Floortime Basics

Let's Play!
FIRST STEPS FIRST: Getting started with Floortime®
Lisa DeFarla, LCSW

A parent asks, “I’m eager to start – but what do I do first?”

1. "Start where the child is:" If there is a Floortime motto, that’s it.

2. Be an observer. Begin by simply watching – you will learn a lot. Use your eyes and your instincts. Where is your child going? What does your child like to do? What captures his interest? What comes hard for her?

3. Become a play partner (not a movie director): Invite yourself in to meet your child at their level. (That’s what puts the “floor” in Floortime.) Put your agenda aside, turn your phone answering machine on, and “follow your child’s lead.” That means joining your child wherever she is at, whatever she’s doing, no matter how seemingly meaningless, and attempt to “woo” her playfully into letting you in too.

4. Pacing is everything: You don’t want to move too fast, or try too hard. Your child may pick up your intensity, or feel pressured and that is sure to lead to resistance. Try to slow your eagerness down and simply go with what the child can tolerate at first. It will expand with time and experience.

5. You are better than any “toy:” Don’t get too caught up in having enough toys around. Think of toys, at least early on, simply as props that facilitate interaction. The best “toy” in Floortime with your child is you. You are the magic, the wonder, the “main man” (or woman) that entices your child into meaningful interaction. No one has the power to reach your child the way you do.

6. Affective equals effective: You hear a lot about using “high affect,” but what is that exactly? Affect simply means “emotions.” In Floortime we use our emotional expression to entice a child’s interest and attention, and make an effective connection with a child.
That means using your warm and inviting smile, sparkle in your eyes, or the playful tone in your voice (regardless of whether or not they can understand) to woo your child in. Think of "affect" as both the carrot and the "glue" that holds the two of you in there together. Careful - a highly emotional and a sensitive child may back off if you come on too strong. Too low, or "flat" in affect, and your child will take no notice. (And don't be afraid to look goofy.)

7. Floortime is any time: You don't have to stand guard, or frankly even "schedule" the time to engage in Floortime with your child. (Though scheduling Floortime with their child at intervals throughout the day is recommended and often helps some parents make the time happen.) Wonderful, natural interactive moments can happen all day, anytime. Simply allow yourself to move with your child into playful back and forth interaction whenever opportunity occurs or when you find it. Feeding time, bath time, car rides, etc., all have potential.

As I tell my clients, there is no such thing as "bad" Floortime, only "better." Here are some common situations and some ideas to get you and your child "cooking."

The Escape Artist

You may be thinking, "Yeah, following his lead sounds great, but Johnny won't stay still. He runs from me!" With a young child on the move - there are often initially a lot of "escape" efforts going on. He may not want to be hemmed in, nor "forced" to attend and focus on you, let alone engage. Maybe close contact is a bit hard - too much sensory information or too much talking going on. Maybe she has had some therapies that force interaction, so she has learned to avoid it. Don't take resistance as a rejection. In Floortime, we don't "force." Instead - we go with it. We even use "escape" as an engagement opportunity.

a) "Playful Obstruction:" A lot of folks read Drs. Greenspan and Wieder's book (see recommended readings below) and perhaps misinterpret this strategy. They think that it suggests that it is OK to simply get in their child's face and block their movements and force interaction, to the point of a giant kid-melt-down. Rather, the idea is to gently and playfully use yourself and your body as "something to deal with" as a child navigates their space, seemingly without purpose. Get on the floor adjacent to him, preferably in his line of sight. As he moves away, you move in front of him, capturing his attention, his gaze, even if only fleeting. He moves away again. You crawl after him, moving your body in front of his, as though trying to "playfully" dodge and block his "escape." Use engaging "affect." So, smile big, giggle playfully as you move, don't restrain your child, let him move if he has to (avoid a power struggle). Your goal? To entice the "gleam" in his eye that let's you know he's checked in with you and having fun.

