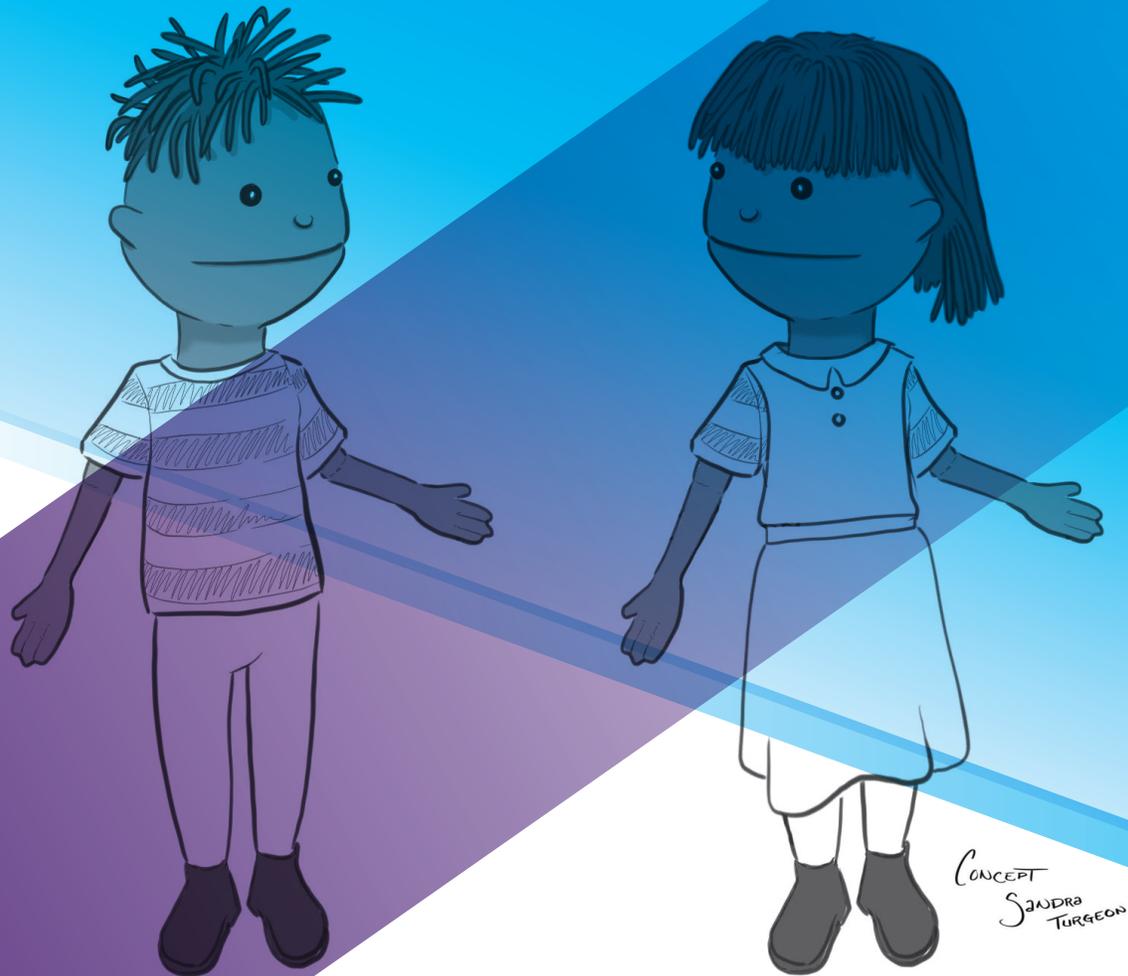


SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING TO
HELP CHILDREN WITH THE PROCESS
OF **IDENTITY AFFIRMATION**



CONCEPT
SANDRA
TURGEON



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Creators of a caring environment

INTRODUCTION

Whether they are directly involved as parents at home or as professionals in schools or daycares, adults are privileged witnesses to children's development.

This document suggests some solutions that will enable parents and educators to: reduce the impact of prejudice on the self-esteem of children who are going through a gender identity or gender expression affirmation process; promote children's development; reduce the social pressure of peers and adults who try to persuade children to conform to the norms of their assigned birth sex; and interact with children who have a non-conforming gender identity or gender expression.

