

## Web-Based Radio Show

### DIR®/Floortime™ Basics Part VII


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Good morning and welcome to our Web-based Radio Show. Today is November 7, 2008. As you know, we have been talking about the challenges of Floortime after you follow the child's lead, tune into the child's affect; we challenge the child to higher levels. And now we're up to gray area and comparative thinking which is a relatively high level. And the question is, how do you challenge that? There are a number of key principles to challenge both gray area and comparative thinking which often go together and we touched on them this last time.

The key thing is to 1) Engage the child in long, long conversations as much as possible; some fantasy based in pretend play with characters and action figures or making up stories, or talking about drawings the child does if the child is an artist or becoming an artist; and 2) the other is reality based – talking about friends, school and by this time we want at least half of the discussion as being reality based and we also want the child involved in lots of peer play.

Asking a child in an open and playful way, “Gee how was today at school?” and if the child is kind of reluctant to talk, “Gee any exciting or fun things?” or “Gee any bad or mean things happen?” just to kind of stir the conversation a little bit. If the child is not very verbal, all the more reason to be playful and see what the child is doing and tune into that child. If the child is more interested in a video game or a board game or going to the store to get a favorite treat – talk about that; or if interested in music, talk about that. So follow a child's lead on the subject, but try to then, if let's say the child is interested in having some juice – “Well, which juice should we have today?” “Apple.” “Oh, and not the orange juice or not the cranberry juice?” “No, no, no, apple.” “Well which is better?” “Well, some days one and some days the other but today apple juice is going to be better.” “And why is that?” “Well, because it just tastes better today.” “Oh, that sounds good. I'll start fixing you the apple juice and by the way, how much better would you say if you had to judge with the apple juice beating cranberry juice?” “Oh, lots better, lots better.” And so you're into the comparative thinking and just talking about juice. You might do the same thing in talking about friends. You can do the same




things obviously about academic subjects, like talking about something the child is studying at school like say the child is studying cities – “Well which city do you think is better, Philadelphia or Washington?” “Well I think Philadelphia because that’s where the Liberty Bell is.” “Oh, why does the Liberty Bell make it better than Washington?” “Washington doesn’t have a Liberty Bell and Philadelphia does.” “Well, how much better does that make Philadelphia?” Now, you’re off and running and the child is learning to be a nuance thinker and a multiple thinker rather than just a single dimension thinker.

So we’re talking about comparative and gray area thinking and how to challenge that and the hardest part is when it comes to feelings. But before getting into the feeling part, everyone knows, I think, or if they don’t know, I’d like to highlight how important this is in mathematical reasoning, as well as in reading comprehension. When you are reading a story and the boy is happy about getting a new bicycle or angry at his daddy because daddy is away on a trip or misses his daddy, you get an opportunity for not only feelings but “Well, how much do you think that boy misses his daddy? A little bit, a lot or a whole lot – can you show me with your hands?” And that’s the way to challenge the gray area thinking. “Well, how does that compare to the boy whose mommy was away in the other story? Do you think their feelings were the same or different or what other feelings might they have?”


So you get into the world of feelings while you’re in the world of literature. If you think about it, you can’t understand literature without understanding people, and you can’t understand people without understanding feelings. So reading comprehension is more than how many trees were there in the story or what were the names of the characters or who did what to whom, describing the action. That’s more memory based but understanding is required when you get into motives or why the boy did what he did; why was he not happy with his school; why did he like his school.

But obviously most important or most challenging is when you get into the area of the child’s own feelings. There are two components to this often. When a child is in the midst of let’s say a temper tantrum or a rage, and he’s giving up thinking for acting and is just crying or banging or even doing a little bit of pushing, the main goal is to just calm the child down. If the child crosses the line and hits, you may have to have sanctions in order to reinforce limits – losing a privilege, a time out, having him do extra chores around the house – whatever is consistent with one’s own priorities and cultural background is fine here as long as it doesn’t scare the child; as long as it’s graded in terms of gradations where the limit is fitting the transgression. In other words, the punishment has to fit the crime, so to speak.