Let him move around you if he must, even getting just a bit frustrated with you (but not too much). Pace and pursue. Each time you move in front of him, go for
eye contact, and repeat, again and again, until he is giggling too. If this isn’t successful at first, try again later. Ultimately he’ll realize that “silly mommy blocking me” is just a game, and it’s fun...and in time he may initiate it himself.

b) “The Chase Game”: A simple game of “chase” can be a wonderful Floortime start. As you move in close to your child, she may scoot away. Follow after her (not too fast, not too spirited, or you could overwhelm her). Say in a playful voice, “Immmmm gottena get youuuuuu.” Depending on her tolerance for touch, as you catch up with her either capture her with big sweeping hugs, or simply a gentle squeeze. Then release, step back, shrug, as though saying, “Now what?”

Give her a chance to signal to you, in whatever way she can manage, that she wants “more.” A “signal,” can be verbal, but more likely it’s going to be in her body language. That means whatever natural gestural or physical communication she can produce to suggest she wants “more.” Tune in. It may be “a look,” such as sideways glance and a half-smile, or even her darting away again, but looking over her shoulder hopefully, to see if you are following. Go for it again, and again.

The Train Engineer

Your child may have some interest in toys, but perhaps not necessarily using them “appropriately,” or better still, “functionally and interactively.” One example is the child who lines up his toy trains, over and over again. You know it’s not “train play,” the way other kids do it. (And darned if isn’t “one of those things” you hear that many children with autism do.) It’s hard to resist trying to break this cycle. However, in Floortime we honor the child’s lead and “join” this kind of perseverative (repetitive) activity and, over time, “move it forward” into something more meaningful and interactive.

a) “Which hand?” Position yourself in front of your child, with the trains between you both. Join him as he lines up the trains, helping him create his line by adding pieces yourself, just as he is doing. He may resist your efforts, or even pick up the train piece you just placed, and replace it somewhere else. However, as he begins to realize that you are not going to intrude and redirect his play, he’ll get comfortable with you participating.

Now, you can get a little mischievous. Make sure he watches as you playfully scoot some of his collection of trains into a little pile behind you (you want him to track your actions visually). All the while you are smiling enticingly as though you have this amazing secret you want to share. Use your body to gently block him from getting “grabby.” Reach behind your body and clasp a train in each hand from the hidden collection. Produce your two clasped fists in front of you,
preferably at eye level (to encourage him to take your facial expressions in). Momentarily open each fist and “flash” the train in each, then clasp tight again.

At first he may try and pry your fingers open to get the train – and that’s OK. Let him retrieve it. That helps him feel sure that he can get his desired object and not go into complete meltdown. Smile encouragingly. Repeat. On the second or third round, pull your hands a bit out of reach as he tries to retrieve, shrug and with wide eyes say, “Which hand?!”. As he goes to touch your hand, (before he starts to pry), open it big and smile broadly, exclaiming, “This hand!” Do the same with the other hand. Repeat. A few rounds later, present two hands, but now one is empty! He has to guess and pick. Pretty soon, he’s smiling and engaging with you around getting the train he desires. He may still line them up, but he’s always coming back to you for “more.”

You’re in. It is no longer a solitary activity. Rather it is one that you are engaging in together. It is now interactive and playful, “shared” or mutual. In addition, watch as he begins to communicate using signals or gesture (touching your hand to find the train or even pointing), all the while referencing your face for information for the reassuring facial read – telling him it’s OK and playful! Finally, you are promoting multiple back and forth interactions as you hide, reveal, and then repeat.

b) Keeping Track: Moving this train-line-up play forward takes some creativity. After all, trains need to go somewhere, do something, right? So, now play “which hand” with the tracks. Collect them and hand them out playfully, but only as he signals for more. As he lines up his trains on the track and circles them round and round, suddenly drop something in a train compartment – a marble, a pebble, a piece of toy food, or wad of paper, etc. He may fish it out and throw it away. Get something else and try again – mischievously sneaking the item on when perhaps he isn’t looking. As he fishes it out in frustration, move in again and repeat. Keep up a playful tempo.

Join his track building, but break the familiar track pattern he’s used to. Send a track piece in a different direction – thus, moving track under a table, or over a table, or down the stairs. Invite his train to follow – as you build your track ahead of his train into all sorts of silly places.

