



Guide good practices + Teaching resources

Project

LISTEN TO THEIR EMOTIONS



Aimed at professionals working with people with disabilities with the goal of acquiring skills to support the emotional management of their users

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CHAPTER 1: COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS: STRATEGIES FOR COMMUNICATING WITH PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

1.1 Introduction: The Foundation of Connection

Welcome to the first step in enhancing your ability to support the emotional well-being of individuals with disabilities. Effective communication isn't just about exchanging information; it's the bedrock upon which trust, understanding, and meaningful support are built. When we communicate effectively, we open doors to understanding an individual's inner world – their joys, fears, frustrations, and needs. Conversely, communication barriers can lead to misunderstandings, isolation, and unaddressed emotional distress.

This chapter is designed as a practical learning module. It moves beyond theory to provide you with concrete strategies and tools you can implement immediately in your work or studies. We will explore the diverse communication needs you might encounter and equip you with foundational and specific techniques, including an introduction to Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC), to foster better connections and provide more effective emotional support.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

- Identify common communication challenges associated with various types of disabilities.
- Apply foundational communication strategies suitable for diverse interaction scenarios.
- Recognize the importance of patience, active listening, and clear language.
- Select and adapt communication strategies for individuals with specific sensory, physical, or cognitive needs.
- Understand the basic principles and types of Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC).
- Utilize simple AAC tools (like pictograms) to inquire about and acknowledge emotions.
- Explain how effective communication directly supports emotional understanding and expression.
- Analyze how communication breakdowns can impact emotional well-being.

1.2 Understanding Diverse Communication Needs

People communicate in wonderfully diverse ways. Disabilities can influence *how* an individual receives, processes, expresses, or understands information. It's crucial to remember that communication challenges are incredibly varied, even among people with the same diagnosed disability. Our role is not to be experts on every condition, but to be observant, respectful, and adaptable communicators.

Let's consider a few brief scenarios:

- **Scenario A (Physical Disability):** David has cerebral palsy affecting his muscle control, making speech slow and sometimes difficult to understand. He might use gestures or a high-tech device, but it takes time and effort. *Challenge: Requires patience, avoiding interruptions, potentially using supportive tools.*
- **Scenario B (Sensory Disability - Hearing):** Sarah is Deaf and uses sign language as her primary mode of communication. She can also lip-read to some extent, but it requires concentration and clear visibility. *Challenge: Requires alternative modes (signing, writing), visual clarity, facing the person.*
- **Scenario C (Intellectual/Cognitive Disability):** Michael has an intellectual disability. He understands concrete ideas best but struggles with abstract concepts, complex sentences, or rapid topic changes. *Challenge: Requires simple language, breaking down information, using visuals, checking understanding frequently.*
- **Scenario D (Speech/Language Disorder):** Amina experienced a stroke, resulting in aphasia. She knows what she wants to say but struggles to find the right words or form sentences. *Challenge: Requires patience, offering choices, using gestures/drawing, accepting non-verbal cues.*

These are just snapshots. Communication can be affected by combinations of factors, including temporary states like fatigue or anxiety.



Reflect: Think about a recent interaction where communication felt challenging (in any context, not necessarily disability-related).

- What made it difficult? (e.g., noise, speed, language, assumptions, emotions?)
- What strategies did you or the other person use, successfully or unsuccessfully?
- How might understanding the factors involved help you approach future interactions differently?

1.3 Foundational Communication Strategies: Building Bridges

Regardless of specific disabilities, certain core principles form the foundation of respectful and effective communication. These are actionable skills you can cultivate and practice daily.

- **Patience is Paramount:** Allow individuals the time they need to process information and formulate their response. Rushing can increase anxiety and hinder communication. *How-To: Pause after speaking. Count silently to 5 or 10 before speaking again or prompting.*
- **Active Listening:** Focus fully on the speaker. This means minimizing distractions, making appropriate eye contact (if culturally comfortable for both), and showing you are engaged through nods or brief verbal affirmations ("I see," "Okay"). It's about understanding their message, not just waiting for your turn to talk.
- **Use Clear and Simple Language:** Avoid jargon, slang, complex sentence structures, or abstract metaphors unless you know the person understands them well. Use concrete terms. *How-To: Short sentences. One main idea per sentence.*
- **Check for Understanding:** Don't assume your message was received as intended. Ask clarifying questions gently. *How-To: "Does that make sense?" "Can you tell me what we're going to do next?" "Did I understand correctly that you feel [emotion]?"* Avoid asking "Do you understand?" repeatedly, as many people will say "yes" even if they don't, to avoid embarrassment. Rephrasing or asking them to explain back is often better.

- **Respect Response Time and Method:** Recognize that formulating and delivering a response might take longer or require different methods (speech, gesture, pointing, device). Wait patiently. Acknowledge and validate their communication method.
- **Use Person-First Language:** Refer to the individual first, not their disability (e.g., "the person with autism," not "the autistic"). This emphasizes their humanity and individuality.
- **Be Mindful of Non-Verbal Cues:** Pay attention to body language, facial expressions, tone of voice (yours and theirs), and gestures. These often convey more than words, especially when verbal communication is challenging.

Checklist: Key Communication Reminders

Before/During Interactions:

- ☐ Am I minimizing distractions?
- ☐ Am I facing the person and making appropriate eye contact?
- ☐ Am I speaking clearly and at a moderate pace?
- ☐ Am I using language I believe the person understands?
- ☐ Am I pausing to allow response time?
- ☐ Am I actively listening, not just waiting to speak?
- ☐ Am I checking for understanding respectfully?
- ☐ Am I paying attention to non-verbal cues?
- ☐ Am I using person-first language?
- ☐ Am I being patient and respectful?

Try This: Practice Simple Language

Think of a common instruction or explanation you give in your work/studies. For example: "Okay, after we finish this task, we need to make sure we clean up the area properly according to the guidelines, and then transition to the afternoon activity which is scheduled in the main hall."

Now, rephrase this instruction using simpler language, shorter sentences, and focusing on one step at a time. Write it down.

Example Rephrasing:

- "First, we finish this activity." (Pause)
- "Good job."
- "Next, we clean up this table." (Point or gesture if helpful)
- "Put the [items] in the [box]."
- "Then, we go to the big room for the next activity."

How does breaking it down change the clarity?

