

Information

Affect Scale (AFS)

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The *Affect Scale (AFS)* is an instrument developed to facilitate and systematize the assessment of an individual's affective functioning. The scale is specially designed for detecting affective disturbances. These are disturbances traditionally viewed as manifesting themselves in the form of depression or mania or both. The scale is also suitable for assessing the affective balance found in psychic disturbances of other types. The scale, which was developed in Sweden and been tried out there has been found to be suitable in a clinical context for diagnosing the following:

- Depression
- Anxiety syndrome
- Personality disturbances
- Neuropsychiatric problems
- Burnout syndrome and chronic stress syndrome

The *Affect Scale* has been developed on the basis of the theories of Silvan S Tomkins (1962, 1963) concerning the nine basic affects which he describes. The scale also provides an assessment of the degree to which the opposite of each basic affect is present. In addition, it allows a general *Affect Factor* to be assessed, indicating where the balance lies between positive and negative affects.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The word *affect* comes from the Latin word *affectus*, which means "mental state" or "mood."

Emotion, a word often used synonymously with "feelings," comes from the Latin word *motere*, meaning "to move."

Our inner world of feelings strongly influences our sense of well-being. Feelings are there and make themselves known, even if we attempt to ignore them. Often, they become particularly strong and difficult to control when we try to hold them back or deny their existence. If we ignore them or endeavour to be indifferent to them, we do this at our own risk.

In the decisions we make and the actions we take, feelings play at least as strong a role as rationality. Throughout our long existence as human beings, feelings have served as useful signposts for what we should do.

In the course of evolution, each type of feeling we have experienced has led to the development of behavioural patterns important to our survival.

Inherent in every feeling is movement of some sort and a readiness to act. Some feelings are universal, whereas others have developed in a manner which has served to create what is unique for each and every one of us. They constitute an important element in the personality each of us has.

Although *feelings* and *rationality* are often regarded as being opposed, they are usually in harmony with each other. When we are overwhelmed by feelings, however, the rationality within us is held back. It becomes difficult to "think clearly." To understand better how feelings can take charge and prevent our being completely rational, we need to look at certain facts and theories of how the human brain has developed in the course of evolution.

EMOTIONS

The centre of feelings in our brain developed in such a way as to encompass the whole upper part of the brain stem. The latter constitutes the original or "primitive" part of the brain. It regulates such basic life functions as breathing and metabolism. It also contributes to the coordination of reflexes and of movements generally.

The centre in which our feelings basically reside developed, in evolutionary terms, from a layer of cells that was formed as a pad or rim around the upper part of the brain stem. It is termed the *limbic system*. The word *limbic* comes from Latin and means *rim*.

It was the *centre for smell* in the brain in which our feelings had their basic origin (Goleman, 1997), a centre once essential for our survival. Food that tasted good and could be eaten produced a sense of well-being, whereas dangerous food produced a sense of nausea or disgust. Today as well, our sense of smell is directly coupled with the sensory organs with which odours are detected, there thus being a direct link between what we experience through our sense of smell and the feelings associated with it. In contrast, what we experience through our senses of sight, hearing and touch reaches us by a more complex route, by way of neural switching and the integration of nerve impulses in the brain before it becomes conscious. Those senses are thus not as rapid or direct as the sense of smell.

Emotions are of different types. Most emotions are delicate and well-balanced in character, being part of what we experience each day. In the course of childhood, the occurrence of emotional outbursts tends to decrease, although during the upper grades in school, bouts of feeling angry tend to increase in length. They also change in character as speech, thinking and behavioural skills develop. This makes it easier to control and conceal our emotions when the need arises.

Feelings can sometimes become too strong. Our ability to feel ashamed often comes to our aid when we have been steered too much by emotions. In a joyous mood, for example, we may talk too loudly in a public library, suddenly become conscious of this, and then quiet down and feel somewhat ashamed. Shame is, in fact, one of our most important affects. It helps us control our emotional intensity and our emotional distance to other persons (Nathanson, 1992).

A sense of *uneasiness* is still another feeling, one closely allied with *anxiety*. It is often a precursor to anxiety and involves an instinctive readiness to behave defensively. If present to only a limited degree, a sense of uneasiness can help us carry out the actions necessary to safeguard our lives and our health. Wearing a helmet while cycling, installing a fire alarm,

and having a timer on a coffee percolator can all be seen as constructive solutions to the problem of risks in everyday life. Feeling uneasy can thus at times be seen as positive if it does not result in a state of anxiety. It tends to make us human and to be concerned about each other in a love relationship, for example. It also strengthens family ties.

When we feel concerned in a constructive way about a near relative who is sick, our uneasiness helps to be sympathetic toward and empathetic with this person. It is only when our uneasiness is no longer anchored in actual dangers, but is based on fantasies created by an oversensitive alarm system, that we have problems, since our bodies have no opportunity to distinguish false alarms of this sort from genuine dangers. If on a flight by passenger plane we become so concerned, after having read of the procedures to follow in case of emergency, that we become filled with fantasies of how the plane may crash and we listen the whole time strange sounds that could signify danger, uneasiness has taken over. The anxiety produced may then become very diffuse in character and be difficult to analyse. One speaks here of "free-floating anxiety", or feelings and anxiety that completely override rational thinking. Rational thinking can then do little to guide us to a more realistic view of things.

