

THE ELEMENTARY TEACHER'S ROLE IN UNDERSTANDING  
EMOTIONALLY UPSET CHILDREN

by

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B. S., Kansas State University, 1958

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A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Manhattan, Kansas

1968

Approved by:

  
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#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The writer wishes to express her sincere gratitude to Dr. Joe H. Loeb of the College of Education for his patience, guidance, interest, and help in the preparation of this report.

## INTRODUCTION

In a world that knows little peace or stability, teachers should be greatly concerned with the importance of helping children develop sound mental and emotional health. To help children become emotionally healthy, teachers first need to be able to recognize the symptoms of emotional disturbance. The teacher needs to carefully observe children's behavior for outward signs of what is going on inside the child. If children are emotionally healthy, their actions will be normal and healthy, but if they are suffering from emotional turmoil, their behavior and their reactions will show it. For this reason, an understanding of behavior provides the most important single clue to the thoughts, feelings, and emotions of children.<sup>1</sup>

It is an accepted fact that all children have basic needs. When these needs are not met and the process of growth is thwarted, problems develop. The elementary teacher is often the first person who recognizes pupils' unmet needs and helps the pupils find ways of satisfying these needs; therefore, it is essential that the teacher understand the pupils whom he attempts to help.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Charles W. Leonard, Why Children Misbehave (Chicago: Science Research Associates, 1952), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Merle M. Ohlsen, Guidance Services in the Modern School (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1964), p. 25.

As knowledge about emotional disturbances increases, new hope for helping emotionally upset children grows among educators. More emphasis is placed on trying to help disturbed children who come to school. The teacher needs to be able to understand children, not merely in terms of psychological generalities, but also in terms of children's particular experiences.<sup>1</sup> In trying to help emotionally upset children the most important thing is that the teacher likes them and shows them that he likes them. The teacher's greatest asset in dealing with these children is patience because improvements in attitude and personality rarely come quickly. Teachers must remember that even small gains can be very important to the children concerned.<sup>2</sup>

Skillful, knowledgeable handling of emotionally upset pupils is the mark of an enlightened teacher. Occasionally a teacher may help turn the key which unlocks a child's personality, freeing the child from feelings of anger, insecurity, failure, or guilt. The knowledge that a teacher has had a part in doing so is one of the greatest satisfactions the teaching profession has to offer.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Louis E. Harper and Benjamin Wright, "Dealing With Emotional Problems in the Classroom," Elementary School Journal, LVIII (March, 1958), p. 316.

<sup>2</sup>Emery Stoops, Russell Johnson, and Owen Smith, Classroom Personalities (West Orange, New Jersey: The Economics Press, Inc., 1961), p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>Louis E. Rath and Anna Porter Burrell, Understanding the Problem Child (West Orange, New Jersey: The Economics Press, 1963), p. 3.

### Statement of Problem

It was the purpose of this report to determine, through a study of available literature: (1) the criteria for the identification of emotionally upset children; (2) the basic emotional needs of children; and (3) some ways that teachers may help children to meet the basic emotional needs.

### Method of Study

The method of carrying out this investigation of the elementary teacher's role in understanding the emotionally upset children was through library research.

### Limitations and Delimitations

Research on this problem included a review of available literature regarding this topic in the main libraries of Kansas State University and Valley Heights Grade School at Waterville. Study was concentrated on the basic emotional needs of children and the ways by which an elementary teacher can help children meet these basic emotional needs.

### Definition of Terms

Emotionally upset children will refer to children in whom symptoms persist to some extent beyond normal expectations but who can manage an adequate school adjustment.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Eli M. Bower, "Emotionally Handicapped Child and the School," Exceptional Child, XXVI (September, 1959), p. 6.

Frustration is the condition of a child when he fails to satisfy the basic emotional needs.<sup>1</sup>

An emotional problem is a problem that upsets our judgment, makes us act so that we harm ourselves or others, causes us to become ill, or disturbs our personalities.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ohlsen, op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>2</sup>Spurgeon English and Stuart M. Finch, Emotional Problems of Growing Up (Chicago: Science Research Associates, Inc., 1951), p. 5.



## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Criteria for Identifying Emotionally Upset Children

Since dealing with emotionally upset children is a daily classroom problem, it is important that the teacher be able to identify these children, that he recognizes the possible reasons for their behavior, and that he be on the alert for various ways of helping these children release their tensions. If the teacher's attitude and actions are constructive, he can be a great help to some children. The uninformed teacher, on the other hand, may compound their problems and suffering.<sup>1</sup>

Emotional problems of growing up. When Benjamin Franklin wrote, "In this world nothing is certain but death and taxes," he might have added "problems" as they, too, are an inescapable part of life.<sup>2</sup> Everyone has problems in his daily life and children are not excepted from this rule. Childhood is a time of new situations that must be met and of problems and anxieties that--scaled to size--are as critical as those that confront adults. Children who can deal successfully with their everyday problems are better able

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<sup>1</sup>Emery Stoops, Russell E. Johnson, and Owen Smith, Classroom Personalities (West Orange, New Jersey: The Economics Press, Inc., 1961), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>O. Spurgeon English and Stuart M. Finch, Emotional Problems of Growing Up (Chicago: Science Research Associates, 1951), p. 4.

