

Where You Are Season 3 Episode 3

Tue, 1/25 10:40AM 26:53

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

feelings, feeling, child, caregivers, joelle, brain, parents, moment, campaign, emotions, emotional, kids, lives, social, development, bit, important, stress, conversation, bc

SPEAKERS

Bryn Askwith, Child 4, Dr. Angela Low, Child 5, Joelle, Child 6, Child 1, Child 3, Child 2, Michelle Horn

D Dr. Angela Low 00:05

You might feel that at any point you have all these things you're supposed to be doing. Simply showing up and being there and just paying attention to children is enough. And it's, it's everything, really, for positive child development. And these are moments that fills their buckets and fills their hearts and allow them to, to cope with anything that comes their way because they know that they're unconditionally loved and they have someone there for them.

B Bryn Askwith 00:42

This is Where You Are, a podcast that helps families and their children promote their mental health and wellness. I'm Bryn Askwith.

M Michelle Horn 00:49

And I'm Michelle Horn,. In the early years, between the ages of zero and six, a child's social and emotional health is every bit as important as their physical health. It affects how they express emotions deal with stress, develop friendships, and helps to determine their connections to the world around them through stories, conversations, and play. It's a key part of a child's development.

B Bryn Askwith 01:10

As parents and caregivers, you know your kids best. That puts you in a really special place to be able to support your child's social and emotional development, and help them learn social and emotional skills that will benefit them for life. From recognizing emotions to just talking and hugging, small things make a big difference. Today on Where You Are, we'll talk about social and emotional development in the early years, including what it is, why it matters, and what you can do to support your child's development of healthy social and emotional skills.

M

Michelle Horn 01:43

On this episode, we have some very special guests. We have Dr. Angela Low, a professor in the Department of Educational Psychology and Early Childhood Education at the University of British Columbia. Also joining us is Joelle, a parent of a five-year-old that keeps her curious and on the go. And something really special for this episode: we have a few little ones with some very real experience and what it's like to be a kid under sex. This was our chance as hosts and guests to ask the kids in our lives, including our own children, for their thoughts and experiences and be a part of the conversation.

C

Child 1 02:16

Let's listen to that converfase-, c-conversation!

M

Michelle Horn 02:28

So our first guest today is Dr. Angela Low. Dr. Low loves working with community groups and educators to help promote resilience and social and emotional competence in children, youth, and their families. Currently, she is working with Child Health BC to develop and evaluate a mental health program to promote social and emotional development in the early years across the province of BC. So Dr. Low, we know social emotional development is a concept that parents and kids alike are hearing more and more about these days, but the term is still a bit academic. So for parents and caregivers listening, can you talk a little bit about what social emotional development is, and in particular, what it looks like in the early years,

D

Dr. Angela Low 03:09

Thanks for having me on! Social and emotional development, it is a mouthful, and it sounds like a really fancy term. And I personally do not love the word so much. Because it describes something so ordinary: knowing when you're feeling something, like joy or anger or excitement, and knowing why you're feeling these feelings. It's also being able to cope with stress, or any uncomfortable feelings, being able to manage our behaviors to focus where we need to focus, to relax when we need to relax, and to ask for help when we need to ask for help. It's also being aware that others have feelings too, and being able to respond to them in ways that are helpful or kind, even if these people are very different from us. But it's especially important to pay attention to social and emotional development the early years. Because this is a time when the brain grows faster than any other time in life. Studies have shown that social-emotional development at this age also builds a foundation for future wellbeing and success. For example, there, there are large scale studies, like this one in BC, where there are over 7000 students that show that kids who enter kindergarten with social and emotional competence feel happier, they have better social relationships, and they do better academically as well, in grade four, and grade six. For the ages of zero to six, though, it's really important to consider that these development happens in the context of family, of their community, and their culture. And what this really means is that when we talk about promoting social and emotional development in young children, we have to look at the adults in their life and see how they're doing and also looking at their social and emotional skills as well.

M**Michelle Horn 04:45**

Thank you so much. And yeah, there's so many facets to social and emotional development, and we're really going to be kind of digging into those a little bit later in the podcast. But I think that provides a really good foundation for what it is, what it looks like in the early years, and why it's so important for, not just kinda the short term, but long term benefits for children over the course of their lives.

B**Bryn Askwith 05:04**

I also wanted to take a moment to introduce Joelle a little bit more, who's joining us today. So Joelle is a single mother by choice to her wonderful son. And in 2015, her lifelong dream of becoming a mother was realized. And in her words, it's been an all soul-consuming experience. Joelle works with Child Health BC as a virtual health manager, and advocates for the use of digital health to improve access to care for children. Welcome Joelle, great to have you on the podcast.

