

Natalie Kirby, PhD - 'Parenting behaviours and supporting early social emotional development'

The ways in which parents interact with and respond to their children have a strong influence on key areas of early development that are crucial for learning. A plethora of theories exist on the role of parent-infant play in promoting early social emotional development. However, causal, empirical evidence on the relationship between the two concepts is limited and inconsistent. Research is needed that breaks down the broad constructs of parenting behaviours and social emotional development, to explore intricate interactions that may exist between them. Such research could positively inform parenting practice and promote development through early childhood intervention programmes.

The proposed study will explore the relationship between specific parent behaviours and early social emotional competencies in depth, aiming to provide some evidence for potential pathways of influence between them. Videos of parents playing with their young children will be coded for parent and child behaviours, and data on infant social emotional ability will be collected via questionnaire. Correlation analyses will provide preliminary evidence exploring potential relationships between these outcomes. These findings will be used to inform a play-based adaptation of an existing, evidence-based intervention consistently found to benefit language and cognitive development, with the aim of extending these benefits to social emotional development. Intervention adaptation will involve focus on supporting parent behaviours empirically linked with early social emotional development. The intervention design will be carefully considered to promote parent engagement and to maximise the likelihood of programme success in improving parent and child outcomes, and in maintaining these potential benefits.