1.4 Tailoring Your Approach: Specific Strategies and Adaptations

While foundational strategies are key, sometimes you need to adapt your approach based on an individual's specific needs. Here are some examples:

For Individuals with Hearing Impairments:

- **Ensure Visibility:** Face the person directly, ensure good lighting on your face (for lip-reading), and avoid covering your mouth.
- **Minimize Background Noise:** Choose quiet environments when possible.
- **Use Visual Supports:** Write key messages down, use gestures naturally, point to objects, or use pictures/icons (more on this





in AAC).

- **Check for Hearing Aids/Implants:** Ensure they are turned on and functioning, if applicable and appropriate to ask/check.
- **Consider Sign Language:** If the person uses sign language and you don't, explore using professional interpreters or basic sign language resources if appropriate for your role.

For Individuals with Visual Impairments:

- **Identify Yourself:** Always say who you are when entering a room or starting a conversation. Announce when you are leaving.
- **Use Names:** Use the person's name to get their attention and the names of others present.
- **Be Specific with Directions:** Instead of "over there," say "to your left" or "on the table in front of you."
- **Verbalize Actions:** Explain what you are doing, especially if it involves touch or changes in the environment (e.g., "I'm going to place this cup on the table beside your right hand").
- **Offer Tactile Information:** Allow the person to touch objects you are discussing (if appropriate). Consider tactile markers or Braille if the person uses them.

For Individuals with Intellectual or Cognitive Disabilities:

- **Simplify Language:** Use concrete words and simple sentence structures (as practiced earlier).
- **Break Down Information:** Present information in smaller, manageable steps.
- **Use Visual Aids:** Pictures, objects, schedules, or social stories can greatly aid understanding. (See AAC section).
- **Be Consistent:** Use consistent routines, language, and expectations.

- **Allow Processing Time:** Repeat information patiently if needed, using the same simple language.
- **Offer Choices:** Provide clear, simple choices rather than open-ended questions when appropriate (e.g., "Do you want apple or orange?" instead of "What do you want?").

1.5 Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC): Giving Voice to Experience

Many individuals with significant communication challenges benefit from Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC). AAC doesn't replace speech if it's present; it supplements or provides an alternative way to communicate.

What is AAC?

AAC encompasses a wide range of tools and strategies:

- **Low-Tech AAC (No Electronics):**
 - Gestures and body language
 - Facial expressions
 - Pointing
 - **Picture Communication Symbols (PCS) or Pictograms:** Simple images representing objects, actions, feelings, places, etc. (e.g., Picture Exchange Communication System - PECS).
 - **Communication Boards/Books:** Collections of pictures, symbols, or words that a person can point to. These can be themed (e.g., feelings board, food board).
 - Writing or drawing.
- **High-Tech AAC (Electronic Devices):**
 - **Speech-Generating Devices (SGDs):** Devices that produce digitized or synthesized speech when a button, symbol, or sequence of symbols is pressed. These range from simple buttons with pre-recorded messages to complex dynamic screen devices.

- **Communication Apps:** Software on tablets or smartphones that function as communication aids.

Why is AAC Crucial for Emotional Expression?

Imagine feeling frustrated, sad, or happy but having no reliable way to tell someone. This is the reality for many individuals with complex communication needs. AAC provides a tangible way to:

- **Express Feelings:** Pointing to a "sad" face pictogram or selecting "angry" on a device allows for emotional expression that might otherwise be impossible or misinterpreted.
- **Report Needs and Discomfort:** Communicating pain, hunger, or needing a break becomes possible.
- **Reduce Frustration:** Having a means to communicate can significantly decrease challenging behaviours that often stem from frustration and unmet needs.
- **Increase Agency and Choice:** AAC empowers individuals to have more control over their interactions and environment.

Using Basic AAC for Feelings:

Integrating simple AAC like pictograms or a feelings board into daily interactions can make a huge difference.

- **Introduce the Tools:** Have visual aids readily available. A simple board might include pictograms for basic emotions: Happy, Sad, Angry, Scared, Tired, Okay. (Visual examples of these would ideally be shown here or in Chapter 4's resources).
- **Model Usage:** Point to the "Happy" pictogram yourself when expressing positive feelings ("I feel *happy* we are doing this activity").
- **Offer Opportunities:** Gently prompt for emotional expression using the tool. Instead of just "How are you?", you might point to the board and ask, "How are you *feeling* right now?".

- **Accept Any Response:** The person might point, gesture towards, or look at a symbol. Acknowledge their attempt: "I see you're pointing to *sad*. Thank you for telling me."
- **Keep it Simple and Accessible:** Don't overwhelm with too many choices initially. Ensure the tool is positioned where the person can easily see and access it.

Mini-Case Study: Meet Maria

Maria is a young adult with limited verbal speech who sometimes gets overwhelmed during group activities. She enjoys music but can become distressed if it's too loud or goes on too long. You have introduced a simple communication board with pictograms for "Happy," "Sad," "Loud," "Quiet," "More," "Stop," and "Break."

Question: The music activity has been playing for 10 minutes. Maria starts fidgeting. How could you use her communication board to check in with her about how she's feeling and what she might need? What might you say while pointing to the relevant pictograms?

(Think about phrasing like: "Maria, how are you feeling about the music?" while gesturing towards 'Happy'/'Sad'. Or "Is the music okay?" pointing to 'Loud'/'Quiet'. Or "Do you want 'More' music or need a 'Break'?")



1.6 Communication and Emotional Well-being: Making the Connection

The communication strategies discussed throughout this chapter are not just technical skills; they are fundamental to effective emotional management support. Here's how they connect:

- **Understanding Others' Emotions:** Active listening, paying attention to non-verbal cues, using clarifying questions, and patiently allowing response time to help you perceive and understand how someone else might be feeling,

even when they don't explicitly state it. Using AAC tools provides a direct window into emotions for those who cannot easily verbalize them.

- **Empowering Emotional Expression:** Providing clear communication channels – whether through simplified verbal language, visual supports, or AAC – empowers individuals to express their own feelings, needs, and preferences. This sense of agency is vital for emotional regulation and self-advocacy. When people feel heard and understood, their emotional state often improves.
- **Preventing and De-escalating Frustration:** Communication breakdowns are a major source of frustration, anxiety, and challenging behaviour. When an individual cannot make themselves understood or feels ignored, their emotional distress escalates. Proactive, patient, and adaptive communication can prevent these situations or help de-escalate them by addressing the underlying communication need.

