
EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING OF THE CHILD AT PRESCHOOL AGE (Parental survey)

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Abstract: The article presents a recent theoretical and empirical study on the emotional well-being of the child at pre-school age. Emotions occupy an important and essential place in the child's pre-school life and play a decisive role in their psychological, physical and social development because they are related to the natural and social world. It is through them that the child perceives and understands the environment, reacts and expresses his/her attitude to it, enters the world of human relations, learns to communicate with adults and peers, understands them, shares with them, seeks and expects their support and understanding.

The problem of the emotional well-being of children in the family and pre-school educational institutions is current, as the positive emotional state is one of the most important conditions for the full development of the forming child's personality.

For the of preschool-age child, emotional well-being is important because:

- feelings are decisive in the psycho-physical, social, cognitive and creative development of the child's personality;
- emotional comfort favours the development of the child's personality and promotes the full development of personal potential;
- positive relationships with others - adults and peers - are an important source for childhood experiences;
- communicating is fruitful when it is based on positive emotions, understanding, respect and mutual trust;
- it creates a favourable environment for the expression of the child's personality by promoting activity, autonomy and working capacity.

Today's child spends most of the day in the kindergarten, along with teachers and peers. It is important for parents to know how children's everyday life goes, how the child feels in kindergarten, if he/she meets the demands and expectations. The questions they ask and their answers relate to the atmosphere and the psychological climate in the children's group, relate to the child's psychological well-being and emotional well-being.

Taking into account the importance of emotional well-being for the development and formation of the child at pre-school age, a survey was conducted with parents whose children attended a preparatory group at the kindergarten.

The aim of the study is to explore the parents' opinion about the emotional well-being of the child in the kindergarten group and their attitude towards the emotional atmosphere between the children and the pedagogical team.

Parents' views on the emotional well-being of the child in the kindergarten group are examined through a survey method.

The questions in the survey are structured to provide the opportunity to:

- identify the attitudes and feelings experienced by the child visiting a kindergarten;
- specify the relationship of the child with the pedagogical staff and the children in the group;
- establish the existence of mutual trust and sharing between the child and the parents;
- explore the personal attitude of parents to child's emotionality;
- determine the parental competence with respect to the personal formation of the child.

The following conclusions are drawn from the conducted survey:

1. The analysis of the responses of the parents who participated in the survey shows that a positive emotional atmosphere has been created and maintained in the preparatory group, which provides the emotional well-being of the child.
2. There is an emotional relationship between parents and children; there is mutual trust, which is evident from the fact that a large part of the children share with their parents how their day in the kindergarten goes.
3. Parents are informed and have competence for the personality formation of their child.

Keywords: emotional well-being, preschool-age, parents

Emotions have a crucial role for the mental, physical and social development of the preschool-aged child because they serve as its link to the world of nature and the social world. Through them, the child perceives and gets acquainted with the environment, responds and expresses its attitude to it, enters the world of human relations, learns to communicate with adults and peers, to understand them, to share with them, seeks and expects their support and understanding. Sincerity and spontaneity are a distinctive feature of the little child and it manifests them when communicating with others and when expressing its own feelings. When the adults who take care of the child

manage to build up and maintain a benevolent atmosphere, they surround the child with love, they express their feelings and love for it and keep the 'glass of emotional trust full'. Thus, the child becomes happy and confident, it feels safe and protected, experiences emotional satisfaction and well-being. Emotional well-being contributes to the normal development of the child's personality, forms a positive and benevolent attitude towards peers and adults. Emotional well-being is an important component of mental health because it satisfies the basic age needs – both biological and social (M. I. Lisina, T. A. Repina). It is important to satisfy the social need of the child of preschool age for communication with its parents and relatives, with pedagogues and assistant-educators, to establish friendly relations between children in the group, to create a favorable microclimate. Negative emotional states lower the child's vitality and the capacity for work, they also lead to emotional and social isolation and violate interpersonal relationships.

