



Create an **EMOTION-RICH CLASSROOM**

Helping Young Children Build Their Social Emotional Skills





Praise for *Create an Emotion-Rich Classroom*

"A necessary and easy-to-use resource for new and veteran early childhood educators alike. Giroux provides relevant and applicable information using real examples we have all experienced, while also considering children from diverse backgrounds and all abilities. I have 20 years of experience, but already know which chapters I will reread first!"

—Amanda Vega-Mavec, Ed.D., Director, Academy for Children, El Centro, Inc.

"A wonderful resource written for teachers by a consummate expert. Through Lindsay Giroux's extensive experience as a Preschool Pyramid coach, she developed classroom planning frameworks (DAPPER and ICARE) that early childhood educators can use to extend their intentional teaching around emotions into the incidental teaching throughout the day. The ultimate purpose is to help young children make sense of their emotions, give them the language to describe what they are experiencing, and teach them to regulate or manage their experiences. Giroux gives practical examples of how to insert social and emotional learning into academic learning experiences, and emphasizes the importance of tracking the data to ensure positive child outcomes."

—Vivian James, Ph.D., CCC-SLP, NC Preschool Pyramid State Implementation Leader (2007–2020), NC IDEA 619 Coordinator (Retired)

"*Create an Emotion-Rich Classroom* is a useful and productive tool that will act as a great resource for educators of early learners. Giroux is thoughtful and practical in her use of tips and strategies to assist educators in recognizing, validating, and responding to big emotions in little learners, as well as our own big emotions. The book provides ample opportunities for educators to reflect on and grow their current practices and offers something for every preschool teacher, those who have been teaching social emotional skills for years and those who are first shifting their focus. As early childhood educators, it is our responsibility to teach foundational skills to our students, including recognizing their emotions and the emotions of those around them. *Create an Emotion-Rich Classroom* offers real-world tips to help our early learners find success in the classroom and beyond!"

—Leigh Anne Bosshardt, M.Ed., BCBA, Infant/Toddler Autism Support Teacher, Red Clay Consolidated School District

"*Create an Emotion-Rich Classroom* takes you, as an early childhood educator, into the world of emotional literacy as you have never been before. The instructional frameworks introduced in the book allow you to dive deeper into bringing emotional understanding to your young students. The author pulls it all together with frameworks, data tools, assessment, and individualization in a way that makes teaching emotions to young children for understanding so easy. Emotions matter!"

—Beth Hudson, M.Ed., NBCT, Union County Public Schools (UCPS) PreK Pyramid Model Coordinator

"*Create an Emotion-Rich Classroom* emphasizes the need for young children to feel safe in experiencing and expressing emotions in early childhood classrooms. This book is a valuable resource for a wide audience of early childhood professionals, providing content to support teachers implementing instruction to create an emotionally rich environment and for professionals supporting teachers to implement best practices. Emotional skills are introduced along an early learning progression, with each chapter building to provide a developmental sequence to support children with recognizing, acknowledging, and regulating emotions. The frameworks used throughout the book support robust teaching, embedding emotional learning and exploration in all aspects of the early learning environment, with added resources to support differentiated instruction and building parent partnerships for a comprehensive approach to promote young children's healthy social and emotional development."

—Kristine Earl, Ed.D., Regional Consultant, NC Early Learning Network, UNC Chapel Hill

"In *Create an Emotion-Rich Classroom*, Lindsay has developed an effective approach to promoting young children's emotional development. The text is set out in a systematic manner that makes it easy to read and work through the concepts that Lindsay grounds with research. She has provided lots of activities, scenarios, and examples, with blank forms that can be downloaded. The reflection questions and ideas for engaging families make it a comprehensive approach for addressing social-emotional learning. This is a book that every early childhood teacher and coach should have in their library."

—Jolene Ferro, Ph.D., BCBA-D, Department of Child and Family Studies Associate Professor, Florida Center for Inclusive Communities, National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations, University of South Florida

"Have you ever cared for a child who had such strong emotions that it made teaching them a daily struggle? If so, this book is for you—the adult who cares and strives to teach young children the foundational skills so that they may become more successful in school and in life. Throughout *Create an Emotion-Rich Classroom*, you will find relatable examples, practical strategies, and feasible applications to create spaces that support children on their lifelong journey towards emotional intelligence. What once seemed like a struggle becomes an opportunity to make a difference in the present and future lives of our children."