Scenario for Analysis:

Samir, an individual you support, suddenly throws his art supplies on the floor and makes a distressed sound. He has limited verbal ability. He cannot tell you what is wrong using words.

- Which *foundational* communication strategies from section 1.3 would you employ *first*? (Think about your immediate reaction and approach).
- Considering Samir has limited verbal ability, what *specific* strategies or tools (from sections 1.4 and 1.5) might you try next to understand the cause of his distress and help him express himself?

How might understanding the *reason* behind his action (e.g., frustration with the task, sensory overload, needing a break) influence how you support his emotional state?

1.7 Chapter Summary and Key Takeaways

Effective communication is the cornerstone of providing sensitive and responsive emotional support to people with disabilities. This chapter equipped you with practical strategies to build stronger connections.

Key Takeaways:

- Communication needs are diverse; adaptability and respect are crucial.
- Foundational skills like patience, active listening, clear language, checking understanding, respecting response time, and person-first language apply universally.
- Tailoring communication methods (using visual supports, tactile information, simplified language) is often necessary.
- Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC), especially simple tools like pictograms and communication boards, is vital for enabling emotional expression for individuals with limited verbal speech.
- Good communication empowers individuals to express feelings and needs, reducing frustration and fostering emotional well-being.
- Communication breakdowns can directly lead to emotional distress.

By consciously applying these strategies, you move beyond simply interacting towards truly connecting with and understanding the individuals you support, laying the groundwork for effective emotional management assistance.

Your Communication Action Step:

Think of one individual you currently work with or might work with in the future.

- Identify one communication strategy or principle discussed in this chapter that you think could improve your interactions with them. (e.g., Allowing more response time? Introducing a simple 'feeling' pictogram? Using simpler sentences?).
- Write down one specific action you will take this week to practice or implement that strategy.

(Example: "With John, I will consciously pause for a count of 5 after asking a question before I speak again.")

This commitment to small, consistent changes builds effective communication habits over time.

CHAPTER 2: EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE: MODELS AND TRAINING PROGRAMS

2.1 Introduction to Emotional Intelligence


In a first approach to emotional intelligence, we can define it as a construct that helps us understand how we can influence our emotions in an adaptive and intelligent way, both on our emotions and on our interpretation of the emotional states of others. In other words, emotional intelligence is the ability to understand, manage and express emotions in an appropriate way, both one's own and those of others.

This concept was popularized by the American psychologist and journalist Daniel Goleman and encompasses several key skills that are fundamental in our personal and professional lives:

1. Self-awareness: Recognizing and understanding your own emotions and how they affect your thoughts and behaviour.
2. Self-management: Managing your emotions effectively, especially in situations of pressure or stress.
3. Empathy: Understanding other people's feelings and perspectives, allowing you to build stronger, more connected relationships.
4. Social skills: Interacting and communicating effectively, resolving conflicts and collaborating with others.
5. Motivation: Have a proactive attitude and stay focused on your goals even in the face of challenges.

In his 1995 book, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, Daniel Goleman argues that emotional intelligence is just as important, or even more so, than IQ for success in life.





The book highlights how these skills influence areas such as work, personal relationships, and mental health. Goleman also stresses that emotional intelligence is not fixed at birth, but can be developed throughout life through practice and learning

2.2 Importance of emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence is essential because it influences almost every aspect of our lives. Its relevance in the personal, professional and social spheres is detailed below:

Personal life

- Self-knowledge: Helps to understand and manage our own emotions, which contributes to greater emotional stability and happiness.
- Interpersonal relationships: Facilitates empathy and effective communication, strengthening our connections with friends, partner and family.
- Resilience: It allows us to better face challenges and overcome adversity without overflowing emotionally.

Professional life

- Leadership: Leaders with emotional intelligence inspire confidence and motivation in their teams.
- Teamwork: fosters a harmonious work environment through understanding and conflict management.
- Success and productivity facilitate balanced decision-making and stress management, increasing professional effectiveness.

Social life

- Empathy towards others promotes mutual understanding and respect, creating more cohesive communities.
- Conflict resolution: By understanding the emotions and perspectives of others, disagreements can be effectively mediated.
- Positive impact: Emotionally intelligent people have a contagious effect that elevates the well-being of those around them.

2.3 Strategies to improve emotional intelligence

It is considered feasible and positive to develop the emotional intelligence of each individual. It can be done from different personal points of view:

- **Self-knowledge:** Taking time to reflect on your emotions and how they affect your decisions and behaviours. Keeping an emotional journal can be helpful in identifying patterns.
- **Emotional regulation:** Learning to manage your emotions in difficult situations. It helps to keep calm by practicing deep breathing, meditation or mindfulness techniques.
- **Empathy:** Striving to understand the feelings and perspectives of others. Actively listen and ask questions to better connect with the people around you.
- **Assertive communication:** expressing your emotions and needs in a clear and respectful way. This improves trust and prevents misunderstandings in relationships.
- **Practice resilience:** Facing challenges with a positive and adaptable attitude. Seeing failures as opportunities to grow is essential.
- **Feedback and learning:** Accept constructive criticism as an opportunity to improve and understand how your actions are perceived by the people around you.

2.4 Emotional intelligence in people with disabilities

Emotional intelligence is especially meaningful for people with disabilities, as it can positively influence their emotional, social, and personal well-being. Here are some key takeaways:

1. **Strengthening self-esteem:** Emotional intelligence helps people with disabilities to recognize and value their emotions, which contributes to greater self-confidence and a more positive perception of their abilities.
2. **Improved interpersonal relationships:** Facilitates the understanding and expression of emotions, which can help overcome communication barriers and foster healthier, more meaningful relationships.
3. **Stress and anxiety management:** By developing skills to manage emotions, people with disabilities can better cope with daily challenges and reduce the impact of stress.
4. **Social inclusion:** Promotes empathy and mutual understanding, both in people with disabilities and in those around them, favouring a more inclusive and respectful environment.

5. Development of adaptive skills: Emotional intelligence allows people with disabilities to better adapt to different situations, strengthening their resilience and ability to solve problems.

