

## Summary of Research on Emotion Coaching

Whilst the issues of underachievement by children and young people in care at school have been recognised for the past few years (Jackson 2001 and 2013) and a number of influential practice-based guides such as Cairns and Stanway (2004) and Bomber (2007 and 2011) have been developed, there is still relatively little empirical research on effective school strategies for meeting such children's needs. Emotion Coaching provides an alternative tool that enables children to learn how to regulate their own emotions and behaviour which can foster improved communication, relationships and resilience (Gottman et al, 1986, Gottman et al 1997). This work adopts a consilience approach, combining research from natural sciences with that from the social sciences and humanities to provide a holistic view of the world (Wilson 1998). Social and affective neuroscientific research on plasticity and apoptosis (Geake 2009; Blakemore & Frith, 2005), the connectome (Siegel, 2013; Seung, 2012), mirror neurones (Decety and Meyer, 2008; Lepage & Theoret, 2007), vagal tone (Porges, 2011; Gottman et al, 1997) and nurturing attachments and environment (Feldman, Singer & Zagoory, 2010; Shonkoff, 2010) provide a sound rationale for interventions that work with the brain and mind and body to support children's self-regulation (Immordino-Yang, 2011). Emotion coaching is a strategy that does this by:

- providing opportunities to work with the brain to produce pro-social behaviour
- helping to create effective neural networks between feelings and behaviours
- providing opportunities to role model empathic responses and problem-solving strategies
- helping to develop and maintain secure attachments

What is Emotion Coaching?

“Emotion Coaching is about helping children and young people to understand the different emotions they experience, why they occur and how to handle them”  
(Gottman, 1997)

Emotion Coaching supports children to:

- become more aware of their emotions
- manage emotions, particularly during instances of conflict
- recognise all emotions are valid but recognise/accept limits (where appropriate) on behaviour

- problem-solve to develop more effective behavioural strategies.

The main research evidence base for Emotion Coaching comes from America and Australia. Randomised Control Trials in America have demonstrated that Emotion Coaching enables children to have fewer behavioural problems, achieve more academically in school, be more emotionally stable and resilient, be more popular and have fewer infectious illnesses (Gottman et al, 1997). Although research has not specifically focused on looked after or adopted children, Emotion Coaching has been used to support children with conduct behavioral difficulties ( Havighurst et al; Katz & Windecker-Nelson, 2004), depression (Hunter et al., 2010; Katz & Hunter, 2007) and those exposed to violent environments, including interparental violence, maltreatment and community violence (Katz et al, 2008; Cunningham et al, 2009). Emotion Coaching has also been positively correlated with secure attachments (Chen et al, 2011), and used effectively to improve the psychological functioning of children who have experienced complex trauma (Murphy et al, forthcoming), as well as reduce the externalising behaviours of children with ASD (Wilson et al, 2013). It has also recently been identified as a protective factor for children with ODD (Dunsmore et al, 2012) and for children at risk (Ellis et al, 2014). Emotion Coaching instils the tools that will aid children's ability to self-regulate their emotions and behaviour (Shortt et al, 2010).

A mixed-method study at Bath Spa University demonstrated that emotion coaching can be an important tool in improving relationships and self-regulation in a variety of settings – schools, youth and children's centres (Gilbert et al, forthcoming; Rose et al, 2012, Rose et al, forthcoming). Emotion Coaching offers a relational model for behavioural management and provides parents and practitioners with strategies to help children to self-regulate their emotions by triggering a calmer response through:

- Empathetic support and role modelling
- Assisting young children to self-soothe by raising their awareness of their own emotional state, helping them to establish good vagal tone
- Using emotional moments as an opportunity to scaffold the young children's self-management of their emotions and behaviour

Emotion Coaching enables practitioners and parents to create an ethos of positive learning behaviour and to have the confidence to de-escalate situations when behaviour is challenging. Emotion Coaching can be viewed as both a technique to provide a value-added dimension to behaviour management strategies and an approach, in that it creates opportunities for longer-term solutions to children's well-being and resilience. The research suggests that engagement in Emotion Coaching can provide transferable skills that benefit practitioners, parents and children. In this respect, it contributes to

sustainable practice that optimises universal well-being and resilience for all children, including looked after and adopted children.

### Publications on emotion coaching

Chen, F.M., Hsiao, S.L. and Chun, H.L. (2011) The Role of Emotion in Parent-Child Relationships: Children's Emotionality, Maternal Meta-Emotion, and Children's Attachment Security. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 21, 403-410.

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Gilbert, L., Rose, J. and McGuire-Sniekus, R. (forthcoming). In Thomas, M. (ed) 'Promoting children's well-being and sustainable citizenship through emotion coaching' *A Child's World: Working together for a better future*. Aberystwyth Press.

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**Review undertaken by Dr Janet Rose and Louise Gilbert  
Bath Spa University  
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