—Raquel Lima, M.Ed., Assistant Principal, Clifton Early Learner Academy, Clifton Public Schools

Create an

EMOTION-RICH CLASSROOM

Helping Young Children Build Their Social Emotional Skills

Lindsay N. Giroux, M.Ed.

Foreword by Mary Louise Hemmeter, Ph.D.

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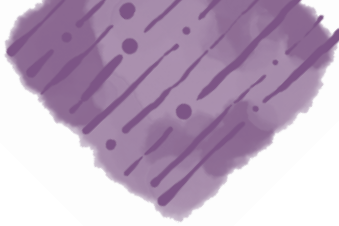
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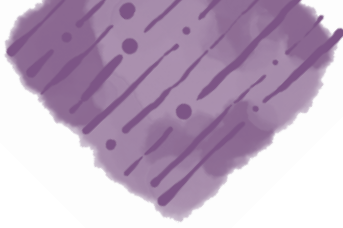
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Foreword

by Mary Louise Hemmeter, Ph.D.

Nicholas Hobbs Chair in Special Education and
Human Development, Vanderbilt University

“We don’t get mad in this house.”

I distinctly remember my mother saying this to me when I was a young child having a temper tantrum. My tantrums often involved crying, flailing my body on the floor, and holding my breath. I think my mother really meant to say, “We don’t get mad the way you get mad,” but I didn’t know what else to do when I was mad. Often when I am in early childhood classrooms, I see young children expressing lots of emotions. They are scared, lonely, jealous, proud, happy, mad, embarrassed, excited, and joyful—just to name a few. However, they sometimes express those emotions with behaviors that adults find challenging, including withdrawing, hitting their friends, screaming at a teacher, knocking over another child’s block structure, or running away from the group. You see, they are *little humans with big emotions*, and they haven’t yet learned how to respond to situations in which they have these big emotions.

Becoming emotionally literate does not just involve learning about our own emotions and ways to respond to strong emotions; it also requires us to learn about others’ emotions, how to recognize emotions in others, and how to support others when they are having big feelings. For example, my friend Sarah told her four-year-old son that I was feeling sad because I was sick. His response was, “Oh no, ML is sick like we were?” His mom said yes and asked, “What do you think we could do to help her feel better?” He looked up at his mom, thought about it with a serious, concerned look on his face, and finally responded, “boom bibbity boom bibbity boom.” I believe Harrison knew what it meant to be sad, and he knew what it meant to feel sick— but he *didn’t* know what to do or say to help me feel better. Stories like this help us appreciate the complex process of learning about emotions, and highlight the need for effective approaches to supporting young children’s emotional development.

The timing of Lindsay Giroux’s book is perfect for a number of reasons. Brené Brown, in her book *Atlas of the Heart*, discusses research in which she found that adults were, on average, able to recognize only three emotions and name them as they experienced them. One of the most significant implications of this is that learning about emotions is a lifelong process. All the more important, then, for us to be careful that our expectations for children are developmentally appropriate. The practices in this book can be used to teach children foundational skills that will help them be successful in school and life. Young children will not become emotionally literate

adults without careful, intentional, consistent teaching and support throughout their school years, and we can lay essential groundwork using the strategies and mindsets in this book.

This work is crucial. Young children are being suspended and expelled from preschool at alarming rates—and there is little evidence that those rates are going down. These suspensions and expulsions are almost always in response to behaviors that adults find challenging—such as hurting others, destroying classroom property, running away from the group, or not following directions. And why are these children engaging in such behaviors? Because they are angry, scared, lonely, embarrassed, proud, or experiencing other big feelings. Essentially, young children are being kicked out of preschool because they don't know how to express their emotions in “socially appropriate ways” or how to engage with their peers. And where are they going to learn these skills? At home, yes, but also in school—unless they are suspended or expelled, that is. Even more disturbing than the overall data on preschool suspensions and expulsions is the fact that these exclusionary discipline practices are disproportionately applied to children of color and to boys, raising larger issues of how adults can better support all children based on individual characteristics, needs, and experiences.