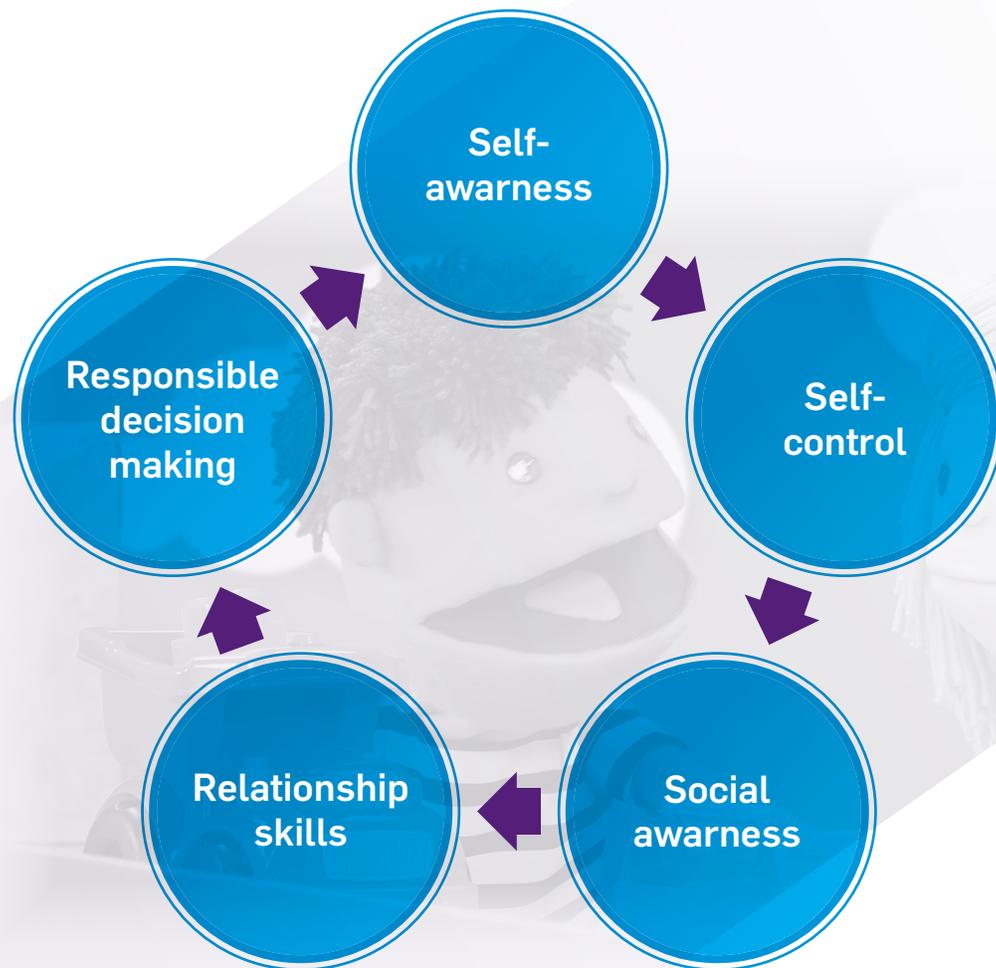
Every situation of course is unique and may unfold differently. If parents or professionals do not have the skills to handle certain situations, if you find yourself facing a wall and cannot offer children any meaningful solutions, if you can no longer reassure them and no longer know how to provide adequate support—do not hesitate to call upon professionals (sexologists or gender identity therapists) for help. We have an obligation to provide children with as much guidance as possible during their identity affirmation process. Ignoring questions and not supporting children can be detrimental to their optimal development and mental health. An Ontario study shows that when children are provided with adequate support while accepting their gender identity and gender expression, they are less likely to suffer from mental health problems (suicidal ideation, depression, etc.) (Trans Pulse Project, 2014-2015).

To find the best resources for you and your children, please consult the section at the end.



SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING TO HELP CHILDREN WITH THE PROCESS OF IDENTITY AFFIRMATION

Social and emotional learning focuses on the development of emotional, social and relationship skills and abilities that enable children to better meet their needs, assert themselves better and develop their empathy (ability to put themselves in others' shoes and understand what they are experiencing and feeling). This learning enables children to live more harmoniously with others by promoting diversity. To create a positive and caring climate, we need to teach appropriate social behaviour. Five components illustrate social and emotional learning¹:



1 - Based on casel.org and responsiveclassroom.org

Self-awareness

Children's ability to recognize and identify their emotions, to recognize their values, strengths and limitations, and to set and achieve goals.

