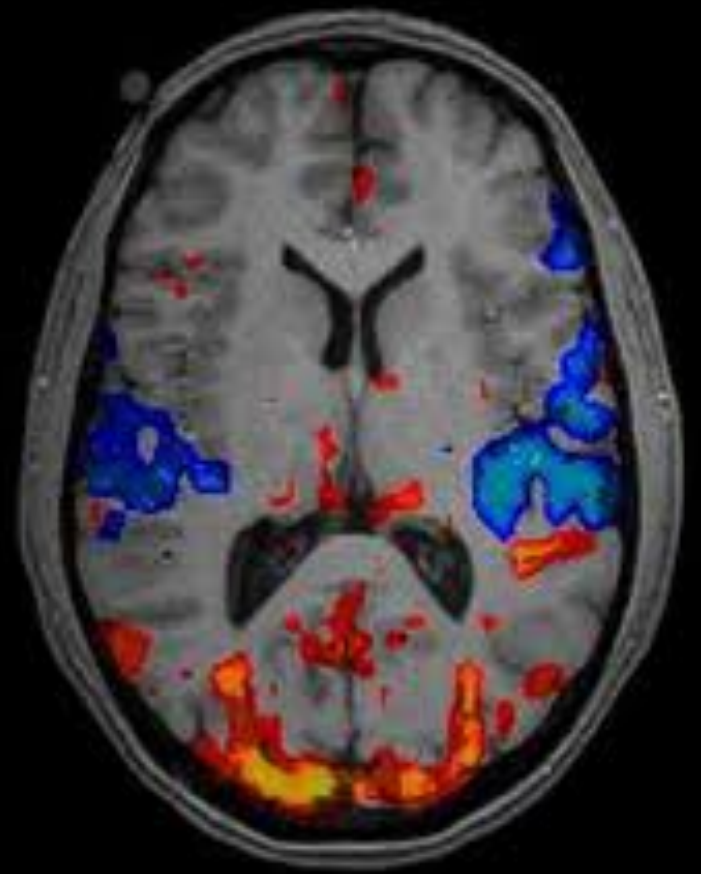
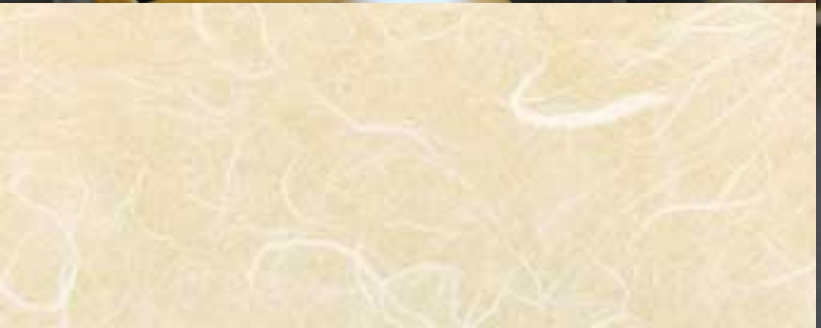


The Emotionate Child

Building Emotional Health and Compassionate Connections

Ross A. Thompson
University of California, Davis





*"The authors' descriptions of flirtatious, learning babies will make you laugh, but the seriousness of their project, and its implications, are breathtaking." *Seattle Times**

THE SCIENTIST IN THE CRIB

WHAT EARLY LEARNING
TELLS US ABOUT
THE MIND



Alison Gopnik, Ph.D.
Andrew N. Meltzoff, Ph.D.
Patricia K. Kuhl, Ph.D.

The Philosophical Baby

*What Children's Minds Tell Us About
Truth, Love, and the Meaning of Life*



Alison Gopnik



A new understanding of early childhood . . .

- the **emotional** child: the vulnerability of young children's emotional lives
- the **emotionate** child: early emotions as a source of social understanding and human connections
- implications for the development of self, morality, and social and emotional understanding

The emotional child



Early emotional problems can be serious, especially for children under stress

- Roughly 10% of children in kindergarten show disruptive emotional or behavioral problems. For low-income children, the prevalence is double or triple this estimate.
- Head Start teachers report that their children exhibit signs of serious emotional distress, including depression, withdrawal, and problems with aggression and antisocial behavior.
- Chronic, uncontrollable stress (“toxic stress”) in early childhood can alter brain-based stress management systems, contribute to emotional dysregulation, and may impair long-term learning and health.