At the same time, staff wellness is a growing concern in early childhood settings. This is due in part to the COVID-19 pandemic, of course—but it is also a longstanding issue for early childhood teachers. Many of these educators are severely underpaid, receive no benefits, have little support, and work with children whose families are experiencing any number of difficult situations—all while being asked to support and guide the emotional development of our youngest children. This is one reason it is so critical to support teachers as they implement the practices found in this book. Ideally, this requires a commitment not only from teachers, but also from administrators. Teachers need time to plan, opportunities for reflection and feedback, and help navigating challenges.

For all these reasons and more, from the minute Lindsay told me she was going to write this book, I was excited to read it—and I could not imagine a better person to write it. Lindsay brings to this work rich experience as a teacher, coach, mother, and student. When she was a student in my lab, she was instrumental in the design of social and emotional activities for a curriculum we developed. I knew any book she wrote would be teacher-friendly, rich with examples, and feasible for and applicable to early childhood classrooms. I want to comment next on what I see as the most exciting parts of the book.

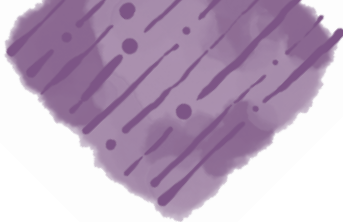
First, it is full of information on effective practices for supporting children's emotional development, with concrete examples of how to implement these practices in early childhood classrooms. Second, Lindsay dispels the myth that focusing on social and emotional skills leaves less time for academics. She does this by providing ideas for how to embed social emotional teaching practices across the day and how to use literacy, math, and science activities as contexts for supporting children's social emotional development as well. Third, she moves beyond the idea of “cute activities

for talking about emotions” and explains the importance of considering children’s stages of learning and providing appropriate supports for each child. She does this through the DAPPER framework she’s created, which both illuminates and addresses the complexity of teaching young children about emotions. Fourth, she acknowledges the role that adults’ own emotions play in this process, and offers ideas and supports for teachers to use when engaging in this work. Fifth, she addresses equity, family engagement, the impact of trauma on young children, and other critical issues, both when describing her core beliefs and throughout the book. Finally, she discusses how to address difficult issues that arise when teaching children to express their emotions. She recognizes the need to seek extra support for children when these issues arise, and also gives teachers ideas for how to respond in the moment.

With this book, Lindsay has provided teachers and the field with a valuable resource; the challenge, of course, is supporting the implementation of the practices Lindsay has so brilliantly described. I’ll close with a few calls to action—and a few words of encouragement:

1. Be intentional about using these practices with every child. This does not mean all children receive the same thing, but that you consider what each child needs, affirm the beliefs and experiences they bring to the classroom, and use this book’s practices to support their individual emotional development. Collect data, reflect on your use of the practices, and make sure each child is getting the support they need.
2. Engage with families in meaningful ways. Learn about how parents support their child’s emotions, learn about families’ cultural norms related to emotions, and work with families to individualize support to children. Listen to, learn from, engage with, and support families in this journey.
3. Find support for yourself in this work. This might come from classroom team members, other teachers in your building, administrators, related services staff, families, or community advocates. It is not easy work. It takes time, planning, reflection, and feedback. Find others who are equally committed to it, and work together to support every child.

And last, I offer you my gratitude as you take on the challenging and essential job of helping young children build their emotional skills. The time is now to help children learn these skills. I hope that this book will help you in this important work.



Introduction

My first year as a full-time preschool teacher was nothing like I had imagined. After years of working as an assistant in early childhood classrooms on my college campus, I had moved across the country and taken a job where I'd have a classroom of my very own. I was excited to have my own space to try out ideas. I was anxious too; as I awaited the arrival of my first class, I had trouble envisioning how my year would go. But I felt I had done what I could to prepare. I'd set up my room, planned schedules and routines, organized materials, and started to build relationships with families before the children stepped foot into school on the first day.