to cope with more difficult situations later in their lives.<sup>1</sup>

Many problems of daily living can be handled in the routine fashion but others cause anxiety, confusion, and can even upset the entire life of an individual. These are the problems that arouse emotions in individuals and make them feel angry, depressed, or bitter; these are the problems that individuals react to emotionally--not logically. Any problem of living--large or small, important or trivial--can become an emotional problem, depending on the way an individual reacts to it and the effect it has on him. A problem becomes an "emotional problem" when it upsets an individual's judgment, makes him act so that he harms himself or others, causes him to become ill, or disturbs his personality.<sup>2</sup>

Symptoms of disturbance. There is good reason to believe that emotional disturbances are caused by frustration. They reflect that deep-seated emotional needs are not being satisfied. Although emotional frustration may express itself in various ways, the four most common behavior patterns to look for include: (1) aggression, (2) submission, (3) withdrawal, and (4) psychosomatic symptoms of illness. These types of behavior do not necessarily indicate serious

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<sup>1</sup>George J. Mohr, When Children Face Crises (Chicago: Science Research Associates, Inc., 1952), pp. 3-4.

<sup>2</sup>English and Finch, op. cit., p. 5.

emotional disorder as all of them may be observed from time to time in normal, well adjusted children.<sup>1</sup> The important factor is the intensity and frequency of the reaction. The more severe the behavior symptoms, and the more frequently they appear, the greater the likelihood that they reflect the frustration of important emotional needs.<sup>2</sup>

Some children reveal aggression in their language; in name-calling, swearing, loud yelling, domineering talk, talk of what they are going to do to some people, and in statements indicating resentment toward authority. Aggression is often revealed in the overt actions of children; some children push, pull, tug or wrestle, hit, slap, punch, or kick. Some throw things at others and sometimes they carry or brandish guns or knives or other weapons. Often aggression is directed toward property--cutting or writing on desks, breaking chairs, and writing on walls.<sup>3</sup>

Some children who have been aggressive in a situation where they were frustrated have met a rather severe kind of punishment. These children seem to have lost their backbone as a result; they seem to have little sense of direction for themselves. They seem to be looking to other people for

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<sup>1</sup> Louis E. Rath and Anna Porter Burrell, Understanding the Problem Child (West Orange, New Jersey: The Economics Press, Inc., 1963), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Rath and Burrell, loc. cit.

<sup>3</sup> Rath and Burrell, loc. cit.

suggestions as to what to do, when to do it, where to do it, and when to stop doing it. A submissive child is apt to show an unusual preference for old and familiar things; he is very timid about trying out new ideas. He yields to authority with little protest; he seems to be quite easily frightened; he may cry rather easily and whine frequently.<sup>1</sup>

Some children choose neither aggressiveness nor submissiveness as ways of expressing their frustration but tend toward a solitary type of behavior instead. They withdraw from society and shun contact with their classmates. These children play by themselves; they are not chosen by the group as members of committees; they are not chosen to be on teams; and they usually walk to and from school alone. A withdrawing child has a tendency to stay by himself. When recess time arrives these children often remain in their seats. If they are directed to go outside, they will dawdle a long time in the classroom. Sometimes these children take a seat in the classroom that isolates them from others. They seem to prefer spectator activity rather than participatory activity.<sup>2</sup>

Children are said to have psychosomatic illnesses when they tend to brood and worry due to frustration and then develop some kind of physical impairment. These

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 4-5.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 5-6.

impairments may be of several kinds: (1) skin, such as excema and rashes; (2) cardiovascular, such as extreme hyper-tension and palpitations; (3) respiratory tract, such as asthma, hay fever, and throat irritations; (4) gastric, such as ulcers, colitis, and diarrhea; (5) miscellaneous grouping, such as migraine headaches, kidney and bowel disorders; and (6) speech, such as stuttering, stammering, and lisping. Children who have the various symptoms of this kind seem to be not ill enough to be under the doctor's care; yet, they don't seem well enough to carry on the learning process.<sup>1</sup>

Teachers should be aware of the storm signals which children send out, often unknowingly, when they are in distress.<sup>2</sup> The emotionally upset child may: (1) feel insecure; (2) be fearful; (3) have a chip-on-shoulder attitude; (4) fail in school with no apparent reason; (5) know something one day and forget the next; (6) have emotional blocks to learning; (7) not respond unless he thinks he is right; (8) have a negative attitude; (9) imagine he is ill when nothing is wrong; and (10) dislike school.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 6-7.

<sup>2</sup>S. A. Hamrin and Blanche B. Paulson, Counseling Adolescents (Chicago: Science Research Associates, Inc., 1950), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup>Stoops, Johnson, and Smith, op. cit., p. 14.

Possible reasons for behavior. Classroom difficulties are only minor manifestations of the real problem. They are like the visible portion of an iceberg, seven-eighths of which lies beneath the surface.<sup>1</sup> A child has reasons for what he does. If a teacher can find those reasons, he can find dependable clues for solving those problems.<sup>2</sup> The reasons an emotionally upset child acts as he does may be due to: (1) sudden change in the child's life--a crisis; (2) slow physical development; (3) early or rapid physical maturation; (4) slow social development; (5) lack of affection and encouragement from parents; (6) over-exacting parents--expect too much from the child; (7) working parents who are seldom at home; (8) problems with his brothers and sisters; and (9) brain damage.<sup>3</sup>

Suggestions for dealing with emotionally upset children. A teacher's efforts should be aimed at understanding the underlying difficulties of the child's emotional problem. Rules that will help teachers understand youngsters with emotional problems include:<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Raths and Burrell, op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Gail F. Farwell and Herman J. Peters, Guidance Readings for Counselors (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1960), p. 198.