**The emotional lives of young children
are deep, rich – and vulnerable**

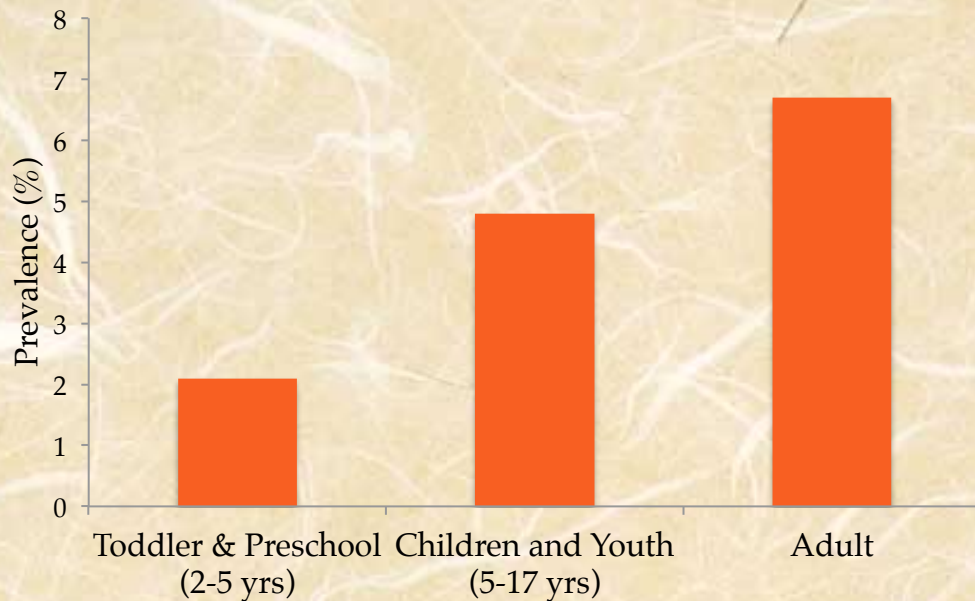
The New York Times

August 25, 2010

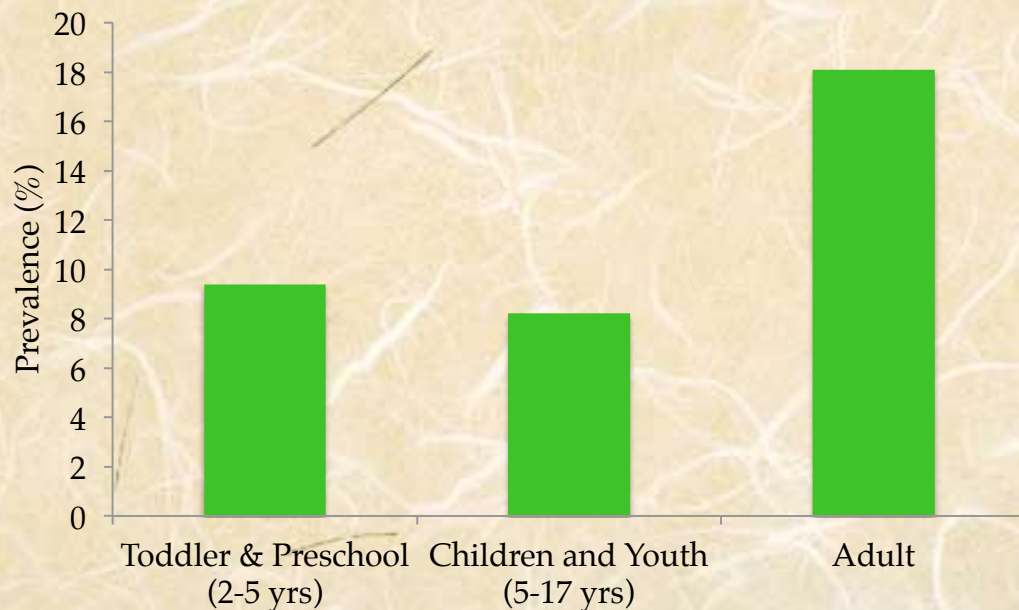
Can Preschoolers Be Depressed?