But that too teaches gradual or gray area thinking as opposed to all-or-nothing thinking. As you remember we talked about last time polarized thinking where everything is all-or-nothing – “Well, you were bad so therefore for a whole month you’re grounded or no after school activities.” You also want to make sure when you’re setting limits or having sanctions that you don’t do things that take the child from developmentally helpful activities. For example, a child who has just learned to play with peers – keeping a child from playing with his best friend as a sanction may not be helpful because it’s something you want the child to learn. Just like you wouldn’t keep a child from school or doing his math homework when he’s learning math because it would be counter-productive. On the other hand, keeping him from his favorite video game or missing TV is something that wouldn’t help him, and also be experienced as a limit setting device that would help him pay attention to not hitting or not pushing or not crossing the line.

That’s the limit setting side, but more importantly to that first step is calming the child down and determining where limits need to be set. If they need to be set, have them be set at a little later time after the child is already calm, but then revisit the issue ten minutes later or a half hour later, it could even be the next day depending on the mood of the child, and try to discuss how the child was feeling when he pushed his brother and where the child can’t come up with the feeling, you can go through multiple choice – a good one first and a silly one second – “So were you feeling sad or angry or were you feeling like your brother was the best little guy in the whole wide world?” and the child might say, “Well, obviously I wasn’t feeling like he was the best guy in the world. I guess I was more angry than sad.” “Well, how angry were you, sweetheart, this time?” “Well, when he comes into my room and gets into my stuff, I get real angry.” “Well, can you show me from the most to the least” and the child might show you with his hands or on a one to ten scale and tell you it was an eight this time. Then you can talk about how the child is feeling with gradations. “What makes it hard to not then push or hit him? Why does the feeling have to lead to that?” “Well, when I get to be so angry, I lose control mom. I just go into action. I almost can’t help myself.” See, that’s a very helpful discussion. That’s going to lead the child to eventually have better self control through learning to talk about the subtleties of these feelings because then the next thing is – “Well, when you feel that way, what else could you consider doing?” “Well, I could come tell you, but you don’t do anything.” “Well, what would you like me to do?” “Well, he should be punished.” “OK, what sort of punishments?” And you might decide, well you have been giving the little guy, his little brother, too much leeway and you’ve got to teach him to respect so-and-so’s, his big brother’s room and belongings, etc. and so this might not immediately but eventually lead to that.



This is just one example but the idea is long conversations where you go into the feelings and help the child elaborate a little more on their feelings. We have a game called “Thinking About Tomorrow” which I’ll mention in just a second that will also help in this regard.

The “Thinking About Tomorrow Game” is where we help the child anticipate situations that are fun or easy, or will be challenging ahead of time, either later that day or tomorrow and challenge the child to describe the situation – “What do you think is going to happen tomorrow, sweetheart?” “Well, I’ll probably see Johnnie and I’ll ask him to play and have that awful math teacher – oh, I’m not going to like that at all.” “Well, how are you going to feel with Johnnie? How are you going to feel with the math teacher? And what do you like to do with Johnnie when you have those feelings?” “Well, I’ll feel really happy and we’ll probably chase each other around a little bit and play with some of the other kids or we will play a video game together and we’ll have fun.” “Well, how about with this math teacher – how are you going to feel with her?” “I’m going to feel really sad and I’m going to feel a little scared too. She’s kind of scary.” “Oh, in what way is she scary?” “She kind of has this loud voice and I’m always afraid she’s going to call on me.” “Well, what does that feel like?” “I get a scared feeling in my body and it’s just scary, almost like a monster was going to attack me.” “What do you usually do in that situation?” “I usually try to hope she doesn’t call on me and I usually don’t raise my hand or volunteer and I try to look down at the floor, but actually I often don’t even pay attention to what she’s saying.” “Well, what else could you do?” You let the child come up with the possibilities. “I guess I could pay attention. I guess I could raise my hand and volunteer.” “Well, how do you think she’s feeling?” “Well, maybe she would feel that I like her and maybe she would be nicer.” “Well, that’s an interesting thought.” Usually it doesn’t happen that quickly that the child will come up with a good solution, but the idea is to help the child brainstorm and then to consider the different options and different feelings, but more importantly when they come up with a good solution, the child is becoming a poet of his or her feelings and seeing the connection between feelings and behaviors, but doing it ahead of time when they are not under stress. And this is a very good way to foster gray area and comparative thinking. It’s a very, very good challenge.

We’ll talk more about this and reflective thinking next time.