the fridge - developing concepts / language, developing social understanding too
- Readiness for school

Promoting social understanding

- Mediating the environment
 - Encourage curiosity in other people
 - Describe social environment, other people’s feelings, wishes, intentions
- Opportunities to enjoy the company of others
- Encourage pretend play - increased complexity
- Activities that encourage children to think about others’ feelings, wishes,
- Using any opportunity to help develop child’s understanding of other people
- Adults’ awareness of child’s socio cognitive understanding

Part 2 - Interacting with Peers

Early social interaction with peers

- Young children spend a lot of time watching their peers,
- Imitation,
- Offering objects as a way to initiate interaction,
- Taking objects.

Social Emotional Competence

- Cooperative and pro-social behaviour
- Initiation and maintenance of peer friendships and adult relationships
- Management of aggression and conflict
- Development of a sense of mastery and self worth
- Emotional regulation and reactivity

Socially competent children

- more likely to be confident and develop a positive self-concept
 - Positive experiences which motivate / negative experiences which help you learn
- use successful strategies for dealing with conflict
 - Avoid conflict / avoid escalation of conflict
 - Take into consideration view of others
- range of strategies to gain group entry - indirect means
- respond to peers' verbal and non-verbal behaviour

Social interaction with peers

- peers interact more and present higher cognitive levels when playing with a friend they like
- peer familiarity - more co-operation - more pretend play - more positive social behaviours

Blind children in mainstream settings

- Issues
 - gestural communication
 - children had less opportunities to play and to acquire language and social skills
 - teachers' view - development of social skills (Kekelis and Sacks, 1992)

Loneliness

“I vividly remember observing the isolation and emotional pain that many blind and visually impaired children experienced in regular public school classrooms. These students lacked the social skills to start and carry on conversations, to play games effectively, and to join and feel part of a group... the acquisition of competent social skills in a sighted environment is an ongoing process: these skills are not easily learned and must be fine-tuned throughout one’s life.”

Sacks et al. 1992

Blind children in mainstream settings –Preisler (1993)

- participation depending on nature of the activity
- free play particularly difficult
- teachers’ limited knowledge of children’s needs
- no appropriate toys
- difficulty in imitating and communicating
- children preferred to move away to a quiet area
- children preferred to interact with adults

Early social interaction and children with visual impairment

- use of other senses to achieve joint attention
- limited visual information from the environment
- dependence on others’ language
- difficulty of others in interacting with child

Experiences of blind children

- Less experiences
- More time needed
- Not so consistent experiences
- No access or access to inappropriate feedback from others
- Limited access to what is happening around them
- Socio-cognitive difficulties

Child with VI

- It can be difficult to know what is available, who is present and what they are doing
- May want to control situation
- Responsiveness to peers - two way
- Dependent on verbal information which young children may not know how to provide
- Joining in with some games that rely on gestures
- Showing and giving/receiving objects

Children with vision impairment in mainstream schools

- Locate a friend in the playground
- Compete at similar levels
- Complete school work on time to join in
- Extra adult support
- Tend to look for quiet areas and to interact with adults
- Adults' view of good interaction as lack of physical or verbal abuse rather than the presence of positive social interaction

Risks

- Learned helplessness
- Dependency
- Feeling of low self worth
- Locus of control - external
- Depression

How does promoting social emotional well being help?

- Getting on with other children and adults and being able to make friends
- Locus of control
- Feel secure and valued- worthy
- Explore and learn confidently and be intrinsically motivated
- Feel good about themselves - acceptance, can do approach and be independent

Role of adult - interaction with peers

- Play and friendships usually happen naturally - creating opportunities for incidental learning
- Mediating the environment but important not to interfere with the social process
- Indirect mediation is much better than a directive approach
- Modeling behaviours
- Encouraging and observing play
- Knowing when to intervene
- Intervene in a way that promotes thinking skills and problem solving - often adults sort out too much - role of TA / training
- Follow it through - using what they learnt from observation to develop the child's social understanding at a later stage
- Developing skills for the future - QTVI crucial role

Part 3 - The importance of friendships

Understanding others

Friendships give children opportunities to care about and try to understand others and to respond to the feelings, needs and concerns of their friends.