Depression

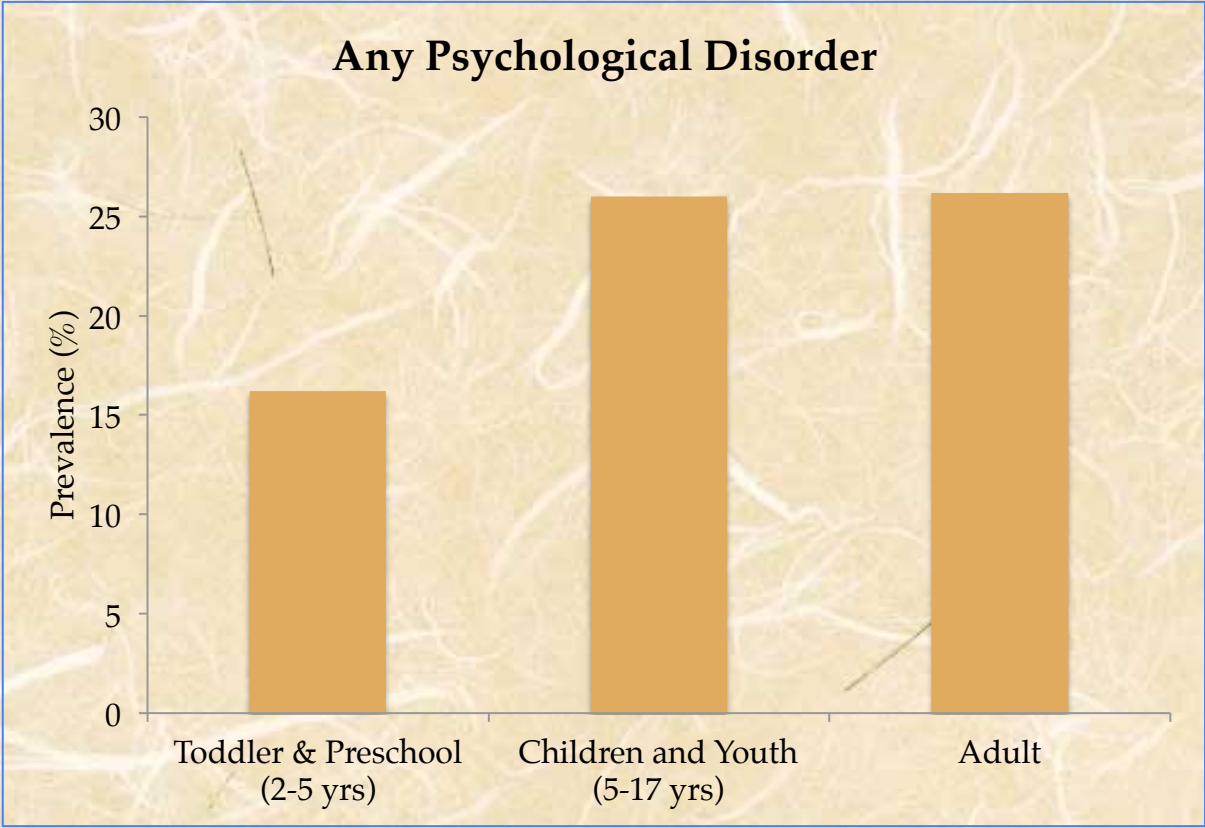


Anxiety Disorders



Sources: Costello, Egger, & Angold, 2005; Kessler, Chin, Demler, & Walters, 2005; Egger & Angold, 2006; and data from the Duke Early Childhood Study, courtesy Dr. Helen Egger, Duke Univ. Medical Center

Any Psychological Disorder



The emotionate child

Emotionate (i-'mō-sh(ə-)nət):

1. characterized by emotional apperception, sensitivity, and/or insight (*her sympathetic response showed that she was an emotionate child*)
2. marked by special bearing upon, reference to, or involvement with emotional understanding (*an emotionate side to his nature*)

Emotion is a child's first entrée into another person's internal experience

- by 6 months, infants respond resonantly to facial and vocal expressions of positive and negative emotion in another
- by 1 year, they know that another's emotions are “about” something: a person, an object, an event the person is looking at while they are responding emotionally
- throughout, emotions are foundational to social communication and developing relationships
- in early social interactions, *intersubjective* experiences create a connection between the internal worlds of another person and the child



00:00:30 -00:01:18

A video player control bar with a progress bar, volume icon, and play/pause buttons. The progress bar shows the video is at 00:00:30 out of 00:01:18.

Emotion is a child's first entrée into another person's internal experience . . .

- by 18 months, toddlers use another's emotions to learn about that person's desires and goals



Helping by 18-month-olds . . .