We can mention various studies that have worked on this issue and the conclusions reached:

- A study published by the University of Jaén analyses the relationship between emotional intelligence, quality of life and interpersonal relationships in people with intellectual disabilities. The results show a positive relationship between certain dimensions of emotional intelligence and quality of life.
- Another study by the Gabriela Mistral University (Chile) focuses on how emotional intelligence and emotional education are worked on in people with intellectual disabilities in the educational field. This study highlights the importance of emotions in the regulation of behaviours and learning.
- Research carried out at the University of Oviedo explores emotional intelligence in people with intellectual disabilities deprived of their liberty. This study seeks to improve the emotional competencies of the participants through intervention programs, showing positive results in their quality of life and ability to reintegrate

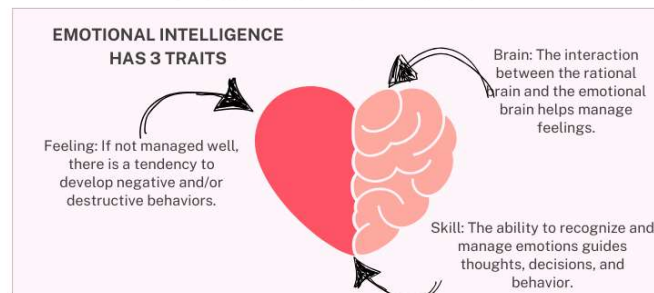


2.5 Emotional intelligence models

2.5.1 Daniel Goleman's model

This model explains the five main components that we saw in the introduction to this chapter: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Goleman's Model is widely used in the business world, as it strengthens leadership and team management.

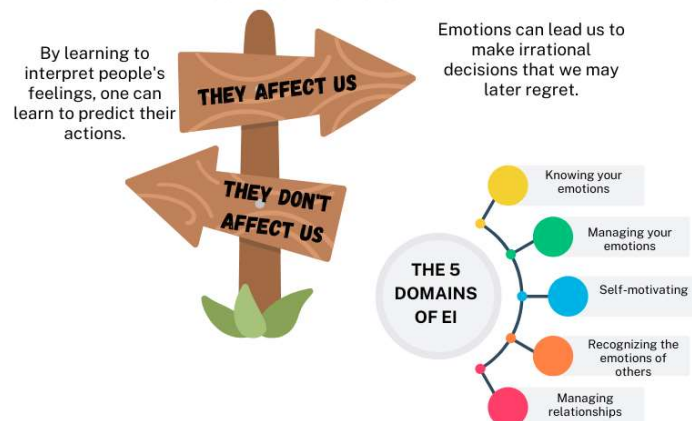
Goleman's Model



8 TIPS TO IMPROVE IT




THE TWO SIDES OF EMOTIONS



Source: own elaboration

2.5.2 Peter Salovey and John Mayer's model

This model defines emotional intelligence as a cognitive skill and is organized into four main areas:

- 
1. Emotional perception: recognizing emotions in oneself and in others, including through cues such as tone of voice or facial expressions.
 2. Use of emotions: integrating emotions with cognitive processes to improve decision-making and problem-solving.
 3. Emotional understanding: identifying the causes and consequences of emotions, as well as the relationships between them.
 4. Managing emotions: regulating emotions to adapt to complex situations and maintain well-being.

This model is widely used in education and psychology, as it facilitates emotional learning.

2.5.3 Bar-On's model

This model focuses on the development of practical skills for adaptation and social interaction. It proposes five main areas assessed using the EQ-i instrument:

1. Intrapersonal: self-awareness, self-confidence and emotional expression.
2. Interpersonal: empathy, social relationships and communication.
3. Adaptability: problem-solving and flexibility in the face of change.
4. Stress management: ability to manage stress and control impulses.
5. General state: optimism and emotional well-being.

The EQ-i (Emotional Quotient Inventory) is an instrument designed to assess a person's emotional intelligence. It was developed by Reuven Bar-On and is based on his model of emotional intelligence, which includes the five skills mentioned.

This inventory uses a self-report questionnaire composed of items that assess different aspects of emotional intelligence. Upon completion, an overall score is obtained, as well as specific scores for the components and subscales of the model. It is widely used in educational, organizational, and clinical contexts to measure and develop emotional competencies.

This model is applied in mental health research and programs to strengthen resilience.

2.6 Emotional intelligence training programs

Emotional intelligence training programs are essential to improve personal and social skills. Below we list what the structure of a basic program would look like:

- Self-awareness: it is about helping participants identify and understand their own emotions. Techniques such as emotional journals or self-assessment questionnaires can be used.
- Self-management: it consists of designing strategies to manage stress, impulsivity or difficult emotions. For example, breathing techniques, meditation or control of negative thoughts.
- Empathy: the ability to put oneself in the shoes of others is encouraged, using role dynamics or active listening exercises.
- Social skills: work is done on effective communication, conflict resolution and team collaboration.



There are different practical activities for an emotional intelligence training program. In addition to developing them below, in the second part of this guide you can find activities ready to be used in this context and improve the skills of people who work with people with functional diversity.

- SimulationGames:
 - Emotional scenarios: creating fictional situations, such as resolving a conflict at work or empathizing with a colleague in distress. Participants must react and manage the emotions involved.
 - Changes in perspective: Participants take on the role of another person in a situation. This fosters empathy and helps them understand emotions from another point of view.
- Group workshops:
 - Shared stories: Each participant can tell a personal experience related to difficult emotions and how they managed it. The group offers support and reflects on how to improve.

- Collaborative dynamics: team games designed to encourage effective communication, such as challenges where everyone must come to a joint solution while managing emotions.
- Active listening exercises:
 - Empathy in pairs: the participants are divided into pairs. One shares an emotional experience and the other practices listening without interrupting, asking thoughtful questions and showing understanding.
 - Reflect emotions: by listening, participants try to identify and verbalize their partner's emotions.
- Emotional relaxation practices:
 - Mindfulness: mindfulness exercises to observe and accept emotions without judging them, such as guided meditations or body scans.
 - Impulse control: games where participants must make strategic decisions under pressure, controlling impulsive reactions.
- Emotional challenges:
 - The challenge of the day: Each day, participants are given an emotional task, such as identifying three times when they managed their emotions well or expressing gratitude.
 - Emotional journaling: Writing about how they feel each day, identifying patterns and learning to recognize their emotional states.
- Use of technology:
 - Apps that allow you to record emotions in real time and offer personalized advice.
 - Virtual reality simulations that present complex emotional dilemmas to solve.