<sup>3</sup>Stoops, Johnson, and Smith, op. cit., pp. 14-15.

<sup>4</sup>English and Finch, op. cit., pp. 46-47.

1. To help a child with an emotional problem, teachers must ask themselves why the child is behaving in an unhealthy way. Why does the child's personality seek to solve its difficulties in this particular way? Why is he so angry? What has scared him so badly?

2. To help a child with an emotional problem, teachers must ask themselves: "What part do we play in the youngster's emotional problem? Are our rules too strict? Are we asking too much? Do we meet the child's hostility with a display of anger?"

3. When seeking to help a child, teachers must keep in mind their own limitations. Emotional problems are not simple to deal with; they are related to the child's early training, experiences, and relationships with others. When the teachers' efforts are fruitless, or when teachers are in doubt, it is wise for them to seek expert guidance.

A teacher must not only deal with the immediate situation but must also find ways to cope more effectively with future instances.<sup>1</sup> Some steps that a teacher can take to try to work out a solution for the emotionally upset child are:<sup>2</sup> (1) investigate his health condition; (2) investigate his intelligence to determine whether he can do the work expected of him; (3) let him express his emotions; (4) give

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<sup>1</sup>Farwell and Peters, loc. cit.

<sup>2</sup>Stoops, Johnson, and Smith, op. cit., p. 15.

him an opportunity to release his tensions; (5) give him physical activities: batting balls, driving nails, walking, running; (6) provide interesting books and magazines on a wide variety of topics; (7) give him tools to use; (8) appoint a classmate to work with him and help him; (9) let him express himself in music and rhythms; (10) provide science equipment and encourage him to perform experiments; (11) give him a chance to rest; (12) arrange for him to go home near the end of the day; and (13) suggest that his parents seek psychiatric help for him.

Merely suppressing a child will not solve the problems which account for his unaccepted behavior. As long as the unsolved problems are lodged within him, his effectiveness will be impaired and he will continue to create discipline problems in the classroom. Whatever the behavior problem, the child must be understood before he can be effectively helped.<sup>1</sup>

Additional ideas that a teacher should keep in mind when dealing with emotionally upset children are: (1) emotionally upset children need to release their tensions and express their emotions; (2) holding emotions in may further aggravate their problems; (3) a fight may release their emotions; (4) emotional upsets have causes either physical or mental; (5) the principal can help; and (6) psychologists

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<sup>1</sup>Ohlsen, op. cit., pp. 391-392.



may be available.<sup>1</sup>

### Basic Emotional Needs of Children

When the common symptoms of emotional disturbance reappear frequently, and with some severity, it's a good indication that fundamental emotional needs are not being met. Children have many emotional needs; however, there are eight needs which are so universal--and so often the cause of emotional disturbance--that everyone who deals with children should be aware of these major emotional needs. In searching for the cause of an emotional disturbance, these eight needs are the obvious place to look. These basic needs are not separate and distinct from one another because human emotions overlap and intertwine, but the categories are sufficiently distinct so that it is helpful to consider them one at a time.<sup>2</sup>

The need for belonging. Every child has to have some sense of belonging in order to feel good about his life. He needs to find people whom he likes and with whom he wants to be; he needs to find among his age-mates, children who like him and who want him. He wants to be a part of group work and he wants to be thought of when people he knows are deciding to do something together. Children like to feel

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<sup>1</sup>Stoops, Johnson, and Smith, loc. cit.

<sup>2</sup>Raths and Burrell, op. cit., p. 7.

they are missed when they are absent from school, and that the group isn't what it would be if they were there.<sup>1</sup>

The child with a need for belonging feels almost deserted. He does not have the feeling that someone is his very best friend; he does not feel that he has someone in whom he can confide his secret worries and his concerns and perhaps his secret ambitions. He feels that he is outside, left out; has a general feeling of insecurity; his world is threatened. He senses these things are known by adults and he feels further depressed.<sup>2</sup>

The need for achievement. Children need to have a feeling of accomplishment throughout all their lives. Everyone needs attention; everyone needs praise; everyone needs a feeling of independence. If a child's need for achievement is not met, he tends to feel inadequate and sometimes inferior. The feeling of worth that each child has, if he is to become sure of himself, must be proved again and again by achieving.

Children who are under the pressure of a need for achievement are apt to do things which indicate their emotional disturbance. Very often the child is likely to indicate a desire to shy away from any activity where his

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<sup>1</sup>Raths and Burrell, loc. cit.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 8-9.

ability might be questioned. He avoids competitive situations; he cheats on examinations; he copies his homework. He associates with children several years younger or older than himself.

These children may reveal a lack of ambition. They have no "will to learn." They are indecisive, lazy, and indifferent; they refuse to recite. On the other hand, these children often have a dogged determination to learn. They work very long or very hard at all activities; they spend time doing things beyond their powers; they don't know when to give up."

Children with a deep need for achievement may meet frustration at home, in the school, and on the playground. They feel that they are outsiders, with no one interested enough to take time to teach them, or to help them out when they need help. The world is "out of joint" to such children and they need help.<sup>1</sup>

The need for economic security. Economic security means faith in the future; it is a continuity of those factors which makes the physical environment friendly, warm, and secure. Economic insecurity is anxiety about the future of this environment, either immediate or long range. Some children are upset because their economic situation is uncertain. The immediate future is either confusing or

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 9-10.

threatening; children are worried for fear the present situation will be greatly changed.