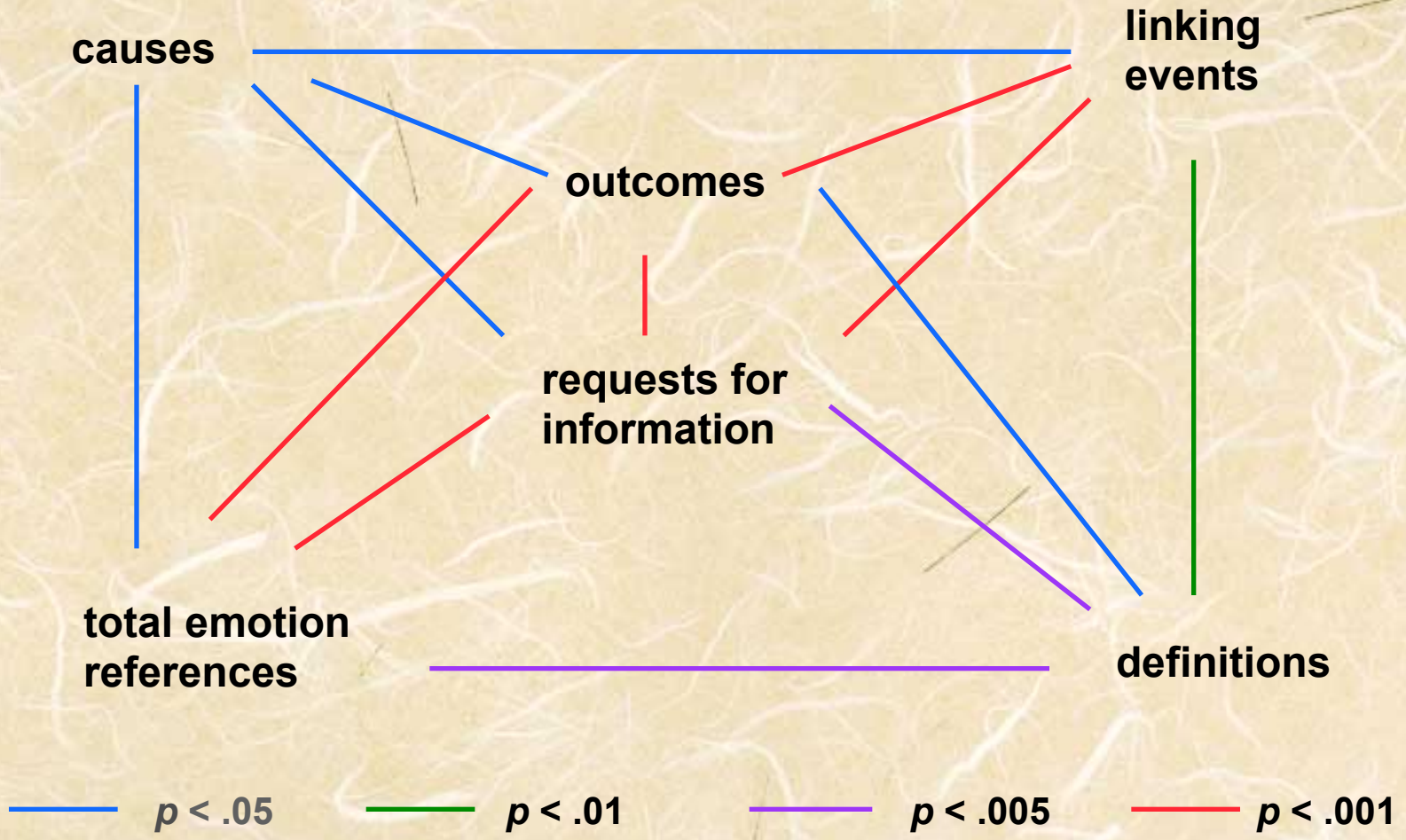
- toddlers provided assistance much more often when the adult showed clear cues of needing assistance (such as reaching for the dropped marker or basket).
- when the adult also looked sad, the toddlers who helped the most were those with the greatest number of emotion words in their vocabularies (a proxy for early emotional understanding)

Child: Eat my Weetabix. Eat my Weetabix.
Crying.

Mother: Crying, weren't you? We had quite a battle. "One more mouthful, Michael." And what did you do? You spat it out!