Feelings cannot be clearly defined in the way that thoughts can be. Many feelings develop in relations with other persons, when we tell another person about something or listen to what the other person has to say. Such feelings tend to become deepened or modified in continued relations with these or other persons and through the mental associations one forms, which in turn give rise to new feelings.

Feelings tend to sometimes live lives of their own, but they are also coupled to our *drives*, as well as to *cognitive processes*.

From a *cognitive point of view*, we say that the thoughts present in a given situation give rise to feelings, rather than its being the other way around. Nevertheless, it is through being able to express and recognize feelings that our personality can be said to develop, for in this way we communicate to others the sort of persons we are.

Feelings also provide us with a much richer inner life than we would otherwise have, provided anxiety does not take charge. If that did occur, we would be engulfed in our feelings, as indeed some persons are.

Feelings appear not in isolation but in a larger context in which they are influenced by linguistic communications, thinking, perception and motor behaviour, for example (Carlsson, 1987). The development of feelings is closely related to developments in the cognitive area as well as to the spoken language and to thinking.

Feelings are formed by the person's experiences and thoughts. They undergo continual change throughout a person's life and become a part of the *cognitive structures* a person possesses. These are basically conceptions or views regarding events that occur that are stored as *schemata*. When young Carl, for example, who has always had difficulties in school with math, is to have a math exam, this may get both his thoughts and his feelings going. He may feel he has no chance of passing. "Just as it always is," he says to himself, "I'll fail. All the others will make fun of me." Carl's original sense of uneasiness may soon develop into a strong sense of anxiety, so that feelings get the best of him and he is caught up in a feeling of panic. Carl wants to simply run away from things. This experience with panic anxiety it generates may also generalize and appear again in a different situation, for example when Carl

is playing soccer. Although he's good at soccer, he may perfectly well make a few simple mistakes during a match. Suppose that the same day he's to play in a soccer match he's failed his math exam. This may lead to his suddenly feeling the same sort of anxiety on the soccer field that he felt during the exam. He panics on the soccer field and wants to simply get away from it all. He feels himself a failure and says to himself, "I'm not good at anything! I'm bad at math and I'm also bad at soccer. I'm only laughed at!"

In this example, the anxiety Carl is stricken with is linked with a sense of shame. He feels he's a failure and that he'll be ridiculed, and thus feels ashamed. In contrast, in the example of a person afraid to fly, the anxiety that was felt had its origin in *fear*, the person being afraid of a plane crash. From these two examples, one can see that uneasiness and anxiety may have origins of differing types.

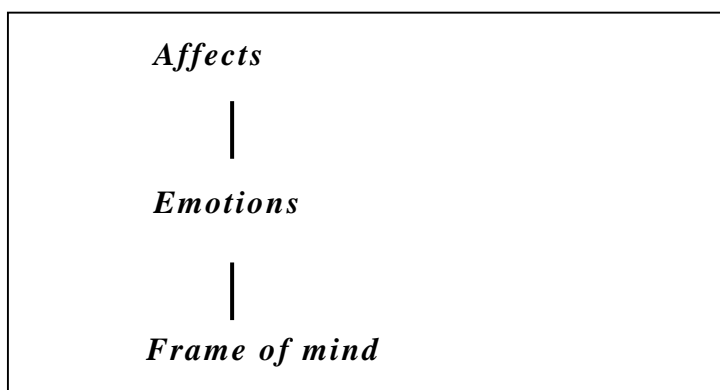


Figure 1. Three levels of feelings

Emotions are preceded by *affects*. The latter involve well-known patterns of biological behaviour. They are often present before we take note of them. They might be said to exist somehow between body and soul. They involve bodily reactions that tend to be extremely contagious. When we laugh and are exuberant, this is often infectious in the sense of affecting others around us.

Feelings that last for extended periods of time tend to be referred to as *frames of mind*. We may feel subdued in our basic mood for a considerable period of time, perhaps for several days, whereas the acute distress that touched this off may have a much shorter duration.

AFFECTS

As just indicated, affects tend to be highly contagious. They also tend to reinforce the stimuli that triggered them off. One can thus say that affects generally make good things better and bad things worse. When we feel *angry*, this may easily become reinforced to the point that we feel *rage*. Feeling *happy* may be reinforced in a similar way. Not only may it be contagious, making other people happy, but we ourselves may be so happy about feeling happy that we feel still happier.

There are various theories of the affects that people have in their repertoire. The theory that is probably the most prominent one is that of Silvan S Tomkins (1962, 1963, 1982), who has described nine basic affects (cf. Nathansson, 1992). *Positive, neutral and negative affects* are involved here.

