

In a child who is oversensitive to sound or touch, the fearful side of life can be overwhelming. If all goes well at this stage children start to understand what reality is, while at the same time still having a degree of fantasy and unlimited power.

They have a better understanding of more complicated relationships and become more emotionally stable e.g. they develop a capacity for more "adult" emotions such as guilt or empathy (although empathy is easily lost when they are feeling jealous or competitive). Having all these abilities helps children move out into the wider world (Greenspan & Salmon, 1995).



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EMOTIONAL MILESTONES FOR CHILDREN

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As children travel through the journey of life they are faced with many different developmental challenges. Early in life, babies learn to pay attention and be part of a relationship. As they grow they learn to use their imagination and think logically.

Greenspan and Salmon (1995) developed a road map outlining the emotional milestones children need to pass through on their way to a healthier, mature personality.

They propose that at each stage children learn basic abilities that carry them forward into the next stage and as children pass through these emotional milestones their ability to think, reason and feel become more advanced.

THE ABILITY TO LOOK, LISTEN AND BE CALM

One of the first abilities that all babies need is to be calm so that it is possible for them to be interested in and attentive to people, things, sounds, smells and movements. If on the other hand the baby is sensitive to noises and unexpected hugs they may become overwhelmed and find it more difficult to be calm.

THE ABILITY TO FEEL CLOSE TO OTHERS

At this stage children have the ability to feel close to others. The child's inner security gives them the capacity to be warm and trusting. On the other hand children who are aloof, withdrawn or expect to be humiliated can become isolated and unable to relate to people in a warm trusting way

TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

At the communication stage children learn to read body language and facial expressions. They also learn to form mental pictures or images so they may form ideas about their wants, needs and emotions. They are able to feel whether they are safe and secure with an adult or whether the adult is dangerous, critical or rejecting.

Children who have difficulties understanding facial expressions or changes in vocal tone find it difficult to make these quick and intuitive judgements.

EMOTIONAL IDEAS

At this stage children can start to exercise their minds, bodies and emotions as one. They learn how to form mental pictures or images about their wants, needs and emotions and begin to use an idea, expressed in words, to communicate something about what they want, feel, or what they are going to do.

Having this ability opens a whole new world of opportunities and growth. Children who use emotional ideas in make-believe play e.g. dolls hugging or fighting, or making up a story about how another child might be feeling, are making creative leaps based on this ability to use their imagination.

If children are sensitive to visual images and to changes in vocal tone, a make-believe story e.g. animal faces and strange voices may be frightening and overwhelming. These children are very nervous about entering into the world of fantasy and imagination. According to Greenspan and Salmon (1995), children who have problems controlling their aggression often have difficulty acknowledging their own feelings and expressing the idea of those emotions through words. They have found that children who have an action approach to life may have a certain degree of difficulty identifying their intentions and feelings therefore use aggression as a way to cope with challenging situations.

EMOTIONAL THINKING

When children reach the emotional thinking stage they go past labelling a feeling, they become able to think with these images starting to connect an idea and a feeling and recognising that one is causing the other e.g.

they might say "I'm angry today because you didn't come and play with me".

At this stage children start to make the distinction between fantasy and reality. They understand more about what is coming from inside them and what influences are external to them. Children who find it difficult to process the information they are hearing find it much easier to live in their own private world.

Greenspan and Salmon (1995) have found these children are usually very dramatic but when asked a difficult question they tend to ignore the question and retreat further into their own fantasies compromising their emotional thinking.

THE AGE OF FANTASY AND UNLIMITED POWER

This is the stage when children from the age of four and a half to seven years develop their abilities to relate, communicate, imagine and think. They have a curiosity about life and a deep sense of wonder about the world. It is the stage where they may start to express themselves fearlessly.

Greenspan and Salmon (1995) have named this stage as the "world is my oyster". There is a great sense of magic and little boys may imagine themselves to be Ninja Turtle or a power ranger, while little girls may imagine themselves to be Cinderella or Barbie. The relationship they have with their parents and others around them helps to develop greater emotional flexibility allowing them to work out complicated feelings without volatile outbursts.

This is also the time where children may become fearful. For example, they may worry about ghosts or have bad feelings concerning being kidnapped.