Some things were brilliant successes. My class responded well to puppet play and songs, and they loved books as much as I did. We had great sensory experiences together, painting with our feet and mixing up slime. Families were appreciative of the developmental notes and photos I shared, and they were great partners in brainstorming and planning for their children's growth. Other things were less successful. The children had a lot of big feelings. There were tantrums when spaghetti was served on pizza day. There were kicks and hits and thrown blocks when a toy was snatched away and when it was time to stop and clean up a favorite activity. I had big feelings too. Between moments of joy, I felt defeated, exhausted, ineffective, and worried.

Emotions Matter

I knew my class needed a lot of social and emotional support, and I didn't feel particularly well-equipped to provide it for them. I wasn't sure how to explicitly teach interaction skills, and I had never had so many children in one group who struggled with handling anger and disappointment. It felt impossible to meet the educational needs of my class without addressing their emotional needs. They needed skills and guidance for handling big feelings and regulating them, expressing emotions in safe ways, and recognizing emotions in others. Emotions matter, and I *knew* this, but I didn't know what to *do* about it.

With support from my coteachers and information gleaned from online resources, I muddled through the year. But I wanted to learn more, make changes, and offer better help to the young children in my care.

A couple years later, I decided to go back to school for a graduate degree, and I wanted to lean into those challenges I had felt so strongly. I studied early childhood special education and focused my research on social and emotional development. I honed my skills in explicit social and emotional instruction and became more confident in my ability to coach children when emotionally intense situations arose.

I couldn't help but think how that first year would have gone differently, and what the benefits would have been for the children, had I known these skills during that part of my teaching career.

In the years since completing my degree, my focus has been on social and emotional learning (SEL), coaching early childhood teachers in both inclusive and self-contained special education classrooms. I have seen amazing, creative lessons on emotional literacy. I have seen children learn to answer "How are you feeling?" with specific emotion vocabulary, and I've seen children select regulation strategies and joyfully announce that they are calm. I have also seen teachers experience many of the same feelings and frustrations I had. They want to meet the needs of their children, and they recognize that challenging behaviors are a result of children not yet having the skills to regulate and express themselves. These educators start to teach about emotions, but often aren't sure where to go next in building skills or being more intentional with instruction. Many curricula encourage reading about emotions, modeling emotions, and using visuals. But when it comes to moving beyond these steps, teachers often feel stuck. What do we do *after* those introductory lessons? What do we do when high-emotion situations arise in the classroom? How do we help children generalize their growing social and emotional skills to other settings, including home?

This book has grown out of my work coaching and training teachers. Within it, you'll find frameworks I've developed to help teachers answer the questions of "What comes after I've read a book and modeled the skill?" and "What do I do or say in the emotional moment to build children's capacity?" You'll notice guided reflections, the same kinds of conversations I have as I coach teachers. You'll read ideas for data collection and prompts for noticing what is working (and what isn't) so you can make adjustments and keep the focus on the children and their outcomes. And you'll see encouragement to make choices that will work for you and your class—because in instruction, as in coaching, there are ample ways to build and reinforce skills. You get to choose your own adventure.

With *Create an Emotion-Rich Classroom*, I have aimed to write a book that would have helped me during that difficult first year—a book that would have given me the skills to understand how to be more effective at teaching about emotions while encouraging me to choose activities and materials that would play to my strengths and create joyful moments in my classroom. I hope this book can do that for you and the children you teach.

Learning from the Past and Looking to the Future

I think now about that difficult first year and the social and emotional needs children brought with them into my classroom. Though many years have passed, I continue to see that young children have many of those same, deeply human needs: the need to feel safety in the routines of the classroom, the need for support with handling disappointment and frustration, and the need to learn prosocial ways to get their peers' attention and express their needs and desires. Like my fellow educators (and parents),



I saw these social and emotional needs increase during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic dealt new traumas to children and their caregivers alike. Illness and death impacted many people. Job loss and insecurity shaped the financial situation of family members and educators. Heightened anxiety about safety hygiene and being near others emerged as a challenge. And isolation for children and families meant children had fewer opportunities to grow socially while adults, too, were disconnected from our own social and emotional supports.