These activities not only reinforce key skills but also make learning more dynamic and interactive.

As for program evaluation strategies, before and after the program, surveys or questionnaires can be used to measure progress in emotional competencies. Direct observation during activities is also essential to identify areas for improvement.

2.7 EI programme for people with disabilities

The development of an emotional intelligence program adapted for people with disabilities must be inclusive and adjusted to the specific needs of each individual. Below we see a proposal:

Main objectives

1. Promote emotional self-awareness, adapting tools to make them accessible.
2. Develop emotion management skills, considering the individual characteristics of each disability.
3. Foster empathy and social skills within their social and community environment.



Program components

1. Adapted self-awareness:
 - o Use of pictograms, images or accessible applications to facilitate the identification of emotions.
 - o Interactive sessions where participants relate emotions to everyday stimuli (sounds, colours, objects).
2. Emotional self-management:
 - o Introduce techniques such as deep breathing, relaxation activities or mindfulness, adjusted to physical or cognitive abilities.
 - o Create personalized strategies for managing stress, such as daily routines or visual supports to guide the process.
3. Inclusive empathy:
 - o Group dynamics in accessible environments that allow you to experience different emotions and understand the perspectives of others.
 - o Collaborative games where communication and mutual support are rewarded.
4. Social skills:
 - o Workshops to practice situations such as expressing emotions or resolving conflicts, using accessible methods (sign language, augmentative communication, etc.).
 - o Use of simulations adapted to face real situations in their community.

Program activities

1. Dynamics of emotional identification:
 - o Participants associate colours, sounds, or textures with emotions. For example: "Red can be energy or anger, how do you feel when you see red?"
 - o Emotional cards that participants select based on how they feel.
2. Social interaction games:
 - o Activity in pairs where they share a personal experience using accessible resources (communication boards, etc.).
 - o Group games that encourage teamwork and emotional expression.
3. Safe relaxation spaces:
 - o Adapted yoga or meditation classes where people can learn to manage stress.
 - o Creation of emotional diaries using text, drawings or voice recordings.

Program evaluation


- Individual progress: Tailored surveys or visual assessments to measure progress in emotional recognition and management.
- Community feedback: involve family members or caregivers in the process to observe changes in social interactions.

This program proposal seeks to improve the quality of life of people with disabilities, offering them tools that allow them to understand and manage their emotions, in addition to promoting empathy and social connections.

Featured Programs

A prominent program used in therapies with people with disabilities is Dialectical Behaviours Therapy (DBT). Originally designed by Marsha Linehan to treat borderline personality disorder, DBT has been adapted to work with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. This approach combines strategies of acceptance and change, helping participants regulate their emotions, improve their social skills, and manage stress.

Another interesting example is the use of games such as Candyland in emotional therapies. This playful approach helps people with disabilities identify and express emotions in an



accessible and relaxed way. The familiarity and simplicity of the game make it an effective tool for reducing anxiety and encouraging emotional communication

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is a widely used approach to help people with intellectual disabilities identify and manage their emotions. It is adapted to include practical and visual activities that facilitate understanding and learning.

The Social Skills Training (SST) program focuses on improving the social and emotional skills of people with disabilities. It includes practical exercises such as role-playing and simulations to develop empathy, communication and conflict resolution.

Interventions known as Mindfulness-Based Interventions, such as the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, have been adapted for people with disabilities. They help improve emotional regulation and reduce stress through mindfulness techniques.

The program called Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) combines emotional intelligence strategies with the development of social and behavioural skills. It is used to promote independence and improve the quality of life for people with disabilities.

2. 8 Conclusion

The benefits of emotional intelligence models and programs are an improvement in emotional and physical well-being, the strengthening of interpersonal relationships, and greater adaptability in the face of challenges. Emotional intelligence is a powerful tool that transforms lives in different contexts. Training models and programs not only develop emotional competencies but also improve quality of life and contribute to a more empathetic and collaborative society.



CHAPTER 3: ACCOMPANIMENT AND VALIDATION OF OTHER PEOPLE'S EMOTIONS – WHAT TO ENCOURAGE AND WHAT TO AVOID

3.1 Introduction: Emotions Are Universal, But Often Unseen

Emotions are the core of the human experience. They shape our relationships, our reactions, and our responses to the world. For people with disabilities, expressing and processing emotions can be more complex—but not less real, less intense, or less important.

Emotional expression may look different for someone with a communication disorder, autism, or cognitive disability. A person might flap their hands when excited, cry out suddenly in frustration, or withdraw when anxious. These reactions are not misbehaviour—they are communication. Recognizing them as emotional signals is the first step toward offering respectful, effective support.

When we speak of **accompaniment**, we refer to the act of “walking with” someone in their emotional journey. It is not about solving the emotion or rushing it away. It is about staying present, listening actively, and offering safety through understanding.

When we speak of **validation**, we refer to the process of recognizing a person's feelings as real, legitimate, and acceptable. Validation communicates, “I see how you feel. It makes sense. You matter.”

This chapter is designed to equip professionals, caregivers, and vocational training students with the tools to validate and accompany the emotions of people with disabilities. It is structured around what to encourage, what to avoid, and how to build emotionally inclusive environments through daily practice.

3.2 Why Emotional Validation Matters

Emotional validation isn't a luxury—it's a necessity. It promotes:

- Trust between individuals and caregivers or teachers
- Greater emotional self-awareness
- Improved communication, even in non-verbal individuals

- De-escalation of emotional distress
- Reduction in behavioural crises
- Long-term emotional resilience

Imagine being in distress and having no one acknowledge it. Now imagine that happening every day. That is the reality for many individuals with disabilities when their emotional signals go unrecognized or unvalidated.



3.3 Emotional Invalidation: What to Avoid

Emotional invalidation can take many forms. Sometimes it's intentional; often, it's not. But the result is the same—feeling dismissed, misunderstood, or unimportant.

Common invalidating phrases:

- “You’re overreacting.”
- “Stop crying—it’s not that bad.”
- “There’s nothing to be afraid of.”
- “You’re being silly.”
- “Big kids don’t act like this.”

