The first reviewed book focuses on promoting children’s emotional health and wellbeing. It addresses vital themes such as children’s need for play, free time and open spaces, as well as to be heard and valued. This offers, at least implicitly, a concretisation of key articles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, such as Art. 31 and Art 12. Article 31 (1) affirms that ‘States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts’. Article 12 (1) declares: ‘States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child’.

The rights to play and to have voices heard need to be much more fully acknowledged across education systems internationally. This must go beyond conceptions of children’s voices in unitary terms as ‘children’s voice’, an approach that dismantles the vitality of diversity. It cannot be assumed that these issues are fully integrated even into research agendas internationally, especially given that in a US context, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is not yet ratified – a quite shocking situation that must be an embarrassment to the US in international terms.

The other two reviewed books are aimed directly at children at primary school level. One is to explore examples of family diversity, the other to interrogate conflicting emotions through narratives so that children can develop strategies to help understand different feelings and how to be better able to cope with them.

Paul Downes
Reviews Editor
1. **Promoting Young Children’s Emotional Health and Wellbeing. A Practical Guide for Professionals and Parents**

**Author:** Sonia Mainstone-Cotton  
**Publisher:** Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London & Philadelphia  
**Year of Publication:** 2017  
**ISBN:** 978-178592-054-7

One of the underlying problems in contemporary society is the accelerated pace of life, often marked by labor responsibility, excess routines and the little space reserved for leisure and free time. This book stems from the need for society to provide good emotional development and well-being in all people, taking into account the importance of starting in the stages of early education. These problems, result of modern life, lead us to become aware of the great importance of emotional health and the well-being in our lives. Knowing what goes on inside people and why it happens, as well as knowing how to interpret the emotions of our nearest environment, is the great challenge facing modern societies.

The book is divided into seven chapters. Each one is based on diverse investigations where the author makes the reader see the effective part of having optimal emotional health and well-being. Each chapter invites the reader to carry out an in-depth reflection as well as its implementation, if desired, on different issues addressed in the chapter. The book deserves special attention from families with children of school age and, above all, the entire sector across education. The fact that the author has relied on other researchers with high success results, in addition to her personal experience, is undoubtedly an addition to the reading of this book.

The order of the chapters is intended to introduce the reader to key aspects that will be useful for advancing reading. While it is true that they could be read at random, its structure aims to offer a plot line with coherence throughout the development.

Chapter 1 "Playfulness and Outdoor play" and chapter 2 "Un-rushing and Stillness", have a close relationship between them. The first chapter begins by taking a tour of the role of leisure and free time in the child, the right to play, the importance of playing outdoors as well as experiencing everything that nature has within our reach. The second chapter shows the risk of having too many occupations, either by academic activities or by other types of issues. It also alerts how important it is for the child to have time for himself, in order to be able to fully develop his/her creative potential. The author tries to show, on the one hand, the importance of games and the open spaces and, on the other hand, the consequences that can suffer, for children if they are deprived of it.

Chapter 3 "Emotional Vocabulary" invites us to take a stroll through the difficulties that both children and adults have, many times, to express and interpret emotions. It also criticizes the difficulties that educational centers present, in terms of time management, to work on emotional issues. This chapter gives us some movies such as Inside Out or some useful books to understand this complex phenomenon of the emotions.
Chapter 4 "Sensory Play" and chapter 5 "Creativity" have a close relationship between them. The most important theme in both chapters is creativity. While chapter 5 focuses only on the importance of creativity, Chapter 4 tries to show the reader how through various sensory activities the child can enhance his talent and creativity. Authors of important prestige in the world of the investigation like Ken Robinson, an expert on subjects related to the creativity, are cited in this last chapter. As we see, the author has a clear message in each of the book’s chapters: play and free time to maximize the development of skills in young children.

Chapter 6 "Exploring and Co-adventuring together" places special emphasis on the need for educators and parents to listen and be interested in children’s tastes, which is the only way they can enhance their skills through what truly interests them and makes them feel good. In this chapter, the author tries to make the reader see how important it is for the child to feel heard and valued.

Finally, chapter 7 "Adult Wellbeing" is perhaps one of the most important we can find in this book. In this chapter, the author tries to make the reader understand the importance of emotional health and well-being in adults, and emphasizes clearly and emphatically that, if it is lacking, it will not be possible to convey everything learned in the previous chapters to young children.

The book begins with a short introduction explaining to the reader what is meant by well-being and what well-being is. Finally, it concludes with the importance that it has for the adult in permanent contact with children, to have and, to know how to provide, a good emotional health and well-being in them.

As a conclusion to all this is worth mentioning that, the backbone of this book is based on three fundamental aspects: the detailed analysis of the benefits of optimal development in terms of emotional health and well-being; its practical content, based on the experiences lived in different educational contexts; and finally, their solid arguments, supported by highly relevant scientific literature. These three details make this book an internationally recommended reading and, especially, in the fields of educational research and health.

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2. **Ollie and the Magic Workshop**

**Author:** Alison Knowles  
**Publisher:** Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London  
**Year of Publication:** 2017  
**ISBN:** 978-178592-241-1

In an era where children are experiencing a huge range of emotional difficulties, therapist Alison Knowles has developed a new way of helping children to navigate their emotions. *Ollie and the Magic Workshop* is the third book in the Ollie series that takes a fresh look at enabling children to handle complicated emotions such as empathy and resilience. The series was developed in an attempt to engage children and adults in a new language, the language of Ollie.