It was a time of profound challenge and loss. And yet, there were glimmers of hope. Along with the healthcare workers and others who acted so heroically to help, educators rose to these new challenges. Teachers worked harder than ever to establish classroom routines as both children and teachers sought stability amid school years disrupted by distance learning and quarantines. To support children craving interactions and connections with others, teachers figured out ways to adhere to social distancing guidelines while teaching how to greet and share with others. Masked teachers encouraged children to read their eyes to learn about facial expressions of different emotions.

The pandemic made teaching these skills more difficult, but not impossible. And while many facets of the pandemic remain difficult to understand and process for adults and children alike, one lesson is clear: Social and emotional learning is more important than ever to support growth and development for all of us as we navigate post-pandemic life.

About This Book

This book's goal is to give you frameworks for planning and implementing a variety of strategies to support the emotional development of young children in your care. It serves as a blueprint to design and build an emotion-rich classroom. Unlike a formal curriculum, which might have a pacing guide of skills and plans for each day, this book provides flexible, adaptable strategies and activity ideas. You can intentionally plan and modify these for your classroom to support the competencies young children are developing during their preschool years. While the content is presented in an order that will allow skills to be built on top of one another, there is not a suggested timetable for how long to focus on one area or skill. Rather, observing children in their interactions and play will support you in knowing whether to teach a new skill or continue practicing and reinforcing the first.

You'll probably notice that there's not a weekly lesson for "Social and Emotional Day." There's not a specific daily lesson for a social and emotional time block either, nor is there an Emotions Unit for the beginning of the school year. These omissions are intentional. Effective social and emotional instruction is woven into the fabric of every school day. It's about teaching explicit lessons, but it's also about responding when a child is upset, modeling when you are frustrated, discussing emotions in

storybooks, and asking children to share examples of emotions from their own lives. Just as a print-rich environment intentionally immerses children in a wide variety of literacy experiences, an emotion-rich classroom intentionally surrounds children with a range of social and emotional instruction and supportive interactions.

Social and emotional learning is much more than emotional skills and competencies. Other skill sets, such as social interaction skills, decision making, problem-solving, and self-management, are also components of SEL and, like emotions, they can be taught and are part of lifelong learning. However, I chose to focus this book on emotional skills because of the interrelatedness of emotions and these other skill sets, and how that plays out in the early childhood classroom.

For example, a child I worked with struggled to handle disappointment. We had taught and practiced asking for a turn with a toy in our classroom, and he was able to use his words and gestures to ask. However, those positive interactions quickly took a turn if a peer told him he couldn't have the toy or said he had to wait for a turn. Without the skills to handle this disappointment, he would kick and shout at others. Classmates learned to move away and avoid him when he was in this state, which in turn limited the likelihood of interactions with his peers even when he was more emotionally regulated. Similarly, he struggled with self-management skills such as persistence to meet a goal, because frustration became overwhelming when he met a roadblock during a task. He needed the emotional competencies to allow him to bring a regulated self into social interactions and problem-solving with others.

As you explore this book, you'll notice that social and emotional skills overlap in many areas. For instance, responding to others' emotions lies at the intersection of emotions and friendship skills. Listening to others talk about their emotions and recognizing that they differ from yours is connected to empathy and social awareness. While this book focuses on skills tied to emotions, I hope you get to see and appreciate the growth in children's overall social and emotional development as you create an emotion-rich classroom.

Focusing on emotions as a distinct piece of social and emotional instruction has benefits too. First, it makes instruction specific and measurable, as we home in on very specific individual skills. Second, it allows both teachers and children to gain and strengthen the foundational skills that support other interactions, such as understanding how we feel and knowing how to read others' feelings. Third, emotions influence every choice and decision that we make; they color our perceptions and drive us into action. And fourth, emotions tend to be a topic that teachers wish to dive into, but the whole of social and emotional learning, with its vast importance and wide range of skills, can feel unmanageable. Looking at one distinct strand of skills, and using that strand as a mechanism to practice new frameworks, gives us valuable practice in taking instruction piece by piece.