The child with a need for economic security is apt to make continued reference to his father's job, wages, or other economic factors which he feels may be threatened now or in the future. He generally lacks faith in the future. Children often show symptoms of economic insecurity in their actions. Sometimes a child seems embarrassed about his home background and may generally try to prevent people from knowing about his economic status. He may refuse to accept assistance or gifts.

Children with a need for economic security may tend to defend their economic and family status; they may boast about their possessions or those of their families; they may tend to hoard a variety of useless objects. Children living in a setting which breeds a need for economic security may feel depressed by news items relating to socio-economic problems; they may feel moody about present uncertainty; they may feel unsure about the probability of the future and they frequently feel that society at large is responsible for their predicament.<sup>1</sup>

The need for freedom from fear. Fear is a powerful emotion in the lives of children. Growth and development are difficult unless fears are minimized. In recent years

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 10-12.

experts in human behavior have learned much that can help parents and teachers understand why children are afraid, why they are brave, why they sometimes act foolishly. Perhaps most important, they have learned much that can help parents and teachers aid children to face life free of crippling, disabling, irrational fears.

"Freedom from fear" is one of the goals for which democracy stands. This freedom is essential to the growth and progress of the nation. It is, also, essential to children's happiness. They cannot grow and achieve to the utmost of their abilities unless they are free from crippling fears.<sup>1</sup>

Children full of fear of so many things are apt to act "nervous" when they are about to take an examination, when they are asked to write in class, or to take part in school plays. Children with a strong need to be free from fear may be uncooperative children. They may refuse to take part in the more active sports and activities; they may refuse to take part in school plays; they may "beg off" or say they "don't know" when called upon. This type of child generally refuses to try new things.

Children possessed with fear feel "nervous" most of the time, tired, nauseous when they are afraid, paralyzed or dizzy at times. Sometimes afraid to be thought of as

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<sup>1</sup>Helen Ross, Fears of Children (Chicago: Science Research Associates, Inc., 1951).

cowards, they may be outwardly brash, noisy, and presumably "unafraid," but inwardly quaking. Such children may frequently feel like hiding in their rooms with pillows over their heads; they may wish they could stop being afraid. Often they wish very much that they could convince adults how terrifying some things are.<sup>1</sup>

The need for love and affection. Love is as important to a child's development as are food and warmth. Children can be undernourished and hungry for love as well as for food. Children do not always know that they are loved, or at least they are not always sure. Love to a child is more than just hugs and kisses; it is made up of a multitude of little things though they are big enough in his eyes that show him that "he counts."<sup>2</sup>

The need to be loved is closely related to the need to belong. In younger children the need for love and affection is associated more closely with family relationships. Later it expands to include the opposite sex. The need for belonging, on the other hand, is associated mostly with free relations with age-mates, with being accepted as an equal member of the group. There seems to be a human requirement for deep warmth and deep love in one or more human

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<sup>1</sup>Raths and Burrell, op. cit., pp. 12-13.

<sup>2</sup>Charles Leonard, op. cit., pp. 41-48.

relationships. Where there is an absence of love and affection, where there is a frustrating of this need, there are the usual consequences of behavior that are sometimes aggressive, sometimes submissive, and in other ways abnormal.

Children with a strong need for love and affection may openly express a desire for demonstrations of affection; they may say that they wish they could talk things over more often with their parents; they often seem to be obviously demanding demonstrations of affection. Some of these children may indulge in "flight reactions" such as running away from home; some may be truant or delinquent, or lie frequently.

Feeling generally insecure and depressed, these children may frequently feel like crying. Perhaps they wish their teacher would pay attention to them instead of doing something else. It is very likely that above all, they want to be loved and they want to love someone.<sup>1</sup>

The need for freedom from guilt feelings. A feeling of self-assurance is possible only when there is an absence of conflict. Conflict means being pulled in opposite directions, feeling two ways at the same time. It is accompanied by uncertainty, as first one feeling and then the other

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<sup>1</sup>Raths and Burrell, op. cit., pp. 13-15.

struggles for control.<sup>1</sup>

When children start to explore the world in which they live they often meet situations for which they are unprepared. As they try new ways of acting, they sometimes do things that are not consistent with "accepted" practice. Sometimes adults use this occasion to shame the children, to humiliate them, to debase them. The actions of adults often serve to make children repress many of their feelings which tends to develop a kind of guilty conscience. When children run away from home or from school, they are often trying to run away from themselves; they are really running away from some inward anxieties.

Children with guilty feelings may say they wish they had not lied; they may say they wish their parents didn't expect them to be so obedient; they may say that they wish they had never cheated or lost their tempers. These children may be extremely submissive; they may isolate themselves and worry unduly over minor mistakes. On the other hand, these children may reveal feelings of guilt by strong, overly aggressive actions; they may be poor losers and commit other such "offenses."