Invalidating behaviours include:

- Ignoring distress
- Laughing at emotional expressions
- Redirecting too quickly (“Let’s talk about something else”)
- Changing the subject
- Using sarcasm in response to emotional pain

Consequences of chronic invalidation:

- Low self-esteem
- Behavioural escalation
- Emotional withdrawal

- Lack of trust in caregivers or peers
- Suppression of emotional expression

For people with disabilities, especially those with limited communication tools, invalidation is not just hurtful—it is silencing.

3.4 What to Encourage: Core Practices of Emotional Validation

There are concrete ways to validate someone's emotions. These practices are simple, teachable, and powerful.

1. Active Presence

Be there—fully. Make eye contact (if appropriate), face the person, minimize distractions, and focus entirely on them.

2. Name the Emotion

Use clear, concrete language to name what you observe:

- “You look upset.”
- “You seem frustrated.”
- “Are you feeling nervous?”

Even if the person can't confirm with words, naming emotions builds emotional literacy.

3. Reflect and Paraphrase

Repeat back what you hear or observe:

- “You wanted to stay longer, and you're sad it's over.”
- “You're mad because someone took your turn.”

4. Normalize the Feeling

- “It's okay to feel angry.”
- “Many people feel scared in new situations.”
- “I feel that way too sometimes.”

5. Offer Support Without Fixing

Avoid immediately trying to solve the problem. Instead, say:

- “Do you want to sit together for a bit?”
- “I’m here if you want to talk or not talk.”

3.5 Strategies for Different Disability Profiles

Different individuals require different forms of support. Below are strategies adapted for common disability types:

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

- Use visual emotion charts
- Avoid abstract language—speak literally
- Validate stimming as a form of regulation
- Respect sensory sensitivities

Example: “You’re covering your ears. It’s too loud, right? Let’s move to a quieter spot.”



Intellectual Disabilities

- Use short, simple phrases
- Pair words with pictures or objects
- Repeat emotional vocabulary often
- Use choices to support expression: “Are you mad or sad?”

Example: “You’re sad because your favourite teacher isn’t here. That’s okay.”

Communication Disorders

- Use AAC tools (boards, apps, objects)
- Validate gestures or behaviours
- Accept pointing, nodding, or even crying as valid expression
- Encourage any attempt at emotional communication

Example: “You showed me with your card that you’re tired. Thank you for telling me.”

3.6 Using Visual Tools for Validation

Visual tools help individuals:

- Recognize their own emotions
- Choose how to express them
- Communicate needs non-verbally

Examples of tools:

- Emotion faces (happy, sad, angry, scared, tired, excited)
- Colour zones (green = calm, red = upset, yellow = nervous)
- “How do you feel today?” boards
- Choice cards for coping strategies

How to implement:

- Place charts at eye level
- Teach their use during calm moments
- Use them during transitions and stressful events
- Model using the tools yourself: “I’m in the yellow zone right now. I need a break.”

3.7 Co-Regulation: Supporting Emotion Regulation Through Connection

Co-regulation is the process by which an adult helps another person calm their nervous system.

Techniques:

- Breathing together slowly
- Speaking in a calm, rhythmic voice
- Offering sensory input (weighted objects, soft textures)
- Sitting quietly and modelling emotional regulation

Example phrases:

- “Let’s take five deep breaths together.”
- “I’m going to stay with you while you’re upset.”
- “You don’t have to talk right now—I’ll wait with you.”

Over time, co-regulation teaches self-regulation. It builds a bridge between chaos and calm.

3.8 Validation in Crisis Situations

When someone is in a state of emotional crisis, validation becomes even more important.



DO:

- Speak gently and slowly
- Acknowledge the emotion
- Provide safety first—solutions later

DON'T:

- Yell
- Threaten or punish
- Say “Calm down!”—which rarely works

Instead say:

- “You’re really upset. I see that.”
- “Let’s take a break together.”
- “You’re safe. We’ll get through this.”

Validation de-escalates emotional intensity. It allows people to feel seen—not judged.

3.9 Emotional Validation in Group Settings

Validation isn’t just for one-on-one interactions. It shapes group culture.

Group strategies:

- Daily emotion check-ins with visuals
- Group discussions about feelings
- Classroom “calm corner”
- Peer support training

Group norms to establish:

- Emotions are not bad
- It’s okay to ask for help
- We support each other with kindness

3.10 Cultural and Gender Differences in Emotional Expression

Culture shapes how people show emotions. So does gender.

- Some cultures value emotional restraint
- Others encourage open expression
- Boys may be told not to cry
- Girls may be discouraged from showing anger

What to do:

- Ask families about emotional norms
- Use inclusive emotion tools
- Validate all styles of expression
- Avoid stereotypes (“boys don’t cry” or “she’s just being emotional”)

3.11 Professional Reflection: How Do I Validate?

Validation is not automatic. It must be practiced.

Self-reflection questions:

- What emotions do I find hard to accept in others?
- Do I rush to solve problems instead of listening?
- Have I unintentionally invalidated someone recently?
- What validation strategy worked well this week?

3.12 Building a Validation Culture in Schools and Services

To truly support emotional growth, validation must become part of the system.

Embed validation in:

- Daily routines
- Staff meetings
- Behaviours policies
- Family engagement plans
- Crisis response frameworks



Examples:

- Include emotion vocabulary in lesson plans
- Post classroom rules that include “respect all feelings”
- Train all staff in active listening and co-regulation
- Create emotional safety policies

Supporting others emotionally is demanding. Staff must care for their own emotional well-being. Caring for others starts with caring for ourselves.

Strategies:

- Peer supervision or debriefs
- Emotion check-ins during meetings
- Reflective journaling
- Scheduled breaks from high-stress roles
- Boundary-setting training

3.13 Conclusion: Validation as Respect in Action



To validate someone’s emotions is to say: “You matter. Your feelings matter. I’m here.” It is one of the most powerful gifts a professional can offer. For people with disabilities, emotional validation:

- Builds self-awareness
- Encourages communication
- Prevents emotional isolation
- Strengthens relationships
- Supports inclusion

Let us build systems and spaces where all emotions are welcomed, all people are supported, and no one is left alone with feelings too big to carry alone.