The Spin Master

Maybe your child likes nothing better than to settle down on the rug, resting comfortably on her side, with a toy car, propped wheels up - repetitively making and then watching the wheels spin. Position yourself, on your tummy if need be, face to face with your child with the spinning wheels of the car in between your mutual gaze. Watch her make the wheels spin and watch her watch you through the spinning spokes.
Don't move in too quickly. Have a couple of craft feathers on hand. Use one to touch the spinning wheel, slowing it down. She will start it up again. Repeat. She may take the feather from you (but she is taking you in, eh?). Have another on hand, and repeat. The game becomes one of her starting the spin, you slowing it with the feather, and she starting it up again. Or maybe she likes your idea and tries it herself.

Next, take a Popsicle stick and hold it in between you both so she can see it. She may wonder, "now what is he going to do?" Slowly poke the stick in between the spokes bringing them to an abrupt halt. She may glance at you in frustration. Play dumb, shrug, pretend to get the stick out of the spokes, but no matter how hard you (pretend) to budge, it won't come out. She pulls it out and you gesture wildly applauding her success. Now she spins again, and you repeat the drama. Perhaps after a few rounds she tries the stop maneuver herself. And you tug and try and pull it out and again, she rescues you.

The Toss Champ

Your child seems to like nothing better than to simply pick up toys and throw them, a toy truck for example. You and Dad aren't really comfortable with that. After all, something could break, or someone could get hurt. You may be trying hard to somehow make that throwing truck play more "purposeful" — trying to introduce figurines to drive the truck, or put stuff in the truck. And he just keeps throwing it. (If that isn't working, than you may be overshooting his level of interest at this time, at least developmentally.)

It is helpful to try and figure out what is the appeal for him in "throwing" these objects. It is often simply the experience of sensory feedback and "cause and effect." "If I do this - that big sound happens. Wow!" If you are comfortable - and this isn't dangerous to anyone or furniture - try imitating him. Take a toy truck and, though not throwing it, drop it yourself right in front of him. If he does it again, then you do it back. If his eye is only on the truck and not on you, bring that truck right up to your eyes, hold it, look eager, wait a beat till his gaze tracks the truck to your eyes (hold his gaze, hold his anticipation) and dramatically drop it again.

Parents may worry that this will "encourage" the otherwise undesirable "truck throwing" behavior, and it may for a bit. But if you can tolerate the "truck toss game," you can also help it grow and expand. Next pick up a weighty ball or a bean bag perhaps - something with "oomph" when it drops. Now drop that right in front of him. Use your facial expressions and look of sheer pleasure as it lands — look at him with big eyes. Woo him into looking back at you. Share a smile and invite him into doing it himself. And he will.
Now introduce a target - (a receptacle) like a large empty trash can. Put the can right in front of him and you. Drop your bean bag with great flourish straight into the trash can. Encourage him to do the same. (By now you can be subtly moving the truck out of the “game” if you must.) Go back and forth as often as you both can tolerate. Introduce and invite him to experiment with you with different “safe” objects – a metal spoon goes “clink,” a cotton ball is silent, a marble goes “plink.”

So what do all these ideas have in common? In a few easy moves, like magic, you have begun to mobilize your child’s first three all-important developmental levels in Floortime-speak:

1. **Attending and focusing.** Your child is regulated and tuned in to you, just as you are to him.

2. **Sharing attention, or mutual engagement.** You and your child are sharing an idea, an activity together.

3. **Back and forth two-way interaction/communication.** Each sequence of physical back and forth played with you - chase/capture, pick up and toss ... are those ever important very **first** “Circles of Communication”. (Communication **starts** with gestures, physical back and forth interaction. It’s not just about words!)

Most important? You and your child are having fun together. And that is indeed where it “starts” and always needs to be.
Recommended Readings and Websites:


www.floortime.org: Partner website to ICDL-Floortime information website.