Play with a friend

The shared narrative that children establish during play has a crucial role in helping children develop their understanding of the links between what people think or believe and how they act.

Significance of play in child's well-being, understanding themselves and others, language development and conflict resolution.

Friends resolving conflict

In the early years, children experience more conflict with their friends than with peers who are not their friends.

But conflict situations between friends are less hostile and friends seem more able to resolve them. Friends are more likely to use reasoning and take account of the other person's point of view or feelings.

Social world of children

As children become more interested in their social world issues of "me and you" become very important and friendships are not only sustained and developed by shared intimacy and affection but also by shared animosity towards others.

Friendships

- Children with VI
 - Friends - people who are willing to help you
 - Limited options of friends
 - Felt that peers are less harsh because of their VI

- Sighted peers
 - Extra effort to be a friend of a child with VI
 - Boys with VI play more with girls than other boys would
 - Children with VI are less competent, need more attention and help

Part 4 - Late Childhood and teenage years

Issues

- Children are more aware of social context and have developed interests
- Peer culture / identity
- Transition into secondary school
- Self awareness - wanting to fit in
- Access to opportunities

Interacting with Friends

- Same status
- Taking into account others' points of view
- Positive self concept
- Group entry – learning to join in
- Conflict resolution

Joining In

- Indirect means
- Assessing situation – non verbal clues
- Identifying common interests
- Imitating behaviour – non-verbal

Bullying

- Main types: emotional, verbal, physical and cyber
- Characteristics
 - Intent to harm - usually involves subtle methods of coercion such as intimidation
 - Often there is repetition over time
 - Power differential
- Can be simple one-to-one to more complex

Most bullying takes place in settings that are not monitored by teachers. Children with special needs are twice as likely as their peers to be bullied.

- Be alone at playtime
- Male
- Having less than 2 good friends
- Having extra help in school

Who are the bullies?

- Some are themselves victims of some kind of abuse, who lack a sense of self-worth, etc.
- Some are rather different, they are confident children who expect to control and they understand very well other's emotions
- Some children may bully after an upsetting event in their lives
- 20% of bullies were former friends of their victim

Bullying and Friendships

Most helpful factors in preventing or helping pupils in dealing with bullying are friendships, avoidance strategies and learning to "stand up for yourself"

Friendship can protect children from bullying to a certain degree but this depends on the quality of the friendship and the characteristics of the friend.

Peer Pressure

- Can be positive and motivating force
- Teenage years - Dreaded Spotlight - identity

Part 5 – Bristol Research

Bristol Research

- Peer relationships, play and language
 - 20 children with VI in mainstream settings
 - Observations during unstructured time - play / choosing
- Small scale research - pupils' views of what makes a good school and their experiences at school

Language

- Interest in language as it is often to mediate the environment
- Much of language development is similar to that of children with no VI but there are a few issues:
- Slow word extension and over extension
- echolalic responses
- difficulty in maintaining topic of conversation
- topic focusing on their body and actions
- locational terms used first as verbs
- difficulty with deitic terms

Family Communication Styles

- Parents more directive towards blind child
 - focus on child's action or possession
 - providing labels rather than descriptions
 - parents introducing topics
 - child receives less information from environment
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- This is also true for children with other SEN

Why?

- Social interaction at risk - reduced positive feedback
- parents' attempt to stimulate - more directive
- parents' difficulty in understanding - interests and what child knows

Findings Bristol research - 3-8 y.o.