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CHAPTER 4: TEACHING RESOURCES FOR PROFESSIONALS

Activity 1: The Emotion Board

This is a tool designed for individual work, taking a journey towards self-awareness and understanding the emotions triggered by life situations.

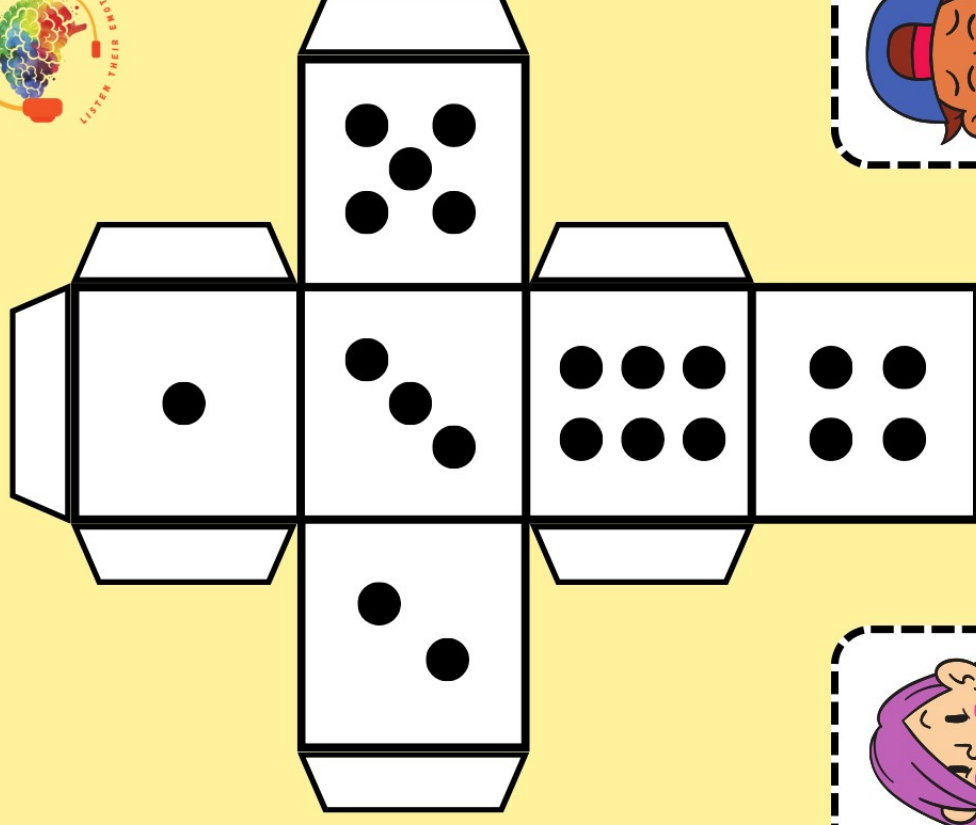
Preparation: Cut out the materials from the second page (die, game pieces, and wildcard cards). Assemble the die by folding along the lines and gluing the tabs.

Game Proposal: The participant rolls the die and moves along the board, reflecting on personal situations and thoughts, guided by the professional accompanying them. If they do not know or do not wish to answer two of the spaces, they may exchange them for wildcard cards. Upon reaching the finish line, the participant will have taken a journey through their mind, personality, and memories, connecting with themselves.

SOMETHING YOU REGRET	EXPRESS A NEGATIVE THOUGHT	SOMEONE INDISPENSABLE TO YOU	A PHRASE OR VERSE THAT INSPIRES YOU	"THE TRIP OF YOUR DREAMS	WHAT MAKES YOU SPECIAL	WHO ARE YOU IMPORTANT TO?
AN APOLOGY YOU'D LIKE TO RECEIVE	<div> <p>WILDCARD CARDS</p> <p>If there are two challenges you don't know or don't want to answer, you can use two wildcards</p> </div>				WOULD YOU LIKE TO DARE TO...	FINISH
"HOW DO YOU THINK OTHERS PERCEIVE YOU?"	WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO YOUR 10- YEARS-AGO SELF?	<h1>THE EMOTIONS JOURNEY BOARD</h1> <p>A journey towards self-discovery and the emotions that life situations evoke in us</p> 				
WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO CHANGE ABOUT YOUR PERSONALITY?	WHAT IS THE MOVIE YOU'VE WATCHED THE MOST TIMES?	A BEAUTIFUL MEMORY FROM YOUR CHILDHOOD	IDENTIFY TWO QUIRKS YOU HAVE	DREAM OR GOAL YOU WANT TO ACHIEVE	WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM THE LAST MISTAKE YOU MADE?	START



WILDCARD CARDS



TALK ABOUT
SOMEONE WHO
INSPIRES YOU

YOUR FAVORITE
FLOWER AND
ANIMAL

HUM A SONG THAT
PUTS YOU IN A GOOD
MOOD

A CHARACTER FROM
A CHILDREN'S STORY
THAT LEFT A MARK
ON YOUR CHILDHOOD

Actividad 2. What are emotions for?

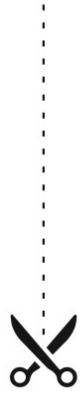
Although we have traditionally divided emotions into positive (joy, satisfaction, calm...) and negative (anger, anxiety, or sadness), all emotions are essential because they help us adapt and respond to different situations. They protect us from danger, prepare us to face challenges, alert us to the unknown, allow us to reflect and learn, and even generate admiration and inspiration. They are an inner guide that connects us with ourselves and with the world around us.

Preparation: Cut out the first page and laminate both the brain parts and the second page. Using Velcro, attach each brain part from the first image onto the second, like a puzzle.

Game Proposal: The purpose of this activity is to reflect on the usefulness of each of the nine emotions presented in the illustration. Each brain section will be revealed and discussed one by one. For example, when uncovering the anger section, one might reflect:

Disgust is a fundamental emotion for our survival. Its primary function is to protect us from potential dangers such as spoiled food, toxic substances, or unsanitary conditions. It acts as a defense mechanism, helping us avoid contact with elements that could be harmful to our health. Additionally, disgust has a social and moral component, influencing our interactions and perceptions of certain behaviors or cultural norms.

What things or situations trigger disgust for you? Do you think this emotion serves as a warning or alert?





It helps protect us from immediate dangers

It helps protect us from intolerant events

It helps identify injustices and prepares us to face them.