Floortime@yahoogroups.com. An "unofficial" parent-chat room that offers support and ideas.
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<tr>
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<td>□ A Observe 1st to warm up</td>
<td>□ A Uses questions he/she doesn't know answers to</td>
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<td>□ A follows</td>
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<td>□ A &amp; C Posing problems</td>
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<td>□ A Widens range of feelings</td>
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<td>□ A &amp; C Reflect on feelings</td>
<td>□ A Uses humor</td>
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<td>□ A Treats child’s behavior as meaningful</td>
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<td>□ A &amp; C Empathize with child and characters</td>
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<td>□ A Uses aggression to sustain engagement and modulate affect</td>
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C = Child  A = Adult or Playmate

Barbara Kalmanson, Ph.D.  2007©
Therapists name ___________________ Student's name _____________________
Date ___________________ Location _____________________

“What goal(s) did I work on?

“Did I get the gleam in the eye? Explain how and give examples.

Was I able to sustain interactions? Explain how and give examples.

Did I support ________________’s sensory system (Were we moving, was I giving deep pressure?) Explain how and give examples.

Did I encourage ________________ to be intentional? Explain how and give examples.

Did I encourage ________________ to make decisions and use ideas?” Explain how and give examples.

How did I encourage ________________ to use different capacities (motor, communication, ideas)? Explain how and give examples.

How did I support ________________ to move up the developmental ladder? Explain how and give examples.
Student’s name_________________________ Therapists name_________________________

Date_________________________ Location_________________________

What does the child like to do?

What brings a gleam to his/her eye? Give examples.

What does the child find challenging, disengage from?

Does the child like to be touched? How?

Do you recognize any sensory sensitivities or cravings (sound, visual, touch, movement, tactile, taste, smell)? Explain.

How does the child communicate what he/she wants?

Can the child make decisions in play, use ideas, sequence ideas? Explain

Does the child have motor planning (executing an idea using fine motor, gross motor or communication) strengths or weaknesses?

What do you think about the child’s visual system (sensitivities, perceptual) and visual-spatial abilities?
Basic Principles of Floor Time

1. Follow the child’s lead.
2. Join in at the child’s developmental level and build on her natural interests.
3. Open and close circles of communication.
4. Create a developmentally appropriate play environment.
Basic Principles of Floor Time
(continued)

5. Extend the circles of communication.
   a) Interact constructively to help the child reach his or her own goals.
   b) Interact playfully, but obstructively, as needed.)
Basic Principles of Floor Time
(continued)

6. Broaden the child’s range of interactive experience.
   a) Broaden the thematic and/or emotional range.
      1) Enjoy and engage in play dealing with the different themes of life.
      2) Challenge the child to engage in neglected or avoided types of interactions.
   b) Broaden the range of processing and motor capacities used in interactions.
      1) Engage the child with sound and/or words, vision, touch, and movement.
      2) Challenge the child to employ underused or avoided processing capacities.
Basic Principles of Floor Time (continued)

7. Tailor your interactions to the child’s individual differences.
   a) Profile the child’s individual differences based on observation and history.
   b) Work with the individual differences.

8. Simultaneously attempt to mobilize the six functional emotional developmental levels
Floor Time Strategies to Building a Symbolic World

- **Establish the foundation** – Be sure to develop spontaneous shared attention and engagement, as well as reciprocal interactions before embarking on the symbolic ladder. While many children can carry out simple symbolic actions (e.g., feed the baby, dump the truck), they do not expand without the flow of reciprocal interactions where affect cues guide the next steps. Think of yourself (parent or other caregiver) as the first “toy”.

- **Facilitate a continuous flow of back-and-forth, affective gesturing** at all times as a foundation for symbolic play and as a vehicle for regulating mood and behavior, forming a sense of self, and enabling symbols to emerge. Keep the continuous flow of affective, gestural exchanges going both during the foundation-building stages and the stages of symbolic play.