J**Joelle 05:31**

I'm so happy to be here and to work with you beautiful ladies. You know, the whole term social-emotional learning, for me as a mom, sort of came out of the blue. You know, once in a while you heard it when the, when my child was in preschool. I did see it sometimes on social media sites that I was, you know, clicking on, but really, it is seemed to be a broad, kind of an abstract term. And that's what really is so helpful with Angela's work. And with the team at Child Health BC with the Feelings First campaign. I found that so informative, and I really am happy that we're doing this podcast today to talk about it in a little bit more detail.

B**Bryn Askwith 06:10**

Joelle, I'm so excited that you shared with, you know, how you first came to learn about social and emotional development, and what about it was interesting for you as a parent, because I know for many parents out there, it might seem like a newer, kind of unique term. It's not something that I heard very often in my parenting circles, maybe you know, 10 years ago, when I had my first one. I wanted to shift the conversation now to how parents and caregivers can support the social and emotional development of their children in the early years. But before we do, Joelle, I also wanted to pick up on a thread that you mentioned, which was the Feelings First campaign. So, a lot of the topics we're going to focus in on today, as we move through the conversation were shared with parents and caregivers in that Feelings First social media campaign that was done recently. And the campaign was led by the BC Healthy Child Development Alliance, of which the Kelty Centre is a proud member of. And Dr. Low, before we get into some examples around social and emotional development for our listeners, can you briefly talk a little bit more about that campaign?

D**Dr. Angela Low 07:06**

Yeah, so the Feelings First campaign was designed to promote the capacity of caregivers to foster young children's social and emotional development, and also an understanding of the importance of early childhood development. And so the way that the Feelings First campaign took place was that 13 messages that were really key to social and emotional development in the early years were developed by the alliance. And a social media campaign was created to communicate these messages out really broadly. And you know, within these messages are examples like, "not all stress is bad stress," or "being present and not perfect," or "it feels good to talk about feelings." So as you can see, it's really kind of simple concepts and ideas that we probably already noticed in our everyday lives with kids.

M Michelle Horn 07:56

Thank you so much, Dr. Low. And if you haven't had a chance to check it out, we encourage you to—we'll put a link to the website in our shownotes. And the videos in particular are extremely cute, so encourage you to check that campaign out. So as you mentioned, Dr. Low, one of the key messages in the Feelings First campaign is this idea of being present, but not perfect. But before we get to some questions about this concept, we thought this would be a good point in the episode to play some audio clips, and hear from some of the little ones about how they like to spend time with their parents and caregivers. And before we play them full disclosure, you might recognize some of the parent voices. [music cue]

B Bryn Askwith 08:34

What's something you like to play with your mom or dad?

C Child 1 08:38

Well, sometimes I like to play hockey, or baseball. It's really fun. When I'm goalie in hockey or batter in baseball, I can hit the baseball and save, and save a hockey puck very good.

C Child 2 08:52

I like to cuddle with my mommy and daddy.

C Child 3 08:56

I like to play board games with everybody.

J Joelle 08:59

What's something that you like to play with your mom?

C Child 4 09:00



Child 4 09:03

Basketball! [music cue]



Michelle Horn 09:09

[laughter] Super cute!



Dr. Angela Low 09:10

[laughter]



Joelle 09:10

[laughter] Way too cute!



Michelle Horn 09:10

Joelle, hearing from these kids, one of, one of which is your little one, about how they like to be present and spend time with our families, what does this idea of being "present, not perfect" mean to you as a parent?



Joelle 09:23

Exactly that. Just really focusing on my child, shutting everything else down, putting the phone down. And it doesn't matter if the housework is not done. It doesn't matter if, you know, dinner's gonna be a little bit later. The most important thing is playing fort or setting up that board game. Those are some of those elements that I think I've really tried to focus on in myself and being a mom, is just the reduction of those distractions that sort of always are there in life. Because really, it's just a short little window of time that our children have at this age and how important it is for us to really dedicate that energy to them.



Michelle Horn 10:11

Thank you, and Dr. Low, anything to add from what you heard from the kids or about this message in the campaign?



