

PARENT POWER AND A CHILD'S EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

As a parent of three, two sons and a daughter, I know how important the formative years of their childhood were to their development. Particularly their connection to their Mum; the mental/cognitive learning aspects, as well as the physical safety and growth aspects. Reading to the kids was a nightly activity enjoyed by all, a love of reading, we as parents settling this kids, and encouraging them to take themselves away to an imaginative land with the help of a good book. The middle child still enjoys the Magic Faraway Tree by Enid Blyton. At the time, we lived by the seashore with parkland so there was always room to run and explore, Soldier Crabs, splashing water, digging sand, and balls of various sizes to chase. These activities fostered a sense of adventure, imagination, and utilising their senses. We as parents would watch on, the loving security blanket to our kids, keeping a watchful eye on their playful antics. There was also plenty of homework assistance as they grew older. Now as a principal, I bear witness to the fine line between educational support and students submitting their parents' work. It is sometimes hard to define how much help you should provide your children in these circumstances; the children appreciate the attention. Fostering strong Emotional Intelligence and skills in this space may prove a more effective lesson than academic intelligence alone.

Unique Emotional Intelligence (EI) research conducted by Swinburne University in 2010 looked at data collected from parents' and their child's EI self-assessment results. Conducted by research author Bethany Parris, her study looked at Attachment Theory, and the four theoretical attachment styles:

1. **Security** – the parent was sensitive and responsive to their child's signals. The child associates love with trust, friendship, and positive emotion.
2. and 3. **Resistant and or Avoidant** – the parent was slow or inconsistent in responding with their infant's cries. The child's perception of love is as preoccupying, and almost a struggle to merge with another person.
4. **Disorganised** – the child's parent consistently rebuffed the infant's attempts to establish physical contact. The child associates love with fear of closeness and a lack of trust.

Attachment Relationships are important because they are the first model of interpersonal interaction. They influence the trajectories of emotional development. They are also shown to predict adaptive behaviours and relationships later in life. Attachment also relates to the development of self-esteem, behavioural disorders, successful relationships, and it is particularly important in adolescence as a period of rapid social-emotional transition. The findings from the research are very pertinent for our community. The research observations include:

1. An adolescents' increased attachment security to mothers predicts increased peer attachment security, or strong friendships with peers. As a result, these attachments influence adolescent EI.
2. Peer attachment security mediates the mother's attachment/influence and the adolescent EI. Peers with strong relationships lessen a mother's influence over the adolescent's EI.
3. Emotional recognition and expression examines ones' ability to understand and communicate their own emotions as one of the four adolescent EI domains. It is influenced by a mothers' attachment, but this is moderated by a peers' influence.
4. Increased attachment to fathers predicted adolescent Emotional Management and Control (EMC), however, this relationship with fathers was not mediated by peers' influence. That is, a fathers' influence on their child's EMC is in a dominant way. The research findings present the view that mothers and fathers influence their children's EI in complementary attachments, and in differing ways when

associated with the influential nature of their peers. Mother and father attachment relationships should be considered as two separate constructs in influencing a child's EI.

5. Secure peer relationships predicted higher adolescent EI, and particularly in emotional recognition and expression.
6. Adolescents with secure attachments to their mothers positively influenced friendship or peer relationships.
7. No statistically significant relationship was shown between parents' and their children's EI, due to the 'moderating' influence of peers. The school environment and strong community encourages healthy relationships between parents and their child, within the context of positive and powerful peer involvements.

In other aspects of EI research, peer 'victimisation' is associated with people who have a combination of high Emotions Direct Cognition (how our emotions affect the way we think) and low Emotional Management and Control (EMC). That is, 'victims' have high EDC and low EMC. Low EMC is also associated with aggression, delinquency, risky behaviours and illicit drug taking. Higher EMC also positively influence academic performance.

Bullying behaviour is associated with low levels of Understanding the Emotions of Others (UEO). EI is important because it promotes psychological well-being; the quality of interpersonal relationships; success in careers; and it broadens traditional understanding of 'intelligence' or 'ability'. Parents have significant roles to play in helping children with their EI development; throughout their learning, future life experiences, and building success, security, resilience, and self-confidence.

Dr Dirk Wellham
Principal