- **Create an inviting environment** for symbolic play and *let your child explore and discover new ideas*. Identify real-life experiences your child knows and have toys and props related to these experiences available on the floor, the seats or low shelves where the objects will entice the child’s curiosity. He may just bump into them or you may just notice him looking at them and comment to woo him into exploration. A baby doll on the couch with a bottle nearby, or a slide with a figure ready to go down, or a toy truck on the road to the farm (simply designated by masking tape and a barn or area for animals) may entice the child to feed the baby, push the figure down the slide as you say the ritualized “Ready, set, Go!” or push the truck towards a destination.

Other useful toys include pretend food, doll house and furniture, figures of people who can be family and friends, figures of favorite characters (Sesame Street, Barney, Disney...), play ground, pool, vehicles, garage and airport, plastic animals and dinosaurs, camera, musical instruments, puppets, hats, dress up, doctor kit and tool kit (include masking tape, rubber bands and clips to hold toys together). Limit cause and effect toys to those with symbolic potential and keep semi-structured materials such as puzzles, play dough, markers, and games in another area. These can and should be used to develop interaction but may be over-relied on when symbolic toys are more challenging to organize and sequence.

- **Toys are a language**. Children play with toys before they speak and can express their interests and thoughts using toys before they have words. Also consider toys the augmentation you need to help children comprehend what you are saying by ensuring they *see* what they *hear*.

- **Let your child discover the symbolic world** - saying “pretend” isn’t usually necessary. Just respond to your child’s real desires through symbolic (pretend) actions and props.
  - Allow child to discover what is real and what is a toy, e.g., if he tries to go down a toy slide or ride a toy horse, encourage him to go on; if she tries to put on the doll’s clothes, do not tell her it does not fit; if he takes his shoes and socks off to put his foot in the pool, ask if the water is cold.
  - If your child is thirsty and asks for a drink while playing, offer him an empty cup or invite her to a tea party.
• Don’t over-ritualize by doing the same expansion each time!
• Provide “seat belts” (rubber bands) to keep the figure on the horse or seated on the
  chair so things aren’t always falling apart and child can be encouraged to go on with
  the idea. Masking tape, clips and silly putty can be essential tools!
• Re-enact familiar scenes your child chooses from books or videos to build better
  comprehension.

• Insert obstacles into the play to challenge and make your child think, be more assertive, learn to
  negotiate, etc. Be compelling and use affect cues to hold his attention and tolerate the dilemma.

• Use reasoning to deepen the plot! - This can be done through questions in a role you add to
  the child’s where you ask to go along or object for some reason. Ask the child to tell you his
  or her idea and what they want you to do. Try to deepen the plot by posing problems, asking
  “what if”, “if then” or why questions, ask about feelings and predictions, etc. Expand
  reasoning in real life and incidental learning simultaneously with symbolic play.

• Expand the range of themes and emotions - The hierarchy of themes and emotions moves
  from dependency, separation, bodily injury, fears, anger, sadness, joy, surprise, jealousy,
  rivalry, competition, aggression, power, revenge, friendship, loyalty, to justice and morality.
  Support child’s attempts to explore new ideas borrowed from experiences, stories, videos and
  peers beginning with “bad guy wolf, witches, or Captain Hook”, to “bad guy” themes in
  reality - robbers, kings, wars, etc.

• Drama, drama, drama to convey affect cues! Match your tone of voice to the affect and
  theme at hand. Pretend to cry when your character is hurt, cheer loudly when happy, convey
  anger or fear when needed, exaggerate deceptiveness to help child figure out what you really
  mean!

• Focus on process – Plan idea with your child including where story takes place, what
  characters, what props, what the problems is, and as you move through the story focus on
  who is in trouble, who is safe, guessing what the other side feels and will do, what the ending
  will be, how each character will feel, etc. Identify the beginning, middle and end of each
  story ides.

• Reflect on the ideas and feelings during and after the story is over – Discuss your child’s
  themes and feelings and elicit the point of the story and the abstraction of what is right,
  wrong, or to be learned from the story. Remember symbolic play and reflective conversation
  is the safe way to practice, re-enact, understand, and master the full range of emotional ideas,
  experiences and feelings.

• Encourage representation of personal issues – Encourage child to role play situations which
  may be challenging which he has experienced or anticipates.