The emotional competencies featured in this book are:

- building children's emotion vocabulary (chapter 3)
- learning to read ourselves and others to recognize emotions (chapter 4)

- understanding and articulating the causes of emotions (chapter 5)
- expressing and regulating emotions (chapters 6 and 7)
- understanding others' emotions and perspectives—a key part of empathy (chapter 8)

These competencies are aligned with the skills needed to be an “emotion scientist,” as described by researcher Marc Brackett and the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence. Brackett and his team coined the phrase “emotion scientist” to encourage analyzing emotions rather than judging them, and developed what they called the RULER approach: to **r**ecognize, **u**nderstand, **l**abel, **e**xpress, and **r**egulate emotions. Children and adults can use these skills to better understand emotions in themselves and others and build their emotional intelligence.

The teacher strategies described in this book are based around the Pyramid Model, a framework for promoting social and emotional competence in early childhood education. The Pyramid Model provides evidence-based strategies to promote social and emotional development and prevent challenging behavior. These strategies, important for effective social and emotional teaching and Pyramid Model implementation, are woven into the structure of each chapter. They include teachers modeling their own emotions or ways to appropriately express emotions (Demonstrate and Describe) and using a variety of different teaching strategies to reinforce skills in both small and large group settings (Demonstrate and Describe, Practice, Planned Opportunities). The Pyramid Model also encourages both giving positive descriptive feedback to children about their use of skills and asking children to reflect on their use of these skills (Reinforce and Reflect). Of course, even with robust instruction, teachers will need to individualize some approaches for specific children, changing instructional procedures or materials to make concepts more salient for those children (Differentiation and Advancement).

You might not be in a program that uses the Pyramid Model for social and emotional development, and that's okay too. You'll recognize that these instructional strategies, such as modeling, practicing, and planning intentional lessons, are fundamentally best practices for early childhood education. The structure embedded in the chapters will support you with robust instruction to meet a variety of needs and will provide you with the vocabulary to talk about your instructional practices. You'll also find strategies for connecting with families, along with data collection tools to support children with emerging skills. These will benefit you and your class regardless of curriculum or approach.

In each chapter, there are several suggestions on how to communicate with families about the new skills you are teaching. There are also ideas for soliciting family feedback about the emotion work you are doing at school; this gives families a chance to articulate what is important to them, what their concerns might be (including around social and emotional skills),

The forms in this book are also available at freespirit.com/cerc-forms. For directions on downloading this digital content, see page 224.



and what emotional strengths their children are bringing into the classroom. Rather than only sending home information about what you are teaching, allowing families to share their thoughts and beliefs about emotions can make your emotion teaching more effective. Examples and strategies from children's home lives make your instruction more meaningful and connected.

You'll also notice a heavy focus on adult reflection. These reflection prompts are included to encourage you to think about your experiences with emotions in your own life, knowing how interrelated your use of these skills is with your teaching. There are also reflection prompts woven throughout that ask you to consider different

aspects of your teaching and your class's responses. Encouraging reflection during classroom coaching is one of my favorite components of my job. Rather than telling teachers what to do, or why a skill is important, reflection allows each of us to identify why a skill matters in our lives and the lives of the children in our classes. Reflection shines clarity on our personal *why* and ties together our actions with the results we see in the class-

room. Practicing reflection as you plan and teach will also enhance your ability to help children reflect on their own emotional competencies.



To begin your reflection on this journey, see the Social and Emotional Skill Reflection Checklist at the end of the introduction.

How to Use This Book

There are many ways to use this book, independently or with others. I recommend using it in whichever way will motivate you to read, reflect, and then implement strategies in the classroom. For some readers, this might mean reading it individually, at your own pace, and taking time to reflect internally without the pressure of a due date or the expectation of sharing your reflections aloud. For others, this might mean creating a book study group to have an accountability framework to encourage you to read, implement, and bring ideas to the table. Consider what structures typically motivate you or allow you the space and energy to try new things.