Children who are overwhelmed with guilt feel debased; they feel small inside. Sometimes they feel as though they

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<sup>1</sup>Nina Ridenour, Building Self-Confidence in Children (Chicago: Science Research Associates, Inc., 1954), p. 43.



alone, of all their age-mates are nasty, or dishonest, or immoral, or stupid. This feeling of small personal worth, of a guilty conscience makes a child emotionally disturbed and his behavior often shows that he needs help. Frequently such children may feel ashamed of their dreams. Perhaps they are always "running themselves down," think that they are always doing something wrong. Possibly they feel they must always be "on top" in competition, and they feel ashamed of the "bad plays" they have made in games. Perhaps these children just generally feel guilty about the trouble they think they create.<sup>1</sup>

The need for self-respect. Everyone needs status; he needs to feel he is an important, contributing individual at home, at school, and on the playground. If he can't get status by fair means, he'll try less acceptable ways.<sup>2</sup>

Children who feel that everybody is trying to run their lives, who feel that they are not respected as persons, sometimes suffer serious emotional frustration. Such children may express the desire for other people to have faith in their judgments; they wish their opinions were asked for more often; they wish their teachers wanted them to take part in making the rules of the school; they often engage in boasting.

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<sup>1</sup>Raths and Burrell, op. cit., pp. 15-17.

<sup>2</sup>Edith G. Neisser, How to Live With Children (Chicago: Science Research Associates, Inc., 1950), p. 32.

Children who lack self-respect may seem to be withdrawing into a shell; they may often permit themselves to be pushed aside; they may withdraw completely if they are rejected; they may cry easily and whine and whimper a lot. On the other hand, children with a strong need for self-respect may seem to be frequently rebellious or disobedient; they may frequently try deception and bluffing; they may fight back when pushed aside.

These children may contradict people who are talking; they may continually pretend to be an authority on any subject under discussion; these are the children who "butt in" at any time; they impose their leadership upon a group and may be very dictatorial; they may steal and generally disobey instructions. Children who feel the need for self-respect may often feel that there is a conspiracy against them, or generally as though their ideas and opinions are not worthwhile.<sup>1</sup>

The need for understanding. Some children seem bewildered by this world because they can't make much sense out of it. Sometimes they don't know the questions to ask; at other times they ask and do not get adequate answers. If the school day neglects these questions, if the answers given result in even greater confusion, if the child thinks

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<sup>1</sup>Raths and Burrell, op. cit., pp. 17-19.

he doesn't understand what's going on around him, he may become emotionally upset.

Children who have a need for understanding will often assume sole or special responsibility for securing information; they may accept the opinions of others without question; they may read constantly. Frequently these children may become aggressive in seeking information; they may ask "why" repeatedly; they may continually question authority; they might be extremely reactionary in their thinking; they may be intolerant or prejudiced. These children feel cheated when they do not get the answers they are seeking. They want to understand the things that are confusing to them. They are bewildered at the differences between what adults say and do, and they feel even more curious about something when they get an evasive answer.<sup>1</sup>

#### Meeting the Basic Emotional Needs

The primary job of a teacher is to promote learning, but anything which interferes with the learning process is also the teacher's concern. If frustrated emotional needs seem to be blocking the learning process, a constructive teacher will want to do everything in his power to relieve tension and remove the block.<sup>2</sup> The factors that cause severe

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 19-20.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

emotional problems in some children are present, to a lesser degree, in all children. Teachers who come to understand the emotionally upset child cannot help but gain a better understanding of all their pupils.

Meeting the need for belonging. Good leadership on the part of a teacher can help children feel that they belong in the classroom; it can help them feel that their classroom is the very best.<sup>1</sup> The teacher's efforts should always be consciously directed toward promoting the feeling of belonging. The activities that a teacher chooses must be enveloped in an atmosphere of warm friendliness. Activities that a teacher may try to undertake to encourage the feeling of belonging are:<sup>2</sup>

1. Let a child who is absent know that you realize he has been away. Send a message through his brother, sister, or classmates or telephone his home and mention that you have missed him and that you hope he will be back soon.
2. Send the absentee get-well cards made by the class.
3. Welcome a child who has been absent back to school and indicate by your actions that you are glad he is back and that you missed him while he was gone.

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<sup>1</sup>William C. Menninger, Self-Understanding (Chicago: Science Research Associates, Inc., 1951), p. 22.

<sup>2</sup>Raths and Burrell, op. cit., pp. 25-28.

4. Set up a situation in which you can greet each child in the morning and also arrange a situation in which you can say "Good night" to children at dismissal.

5. Associate with pupils occasionally in many different ways so that you will get to know them better and they will get to know you better.

6. Arrange for the recognition of the child's birthday in the classroom.

7. Help the newcomer--help him to see that you want him to belong to the class and that you want the class to belong to him.

8. Try to find the strengths of those children who are deficient in skills and build on those strengths rather than on the child's weaknesses.

9. When there is a need for discipline, criticize the action and not the child. Be certain you let the child know that you accept him even if you do not approve of what he does.

10. Develop an atmosphere in which the child's concerns are given importance. His need for belonging will be satisfied only when his ideas have had a fair hearing.

Meeting the need for achievement. If teachers are interested in furthering a child's sense of security, they will want to provide plenty of opportunities for successful achievement. To spur pupils on to greater efforts, teachers

often tend to set standards so high that pupils are constantly falling short. It is this feeling of never being able to make the grade that undermines a sense of security. On the other hand, nothing so bolsters emotional well-being as knowing that one has done well.<sup>1</sup> Teachers today work hard to see that each child finds success in some aspect of his school experience. They understand how important success is to a child's development.<sup>2</sup> Activities that a teacher may undertake to help meet a child's need for achievement include the following:<sup>3</sup>

1. See to it that a child does not have a lot of failure experiences. If the standards are too high for a child to reach, change the standards.
2. Let the child set his own standards and help him see when those standards are improving.
3. In giving rewards, emphasize the process by which excellent accomplishment is made.
4. Try to supply a variety of media to work in so that children will have an opportunity to reveal their unusual talents.
5. A sense of achievement comes when tasks are well spaced and placed. Try to pace activities to the tempo of

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<sup>1</sup>Neisser, op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>2</sup>Leonard, op. cit., p. 43.

