

The Importance of Floor Based Play on Child Development

Kim Martinczak

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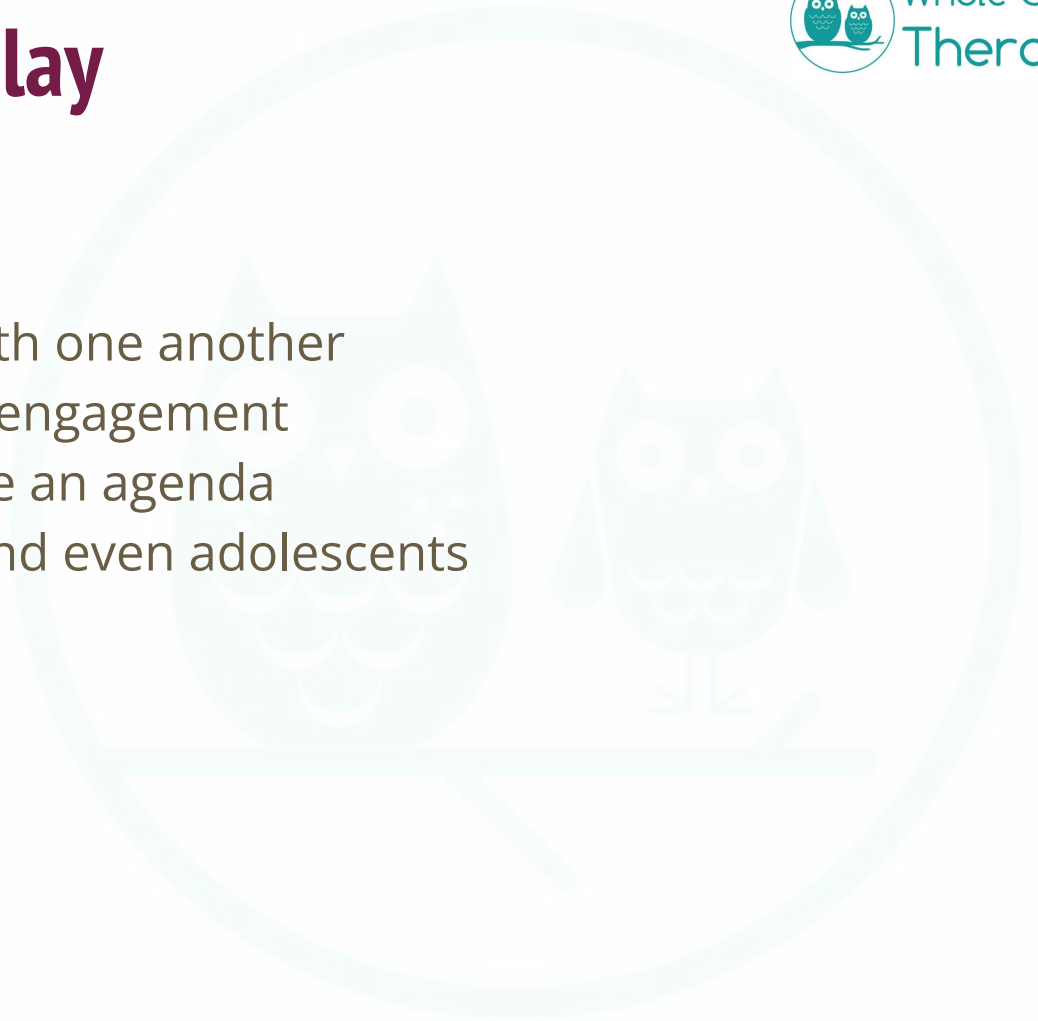
- Children's Occupational Therapist
- Clinic manager at Whole Child Therapy
- Social enterprise
- Interdisciplinary therapy centre