Meet Ollie: a young boy who, with the help of his old friend Mr Wilcox has learnt that his emotions are in actual fact superpowers, and that he has the ability to control them completely. As he grows up, he has the opportunity to develop new skills in understanding emotions and tries to gain his Captain’s stripes in the process. The formula is simple but effective: in Ollie’s world, emotions have superpowers. They can become bigger or smaller with their Captain’s help. For Knowles, this is a concept that children can easily relate to. According to her, in her dream world there would be no need for therapists. Emotions would be dealt with long before they become a problem. Through the language of Ollie, children will be empowered to steer their way through life’s problems.

In *Ollie and the Magic Workshop*, Ollie meets Mollie, a foster child struggling to manage her way through a myriad of different emotions, as her foster mother is taken ill. She longs for a “forever home” and she is angry that this continues to evade her. Whilst Ollie is not that keen on a girl living in his house, he soon learns to try to empathise with Mollie, having gained his empathy stripes in the previous book. With the help of Mr Wilcox, he tries to help Mollie to overcome her feelings of being grumpy, scared and unloved, as he believes that this will help her in her quest for a “forever home”. Ollie cannot understand why Mollie is grumpy all the time.

There are many poignant moments in this well-written and cleverly crafted book. Ollie learns that Mollie is grumpy, as her superpower grumpy is protecting her. Grumpy is preventing people getting too close to Mollie so that she does not get too attached to them, thereby feeling less hurt when they eventually disappear, as everyone else in her life has done. Through the character of Mollie, the reader is gaining insight into the emotional turmoil of children experiencing attachment difficulties. And yet, this complex issue is presented in such a simple and clear way.

Ollie is trying hard to put himself in Mollie’s shoes. However, when Mollie begins to attract more attention than Ollie, things change and Ollie is left with a growing feeling of being unloved and sad. When it is time for him to earn his next set of stripes, his superpowers of strength, happiness and bravery cannot beat the feeling of being unloved and he fails his test, falling rather horridly into a bath of broccoli soup! As the rest of the book unfolds, Ollie learns that if you believe something, you take it to heart and that feeling gets
bigger and bigger, and eventually takes over. Ollie must learn to be resilient and to throw away negative feelings. In his magic workshop, Ollie finds his resilience armour and he strives in his quest to be enabled to wear it.

There are significant messages and metaphors throughout this tale. Ollie has his own library, which stores everything that he has ever learnt. The librarian working there has stored it into different boxes, according to the different emotions that Ollie experienced when he learnt those things. Ollie must overcome even the negative experiences in order to continue his journey to be a fully fledged Captain of his own emotions.

As adults, we are only too aware that emotions are not always tangible. This series of books presents us with a brilliant example of how children can develop strategies to begin to understand different feelings and to be better able to cope with them. The ability for a child to imagine each emotion as a different superpower is a powerful and comprehensible metaphor for children. In a primary school setting, it can be challenging to find material to help children to understand and to deal with conflicting emotions that can arise. We endeavour to teach empathy skills and emotional resilience to children who cannot really understand what these things are. As soon as I read this, my first Ollie book, I became fascinated by this idea and I am looking forward to reading it with the children in the coming weeks. Likewise, the language of Ollie offers an opportunity to parents to embark on a journey of discovery, helping their children to make sense of their emotional turmoils.

_Eleanor Barwise_
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The traditional concept of family that, over the years, had been internalized as the only model to follow, has evolved while the social and cultural part of our society has done so. The types of families we can find today are heterogeneous and can range from the traditionally known family to single-parent families, homoparental families, adoption, among many others. All this diversity of families can, sometimes, create some curiosity in young children, either because they consider that their family can be different from the rest of their classmates or, also, because they have classmates whose family nucleus is not formed like the of a large majority. Curiosity, both in children and adults, is part of our nature and, therefore, that children raise questions about these issues is part of human reasoning itself.

The difficulty can be found, perhaps, in the diversity of responses that children can find in their reference models. Treat the subject of different types of family in the most natural way possible and, without any negative connotations, is the best way to talk to our children or students. However, the thoughts and feelings of people are not always unanimous and, on occasion, this can generate, in some adults, a certain reluctance to talk about these issues with young children.

All you need is love is a didactic book that tries to explain to a child audience, clearly and simply, the composition of family diversity. This book, designed especially for children between the ages of 3 and 8, covers nine stories of different types of families. All the stories contain a sheet with an illustration of each family and another, where the day to day of each of these families is briefly and concisely explained. The strong point of each story is found in its simplicity, making reading fun for any child.

Each story is independent and the order of its reading can be done randomly. This allows the reader, if that is the intention, to read some stories individually. However, these nine parts are proposed to invite the reader to reflect on different types of families. At the end of the stories, the author gives us a small reflection on the importance of feeling loved by our own family, in all "the colors, shapes, or sizes”.

This book contains a support guide for adults where it offers different ways to take the initiative when talking with young children about family diversity. In the book, you can find very useful strategies that allow us to work both from our homes and in the classroom with our students.

In the educational field, teachers have a powerful resource with this book. Reading it in the classroom, discussing it and encouraging reflection is a good way to work within it. Talking about what students understand by typical families, discussing the different types of families that appear in the book, relying on a single story for a specific case, as well as breaking with the old traditional family topics, are part of the content that offers the guide for supporting adults to work with young children.
The book begins with a table of contents where we can find the order of each of the stories, the practical guide for adults and the acknowledgments. At the end of the book, we find a small description of the author's life, both personally and professionally.

As a conclusion, it is worth mentioning the relevance of this book to work on fundamental aspects such as inclusion and family diversity. Its simple, practical and enjoyable content, as well as its work guide, make this book a recommended reading in the international field and, especially, in the field of education, psychology or families with children of early school age. In addition, this book can be a resource of self-help for the smallest since, the different histories, as a whole, can help him/her to understand better the familiar composition in the modern societies.

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