Dr. Angela Low 10:17

Oh, I just, I just, you know what I hear? I hear the delights in the voices. And I think that's what makes us smile, right? That it, it's almost like you can see how much it means to their little hearts, that they get to play basketball, they get to tell you a story of this significant moment in their lives. And I think it speaks to the power of being present. Like, this is one of my favorite

messages in the, in the whole campaign, "be present not perfect." I think sometimes, that sometimes we can get lost in it. And it can be a little bit overwhelming. And you might feel that at any point, you have all these things you're supposed to be doing. And you don't know which one to do. But what this, what their voices show and what this message shows, is that simply showing up and being there and just paying attention to them is enough. And it's, it's everything really, for positive child development. Having those moments of full presence during a day. I think of them like, like banking, you're always banking this time with them and, and these are moments that fills their buckets and fills their hearts and allow them to, to cope with anything that comes their way because they know that they're unconditionally loved and they have someone there for them.

C Child 2 11:34

You're listening to Where You Are.

M Michelle Horn 11:38

You can find all of the resources in today's episode on our podcast page, keltymentalhealth.ca/podcast. Are you looking to learn more about social and emotional development in the early years? Check out feelingsfirst.ca, a website from the BC Healthy Child Development Alliance that offers videos, tools, and resources to help parents and caregivers support their child's social and emotional health.

B Bryn Askwith 12:06

Another theme in the campaign was self care. But, let's be honest, self care, as a message, can sometimes come across as one more thing for parents and caregivers to do and can sometimes add to stress levels when people have very full plates already. But in previous conversations with you, Dr. Low, you talked about the neuroscientific basis for self care. And it made me think about self care in a bit of a different way and kind of shifted my perspective. Can you share a little bit more about the neuroscientific basis for self care with our listeners today?

D Dr. Angela Low 12:37

Well, being a parent, or being caring for little, little ones, is really hard, because we often have to step in for that part of their brain that's still growing, the part of the brain that exercises self control and make good decisions. And we do that by also regulating our own feelings. Because sometimes moments like this can be frustrating and could be, you know, it could be overwhelming. So we know that regulation is effortful. Even before I tell you why, like if you think about having to inhibit yourself from saying something or to get yourself calm when you don't want to be calm, that's really hard. It takes a lot of cognitive resources. Neuroscience has shown us that there is a part of our brain that are responsible for this regulation, that allows us to focus on goals and consequences and what our long term plans are. And this is in the prefrontal cortex, so the frontal part of your brain. And the case for self care comes when we look at the studies that show us that the functioning of this part of our brain is directly impacted by stress and by exhaustion. So it's not about you, it's not about the kids, it simply is

just the way that our brains are wired. And knowing this, to me, makes it so obvious then, that caring for ourselves is really a healthy relationship with our brain. Because then we know that, you know, in order to have access to our better selves and to be the parent that we want to be, taking a break, managing our stress, having enough sleep, taking a rest when we need to, and being kind to ourselves is simply part of the work.

M Michelle Horn 14:15

So Joelle, hearing what Dr. Low has just shared about the importance of self care, can you offer some examples of what self care looks like for you?

J Joelle 14:26

Sure. My self care is exercise. It's quite a religious thing for my mommy friends and I to go on a run on Sunday morning. So it's not super relaxing, but it really does get all of our energy out and really fills that bucket of doing physical activity, which makes me feel great, but also gives us an opportunity to sort of like, do a check in "what's going on with your kid? How are you dealing with this and that? And we're all at the same stage. We all have children that are the same, and, and just sort of really caring for one another and saying, I know where you're coming from. It's, that's what we're going through now, too. And just those, the ability to combine those two things, and to have developed this wonderful network of friends has just been so important for me. And also for my self care.

M Michelle Horn 15:15

And have you noticed through being able to take care of your own, your, your own needs and engage in self care, and therefore be able to kind of regulate your feelings and yourself better, have you noticed that that has had an impact on your son or your connection with him?

J Joelle 15:30

Definitely. When I come back in after that early morning run, it's full of energy. And, you know, he sees me happy, and it's definitely positive for him, too. And he knows how much I love running and he's happy when I'm happy. And, and, you know, we then you know, we're making plans for him to even start doing a couple of shorter runs, like competitions, because he sees that I do them, as well. And so, you know, my passions definitely are becoming some of his "never forced, but just, you know, out of interest, and let's give it a try kind of thing.

M Michelle Horn 16:04

Yeah. It's also that good modeling, right?

J Joelle 16:05

Yeah.

M Michelle Horn 16:05

Like showing our kids that it's important to take care of ourselves and do those things that fill our own buckets, too.

B Bryn Askwith 16:11

Dr. Low, another concept in the Feelings First campaign was the importance of discussing emotions. But this can be hard for both adults and kids. Before we get to questions about that, we actually have some audio clips of us talking to our kids about their feelings. [music cue]

M Michelle Horn 16:29

So can you tell me something that made you feel happy today?