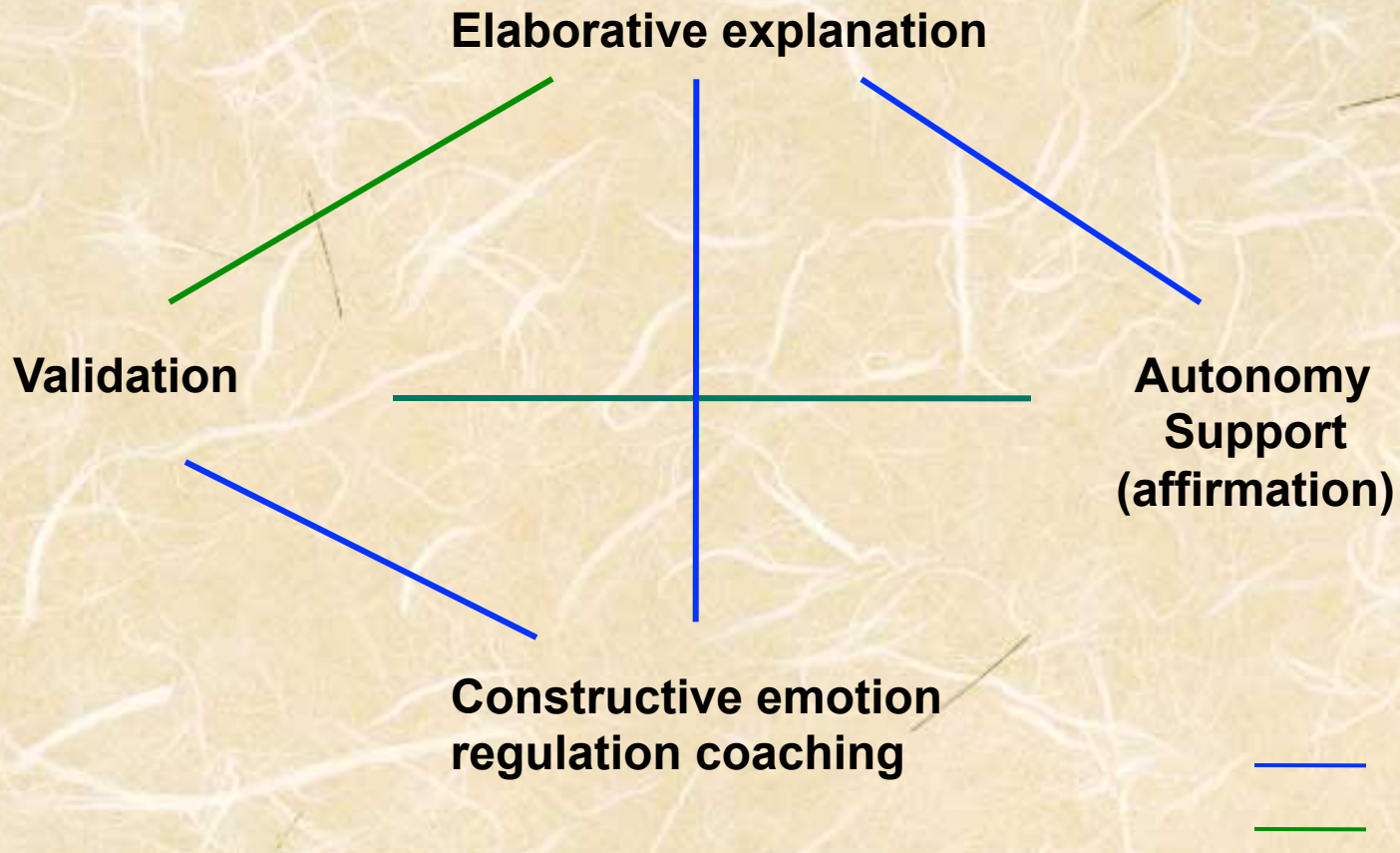
Child: (*pretends to cry*)

Elements of mother-child emotion conversations:





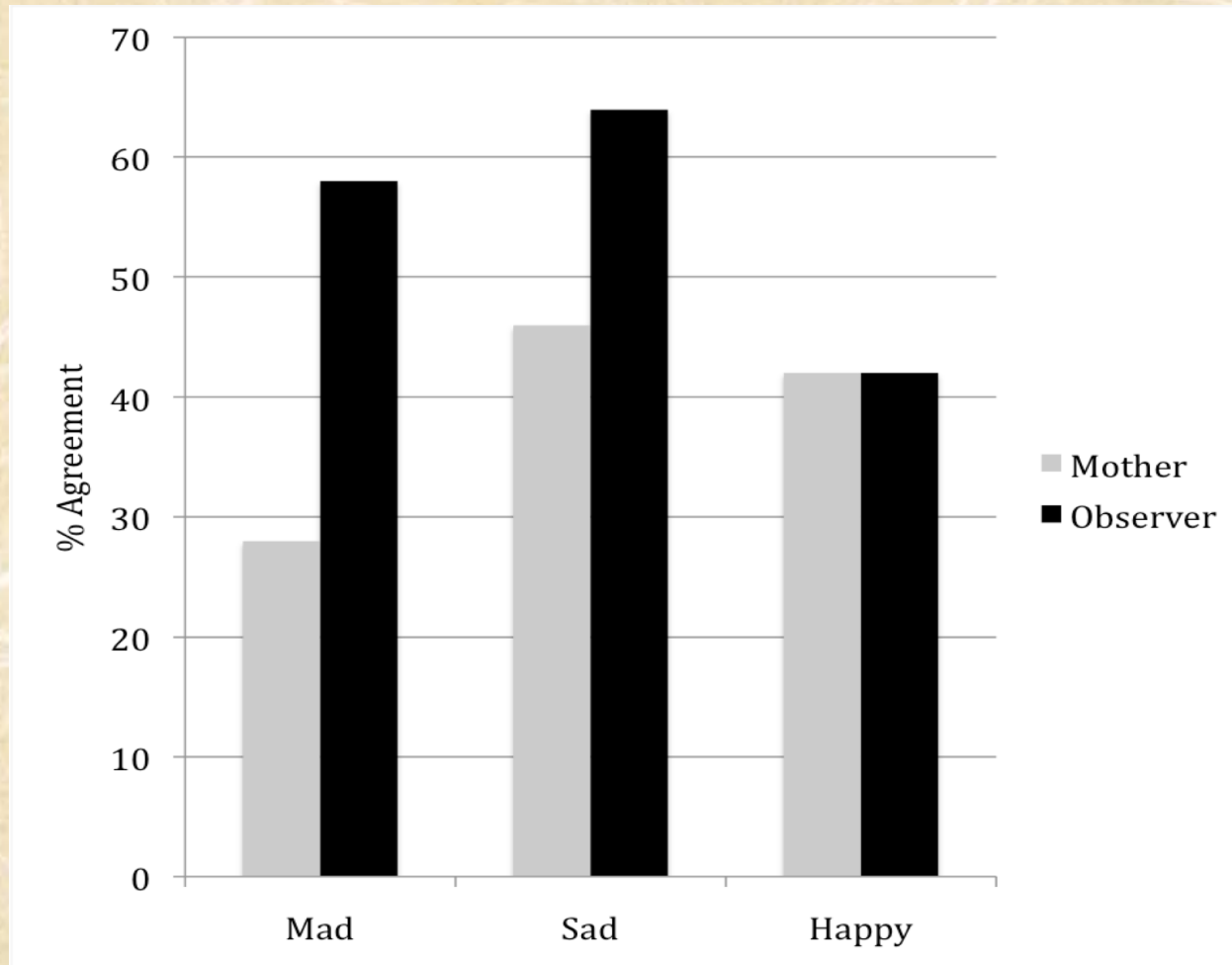
- It's hard when you feel so angry. You're going "AAAH, he's bouncing my guy off there!" Right?
- How did the other kids feel when you shut off the game?
- It makes you sad thinking about it, doesn't it?
- After you stopped the game, the other guys said, "You know, Joey wasn't really doing so bad." You thought you were losing, but you weren't.