<sup>3</sup>Raths and Burrell, op. cit., pp. 29-33.

the children and have their own ambitions guide their steps.

6. Praise and rewards should always be sincere.

There should be praise and rewards for improvement, evidence of effort, and intensity of purpose--praise and rewards that every child can earn.

7. Help children anticipate the possibilities of failure so that they will learn that "mistakes made" are an asset because they show what to avoid in the future.

8. Before children start out on a job, make sure that they have had some preparation for it and that they have some ideas about how to go about it.

9. Sometimes children get a sense of achievement when they are asked to help someone else.

10. Pay attention to the concerns of children and try to find some "experts" to whom the child might go for help.

Meeting the need for economic security. Economic insecurity is anxiety about the physical environment, either immediate or long range. A home situation which breeds economic insecurity is difficult for a teacher to combat. Some things that a teacher can do, however, to try to alleviate the situation and to see that the feelings of insecurity are not intensified by experiences at school are:<sup>1</sup>

1. Be especially concerned about classrooms in which children of widely varying family incomes are represented.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 35-37.

2. Be very careful about publicizing the contributions of each individual child to any fund-raising campaign.

3. Sometimes a child can be helped in a private and personal way. Make inquiries about social agencies because they are often in a position to help many children with respect to medical, optical, dental, and other professional services.

4. Help children to see more clearly the limited part that material things play in what we call the good life. Let children see that you don't judge people by their wealth, or by their clothes, or by their possessions.

5. Emphasize the contributions that all categories of people have made to our success as a nation: different racial groups, different religious groups, and different status groups. Point out that the many cases in which specific periods of deprivation served as a challenge that spurred famous people on to great accomplishments.

6. Help children see how education, how special skills, how persistent efforts, how sharing with each other all can help to improve an economic situation.

7. As you talk with children, emphasize the worthwhileness of all effort no matter what the occupation in which it is expended. Help children see that the world needs all of us and can make use of all of us.

8. Be careful when you try to get information about a child's parents and their employment. Children are



sensitive to this kind of issue; do it with great caution and always with the safeguards of privacy.

9. Some children are so overwhelmed with economic disaster that has stricken their families that they seem to have a sense of hopelessness about the immediate future. Talks with such a child, the study of great men who have come through such crises, and sharing experiences from your own life help sometimes to bring assurance.

10. Bring knowledge of our nation's social security policy to the children in the classroom in such a way that it adds to the children's sense of economic security.

Meeting the need for freedom from fear. It would not be wise to rear children to be absolutely free from fear; however, teachers can help children grow to maturity unburdened by destructive anxiety, free to become spontaneous and creative adults with a greater capacity to enjoy themselves and to contribute to the happiness of others.<sup>1</sup> Various activities must be carried out in such a way as to bring confidence to children, to bring reassurance to them, to bring the idea that many fears are irrational, and that other fears should be replaced by intelligent caution. Activities that teachers may try to minimize fears include:<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Helen Ross, Fears of Children (Chicago: Science Research Associates, Inc., 1951).

<sup>2</sup>Raths and Burrell, op. cit., pp. 39-43.

1. Create situations in which children may talk about their fears. Getting their fears out into the open and becoming aware that other children have fears, too, help children relieve their tensions.

2. Help children to learn how to handle "fearful" situations by cautious approaches, by preparation and readiness so that they will be better able to handle their fears and to make their inner life more secure.

3. Emphasize that some of the common dangers of everyday life are not to be deeply feared, but to be intelligently handled; for instance, scissors and knives are dangerous but can be useful tools when handled well.

4. Develop a policy in school whereby body-contact games are played by children who are about the same weight or body type. Try to make competition voluntary, and control it by having those who are about equal in ability and strength compete with each other.

5. See that children come to know about the many individuals and organizations who are working for good will and friendliness among all people.

6. Try to help others understand the powerful role that fear plays in distorting behavior. In contacts with parents, librarians, law officers, and Sunday schools, teachers can make their influence felt to reduce fear in the lives of children.

7. Teachers can encourage children to talk about what they have heard or seen in movies, television, or radio that has produced fears and anxieties; teachers can help children see the "imaginary character" of these situations and oftentimes the stupidity of them.

8. Sometimes fears are reduced as children try to make an objective study of them. The curriculum might include some unit on common fears. The understanding of what is taking place--storms, traffic, germs--can act as a reducer of fear.

9. Children's fears are real and important to them so teachers must pay attention and be sympathetic to the first expression of those fears.

10. A general atmosphere of permissiveness and participation--if there is flexibility of requirements, if children help set standards and help enforce them--this "totality" of things operates as an effective aid in reducing fear.

Meeting the need for love and affection. The "right kind of love" involves being able to accept and enjoy each stage of a child's development as it comes along; however, it does not mean holding a youngster too long at any one of those stages. Teachers can meet children's need for affection in different ways; they can give love without making it

conditional on achievement or good behavior.<sup>1</sup> Whether inherited or acquired, the longing for love and affection seems to be one of the most important needs of all. Ways to help satisfy this need include:<sup>2</sup>

1. Accept the feelings of children. Reassure them that these are feelings that every normal person would probably have in similar situations.