Self-control

Children's ability to manage their emotions (self-management), which are usually related to needs that they also learn to verbalize.

**Through self-awareness and self-control, children learn to understand their emotions as well as those of others around them. They are then able to use appropriate strategies to manage their emotions.*

Social awareness

Enables children to develop healthy relationships, show empathy, understand different viewpoints and appropriately use family, school and community resources when needed.

Relationship skills

The development of these skills fosters the development of positive relationships with peers and adults. It also helps children appropriately resolve conflicts.

Responsible decision-making

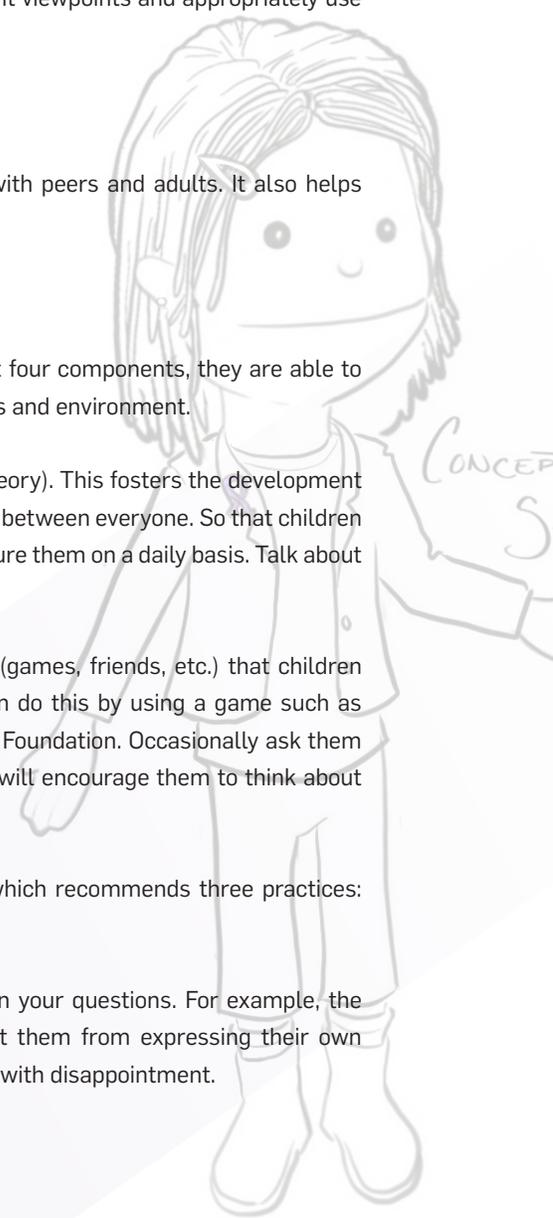
When children have properly developed (or are in the process of developing) the first four components, they are able to make informed and responsible decisions that will have a positive impact on their lives and environment.

Adults should be positive role models by leading by example (Bandura's modelling theory). This fosters the development of children's emotional and social skills. Healthy communication creates strong bonds between everyone. So that children will confide in you in the most difficult times, take the time to talk with them and reassure them on a daily basis. Talk about anything: their hobbies, current events, family outings or school activities.

Also, discuss emotions (not just when the emotion is negative), needs and choices (games, friends, etc.) that children experience on a daily basis. Since children learn through play and pleasure, you can do this by using a game such as the Emotion Game, a tool found on the website of the Jasmin Roy Sophie Desmarais Foundation. Occasionally ask them "How do you feel?," "What do you need?" and "Why did you make that choice?" This will encourage them to think about and verbalize what they feel and will build their self-esteem and autonomy.

Take inspiration from the child socialization model proposed by Eisenberg (1998), which recommends three practices: modelling, discussion and reaction (with or without reinforcement).

However, try not to influence their language and ideas by not suggesting answers in your questions. For example, the question "Do you feel angry?" might influence the children's response and prevent them from expressing their own nuances. Sometimes we do not only feel angry or the emotion we feel has more to do with disappointment.



QUESTIONS

How do you feel today?
What would you like? Why?

How did you feel in class today?
What do you want?

When you did "such a thing," how did you feel?
How do you think others felt?

Why do you think you feel like that?
What do you think the solution is?

Do you need something?

Can I do something?

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Ask anytime, even when everything is fine.

To find out how they feel and have them verbalize their positive and negative emotions and perceptions about school, daycare, peers or adults.