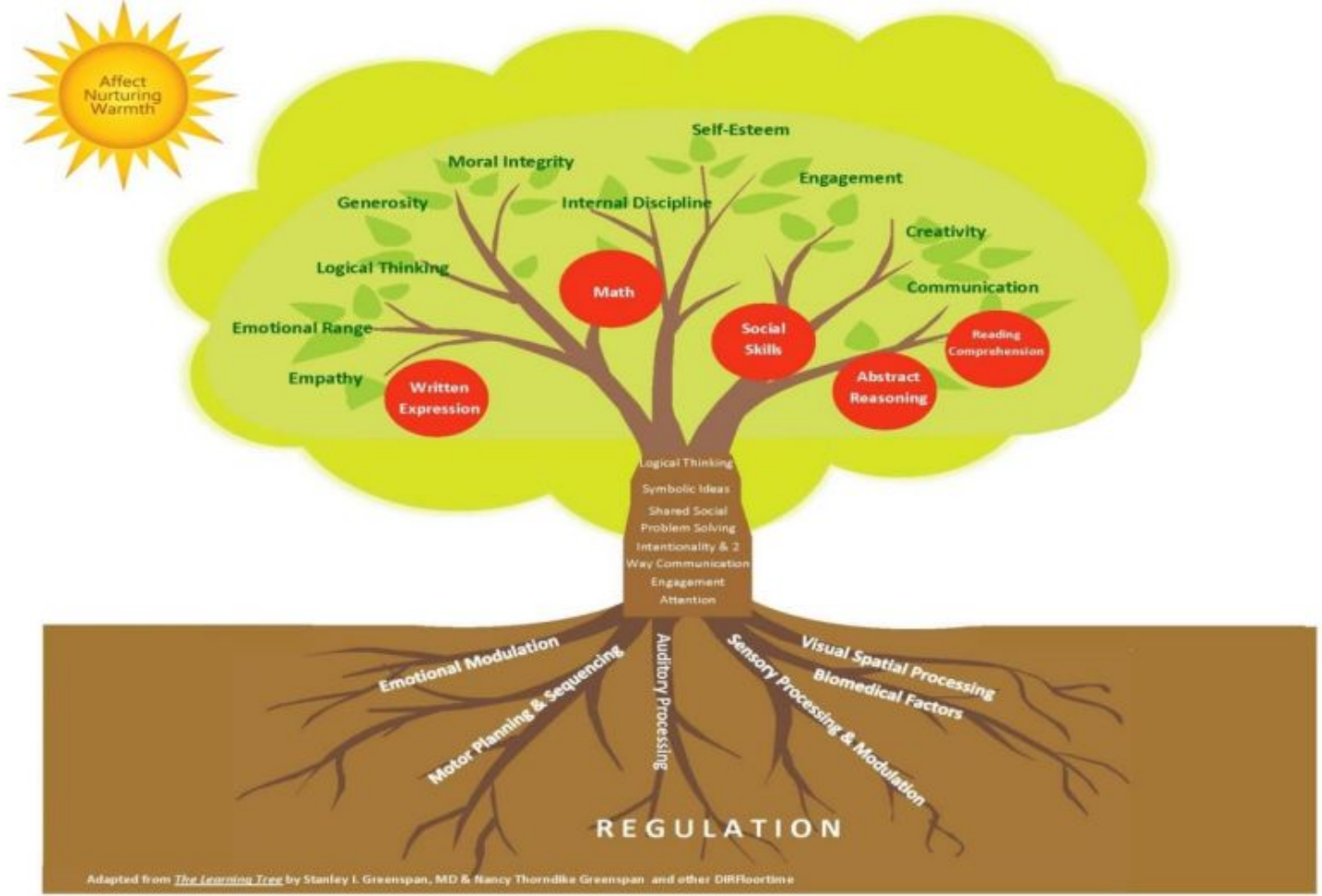
Learning aims

- To understand the benefits of floor based play on a child's development and the concerns that may arise if this stage is missed.
- To demonstrate understanding of the social, emotional and physical benefits of floor based play throughout childhood.
- Learn how to follow the child's lead to engage in floor based play.