The issue of children's emotional well-being in families and preschool educational institutions is topical because positive emotional state is one of the most important conditions for the complete development of the child's personality.

During the past few decades, scientists have expressed a great interest in emotions and emotional development, a number of studies concerning 'emotional intellect' have emerged, there have been matters related to 'emotional education', the relation between mental health and 'emotional well-being' has been researched.

Why 'emotional well-being' is so important to the child of preschool age?

According to I. M. Slobodzhikov, emotional well-being provides high self-esteem, forms self-control, encourages achieving success in set goals, provides emotional comfort in the family and out of it [3, p. 512]. The author emphasizes the significance of emotional well-being for the self-development, self-improvement and self-evaluation of the individual.

A similar sense is also invested by I. Yu. Ilyina, A. D. Kosheleva, E. P. Arnautova [2, 125-126], all of whom define emotional well-being as the positive emotional self-evaluation of human which lays in the foundations for his or her relationship with the environment. It is a specific internal experience of the individual relating to his/hers emotional-volitional and cognitive sphere, of the ability to experience stressful situations and opportunities for interacting with others.

Emotional well-being is viewed as a base condition which determines the positive attitude of the child to the world and to itself. It has a positive impact on the emotional-volitional and cognitive sphere, it forms an orientation for success and achieving set goals. Consequently, emotional ill success is a violation of the child's positive relationship with the outside world which can result in the development of undesirable traits: aggression, nonchalance and also to psychosomatic disorders [1].

It is also defined as a feeling of security and safety which ensures harmonious development of the individual and forms a positive attitude towards the surrounding reality [4, p.11].

Emotional well-being has specific manifestations in children of preschool age. In 3-5-year-old children, it is viewed as a positive emotional state characterized by a sense of comfort, feeling of being protected, success, all of which arise based on satisfying children's fundamental needs for safety, love and belonging, self-expression and communication [5].

Emotional well-being is an essential integral feature in the structure of the individual. It has the greatest influence over the success of the individual as well as over the activities which he or she performs and over the communication with others. Communication is useful and satisfying if participants are able to understand the emotional state of their interlocutor and are able to control their own emotional state.

For the child of preschool age, emotional well-being is important because:

- feelings define the mental-physical, social, cognitive and creative development of the child's personality;
- emotional comfort encourages the development of the child's personality and helps for the complete unfolding of the personal potential;
- positive relationships with others - adults and peers - are an important source of children's experiences;
- communication is beneficial when it is based on positive emotions, understanding, respect and mutual trust;
- it creates a favorable environment for expression of the child's personality by encouraging activity, individual work and efficiency.

Modern children spend most of the day in kindergartens with teachers and peers. For parents it is important to know how the child's life is going, how does the child feel in the kindergarten, does it manage to meet requirements? The questions which parents ask themselves and to which they seek answers are related to the atmospheric and psychological climate in the children's group, they relate to the mental and emotional well-being of the child.

A survey with parents whose children visit a preparatory group in kindergartens was made by considering the importance of emotional well-being for the development and the formation of the preschool-aged child.

The purpose of the survey was to study the opinion of parents about children's emotional well-being in the kindergarten group and their attitude towards the emotional atmosphere between children and the pedagogical staff.

The views of parents about the emotional well-being of children in the kindergarten group is studied by a survey.

The survey was conducted in October 2018 with the participation of 25 parents of 6-7-year-old children who attend 'Rayna Knyaginya' Kindergarten in the town of Veliko Tarnovo. All surveys were completed by the children's mothers. The age range of the respondents is the following: the largest number is those of mothers on the age of 30-40 (11 of them are aged 30-35, 10 of them - aged 36-40), 2 are aged 20-25 and 2 are aged 40-45. The survey group was dominated by families with two children - 16 families, 7 of which are with 1 child and 2 - with three children.