If you opt to read this book on your own, you might find that recording thoughts and ideas in a notebook as you read can help you revisit and reflect on what you have learned and what you have brought with you into the classroom. Similarly, I recommend that you do take the time to stop and reflect when prompted, as it will encourage you to not only think about *what* you are implementing but also *why* you are working toward an emotion-rich classroom. Documentation of your reflections and instructional decisions can also serve as a record of your professional growth or may become helpful notes to reference if you are working toward Pyramid Model fidelity. And having your thoughts, choices, and plans written or typed out will make creating next year's emotion-rich classroom much easier.

You might choose to read this book with others, such as a group of adults who work in your classroom or a group of teachers at a school. Reading together creates the opportunity for shared study. While you might divide and conquer the content of

some books (for example, I read chapter 3 and summarize for the group, and you read chapter 4 and summarize), this particular book does not lend itself to this book study format. Because each chapter contains reflections and instructional decisions that you'll want to make with your own teaching style and your own class's needs in mind, it is hard to reap those benefits without diving into each chapter yourself.

Therefore, other book study formats might work better with the structure of this book. For instance, one such structure would be for all participants to read the same chapter and each complete a "DAPPER Planning Sheet" for their classroom, before holding a book study meeting where everyone shares elements of their DAPPER plans and gives feedback prior to implementing these plans in the classroom. (You'll learn about the DAPPER framework in chapter 2.) Another successful structure could be to have everyone read and begin to implement a chapter's strategies, and then come back to discuss successes and challenges, review child data, and brainstorm next steps to strengthen instruction. To support this work, you can find a PLC/Book Study Guide at freespirit.com/PLC.

One other thing to note: the first time you read this book, I recommend working through the chapters in order. You'll find that the skills rely on the ones before them. Chapters intentionally reference skills, visuals, and activities from previous chapters to build on children's prior knowledge. After you work through the chapters, planning and implementing their suggestions for the first time, you might opt to revisit specific chapters as you plan for a new school year. At that point, this book becomes more of a resource to revisit, reflect again, and revise plans to meet new needs.

Looking Forward

As you embark on the journey to an emotion-rich classroom, I encourage you to envision what you want to create. How would your classroom look if children had the skills to understand emotions, discuss them, and regulate them? What would your classroom sound like? How would your classroom feel if you and the children had these skills?

Most of all, I challenge you to bring an open mind. Exploring your own emotions, reflecting on your experiences with emotions, and working to build new habits of implementation are hard work. Continuing to strive toward creating an emotion-rich classroom requires giving yourself grace. It's normal to feel like you didn't handle an emotionally charged situation well enough, or to feel frustrated when your strategies aren't meeting the needs of your class. A little grace for yourself, alongside reminding yourself of the classroom you have envisioned, will help you move the work forward.

Lindsay N. Giroux, M.Ed.

Social and Emotional Skill Reflection Checklist

It's very challenging to teach a skill that is not easy for you to use in your own life. To improve children's social and emotional skills, you can work to improve your own. Practicing key social and emotional skills allows you to better explain, model, and teach these skills, and encourages empathy as others learn them too.

Take a moment to reflect on each skill in this form, marking your own personal comfort level. Then reflect and mark the columns that represent how comfortable you feel teaching these skills to children.

Social and Emotional Skill	Personally, my comfort level with these skills in my own life:			As a teacher, my comfort level with teaching these skills to children:		
	Not yet comfortable	Somewhat comfortable	Comfortable	Not yet comfortable	Somewhat comfortable	Comfortable
Giving positive descriptive feedback (for example, "You did it. You asked for help when you were frustrated!")						
Receiving positive descriptive feedback						
Talking about your emotions using a nuanced emotional vocabulary						
Accessing calm-down strategies when you have big feelings						
Seeing the intent and desires that drive your actions and emotions						
Responding to others' emotions appropriately (for example, validating and offering support instead of dismissing or minimizing feelings)						
Describing your own emotions, behaviors, and skills (for example, "I was so angry that my face felt hot and my heart was beating quickly. I had to take deep breaths to calm down.")						
Reflecting on your own use of social and emotional skills (such as what worked and what did not)						

