

# childPSYCH News

A newsletter for professionals and parents

## Inside this issue:

"Brains will only take you so far in life"	1,2
Mummy don't go!	2

We're on the web  
[www.childpsych.net.au](http://www.childpsych.net.au)

## Special points of interest:

At *childpsych* only psychologists who are registered teachers and/or Educational Psychologists will write the report on learning difficulties

All *childpsych* psychologists are trained as specialist psychologists

To unsubscribe from this newsletter at any time, either email or call *childpsych*

## "Brains will only take you so far in life"

Feature article by Philip Gosschalk MAPS, Director & Psychologist at *childpsych*

The title of this article is a familiar comment made by people from all walks of life. People have long observed that "people skills" seem to be more important for success with work place relations, marriage and job promotion. I recall a friend applying for a job as a scientist with a private firm where the senior scientist gave him the job saying something like, "mate..you're easy to talk to compared to some of your other colleagues who topped their class". Terms such as "social intelligence", "social skills" and "emotional intelligence" have been used to describe a human being's ability to interact socially. Social Competence is a term that has been used by psychologists researching this area. Poor social competence places an individual at risk of mental health problems such as anxiety and depression.

### Social competence

Social competence is generally used to refer to a variety of abilities such as: awareness of ones own emotional state, ability to understand other people's emotions, ability to use emotional language (express yourself), empathy and caring, ability to cope with distressing emotions and so on. These abilities are the result of your environment and your biology. By environment I mean such things as the quality of the bond with parents and peers. By biological, I mean such things as your "temperament". Tempera-



**People have long observed that "people skills" seem to be more important for success with work place relations, marriage and job promotion.**

ment refers to the biological basis of your personality – it is how you are born or pre wired. For example, some children are pre-wired to be highly active and we may call extreme examples of this AD/HD. Understanding that our social competence is the result of our environment and biology is important for working out how we can develop social competence in children.

### The uniqueness of each child

Keep in mind that the amount the environment and our biology contributes to social competence varies for each child. Children with a biological disorder such as AD/HD or autism will have a greater "biological component" causing their social difficulties compared to a child who was simply raised in isolation from other children.

### Biological causes

Biologically, brain functioning influences our ability to interact socially. For example, the frontal lobe (your "forehead") is involved in making you stop and think and the right side of your brain is involved in such things as looking at the features of a

visual object and making sense of it. So you can see that if you are born with problems with processing information through the right side of your brain, then you may have difficulty with reading facial expressions. This is one of the reasons individual's with Asperger's Disorder (a form of autism) have difficulty with interacting in social situations. Likewise, children with AD/HD often have problems with the frontal lobe so they do not stop and think in social situations and blurt out inappropriate things or inadvertently hit another child. Therefore, for some children, their social difficulties are closely related to underlying neurological processing problems. It may be logical to say that a biological intervention, such as medication, should be helpful. However, research with children with AD/HD failed to show that taking medication helped with peer relationships.

### Environmental causes

Environmentally, research has shown that a child's bond with their parents is very important. Children who have what's called a "secure attachment" with their parents tended to have better social competence. Parental sensitivity has been closely linked to social competence. Parental sensitivity means the parent is able to respond to the child's needs but also knows how to set limits. For example, the parent knows when the child is tantruming for

Continue over...

CHILDPSYCH:PSYCHOLOGY PRACTICE

4 / 671 Sherwood Road  
Sherwood Q 4075

DIRECTOR: PHILIP O. GOSSCHALK MAPS

Phone / Fax: 07 3716 0445  
Email: admin@childpsych.net.au


childpsych  
PSYCHOLOGY PRACTICE

**They're the most  
important thing  
in your life**  
and sometimes they need our help

"Research...has shown that...parental involvement was better than just social skills training. This is the philosophy of *childpsych* - parents are involved as co-therapists in their child's problems."

## New Group Program



Learn social competence  
8 session program  
For ages 5-12

**Enrol Now 3716 0445**

See our website for more  
information

[www.childpsych.net.au](http://www.childpsych.net.au)

Social competence can't be taught in isolation, it requires attention as opposed to is unwell and requires comfort. Of course there is an interaction between the child's personality and the parents. For example research has shown that boys who have poor ability to regulate their emotions (frontal lobe problems) and have parents who are demanding and aggressive, were more likely than other similar boys with supportive parents to have poorer social competence. The quality of child care is also an important factor. Research suggests that childcare where there is a high ratio of adults (1:6 for toddlers) has been recommended for toddlers. This high ratio allows toddlers to develop social competence because the childcare worker has time to guide the child to share, take turns and so on.

So the path to social competence is complex! Thankfully, we can provide children with skills to interact better with their peers. Interventions that do more than teach social skills, such as how to read another person's facial expressions and

The first few weeks of school can be a challenging time for some children. It's not uncommon in the first few weeks of the new school year to see the teary child holding on tight to mum or dad, the teacher prying the child off the parents and the parents scurrying away. Anxiety about going to school is a common childhood problem and can last as little as a few days or several years.

If your child is anxious about school, you are not alone. So what do you do? You can ease this anxiety by letting them take something of yours such as a hair band or inexpensive piece of jewellery. This will provide them with comfort. Consider using a rewards chart where they get a sticker for "being brave" every time they say goodbye and walk into their class with their teacher. Also, let the teacher know that you are having trouble. Many teach-

ers understand another person's perspective can help. The use of role plays and a multisensory learning environment are often helpful for children learning social competence. In our practice we have developed a new program called *Social Kids* (see our website) that teaches social competence over eight sessions, in a group environment, involving the parents and teachers.



### What parents can do

As a parent you can promote social competence in your child by making sure they socialise with other children. Also be a coach for your child - I see wonderful parents of children with autism

saying gently to their child, "look at him when he's speaking". These parents are instinctively being sensitive to their child's needs. Provide your child with an opportunity to interact with a variety of other children from different walks of life. Encourage your child to reflect on their behaviour with other children. Help your child interact with other children and help other adults understand your child's needs. Research with AD/HD children has shown that such parental involvement was better than just social skills training. This is the philosophy of *childpsych* - parents are involved as co-therapists in their child's problems.

Remember that the vast majority of children will experience social difficulties. Problems in social situations are how we learn after all. It is only when these social difficulties persist for months and years that professional help is needed.

## Mummy don't go!



ers are used to helping children adjust to the beginning of the school year and will meet you in the mornings to help out. Consider going to your local library and getting a storybook on anxiety and going to school to read to your child. Children often find stories such as these therapeutic because they identify with the struggle and triumphs of the characters. Finally, make your good-byes short and sharp - a quick kiss, hug and "see you this afternoon" are all that's needed.

When should you seek professional help? First, trust your instincts as a parent. If you

believe your child is not coping then seek professional help. Second, if your child's anxiety is so bad that they are physically sick or engaging in dangerous behaviours such as trying to jump out of the car while its moving, then you need to see a suitable mental health professional. This professional will conduct a proper evaluation of the problem and develop an appropriate treatment strategy. Some children who have trouble going to school because of anxiety have a formal anxiety disorder such as Separation Anxiety Disorder or Social Anxiety Disorder. These are serious mental health conditions, that left untreated, can become worse. Often forcing such children to school can worsen the situation. However with professional help these problems can be resolved speedily.