

# Why Emotions are the Foundation of All Learning

*What neuroscience and psychology teach us about affection and development*

por Fernanda Lucio | Pitanga Kids

## The neuroscience that proves what the heart already knew

For decades, education treated learning as a purely cognitive process. Modern neuroscience has overturned this idea. Research shows that the limbic system — the emotional brain — is activated before any learning process. In other words: a child who does not feel safe and loved simply cannot learn as effectively.

Daniel J. Siegel and Tina Bryson, in "The Whole-Brain Child", demonstrate that emotional development and cognitive development are inseparable — trying to work one without the other is like trying to walk on one leg. The integration of emotion and reason is the foundation of a child who thinks, feels and relates in a healthy way.

## Bowlby and attachment: the secure base of everything

John Bowlby, British psychiatrist and creator of Attachment Theory (1969), demonstrated that the quality of the emotional bond between baby and caregiver is fundamental to child development — affecting the individual's ability to form healthy relationships throughout life (Artmed, 2024).

Children with secure attachment — who know, deeply, that someone loves them unconditionally — explore the world with more courage, face challenges with more resilience and recover from frustration more quickly. Every time you comfort your crying child, every "I love you" for no specific reason: you are building the neurological foundation of their learning.

## Goleman and emotional intelligence: the 21st century differentiator

Daniel Goleman, in "Emotional Intelligence" (1995), popularized the idea that IQ is not the only predictor of success in life. The ability to recognize, express and manage emotions — emotional intelligence — is equally or even more important.

The Ayrton Senna Institute (2023) confirms: children who develop socioemotional competencies show better academic performance, healthier relationships and greater wellbeing throughout life. The good news: emotional intelligence is not an innate gift — it is a skill that is learned, practiced and developed, especially in childhood.

## How to cultivate emotional intelligence at home

Naming emotions is the first step. "You are frustrated because you couldn't open the box" instead of "stop crying" — this simple change teaches the child to identify what they feel, the first step toward self-management.

Validate before solving: "I understand you are angry" before "but you can't hit." The child needs to feel understood before being able to self-regulate. Model your own emotions: "Mom is a little sad today, but that's okay — it will pass." By showing that adults also feel, you teach without words that emotions are natural and that there are healthy ways to express them.

## Art as emotional language

A Portuguese study "From emotions to art for child development" — supported by Siegel and Bryson's whole-brain theory and Augusto Cury's multifocal intelligence theory —

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proposes art as a bridge between psychology, neuropsychology and education.

Artistic activities — painting, music, dance, theater — are great facilitators of emotional expression. When the child paints what they feel, they are literally processing emotions through a language that precedes words. The Pitanga Kids App incorporates this vision: Art with Emotions activities help children name, express and understand their feelings in a playful and safe way.

### The most important message of all

Siegel and Bryson summarize it this way: "Connect, then redirect." Before correcting, teaching, explaining — connect emotionally with the child. They will only hear what you have to say after feeling heard.

You don't need to be a perfect parent. You need to be a present parent. A child who feels loved learns with their heart. And a child who learns with their heart carries that learning forever. This is the most important truth that neuroscience, psychology and — above all — love teach us.

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