2. Let children know that they are liked. The tone of the teacher's voice, the sincerity of his questions and answers, the sympathy he expresses, the gladness he expresses, are all ways of communicating a warm and friendly atmosphere.

3. Be sure to identify as well as possible the children who are in great need of love and affection; create special situations in which some love and affection can be lavished on these children.

4. If children offer little presents, be careful not to offend them by your refusals or by the way you accept the gifts.

5. Bring emphasis to the positive side of life-- point out strengths in children, be liberal with praise, be sensitive to the good things that children are doing and point out these good things often.

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<sup>1</sup>Neisser, op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>2</sup>Raths and Burrell, op. cit., pp. 45-50.

6. Show a kindly interest in children as their out-of-school life may often be lacking in love and affection.

7. Be concerned with the child's absences and particularly with short or long periods of illness.

8. Try to create situations in which a child will be encouraged to talk if he wants to.

9. Avoid the temptation to let responsibilities end completely with the end of the school day.

10. Have respect for children, their parents, their friends, and for their life outside of school.

Meeting the need for freedom from guilt feelings.

Unwise teaching in childhood often lays the foundation for an intensely guilty conscience; feelings of guilt and bad conscience trouble a child inwardly. The conscience stricken individual does not have poise, serenity, and self-confidence. Since conscience is largely a product of learning and training, a teacher can do much to give a child freedom from a feeling of guilt. Specific suggestions that teachers can try to raise a child's self-evaluation, to increase his self-esteem, and to develop his feelings of self-respect are:<sup>1</sup>

1. Learn to ask questions of children. Find out how they happened to do what they did; find out if they know why

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<sup>1</sup>Raths and Burrell, op. cit., pp. 51-55.

they did it; find out if they know alternatives to what they did. In this way, one is not apt to pre-judge children without having the evidence for judging.

2. Work closely with children who seem to have a feeling of guilt. Help them be ready for the next situation. Praise them for the good things that they do, but be certain that your rewards go for the process of achieving.

3. Help children see that nobody is perfect. Show them that the mistakes of children are those that can be expected of anyone growing up in a complex world.

4. Make sure that rules and regulations are understood by children. Take the time to help children see what the requirements of situations are.

5. Help children see that "conscience" is in part the result of previous experiences; that this "conscience" represents some of the things we have learned from previous experiences; that a "bad conscience" is appropriate only if one knows of several choices and deliberately chooses a bad one.

6. Be very sensitive to children who are running away from things in general. These children are showing symptoms that may be associated with guilt and it is the teacher's job to recognize this symptom and then be sensitive to the child's need for more self-respect and feeling of personal worth.

7. In relationships with children as groups, emphasize that it is no disgrace to lose. Avoid associating defeat with disgrace, defeat with shame, defeat with personal abasement.

8. Help children see that different situations call for different standards, that perfection itself is not always the standard. Failure to achieve perfection is no disgrace--it's to be expected.

9. Help children see that successful adults also faced problems of childhood, also made mistakes, and probably were helped to profit from them.

10. Help children see that the past is past, and that we are now living in the present. Point out that every day offers opportunities and we should make use of them.

Meeting the need for self-respect. Children are different and have different interests and different concerns. They want the chance to express these differences and they want to be respected in the process. Where decisions are made they need to feel that they are important human beings, and that their ideas and values are being respected. Things that teachers can do to meet children's needs for self-respect include:<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 57-58.

1. Ask children to share in setting up the schedule, in setting up standards of achievement, and in choosing some curriculum experiences.

2. Encourage the making of judgments, the interpretation, the planning of a solution of a problem.

3. Build a curriculum with children that shows you respect for many abilities and many trends.

4. Give children a chance to help evaluate their work. Listen to the individual children carefully. Indicate your agreements and, if you disagree, tell why.

5. Create situations where children will have more responsibility; perhaps student government may be instituted.

6. Do more trusting of children. Accept statements of what they do as honest expressions of their efforts.

7. Arrange for dramatic productions in which everybody will have a part.

8. In every group situation where a decision is to be reached, the teacher may at times comment to the effect that some children haven't spoken at all. He then asks if they want to say anything before the group goes ahead to make a decision.

9. Emphasize the all-round world of life. Avoid preoccupation with a single standard and restricted activities.

10. Continually examine each situation with children to see if we can put different choices before them. Then



let them list and discuss additional choices.

Meeting the need for understanding. Every child seems to want to make life meaningful, purposeful, and understandable. He wants to see himself in a purposeful relationship to the world in which he lives. To help a child become a more integrated person, it is necessary that teachers help him understand some of his own problems and his own relationships to them. Some possible ways to do this are:<sup>1</sup>

1. Try to provide a permissive atmosphere in the classroom in which the children will feel free to ask questions and exchange ideas.

2. Make an effort to secure more sources of information for answering questions. Work with school officials and librarians to get more current newspapers and magazines representing different points of view for distribution.

3. Ask children as they work on projects what they hope to accomplish, and why they think it is important.

4. Create an environment that respects the need of children for understanding and developing purposes; avoid making remarks about the "silly" character of some questions.

5. Try to set up situations where children have to choose between several "goods" or between several "bads"

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 59-62.

because this is better for stimulating thinking and planning than stereotype situations.

6. If children do not raise certain issues as they work on their own concerns, sensitive teachers should raise some of these issues with them.

7. Explore ideas for proposed changes eagerly; bring adults of the neighborhood into the picture whenever possible.

8. Arrange assembly programs by which people with different points of view will make troublesome issues more clear; these programs may be followed by discussion periods.