The questions in the survey are structured in order to provide an opportunity:

- to establish the attitudes and feelings experienced by the child attending a kindergarten;
- to specify the relationships of the child with the pedagogical staff and the children in the group;
- to find out if there is mutual trust and sharing between children and parents;
- to examine the personal attitudes of parents towards children's emotionality;
- to determine parents' competence concerning the personal development of children.

The analysis of parents' answers provides an opportunity to determine the emotional sensitivity of children and the relation between subjects of the educational process, to reveal the nature of the child - parent, child - educator, child - child relationship, which will help to illustrate the situation of the emotional microclimate in the researched group and to recognize the indicators of the child's emotional well-being.

The first two questions explain daily attitudes of the child to the kindergarten and the reasons that have a negative influence over the child's desire to visit the children's group. The answers to the question about the mood with which the child arrives at the kindergarten show a positive attitude of children to the preschool educational institution. 72% of mothers respond that their children go to kindergarten 'with passion and joy', as 12% of them say that their children 'sometimes do not want to go there' which can be explained by the current state of the child. 20% of the respondents answer that their children 'sometimes do not want to go there' and 4% say their children 'often refuse to go' and 4% - that their children 'are being whimsical'.

The determination of the responses of 72% from the respondents concerning the desire of their children to visit a kindergarten is confirmed also by 44% of mothers who do not mention 'reasons why their children do not want to visit a kindergarten'. According to 32% of the participants in the survey, the lack of desire is explained by the 'conflicts with certain children from the group', while 24% mention other reasons such as 'the large number of children in the group having 1 teacher', 'the child wants to stay at home with mom', 'sometimes the child feels sleepy', etc.

The answers to both questions establish that the majority of children have a positive attitude and attend kindergarten with will. They feel comfortable in the social environment of the group. Sometimes, some of the children express unwillingness to go but it is not caused by the negative feelings towards the living conditions and microclimate within the group, they are rather caused by random circumstances which cannot be considered as grounds to think that there is a sustainable tendency for a negative attitude towards kindergartens.

The questions about the relationship of children with pedagogical staff and peers are of prime importance because the most important condition for emotional well-being is the atmosphere of friendly and tolerant communication based on mutual trust.

All respondents define the relationship of the pedagogical staff with their children as 'favourable' which gives reason to define that the pedagogical staff provides emotional well-being for the children in the group.

The question 'How does your child interact with other children' provides the following answers:

- a) calmly
- b) patiently
- c) pliantly
- d) tolerantly
- e) shows short temper
- f) is willing to command
- g) is willing to obey
- h) others

The answers to this question confirm our findings about the emotional well-being which children from the examined preparatory group experience. 68% of respondents report that their child communicates 'calmly' with other children, 32% of them only mention the calm attitude towards other children, while 20 %report a combination of these two qualities 'calm and tolerant'and 16% - 'calm and pliable', to 16% of the surveyed, their children are 'easy-going' as much as being 'pliable', 16% are 'willing to command', 12% are 'willing to obey', 4% are 'pliable and willing to obey', and 4% are 'sometimes short-tempered'.

From what parents shared, it is obvious thattheir children are calm, easy-going and conciliatory which shows that they play, learn and create in an emotionally balanced educational environment and experience emotional satisfaction from communicating with their peers.

It is very important for the emotional well-being of children of preschool age to share with their parents what are their relationships with other children in the group. 52% of parents explicitly claim that their children share with them about their relationships with other children and the remaining 48% claim that this happens 'sometimes'. The responses of parents are indicative of the reciprocity in sharing and the support that children get from them. Therefore, an emotional relationship is built between parents and children which maintains mutuality and guarantees security for the child and calmness for parents.

It is of utmost importance for the emotional well-being of the child to explain what are the most common reasons that cause negative feelings in communication between children. Parents' answers establish that among children in the group there are very good relations and there is an atmosphere of understanding. 72% of parents respond that their children 'sometimes complain from their peers', 20% claim that their children do not complain and only 8% stated that their children complain. 40% of parents do not mention reasons for discomfort in children, in most cases conflicts between them are because of toys – 24% claim this, 16% claim that complaints are due to offences, 12% claim that their children are not accepted in games and 8% claim that others do not want to be friends with their children.