Makes them aware of the impact of their choice of words, expression of their emotions or their actions.

Allows children to make connections between what they feel and experience, verbalize a feeling and associate it with a situation. This develops their emotional language and involves them in the search for solutions.

Makes children aware of their needs, makes them think about what they may not have thought about at first. This helps them with their process of exploration, trial and error.

Without suggesting an answer, we can indirectly convey to children that we are able to help them. This can help them find new solutions to solve their problem.

There are many other questions that can help children verbalize what they feel and need. It's up to you to discover them during a conversation and when an opportunity arises in class or at home.

ADULTS' ROLES

What should be the roles of adults who are helping children with their identity affirmation process? Let's see what actions are helpful and what actions can harm children in their identity affirmation process.

ROLES TO BE PROMOTED

Listen to children and answer their questions.

Remain neutral, disregarding your personal feelings.

Use appropriate vocabulary without any personal judgment, even if you do not agree with what children are experiencing.

Accept children as they are.

Allow children to make their own choices and support them without judgment.

Allow children to experiment and make mistakes.

ROLES TO BE AVOIDED

Ignore children and their questions or minimize their importance.

Act impulsively based on a negative judgment or perception.

Use authoritarian vocabulary by imposing prejudices and gender stereotypes.

Ask children to conform to social norms associated with their assigned birth sex (expected behaviour, choice of activities, clothing, etc.)

Influence children's choices based on their assigned birth sex and don't give them any choice.

Interfere with their activities and prevent them from doing what they want to do because we think it's best for them.

The left-hand column recommends that adults act with kindness. These roles should guide interactions between children and adults as well as among other children. The roles focus on adults' self-control, developing children's social skills and helping them with responsible decision-making.

EMOTIONAL SELF-CONTROL

Adults should listen to children under all circumstances. Without necessarily wanting to reason with them or suppress the behaviour, we recommend various tips for understanding children. Depending on the emotions and situations experienced, teach them to manage their emotions so that they can better communicate their needs. Here are some tips that can help you support children in their exploration and foster attachment.

- Listen;
- Console / reassure children that they are lovable, even if they feel different and emphasize that their difference is positive and makes them unique;
- Comfort / reassure children that they have the right to do what they want and to like what they want (in case they say they do not feel different from others);
- Ask non-directed open questions;
- Give them time to rest alone in a corner, where they can read or listen to music they like, etc.;
- Allow them to draw to show us their imagination and desires;
- Allow them to write it if they can write;
- Help them with their interactions with peers, so that they can understand their reality, or so that they can learn to respect their difference and uniqueness;
- Play with them to understand their reality, allow them to explore a behaviour or an action that we do not initially associate with their assigned birth sex, so that they can form their own opinion about it;
- Explain how to do or carry out something if necessary;
- Explain children's reality to others and explicitly teach ways to react, act and express themselves to others;
- Encourage them to continue their approach, actions or activities if that makes them happy;
- Suggest conflict management and resolution strategies.

Toutes ces possibilités peuvent contribuer à désamorcer une situation problématique et favoriser l'autorégulation des émotions de l'enfant. En ce qui a trait à l'entourage et à son éventail de réactions, voyez la prochaine section.

THE AWARENESS OF OTHERS: ENCOURAGING A POSITIVE VIEW OF DIFFERENCE

“I respect the differences and opinions of others just like I want people to respect my own differences and opinions.”

When children adopt lifestyles that are not necessarily associated with their assigned birth sex, others' looks can become painful and their self-esteem can take a hit. Their peers may voice their discomfort and certain intolerance towards the person who they consider to be different and non-conform.

It is absolutely essential to intervene with peers in order to promote socialization and develop their relationship skills with children, if necessary. Here are some tips:

- Ask all children to confide in something they are doing and that they do not necessarily want others to know about them. Guide the discussion to open everyone's mind and promote respect.
- Ask a specialist to explain the children's situation to others (sex therapist, gender identity therapist, etc.), always with the children's and family's consent.
- Do role-playing and ask children to identify the most appropriate ways to react or act. Subsequently, be sure to apply the proposed solutions to real life.
- To facilitate discussion, encourage play among students and allow them to show others what they like.
- Explicitly teach the expected behaviours and ways to respect others.
- Dispel prejudices by eliminating gender stereotyping from teaching.

