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The DIR® Model

- Developed by Drs. Stanley Greenspan, Serena Wieder and other members of the Interdisciplinary Council on Developmental and Learning Disorders.

DIR® stands for **D**evelopmental, **I**ndividual-Differences, **R**elationship-Based.

The Child with Special Needs by Drs. Greenspan and Wieder is a terrific reference and a good starting point to learn about the DIR® Model.

The **DIR®** Model:

- is not exclusive to children with concerns along the Autism Spectrum.
- is used with children with all types of developmental concerns or with children with delays in functional emotional development.*
- examines functional emotional development in a developmental context. (The “D”= Developmental)
- considers the biological based differences in sensory processing, modulation, muscle tone, language processing and motor planning and sequencing. (The “I” = Individual-Differences)
- recognizes and takes advantage of the role of affect in building social and emotional development. (The “R” = Relationship)

Developmental

Previous levels should be mastered and integrated before moving on to the next level with constant strengthening of the base while attending to the current developmental level and looking for the next developmental level.

The DIR® Model examines and understands a child's emotional development by looking at:

6 Functional Emotional Developmental Levels.

Level 1 – Shared Attention and Regulation

- Shared Attention= The ability of the dyad to attend to each other
- Organize & regulate sights, sounds and sensations of the world
- Focus and attention
- Recover from distress within 20 minutes with help from a caregiver
- Shows interest in people
- Readily observable from birth to 3 months of age

Level 2 – Engagement and Relating

- Intimacy – establishing relationships
- The ability to engage in relationships with others through looks and gestures
- Responds to your overtures with pleasure
- Responds to overtures with curiosity and interest

- Becomes displeased when you are unresponsive in play for 30 seconds or more
- Readily observable between 2 and 6 months of age
- The child has readiness to engage, interest in the world, is able to participate in an interaction, can take in stimulation without becoming disorganized, irritable or withdrawing, is able to calm self and can use another to help calm, able to focus and be curious about the environment

Level 3 – Two-way Purposeful Emotional Interactions

- Opening and Closing circles of communication, reciprocal, back & forth emotional signaling, starting with gestures, smiles and actions
- Co-regulation (rhythm and timing) “Your child’s behavior impacts you and your behavior impacts them” *“Attunement”*
- Initiation and Intentionality in interactions
- Understand the intention and communications of others
- Readily Observable between 4 and 9 months of age

Levels 1-3 form the foundation for basic human interactions, they establish the connection between the child and the world and helps the child establish a “core sense of self”

Level 4 – Shared Social Problem Solving

- The ability to create complex gestures, to distinguish facial expressions and body postures
- To string together a series of actions into long chains
- Intentional & elaborated imitation

- Close circles of communication with a wide range of feelings
- Continuous flow, endless circles
- Accepting other's ideas become possible
- Readily observable between 9 and 18 months of age

The importance of level 4 has to do with the continuous flow and the development of attention necessary for interaction and new learning. These long chains are crucial for the development of representation and set the stage for the development of real symbols. "Lays the groundwork for learning"

Level 5 – Creating Symbols and Ideas

- The ability to create emotional ideas in play and to use word/symbols to indicate wishes, feelings and interests
- Complex fantasy play with creative use of ideas and elaboration
- Plays simple motor games with rules
- Uses pretend play to recover from and deal with distress
- Readily observable between 18 and 30 months
- Emotional Ideas!

Level 6 – Building Logical Bridges Between Ideas: Logical Thinking

- The ability to build bridges between ideas to make them reality based and logical
- Express ideas in play and in words
- Describe feelings instead of acting them out
- String ideas together in logical, original thoughts

- Give reasons for wishes
- Answers “why” questions
- Readily observable between 30 and 48 months

Level 5 and 6 are important because they serve as the foundation for symbol systems, such as language, and thus to develop meaningful communication

Provides the foundation necessary for the individual to symbolize the world and reflect on actions and emotions

Individual-Differences

Regulatory-sensory processing

Tactile, Auditory, Visual, Proprioceptive, Olfactory/gustatory, Internal stimulation, Defensiveness, modulation, discrimination (over/under/shutdown/seeking) and integration.

Sensory Integration is the ability of the CNS to organize and process input from different sensory channels in order to make adaptive responses.

Motor planning & imitation

Difficulty creating, planning and sequencing responses

Language comprehension, production and auditory processing

Auditory processing, reactivity, speed of processing, interference, language comp, expressive language

Visual-spatial processing

Body awareness and sense, location of body in space, relation of object to self, visual logical reasoning. Also search behavior, shifting attention, visually organizing large space, foreground/ back ground and selecting important stimuli.

Symbolic capacity

Uses actual objects to represent/act out real events, pretend play to symbolize internal experiences, memories and intention, recreate emotional themes in play

A core processing problem in Autism Spectrum Disorder has to do with the ability to connect **affect** or intention to motor planning & sequencing & language, thus **affect** or emotion is very important part of the DIR® model. Within the model, **affect** is mobilized within **Relationships**!

Relationship-Based

Relationships are the basis for our ability to regulate and engage with the world

The DIR® Model is most often associated with one of its components: “**Floor Time**”, however it is only part of the model.

Basic Principles of Floor Time

- 1. Follow the child’s lead.**
- 2. Join in at the child’s developmental level and build on their natural interests.**
- 3. Open and close circles of communication.**
- 4. Create a developmentally appropriate play environment.**
- 5. Extend the circles of communication.**
 - a) Interact constructively to help the child reach his or her own goals.

b) Interact playfully, but obstructively, as needed.

6. Broaden the child's range of interactive experience.

a) Broaden the thematic and/or emotional range.

1) Enjoy and engage in play dealing with the different themes of life

2) Challenge the child to engage in neglected or avoided types of interactions.

b) Broaden the range of processing and motor capacities used in interactions.

1) Engage the child with sound and/or words, vision, touch and movement.

2) Challenge the child to employ underused or avoided processing capacities.

7. Tailor your interactions to the child's individual differences.

a) Profile the child's individual differences based on observation and history.

b) Work with individual differences.

8. Simultaneously attempt to mobilize the six functional emotional developmental levels.

When doing "Floor Time":

"When in doubt....Go for the Joy...Go for the Fun...Go for the Affect/Emotion!!"

The DIR® Model has both a **Home** and a **Parent** Component

School Program:

The school program is based on the needs and individual differences of the student, however the following are components that may be a part of your child's program.

“Floor Time” sessions

Semi-structured Problem Solving interactions sessions

Motor, Sensory and Visual/Spatial interactions sessions

Additional Educational Strategies may also be incorporated,

these include:

- 1) PECS
- 2) ABA
- 3) TEACCH
- 4) Miller Method
- 5) Augmentative Communication

Parents : The most important play partners!!!

Ideally should contain:

6-8, 20 minute “Floor Time” sessions

6+, 20 minute sessions focused on semi-structured, problem-solving sessions involving cognition, language and social/emotional skills.

3+, 20 minute sessions of Motor, Sensory and Visual/Spatial activities.