• Build bridges between ideas – Through conversations, ask for opinions, compare and
  contrast themes, have debates, change sides, empathize and reflect on how play relates to
  personal challenges.
If your child is hungry, offer her a piece of the toy pizza pie you are “eating” or ask if she wants ice cream or a cookie.
If she wants to leave, offer her the keys or a toy car.
If she lies down on the floor or couch, get a blanket or pillow, turn off the light and sing a lullaby.

* Encourage representation – use a specific set of figures/dolls to represent family members or friends and call them their names as you play, e.g., “Here come Daddy and sister Sarah!” The child is more likely to accept figures named for other people before he accepts a figure with his name. At first he may experience representing himself as having to give up the object he desires!

* Be a player – Get involved in the drama. Be a player and assume a role with your own figure
  - Use two voices – as the parent encouraging, supporting, clarifying as well as the other kid or symbolic figure you want your child to play with! Your parent voice, which should have your natural tone in a compelling whisper can encourage the child to close the circle, e.g., “But you didn’t tell Ernie what you want!” and insist your child try to answer the question.

* Be a partner – Help your child negotiate and problem solve with your figure or directly as you step out of the story for a moment to take his side with your parent voice to help him work things out or be more assertive, or figure out what to do with the hungry alligator as it (you) inch it along towards the pirate ship!

* Encourage role play and dress up as well as puppets – child may prefer to be the actor in dramatic play as an alternative to the use of the figures which may also be harder to manipulate. Similarly, a puppet is the extension of one’s body and often easier to execute. Role play may allow for clearer gestures and imitation.

* Start with symbolic figures your child knows and loves, such as Disney, Sesame Street, or Blue to generate symbolic play with simple feeding, picnics, playground trips, bedtime, etc.

* Give symbolic meaning to furnishings and other objects in the environment – when your child climbs to the top of the sofa, pretend he is climbing a mountain, or when she comes down the slide, treat it as if she is sliding into the ocean to see the fish, etc.

* Substitute one object for another when props are needed – the ball might be a cake or the spoon a candle.

* Resume use of gestures for props along with toys and substitutes – just use your hand in a gesture to offer money for the toll or to drink a cup of tea!

* Elaborate, elaborate, elaborate! – Try to expand child’s idea by expanding its purpose (e.g., drives the car to go to the park or zoo and bring props over), or make use of breakdowns or problems with symbolic solutions.
  - If the car crashes, get the tow truck and mechanic with tool kit.
  - If the doll falls, hug the boo boo, get a bandage (masking tape) or rush to the hospital with doctor kit, etc!
Seize opportunities for spontaneous learning/Teachers MUST be flexible!!!!!!

➢ A trusting relationship must be the foundation for all interactions
➢ Follow the child’s lead-MAKE IT THEIR IDEA!
➢ Read the child’s cues
➢ Attend to sensory needs
➢ Move up and down the ladder as needed
➢ Go for the GLEAM IN THE EYE!!!
➢ Think about your pace and rhythm
  o Go Slow
  o Hold back, WAIT! Silence is OK!
➢ Extend circles of interactions
  o Don’t take “NO” for an answer!!! CLOSE EVERY CIRCLE!
  o Expand, expand, expand!!!
  o The activity isn’t important!!!
  o PROCESS IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN PRODUCT
➢ Use anticipation to engage
➢ Work face to face
➢ Use AFFECT-Be dynamic!!!
➢ Encourage child to initiate and be intentional-MAKE IT THEIR IDEA!!!
➢ Encourage MOTOR-PLANNING
  o Don’t do for the child what they can do for themselves
  o Give the child time to “Do it all by themselves!” Help him do it HIMSELF!
  o Support pride in being independent
➢ Encourage the child to problem solve and THINK for themselves
  o Prompt the child to THINK, not to DO
➢ Encourage the child to be creative and have ORIGINAL IDEAS
➢ Encourage the child to share his/her EMOTIONS
➢ Encourage the child to give reasons behind their ideas, expand and negotiate
  o Give multiple choice if needed

ENCOURAGE PEER INTERACTIONS!!!!!!!!!!!
Functional Emotional Developmental Levels

1. Shared Attention/Regulation and interest in the world

The child’s ability to regulate his or her attention and behavior while being interested in the full range of sensations (sights, sounds, smells, their own movement patterns, etc.). The child’s ability to enter into a state of shared attention with another person. This is a child’s ability to process their environment, filter out distractions, and engage with others, attend to play or tasks (pay attention in the classroom).