What is Floor based play

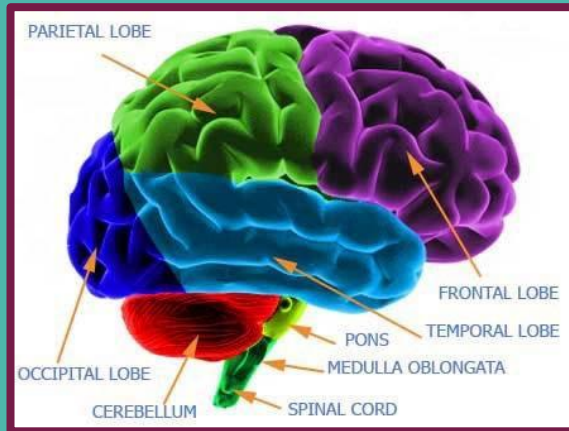
- Child directed
- Away from the table
- Entering a shared world with one another
- Promotes exploration and engagement
- Open ended, does not have an agenda
- Beneficial for all children and even adolescents
- Based off the principles of:
 - DIR Floortime
 - Intensive Interaction





From: The Learning Tree, Dr Stanley Greenspan

The Developing Brain



- The brain of a newborn is about one third of the size of the adult, but contains nearly all the brain cells it needs throughout life. Yet only a fraction of these will be used.
- Main period of brain growth <1 year.
- Between 15-months and 6-years of age the cerebral cortex appears to double in size with 700 new synapses every second.
- Synaptic density reaches its peak at 3-3½years.

Greatest window for development

- Neurons start unspecialised, allowing flexibility of function.
- Those in constant use will strengthen to form motorways of the mind, the weaker ones are replaced or eventually disappear.
- Frequently stimulated neurons will relay information faster and more efficiently.
- Stimulation helps to engage children mentally and develop their senses.
- Neglect has a negative impact on child development due to lack of stimulation to the brain.



What leads to synapses firing?

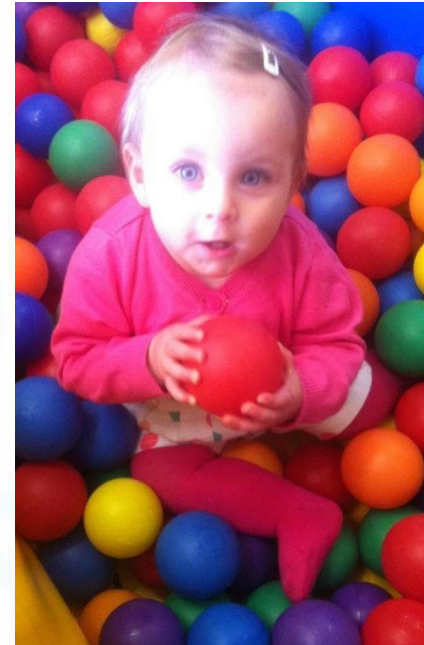
- Interaction with the environment and experience stimulates structuring and organising formal connections within the brain.
- Differing life experiences influence how certain areas of the brain develop and continue to grow.
- More meaningful experiences and interactions = more synaptic firing.
- Plasticity is ongoing throughout the lifespan!