- Presence of adults and the use of peers to get something depended on the age of the child and the severity of their vision impairment
- Control of activity
- Language
 - Children with VI requested: objects, information about localisation of objects or people, for an action
 - others requested information about: child's own actions, child's wishes and feelings, child's imaginative play

Difficulties in promoting social interaction

- activity controlled by adults
- Lack of adult's understanding about how to expand child's play
- suggesting activities that were inappropriate
- missing out on opportunities to use child's own initiative

Promoting social interaction

- type of activity
- physical and social context
- support from adults:
 - comments on other children's actions
 - opportunities to have a variety of roles
 - suggesting events that expanded play

Bristol Research – year 6 and secondary

Interviews and group discussion with a group of 5 blind young people (10-15 years of age)

- school experiences,
- friendships
- what an ideal school would be like

Main Issues

- Same interests as other young people, music, friends, computer games, etc.
- 4 out of 5 said that friends were what made them like school
- Break time – enjoying being without adult supervision (yr 6 sometimes adult interfere too much), wish for longer break times (change in timetabling make it difficult for pupil to join outings to town at lunch break – peers do not want to wait).

Friends in primary school

- Had some friends but I did not see them much
- Just made friends
- Difficult towards the end of primary because the whole culture gap began to affect things... between what they could do and what the pupil could do – sighted peers were all into various games that pupil couldn't access (play station, etc)

Friends in secondary school

- Welcomed by school, made friends very quickly – found it easier as pupils are older they could appreciate pupil more
- Small classes so pupils met each other all the time (special school)
- First spent time within the resource base so tended to make friends with other VI pupils
- Although pupils at the school had a good awareness about VI pupils the year 7 new sighted pupils did not have such awareness

What would an ideal school be like?

- Nice people – who understand and share interests with you and do not tease you
- Mixture of people
- More choice of subjects available
- Being consulted about changes, e.g. changes of timetabling, etc.
- Larger corridors

Part 6 - Promoting Social Emotional Well-Being

Social Emotional Development

- As early as possible - recognise the importance of social emotional development
- Think family - support parents
- Social skills - think ahead - what is OK today is not OK tomorrow

Promoting social emotional development

- Help the child understand other people's points of view and vice versa - develop shared understanding and extend it
- Give positive but **realistic** feedback - help child feel worthy
- Supporting empathy and mutual respect
- Encourage others to ask questions to the child (not to you) and vice versa
- Physical layout - promoting independence and participation
- Social context - access to good role models

- Creating opportunities to have positive experiences of social interaction and friendships
- Expect CYP to be able to solve problems – you may need to mediate but ask them what they think before giving an answer / solution
- Monitor social interaction/ play from a distance – playground / break time / in class
- Provide opportunities to practice skills, e.g. use SEAL (social emotional aspects of learning) activities, games, discussion time
- Considering carefully level of support required by adult and how to best promote social interaction throughout the day
- Learning activities that promote interaction (cooperative learning strategies)
- Planning some of the play-time sessions around child's needs, e.g. circle of 3 choices
- Individual sessions to discuss issues around social interaction/friendships
- Small group sessions
- Circle of friends - using the child's natural peer group to support the child
- Peer Mentoring
- Think Right / Feel Good
- Goal planning
- Social Stories
- Self Advocacy / Assertiveness

Small group activities

- 4-6 children - same group each term
- To participate actively as a member of a group
- To express feelings and understand others' feelings
- To solve problems in a team effort
- To understand others' perspectives
- To help others
- To gain attention, initiate and maintain conversation
- To develop strategies to cope with conflict
- To develop self esteem and confidence

Important issues

- Developing a sense of worthiness
- Locus of control
- Motivation
- Specific social skills learning – real situations
- Staff and peer awareness in this area
- Opportunities for VI children and young people to meet each other

Part 7 - Role of QTVI

- Observation and assessment
- Training and raising awareness of parents / staff / peers
- Keeping high aspirations and prepare for the future to ensure a smooth journey through education, positive wider outcomes
- Good start in early social development lays the foundation for future development

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