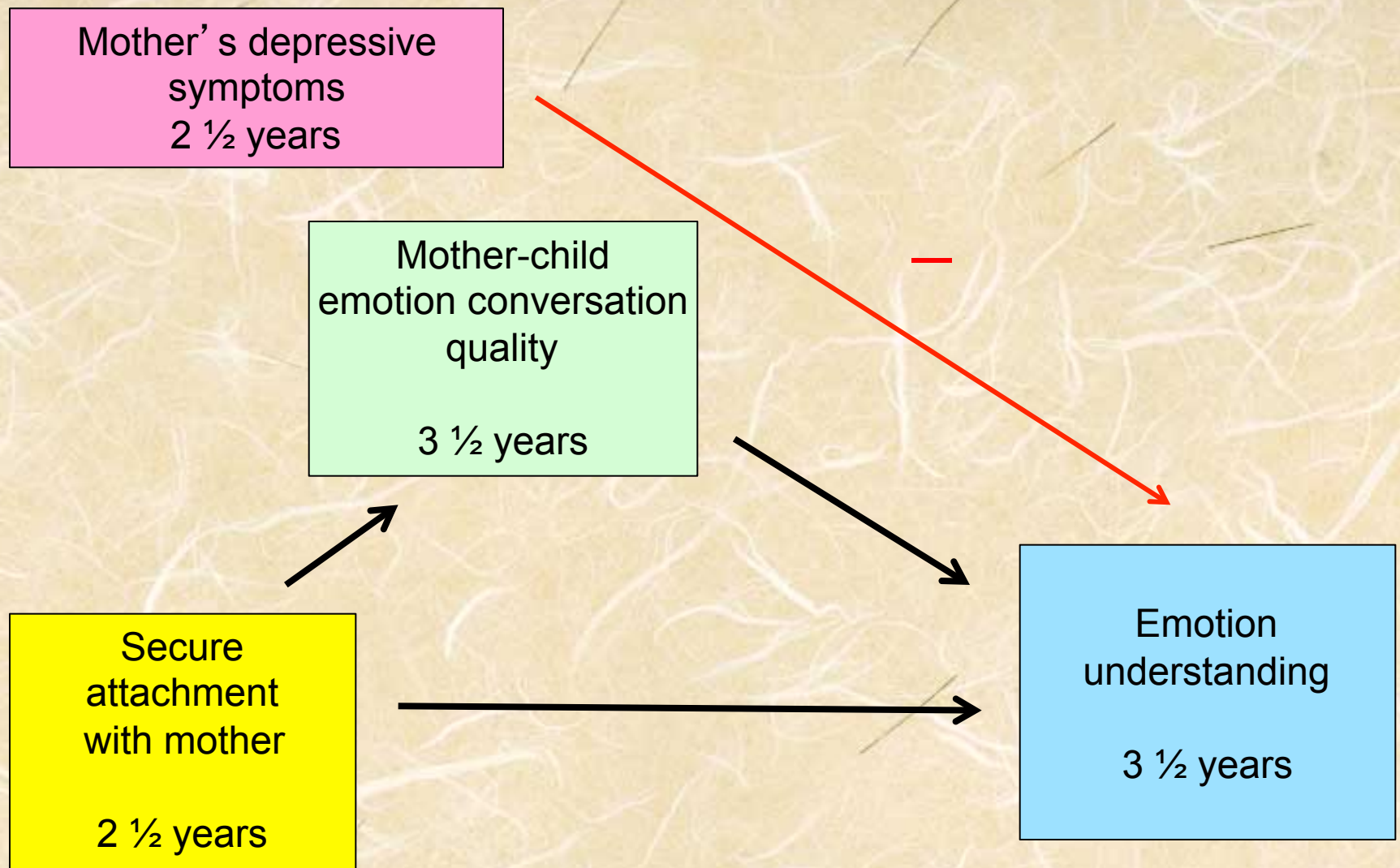


Security of attachment is significantly associated with the combination of these measures of conversation quality

Understanding what children are feeling is important . . .