9. Sometimes a question occurs in a context which seems hardly appropriate. The teacher should write it down somewhere so it can be taken up later--and not ignored.

10. Assure children that it is perfectly natural not to understand a lot of things. Nobody understands everything; all of us have questions that we can't answer. However, the more we think, the more information we collect about questions and the more answers we discover.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

It was the purpose of this report to determine, through a study of available literature: (1) the criteria for the identification of emotionally upset children; (2) the basic emotional needs of children; and (3) some ways that teachers may help children meet the basic emotional needs.

Dealing with emotionally upset children is a daily classroom problem; these children can't be ignored or avoided. If the teacher's attitude and actions are intelligent and constructive, he can be of great help to some children; the uninformed teacher, on the other hand, may compound the children's problems and suffering.

Emotional frustration makes it difficult for some children to learn and may also cause behavior problems. To help children become emotionally healthy, teachers need to be able to recognize the symptoms of emotional disturbance by observing what is going on inside the child--his behavior. An understanding of behavior provides the most important clue to understanding the thoughts, feelings, and emotions of children.

That children have basic emotional needs is an accepted fact. When these needs are not met and the progress of growth is thwarted, problems develop. Every teacher must be sensitive to the children's needs, contribute to their

satisfaction with the resources available to him, recognize serious problems when they arise, and seek the help of other professional workers when he is unable to provide the necessary assistance. Understanding the pupils who he attempts to help is essential for the elementary teacher as he is often the one who first recognizes the unmet needs of his pupils and helps them find ways of meeting these needs.

As knowledge about emotional disturbances increases, new hope for helping the emotionally disturbed child grows among educators. More emphasis is placed on trying to help the disturbed children who come to school. The teacher needs to be able to understand a child, not merely in terms of psychological generalities, but also in terms of his particular experiences. To know what emotional responses--either happy or unhappy--come to the child as a result of his experiences is important. To have this understanding and, as a result, to deal with the child in terms of the way he feels rather than in terms of what he does, is the foundation of wise child training. Emotionally upset children can never be handled effectively unless they and the backgrounds that produce them are understood. Understanding can come through intelligent and integrated research.

The primary responsibility of the teacher is to promote learning, but anything which interferes with the learning process is also the teacher's concern. If frustrated emotional needs seem to be blocking the learning process,

the teacher should want to do everything in his power to relieve tension and remove the block.

In trying to help emotionally upset children the most important thing is that the teacher likes them and shows them that he likes them. The teacher's greatest asset is patience. Improvements in attitude and personality rarely come quickly. Teachers must remember that even a small gain can be very important to the child concerned.

Skillful, knowledgeable handling of emotionally upset pupils is the mark of an enlightened teacher. Occasionally he may turn the key which unlocks a child's personality, freeing him from feelings of anger, insecurity, failure, or guilt. The knowledge that he has had a part in doing so is one of the greatest satisfactions the teaching profession has to offer.

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THE ELEMENTARY TEACHER'S ROLE IN UNDERSTANDING  
EMOTIONALLY UPSET CHILDREN

by

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B. S., Kansas State University, 1958

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Manhattan, Kansas

1968

It was the purpose of this report to determine, through a study of available literature: (1) the criteria for the identification of emotionally upset children; (2) the basic emotional needs of children; and (3) some ways that teachers may help children meet the basic emotional needs.

Elementary teachers cannot escape the challenge of working with emotionally upset children as almost every child is emotionally upset at one time or another. Since dealing with emotionally upset children is a daily classroom problem, it is important that the teacher be able to identify these children, that the teacher be able to recognize the possible reasons for these children's behavior, and that the teacher be on the alert for various ways of helping these children release their tensions. If the teacher's attitudes and actions are constructive, he can be a great help to some children. The uninformed teacher, on the other hand, may compound the children's problems and suffering.

There is good reason to believe that emotional disturbances are caused by frustration. They reflect that deep-seated emotional needs are not being satisfied. Although emotional frustration may express itself in various ways, the four most common behavior patterns to look for include: (1) aggression; (2) submission; (3) withdrawal; and (4) psychosomatic symptoms of illness. The important factor is the intensity and frequency of the reaction. The more severe the behavior symptoms, and the more frequently

they appear, the greater the likelihood that they reflect the frustration of important emotional needs.

That children have many emotional needs is an accepted fact. There are, however, eight needs which are so universal and so often the cause of emotional disturbance that everyone who deals with children should be aware of these basic needs. In searching for the cause of an emotional disturbance, these eight needs are the obvious place to look.

When the basic emotional needs are not met and the process of growth is thwarted, problems develop; therefore, every teacher must be sensitive to these needs of children, contribute to the satisfaction of these needs with the resources available, recognize serious problems when they arise, and seek the help of other professional workers when he is unable to provide the necessary assistance.

The primary responsibility of the teacher is to promote learning, but anything which interferes with the learning process is also the teacher's concern. If frustrated emotional needs seem to be blocking the learning process, the teacher should want to do everything in his power to relieve the tension and remove the block. Teachers who come to understand the emotionally upset children cannot help but gain a better understanding of all their pupils.

In trying to help children with emotional problems the most important thing is that the teacher likes these

children and shows them that he likes them. The teacher's greatest asset is patience. The knowledge that a teacher has had a part in helping emotionally upset children is one of the greatest satisfactions the teaching profession has to offer.