C Child 5 16:31

Um, I was playing soccer at recess.

M Michelle Horn 16:35

Great. And is there anything that made you feel sad or frustrated today?

C Child 5 16:39

I didn't have library and gym today.

M Michelle Horn 16:42

Oh, you didn't get to do library and gym at school? That sounds like that would be frustrating.

B Bryn Askwith 16:46

Today, when you were doing Christmas cards, I noticed you scrunched up some papers and pushed them to the side. Can you tell me what you were feeling?

C Child 1 16:55

I was feeling mad. And you might be wondering why I was feeling mad. So here's why. I was

doing mad because on one, I did a bunch of backwards Ss and As, which made me pretty mad! So I scrunched it up in the ball and threw it to the side! [music cue]

B

Bryn Askwith 17:10

[laughter] So Dr. Low, you could hear from the little voices there some examples about how kids and families get in those conversations into their days about talking about feelings. Can you tell us why it's important to have those conversations? Again, because it can be tough. And do you have some tips for families on how they can go about doing this?

D

Dr. Angela Low 17:34

Yeah, just first, I love those voices so much. I really do. And it, it just delights me when they're able to not only put names to how they're feeling, but even, but they're able to say and this is why I'm feeling this way. So I think first and foremost, kind of just talking about feelings and normalizing that we all have feelings is really healthy. There is this fascinating finding that shows that if a child comes across a word that feels right to describe something they're feeling inside, even if their emotional brain is very activated, which means, if they're, you know, even if they're feeling quite emotionally aroused. Just having the name or label for this emotion calms the brain down. Studies have shown that even just having somebody else label that emotion, and if it feels right, that effect also happens. I think what was modeled in those little clips are exactly like, they just sound like 10 stars! For, for, for how you you were doing it. Basically reflecting back, if you notice some emotions that are happening. I see that your eyebrows are furrowed, I see that you are gripping your hands, I see that, you know, like you've just thrown the ball. I wonder how you feel? Like, oh, I wonder if you're feeling mad? And then, you know, and if they're open to it, maybe even furthering the conversation to exploring what is it that might have caused them to feel that way.

M

Michelle Horn 19:08

I know a question that we often get through the Kelty Centre is like, when is it a good time to have this conversation? So if your child is like really frustrated or angry or crying, like is it better to try to talk about it in the moment or, or wait a little bit and talk about it later? But you know, when should you try to have these conversations?

D

Dr. Angela Low 19:24

I know I learned the hard way that in the moment of having big feelings is not a good time to be teaching anything. And quite simply, it's because in these moments when we're feeling big feelings, our brain's capacity to think and reason is simply hijacked by these emotions. So when children are, you know, hijacked by their feelings, they're feeling overwhelmed. That is not the time to talk or teach or explain, and the more effective, or efficient way really, to, in that moment is to connect with them, to get down on their level. And to do what Dr. Dan Siegel calls attunement, where we're not using words, but we're using our connection with them, using facial expressions or tone of voice, maybe hugs if they're open to hugs, to help to co-

regulate, to help to calm them down. And then only when their brains are calm again, and the thinking part of the brain comes back online, that's the time then to, to debrief, to talk, to talk about the different feelings, and maybe talk about what can happen differently next time.

M Michelle Horn 20:33

Thank you, Dr. Low. And we're going to explore how to support kids with big feelings a little bit more and Joelle, get your thoughts on how you do this in your family. Before we do that, we have a few examples from our kids that we spoke to about what they do when they have big feelings and what helps them calm down. [music cue]

C Child 6 20:52

When you're, you are upset or worried wh-what do you do to calm down?

C Child 3 21:01

Um, snuggle my mom.

C Child 1 21:04

Usually, I squeeze a pillow really tight. Like really, really tight. Or I walk away and take deep breaths.

C Child 5 21:13

I breathe. And I...hmmmm. Go in" and I play a little game, if I'm, if I'm like, um. If I'm sad, I can, I like going to my room and playing a little game.

M Michelle Horn 21:33

You do something like a quiet activity to calm your body?

C Child 5 21:35

Yeah. Mhm.

M Michelle Horn 21:36

Yeah. Okay. Do you ever talk to your mom or your dad about your feelings?

C Child 5 21:39
Yeah. Kinda.

M Michelle Horn 21:40
[laughter] Kind of! Does that help?

C Child 5 21:42
Yeah!

M Michelle Horn 21:43
Yeah. Okay.