Consistency of mothers' and observers' reports with children's own descriptions of their feelings





A secure attachment provides young children with a “psychological secure base” for exploring and understanding emotions – especially negative emotions that may be upsetting or threatening

the emotionate child and . . .

- self-understanding
- moral development
- social understanding

Self-Understanding



“These puppets are writing a story about children your age. They will tell you about themselves, and then you can tell them about yourself.”

“I like to play by myself.”

“I like to play with friends.”

“How about you?”

Dimensions of Self-Awareness in Young Children

*4- and 5-year-olds*¹

Timidity
Agreeableness
Negative affect
Positive self-concept

*4 ½- to 7 ½-year-olds*²

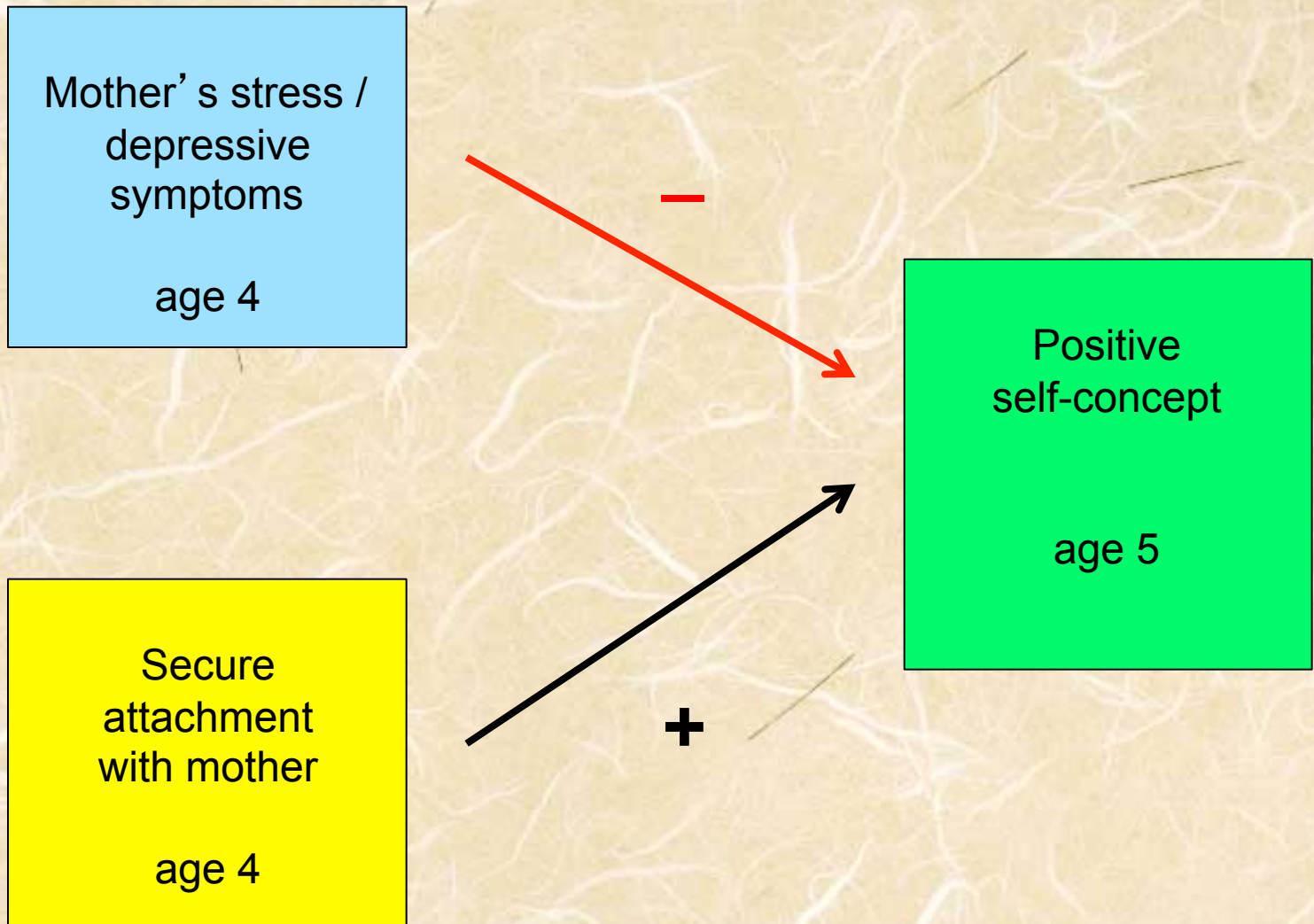
Depression – anxiety
Aggression – hostility
Social competence
Peer acceptance
Academic / Achievement