Mirror Neurons

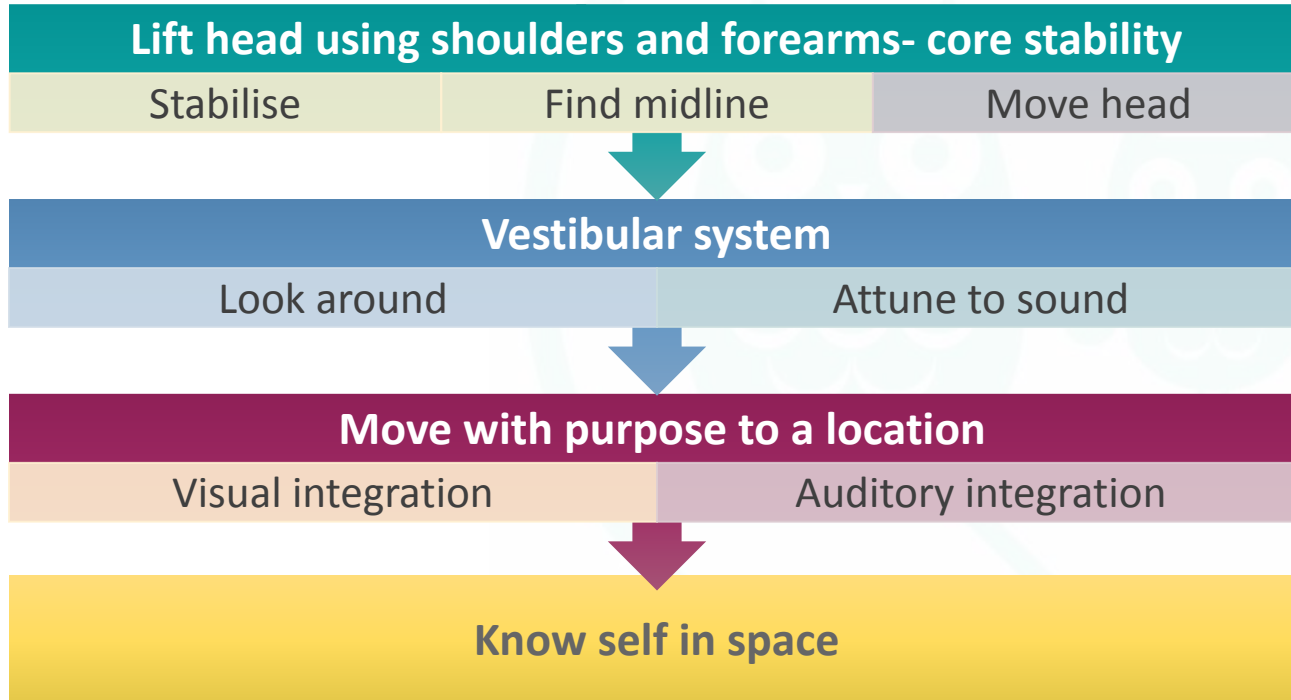
- Mirror neurons fire when people engage in an action and when they observe the same action completed by another person.
- Mirror neurons enable empathy and skill building through observation.



EXPLORATION AND ENGAGEMENT IS KEY



DEVELOPMENTAL MOVEMENT



EXAMPLE OF TUMMY-TIME (3-4 MONTHS)



Other developmental benefits of floor based play

- Language, cognition, emotional, and social skills are learned through emotionally meaningful relationships.
- Connection with one another is key!
- Not just for babies but children benefit from floor based play throughout childhood.
- Once the roots are strengthened, the trunk of the tree begins to grow. This includes communication, engagement, and attention.

HOW TO ENGAGE IN FLOOR BASED PLAY

- Follow the child's lead
- Interact don't instruct
- Tune into individual preferences of children
- Reduce words
- Breathe
- Relax your muscle tone
- Reduce challenge(s)- leave an open door
- Reframe what behaviors such as fidgetiness mean to adjusting the nervous system

DON'T KNOW WHERE TO START?

- “Watch, wait, and wonder”
- Allow children to have processing time, you don’t have to fill in pauses with words.
- Imitate the child and what they are doing.
- All behaviours have a purpose—what is the child trying to tell you?
- Look for shared attention-is the child with you in the moment?
 - Involves having two (or more) people attending to same object and exchanging information about it
 - Simple shared attention activities
 - Blowing up a balloon
 - Bubbles
 - Paper airplanes
 - Pop tubes

BE PRESENT, SHOW YOURSELF, ENJOY



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UvIEwUbzF4c&t=1s>

Remember the 7 drops

- Drop your voice
- Drop your body - go to the child's level
- Drop what you are doing - take time
- Drop your guard - don't over protect
- Drop your defenses - it's not about you
- Drop your batteries - no electronic devices
- Drop your misconceptions that fun is frivolous. Sensory experiences are a necessity.

Carol Kranowitz, *The Out of Sync Child Has Fun*, 2003

A recap of what we've covered

- **Floor based play helps to strengthen a child foundational skills**
 - Promotes overall strengthening and fine and gross motor development.
 - Essential to a child's emotional, cognitive, and social development as well.
- **Why address foundational skills first?**
 - Interactions and experiences lead to neural firings.
 - Mirror Neurons.
- **Floor based play techniques**
 - Follow the child's lead
 - Remember the 7 drops

Resources

- **DIR Floortime**
 - ICDL.com
 - DIR 101 course available
- **Books by Stanley Greenspan**
 - Engaging Autism
 - The Learning Tree
 - The Challenging Child
- **Intensive interaction**
 - intensiveinteraction.org