It is important for parents to comprehend the emotional state of their children, to be able to define its reactions and to understand children's attitude towards others. This is why we asked respondents: 'How does your child show/ express its sense of dignity?'. The answer of this question is open because every child expresses its emotions and defends its dignity in different ways. The fact that 20% of mothers did not respond to this question is disturbing which means it is difficult for them to determine the emotional state of their children and define the ways in which their children defend their opinion, so we can consider that they cannot respond adequately to children's behaviours. The answers of other participants in the survey are diverse which is normal because the individuality of the child is manifested in its peculiar emotional behaviour. The following results were received upon summarizing parents' views:

- a) 64% have a positive attitude which is expressed in the following:
 - the child is able to express its opinion freely - 16%
 - the child defends its role in games - 8%
 - the child expresses its own opinion, 'I am old enough, I can, I want to' -8%
 - the child does not want to be offended - 8%
 - with a drawing, a hug, a kiss - 12%
 - the child helps, takes care of and talks to everyone who needs this, the child does this with the confidence of being a good person – 12%
- b) 36% have a negative attitude expressed by:
 - turbulent emotions - 16%
 - depending on the situation - anger, tears, the child screams and offends others –the child is angry or cries - 8%
 - the child defends its opinion even by crying a lot – 12%

These answers allow us to establish that positive emotions and positive attitudes related to defending own dignity are due to the created emotional climate in which children live, grow and are educated both at home and in kindergartens. On the other hand, the benevolence of the majority of children in the preparatory group helps to maintain emotional well-being in communication within the group. The number of children who still can not control their emotions is not so small and when they have to defend themselves, they do it violently by screaming and crying.

What are children's reactions if someone shows aggressive behaviour towards them? The answer of this question is open too because each child reacts differently depending on their sensibility. Some children respond to aggression caused by a peer with aggression as well or as mothers say, 'in the same way', and when this aggression

is manifested by an adult, they can not explain why adults raise their voice instead of speaking calmly. Some children react by crying while others seek the help of adults:

- the child gets angry, puckers its brows and it sometimes reacts calmly by waving its hand;
- the child reports to the teacher about what happened;
- the child cries;
- the child is sometimes upset and sometimes it strikes back in the same way;
- the child is filled with indignation;
- the child does not react with aggression, it seeks the help of an adult;
- the child is sad, it tries to control its emotions and asks why other children and adults raise their voice

instead of speaking calmly;

- sometimes the child behaves aggressively as well.

The emotional well-being of the child is influenced on one hand by the attitude of the parents towards it, and on the other hand - the relationships with other children in the group. When being asked the question: *'What would you like to change about the relationship of your daughter (son) with other children in the group?'*, parents answered as follows: 16% - do not want to change their child and are proud of it;

- 12% - do not want children to offend each other;
- 12% - want children to be more united;
- 12% - want children to be more patient and to defend their opinion in a reserved manner;
- 12% - want their children to be calmer, more confident and to have greater self-esteem;
- 8% - want their children to be more tolerant;
- 8% - want their children to be more respectful;
- 8% - want their children to be more sociable, more individual;
- 12% - did not answer the question.

Therefore, parents accept children with their personal characteristics and desire improvement of social skills, tolerance and mutual respect of personal qualities such as independence and confidence which would improve the emotional well-being of children.

The following conclusions can be drawn up from the conducted survey:

1. The analysis of the responses by parents who participated in the survey shows that an emotional positive atmosphere is created and maintained in the preparatory group which provides the emotional well-being of children.
2. An emotional connection is built between parents and children, there is mutual trust which is obvious by the fact that many children share with their parents how did their day in the kindergarten go.
3. Parents are informed and possess competencies for the personal development of their children.

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