Promote diversity in games and emphasize that egalitarian relationships can have many direct benefits in the living environment. Physical differences are one thing, but everyone, boys and girls, can have ideas and desires. When we teach in schools, we can make them understand that boys and girls learn the same academic content and that they can all apply their knowledge to carry out a project. Since we are all unique, everyone's results and work may be different, but they will be guided by the same criteria and the same learning.



SOME EXAMPLES...

Explore various games with children. Be playful. Put them voluntarily in an environment containing various toys, even those with which they are not inclined to play with at first sight. Use all these toys with them. Explore toys traditionally associated with boys and girls in our society. Use interesting and original role-playing and ask them questions while playing.

The classic example: we can play with a doll with a boy. We can ask him:

- **What is the doll for?**
- **Who can play with this toy?**

If he does not find the answer by himself, you can suggest to him: dads also take care of babies and playing with the doll allows the child to play the role of a dad, in the same way he plays the role of a superhero at home or on the schoolyard.

With a girl, you can play with trucks, for example. We can repeat the same questions and tell her, if necessary, that girls also drive and can have a career in trades that require her to drive big cars!

In so doing, we are helping eliminate gender-specific stereotyping. Since they are using toys or colours that are not traditionally associated with their assigned birth sex, we are reducing inequalities and potential discrimination among children.

Children should explore, discover themselves over time and present the results of their discoveries. As adults, we must be attentive to and guide children when they need a helping hand and a pat on their backs.



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Books to be consulted with children:

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Boutignon, Béatrice. *Un air de famille : Le grand livre des différences*, 2015, éditions Le Baron perché/Hoche Communication SAS- Jacques-Marie Laffont éditeur (42 pages).

Doumont, Gwenaëlle. Richard, Stéphanie. *J'aime pas la danse*, 2015, Talents Hauts (28 pages).

Doumont, Gwenaëlle. Richard, Stéphanie. *J'aime pas le foot*, 2015, Talents Hauts (28 pages).

Green, Ilya. Hense, Nathalie. *Marre du rose*, 2008, Albin Michel jeunesse (40 pages).

Scotto, Thomas. Tallec, Olivier. *Jérôme par coeur*, 2015, Encore une fois... (32 pages).

Community organizations:

ATQ – Aide aux transsexuelles et transsexuels du Québec

- Help line and various events
- 514-254-9038 | 1-855-909-9038 # 1
- ecoute@atq1980.org

Centre for Gender Advocacy

- Support, resources and events
- 514-848-2424 #7880
- info@genderadvocacy.org

LGBT Family Coalition

- Soutien, ressources et événements
- info@familleslgbt.org

Gender Creative Kids Canada

- Support, resources and events
- info@gendercreativekids.ca

Projet 10

- Support for youth 14-25 years old
- questions@p10.qc.ca

AlterHeros

- Virtual community, information and news
- info@alterheros.com

Le Néó – Lanaudière

- Resources and support
- 1-800-964-1860
- neo@le-neo.com

I.R.I.S. Estrie – Estrie

- Resources and support
- projet_cameleon@hotmail.com

MAINS Bas-Saint-Laurent – Bas-Saint-Laurent

- 418-722-7432
- lgbt@mainsbsl.qc.ca

LGBT Coalition – Abitibi-Témiscamingue

- info@coalitionat.qc.ca

Réseau des alliés des lesbiennes, gais, personnes bissexuelles, bispirituelles et transgenres

– Gaspésie-Iles-de-la-Madeleine

- Resources and support

Association des lesbiennes, gais, bissexuelLEs, bispirituelLEs, trans* et queer

de la Baie-des-Chaleurs – Gaspésie

- Resources and support
- lgbt.bdc@gmail.com

Jeunesse Idem – Outaouais

- Resources and support
- info@jeunesseidem.com

Trans-Outaouais – Outaouais

- Resources, discussion and support
- 819-771-2277 – leave a message

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Eisenberg, N., Cumberland, A., & Spinrad, T.L. (1998). *Parental socialization of emotion*. *Psychological Inquiry*, 9, 241-273.

The Emotion Game, Jasmin Roy Foundation, 2017
<https://www.desjardins.com/ressources/pdf/d45-emojeu-e.pdf>

Responsive classroom
<http://responsiveclassroom.org>

Transgender People in Ontario, Canada: Statistics from the Trans PULSE project to Informe Human Rights Policy (2014-2015)
<http://transpulseproject.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Trans-PULSE-Statistics-Relevant-for-Human-Rights-Policy-June-2015.pdf>

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