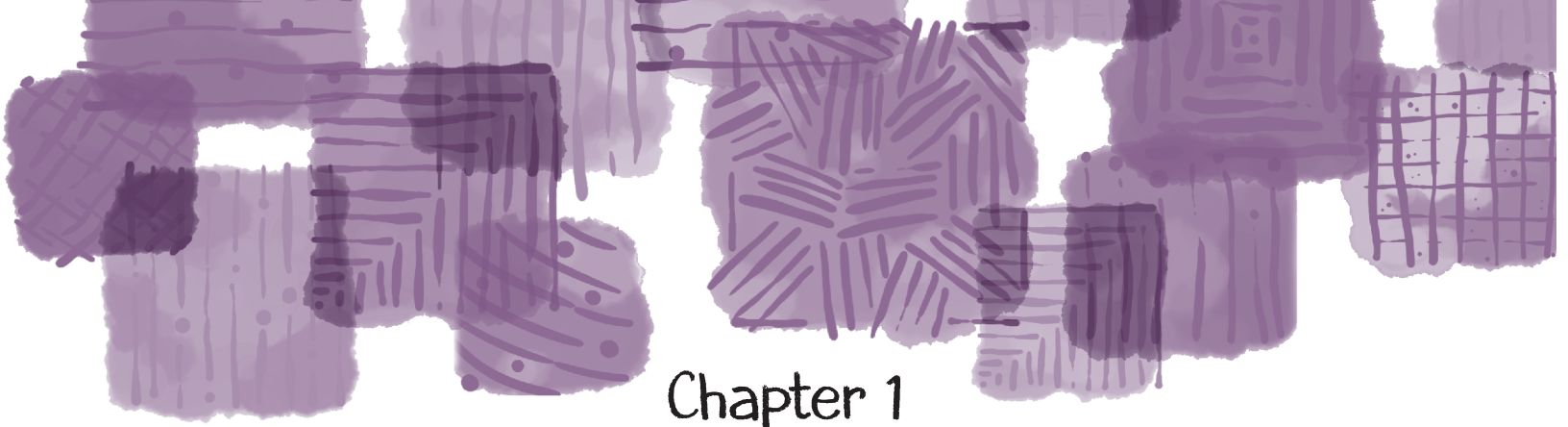


Reflect on your answers. What do you notice about them?

How will this knowledge help you prioritize areas for your personal growth?

Consider the children you work with. Are you equally comfortable teaching all of them these skills? Are there children you find harder to reach? Why is that? What resources can support you in reaching them too?

What will you need to support your comfort and competency with these skills?



Chapter 1

Six Beliefs About Emotions in Early Childhood

Preschool classrooms are full of displays of emotions, day in and day out.

Crying upon separating from parents.

Squealing with joy when a classmate arrives.

Quaking with frustration when the last piece of a puzzle won't fit.

Cheering when the teacher brings out a new activity.

Hiding behind a bookshelf when a substitute teacher enters.

Shouting when a peer refuses to pass a preferred toy.

Young children are learning how to navigate their emotional worlds. As emotional moments happen, children might be wondering, “What am I feeling? How do I describe this feeling? What can I do to help myself feel better? How does my classmate feel? What can I do to help *them* feel better? When my emotions are too big, how can I regain a sense of control and stability?”

First, imagine that a teacher dismisses or diminishes these emotional moments. She tells sad children, “You’re okay,” and asks children who are bubbling with excitement to sit down and be calm. She tells a scared child, “There’s nothing to be afraid of,” and tells an angry child that the problem is a small one and not worth getting upset about. The children might then have different emotions; perhaps they feel embarrassed, shamed, confused, or anxious that their teacher doesn’t seem to understand them. The message the teacher is sending, whether intentional or accidental, is that emotions have no place in this preschool classroom.

Now, picture a teacher who has been working to explore feelings and teach emotional competencies to her class. She helps label a child’s feeling with clear and specific emotional language: “Wow, you seem really excited to try this activity!” She coaches a child through frustration by offering techniques to help regain a sense of calm. She shares an experience about a time when she felt joyful and describes what it felt like in her body, and she encourages children to use their budding emotion vocabulary to try to explain how they are feeling and what’s causing those emotions. While the first