C Child 2 21:45
[singing] Count my fingies, tap, tap, tap, tap, tap, tap, tap, tap. Take a deep breath, and blow it out! [blows]

M Michelle Horn 21:56
Ooh, where did you learn that?

C Child 2 21:58
At my school!

M Michelle Horn 22:01
In your kindergarten class?

C Child 2 22:03
Yeah.

M Michelle Horn 22:03
That seems like a good thing to do! [music cue]

M

Michelle Horn 22:08

[laughter] So there's some kids talking about the different strategies they've learned, touching on some of the things that Dr. Lowe was saying about that physical touch, talking about feelings. Joelle, how do you talk about feelings with your child and help them, them manage some of the big feelings that they can have?

J

Joelle 22:24

Definitely, with lived experience, I'm sure all of you have felt the same way as Dr. Low had indicated, that in the moment, it's never the right moment. Really, what I do is, with my child—and comes from anything, you know, the million tantrums that he's had at the playground, or you know, in the shopping mall or whatever. Just really moving my child out of an environment that is causing him stress. And then just being there with him, getting down on his level. I use a lot of touch. I wrap him in a mummy burrito. And we just sit there and we breathe together and we calm down. And listening to his actions, as well as his words are really important for me, you know? Sometimes they, they have a hard time putting a label on being mad or being upset or let down! You know that feeling like, I had higher expectations, right? And just that kind of comes out. And sometimes it doesn't come out in words, sometimes it comes out in what, you know, their actions that they're showing. And then I really try to use those "I statements" and I saw or I think you might be feeling this and...but really, it's just slowing everything down and concentrating on breathing.

M

Michelle Horn 23:40

Thank you. There's a quote that I wrote down a while ago, it came to mind when you were talking and it was, "all behavior makes sense." I don't remember who said it. But I repeat that to myself sometimes because it's true, right? That helps me to remember there's, there's a reason behind this behavior. There's a feeling, there's an emotion.

B

Bryn Askwith 23:54

So very true. Recognizing that we've, we've had you both with us for a fair little bit today, I wanted to just check in and see if either of you, maybe we'll start with yourself, Dr. Low, have any final thoughts or words of wisdom that you would like to share with our listeners today?

D

Dr. Angela Low 24:12

I'm just going to say that there's—when it comes to promoting social and emotional development, there, there isn't a right answer or wrong answer, or the right way to do things, or the wrong way to do things. I think it can be really overwhelming sometimes to hear, you know, all the strategies that you're supposed to be doing or a certain kind of behavior that is or isn't there, that's supposed to be there. And, you know, I think my last word on this would be to say, just try something and well, one, be present to the moment and just know that you know

your kid best and you know yourself best and you know the relationship between the two of you best. And that knowledge is more than anything else out there that can help you promote social and emotional development. And so just trust that.

B

Bryn Askwith 24:59

And Joelle, how about for yourself, any final thoughts?

J

Joelle 25:03

It really is never too late to take these little gems of parenthood and incorporate them into your lives. And you know, have them just there in your back pocket and just really understand them. It is this very short moment that they're at this phase. But how important is that for, as a building block for them to become really successful in school and in their lives in general?

B

Bryn Askwith 25:27

Thanks so much, Joelle. And a huge thanks to you both for making the time to be here on the podcast today. I feel like it's one of those episodes that we could probably have a series on, because there's so many great points and so many great takeaways, but we'll leave it here and leave, share these golden nuggets with our listeners for sure.

D

Dr. Angela Low 25:47

Thank you.

J

Joelle 25:47

Thank you.

B

Bryn Askwith 25:50

A big thanks to you Michelle, for co-hosting this episode. And thanks to our listeners as well. This episode of Where You Are is brought to you by BC Children's Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre. Our show is produced and edited by Emily Morantz, with audio engineering by Sam Seguin. Audio production by JAR Audio. If you enjoyed this episode, please leave us a rating on Apple Podcasts or wherever you might be listening now, Looking for more great episodes of Where You Are? Find us wherever you listen to podcasts, and of course, at kelytmentalhealth.ca/podcast. We hope you'll make us a go to resource to promote your family's mental health and wellness.

M

Michelle Horn 26:30

Can you say "from where you are to where you want to be"? [long pause] You just have to say it. [laughing]

C Child 5 26:37
What do you mean?

M Michelle Horn 26:38
[laughing] You just say it!

C Child 5 26:39
What?

M Michelle Horn 26:41
[laughing] What I just said! "From where you are to where you want to be."

C Child 5 26:45
To where you are to where you want to be.