Top: The child is calm, organized and able to attend and interact.
Bottom: The child is self-absorbed, engages in self-stimulating behavior (possibly anxious), and/or unable to interact with others.

2. Engagement/Forming relationships

The child’s ability to engage in relationships, including the depth and range of his pleasure and warmth, the related feelings, such as assertiveness or sadness, that can be incorporated into the quality of engagement and the stability of the child’s engagement (does he withdraw or become aimless when under stress).

Top: The child is able to engage with others through a range of emotions and activities (does not disengage when upset). The child displays a range of affect including “The GLEAM IN THE EYE!”
Bottom: The child has difficulty engaging with others, is self-absorbed or fixated on “things” (plays with objects rather than people), is easily distressed and/or displays flat affect.

3. Two-way, purposeful interactions with gestures/Intentional two-way communication

The child’s ability to enter into two-way purposeful communication. At its most basic level, this involves helping a child open and close circles of communication. This is a child’s ability to be intentional in interactions and activities (e.g., a child is able to initiate with another person to keep activities going, for desired objects or activities, etc.).

Top: The child is intentional, purposeful and persistent and can use gestures to convey intent.
Bottom: The child has no ability to be intentional with others except to maybe whine or grab for basic needs.

4. Two-way, purposeful problem-solving interactions/Development of complex sense of self

The ability to string together many circles of communication/Problem-solving into a larger pattern (ten or twenty). This is necessary for negotiating many of the most important emotional needs in life (being close to others, exploring and being assertive, limiting aggression, negotiation safety, etc.) This is the stage where the child begins develop a sense of self/Self esteem/Independence (“I did it!” or “Look what I did!” using affect, gestures and words if verbal).

Top: The child can sustain interactions for longer periods of time, uses motor planning to solve problems, is persistent in interactions and displays a strong sense of self.
Bottom: The child has no ability to sustain interactions for longer periods of time or when faced with challenges.
5. Elaborating Ideas/Representational capacity and elaboration of symbolic thinking

The child’s ability to create mental representations. The ability to do pretend play or use words, phrases or sentences to convey some emotional intention (“What is that?,” “Look at this fish!,” or “I’m angry!” etc.). The child begins to have their own ideas and share them with the people around them. This is the ability to share ideas with others and represent ideas and real life through play or activities.

Top: The child begins to use language to express ideas, can have original ideas (not scripted), share them with others, elaborate on his/her ideas, connect emotions to their ideas and replicate real life through play and work.

Bottom: The child has no ability to have original ideas or express their ideas, is often scripted or stressed when encouraged to “think,” has little understanding of emotions and/or the world around him/her.

6. Building bridges between ideas/Emotional thinking

The child’s ability to make connections between different internal representations or emotional ideas (“I’m mad because you’re mean.”). This capacity is a foundation for higher level thinking, problem-solving and such capacities as separating fantasy from reality, modulating impulses and mood, and learning to concentrate and plan.

Top: The child can connect ideas logically, answer “why” questions and understand the underlying meaning behind ideas, give reasons behind their emotions, and display higher-level thinking abilities.

Bottom: The child can have ideas, but cannot connect them logically or give reasons behind them.