*5 ½-year-olds*³

Self-control
Self-acceptance via
achievement / affiliation

*4- and 5-year-olds*⁴

Self-concept in specific areas



Moral Development

- “Conscience” development in early childhood, which involves young children’s thinking, feeling, self-regulation, self-understanding (“moral self”) and the influence of close relationships
- Our study examined mother-child conversations during conflict episodes in the lab when children were 2 ½ years old (e.g., forbidden toys; free play & clean-up; difficult puzzle while mothers were distracted)
- At 3 years, we assessed conscience development in a resistance-to-temptation procedure with mothers absent

2 ½ years: Mother-child conversation elements during conflict episodes in the lab

Talking about rules

Talking about the consequences of actions

Talking about people's emotions

Moral evaluative statements ("good girl!")

Compromising or bargaining

Justification and reasoning /
Low use of threats, teasing or insistence

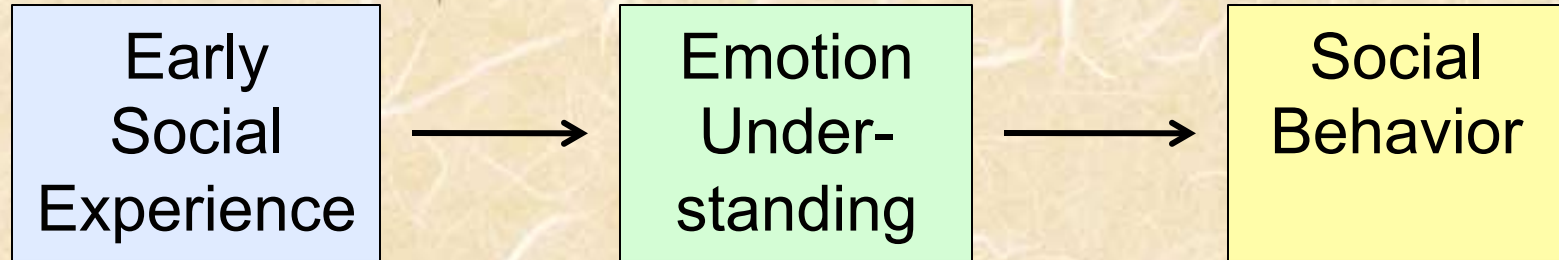


Conscience
Development
age 3

Social Understanding

“ . . . mental representations (are) a bridge between children’ s early experiences and their later (social) expectations and behavior.”

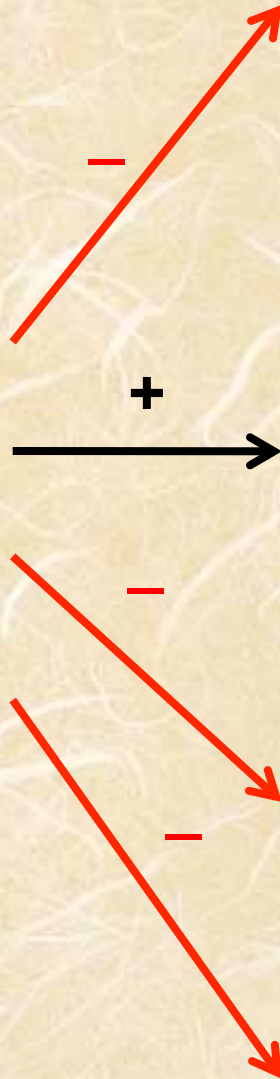
Dweck & London, 2004



Sample drawn from the NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development:

1,016 children and families from 10 sites nationwide, recruited immediately after birth and followed to age 15.

Secure attachment with Mother
age 3



Negative attribution bias
Belief that others have negative Intentions in uncertain situations (e.g., a block tower falls over when another child runs by)

Social problem solving
Number / variety of positive solutions to social problems (e.g., how to make friends with another child)

Loneliness
Children's responses to short interview questions (e.g., "How easy is it for you to make new friends?")

Negative attribution bias

4 ½ yrs

1st grade

What have we learned . . . ?

- Emotions are foundational to early psychological development – this is why they can be sources of vulnerability and resources for social understanding, self awareness, and compassionate connections.
- The emotional and emotionate character of young children depends significantly on stress and support in their environments of care, especially their experience in close relationships.
- Emotions can be confusing, sometimes overwhelming to young children – this is why *what* is said, and *how* it is said, in emotion conversation is important for understanding, managing, and enlisting emotions into psychological competence.
- Development of the emotionate child has broader consequences: as a buffer to emotional vulnerability, support to emotional health, and a contributor to a positive, constructive orientation to others.

Thanks!

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