It helps to form positive thoughts and gives us energy

It helps us reflect with ourselves

It helps cope with difficult moments and prepares us to accept losses

It helps alert us to future situations that are unknown to us

It helps identify when we make mistakes and generates learning for us

It helps us generate admiration and inspiration

WHAT CAN EMOTIONS BE USEFUL FOR?

Activity 3: Using Basic Emotion Pictograms for Communication

Objective: To practice introducing and using the six Basic Emotion Pictograms (Happy, Sad, Angry, Scared, Surprise, Worried) to help an individual identify and communicate their feelings. This activity supports the principles of AAC and responsive communication discussed in Chapter 1.

Instructions: Cut out and laminate the cards.

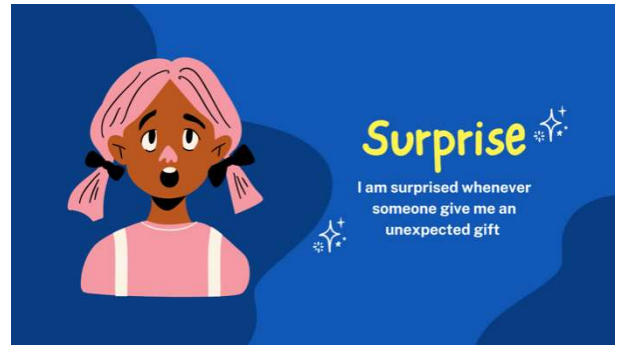
Game Proposal:

- Start Simple: Begin with just two or three pictograms that represent common or easily understood emotions.
2. Model the connection (show, don't just tell):
 - Briefly link the feeling to a simple experience. This helps the individual understand that the cards represent real feelings.
 - Example: Point to Happy. "When we play with the ball, I feel Happy."
3. Offer a communication opportunity:
 - Lay out the 2-3 familiar pictograms where they can easily see and reach them.
 - Ask a simple question like: "How are you feeling right now?"
4. Wait patiently for a response:
 - This is very important. Give the individual plenty of time (at least 10-15 seconds, or longer if needed) to look, process, and respond.
 - They might respond by pointing, touching the card, looking intently at one card, making a sound, or using a gesture. Avoid repeating the question too quickly or prompting excessively.
5. Acknowledge and Validate Their Communication:
 - Whatever response they give, acknowledge it clearly and validate the feeling expressed.
 - Example: If they point to Sad, respond with: "I see you're pointing to Sad. Thank you for showing me you feel sad."
 - Example: If they look at Happy, you could say: "You're looking at Happy. Are you feeling happy?"
 - *Key Point:* The first goal is to acknowledge that they have successfully communicated something using the tool. Don't immediately try to change their feeling; just show you understand their message.
6. Gradual expansion:
 - Once the individual seems comfortable recognizing and using the first few pictograms, gradually introduce the others one at a time, using the same method (Show, Label, Model, Offer Opportunity).
7. Be consistent:
 - Use the pictograms regularly throughout the day or week, in different situations. Consistency helps the individual learn that these cards are a reliable way to express how they feel. Keep them visible and accessible.



Happy ✨

I smile when I celebrate my birthday!



Surprise ✨

I am surprised whenever someone give me an unexpected gift



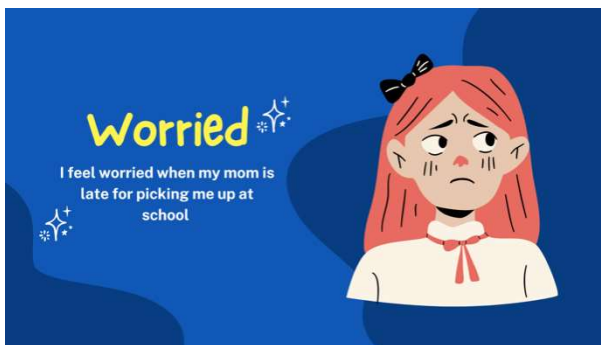
Sad ✨

I feel sad when I am sick because I can't play with my friends.



Angry ✨

I get angry when my friend teases me



Worried ✨

I feel worried when my mom is late for picking me up at school



Scared ✨

I feel scared when I thought my mom left me alone at home.



Activity 4: Treating myself well

This activity aims to transform intrusive thoughts into kind and realistic messages toward oneself. When we are overwhelmed by certain emotions, our subjectivity can prevent us from moving forward and overcoming situations.

Instructions: Cut out the cards and match each intrusive thought with its corresponding positive message. You can print them on cardstock or laminate them to preserve them longer.

Game Proposal: The idea is to randomly pick cards, read the negative message, reflect on the moments when we have had that thought, and offer a kinder, more realistic perspective to apply the next time that thought arises.



I'm going to fail



I don't know if I'll pass or fail—I'm no fortune teller. What I do know is that I'm making an effort

It's not going to turn out well



I really can't know for sure. I'm going to give it my all, and if it doesn't turn out well, I can try again

I'm not enough



I am enough for myself. I love and respect myself

I have to prove that I'm worthy



The people around me should add to my self-worth, not define it entirely



Everyone laughs at me



**It's not my fault.
Sometimes people make
mistakes when judging. We
all make mistakes**

I am not successful



**Success is not defined by a
job or a partner. Success
can be the small challenges
in life that are within my
reach**

Nobody loves me



**I am valuable regardless of
how others perceive me,
but my family and friends
appreciate me a lot**

I must be the best



**I don't have to be the best
at anything. Who decides
who is the best? I'll try to
do my best within my
possibilities**

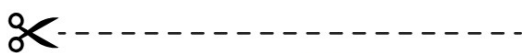
Activity 5: The Magic Mirror

In this activity, we will work on both self-concept and self-esteem, involving the participant's social circle.

Instructions: Cut out the mirror and laminate it so it can be written on with an erasable marker. Cut out the envelopes using cardstock or regular paper.

Game Proposal: In the days leading up to the activity, participants will give a card to family members, friends, colleagues, etc. On the card, they should write a positive trait they recognize in the participant. Once all the cards have been collected, the participant will stand before the mirror on the first page and write their own thoughts using an erasable marker. Then, they will compare their self-perception (self-concept) with the positive traits identified by their close social circle, aiming to strengthen their self-esteem.





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