These three levels for grade school children only

7. Multi-cause, Comparative, and Triangular thinking

The child is able to explore multiple reasons for a feeling, comparing feelings, and understanding triadic interactions among feeling states (“I feel left out when Susie likes Janet better than me.”) Finding an indirect road to problem solve. Example: John wants to be Sarah’s friend. He sees that Tom is Sarah’s friend, so John becomes Tom’s friend. This type of thinking is more expansive and even a little manipulative. He learns to “work the crowd” to satisfy his social needs. During this stage the child becomes more interested in his body and sexual relations. These feelings may cause the child to be fearful. Nurture him through his fears and help him to understand his fears. It is a good sign when a child becomes manipulative in a triangular way. Understanding the three person system the child becomes interested in all facets of their world: sex, death, where did I come from?, etc. Some children experience fear and anxiety dealing with this. This is common in all pre-adolescents. Work on the fears and nurture them giving them structure while they are going through this.

8. Emotionally differentiated gray-area thinking

Shades and gradations among differentiated feeling states (Ability to describe degrees of feelings about anger, love, excitement, disappointment-“I feel a little annoyed”) The child begins to know where they fall on the social ladder. He begins to define himself by how accepted he is by his peer group. He begins to see the “shades of gray” and become better problem solvers. He can also see consequences of their behavior. The child is able to give you a range of emotions. For example, “I’m a little mad, very mad, etc.” or “I’m the best, Jo is the second best, and John is the worst.”

9. Intermittent Reflective Thinking, a Stable Sense of self, and an internal standard

Reflecting on feelings in a relationship to an internalized sense of self (“It’s not like me to feel so angry” or “I shouldn’t feel this jealous”) The child begins to internalize values and develops a greater sense of self that can’t be broken down by lack of acceptance by peer group. Example: Sally was mean to me because she was having a bad day, but I’m still a good person.
The Six Emotional Milestones
From *The Child With Special Needs*,
by Stanley Greenspan, M.D. and Serena Wieder, Ph.D.

Historically, we thought of development in very isolated ways. For motor development we had a timetable for sitting up, for walking, etc. In language development we knew when the first sounds are made, when the first words are made. In different areas of cognitive development, we knew when a child searches in your hand for an object and when a child can stack blocks in a certain way. In social and emotional development we knew when a child would wave, when a child should play with peers, when a child should be able to pretend. But each area has been looked at separately.

Over the past 10-20 years we’ve put together a functional developmental roadmap to help understand the core levels that synthesize and integrate all the developmental capacities. We have identified six core levels (and additional ones beyond that) that help us organize child development in a new way.

*Milestone 1: Self-Regulation and Interest in the World*

Infants try to process what they see, hear and feel, and learn to turn toward a pleasing face or a soothing voice. They learn to enjoy, understand, and use those pleasant sensations to calm themselves. This ability to self-regulate enables us to take in and respond to the world around us.

*Milestone 2: Intimacy*

In our earliest experiences with our parents we learn to fall in love. We can experience our parents as nurturing and joyful, we reach out for them, we trust them. This ability to be intimate allows us to form warm and trusting relationships with people that grow throughout our lives.

*Milestone 3: Two-Way Communication*

Mommy smiles at me, I smile back. Daddy rolls me the ball, I eagerly roll it back. These early efforts at two-way communication teach us about our own intentions, provide our first sense of causality, of making things happen, and begin to establish our sense of self. As these early interactions become more complex, we learn to communicate with our gestures and understand the intentions and communications of others. We build the foundation for participating in much more sophisticated conversation later on.
**Milestone 4: Complex Communication and Problem Solving**

The toddler runs to greet Daddy at the door, holds up her arms for a hug, then teasingly runs away, saying through her behavior, “Daddy, I’m glad you’re home. Hug me, now chase me!”

**Milestone 5: Emotional Ideas**

Simple play, such as stacking blocks, transforms into complex fantasy play – the blocks become a fort where good guys and bad guys engage in battle. The child uses these scenes to create with a wide range of feelings and ideas as he discovers his world. He also uses words to indicate wishes and interests: “I want juice.”

**Milestone 6: Emotional Thinking**

The ability to build bridges between ideas to make them reality-based and logical. The child begins to express more of her ideas in play and in words, to describe her feelings instead of acting them out, and to string ideas together into logical, original thoughts. “I am mad because you took my toy!” This is the beginning of all higher-order thinking.