<i>Positive affects</i>	1. <i>Interest - Excitement</i>
	2. <i>Enjoyment - Joy</i>
<i>Neutral affects</i>	3. <i>Surprise - Startle</i>
<i>Negative affects</i>	4. <i>Anger - Rage</i>
	5. <i>Fear - Terror</i>
	6. <i>Distress - Anguish</i>
	7. <i>Shame</i>
	8. <i>Disgust</i>
	9. <i>Dismell</i>

Figure 2. *The nine basic affects according to Tomkins*

During the earliest years of life, the various affects exist largely in isolation from one another. They gradually develop, however, to become more complex. They finally form patterns of emotional reactions that are unique for each individual, creating the basis for the differences in personality that exist.

Every affect has its own time profile and also has a particular effect on the body as a whole. It has been noted that the affects of *interest*, *anger*, *disgust*, *dismell* and *surprise* can be observed very early in the life of the infant, whereas *shame* does not appear before the end of the first year. The latter affect is connected with the ability to be ashamed, which requires a certain degree of cognitive and emotional development in order to appear.

Of the positive affects, *joy* is particularly easy to identify. We usually display it by smiling. This is something we can just as well do when alone, such as in reacting to something positive said to us in a telephone conversation, or when someone gives us a compliment. Joy is the affect, in fact, that is generally considered to be the easiest of all to recognize, and it is considerably easier to identify than many of the negative affects are.

Interest is the other positive affect. We display it above all by raising our eyebrows. Eye contact as such also tends to arouse interest. *Interest* provides a clear basis for an increase in attention and thus plays an important role in our development.

In the neutral zone, one encounters the affect of *surprise*. This affect is neutral in the sense of being neither positive nor negative generally, although in the specific case it may well be either the one or the other. Anyone who dislikes surprises from the start may have had unpleasant experiences in connection with certain unexpected events earlier. Otherwise,

surprise has the peculiarity of tending to clear the system of all affects found there previously, including the negative ones.

In Tomkins' affect model there are six negative affects. That there are more of these than of the positive affects is believed to be due to our needing them for purposes of survival, as seen from the standpoint of evolution.

Fear and its extreme, *terror*, represent a highly important affect that can easily be combined with the other affects. Fantasies are often far more frightening than reality, particularly in children. For this reason, it is important that a child be given words and concepts that can help such fear to be overcome. Difficulties in dealing with fear, such that terrifying fantasies get the upper hand, easily lead to anxiety and to compulsive behaviour, the individual attempting to overcome uncertainty and fear through structuring things.

Distress and its extreme, *anguish*, represent an affect that has a considerably longer time profile than fear, for example. It can be triggered off by the experiencing of pain or discomfort for an extended period of time. If the type of situation in which the pain or discomfort was first experienced returns, *distress* or *anguish* can be triggered off again. This can prevent other affects from being experienced.

Anger is an affect which generally has a short time profile. It is often preceded by a period of discomfort until the latter becomes "more than one can take" and one becomes openly angry. Although anger often lasts for only a brief period of time, it can also be kept active by the occurrence of new insults, misunderstandings or whatever, such as in the course of an argument, these providing new fuel to the anger one already experiences. Those who have difficulties in showing their anger are usually sensitive to and conscious of it but fail to open up and give vent to their anger. The affect of *anger* can be camouflaged in many ways. It can be held back and be expressed more in the form of a general state of irritation. Many persons are unable to recognize anger in other persons if it does not become clearly manifest through their becoming red in the face or gesticulating and shouting.

Disgust and *dismell* are two affects that can be considered to have long had an important role in the development of primates. Both affects are viewed as being clearly linked with drives, where in human development they provided a means of quickly avoiding poisonous substances, as illustrated by the reaction of making a face and spitting out things that have a bad taste. These affects are so strong that simply the recollection of food that was disgusting can be sufficient to spoil our liking of food. *Disgust* and *dismell* are easily activated too by conflicts, by separations in marriage or by divorce. In such a situation one's affects can make one feel sick and withdraw from others, or from the partnership or marriage. In a conflict situation it is not unusual for the one person to say "I abhor you!" or a remark to this effect.

Shame, the last of the negative affects, is one of the most important and one of the most striking. Its role is to regulate the positive affects. Shame disturbs our thinking. It can make us red in the face, become nervous and even begin to stutter. Shame tends to be triggered off when the sense of joy or the excitement we show become too great, i.e. when these become more than social norms tolerate. This leads to our withdrawing a part of our positive feelings. The fact that we experience *shame* can be viewed as a price that we need to pay for having a civilization and being human. Without this affect we would have a much harder time of adjusting to social rules and taboos.

Modern *self psychology* strongly emphasizes the individual's self-regulating abilities (Skårderud, 1999). Possessing an integrated self can be seen as a basic need for human beings generally. Symptoms that appear under conditions of poor mental health can be viewed as an attempt to strengthen one's self esteem and one's *sense of self* generally. It is when a person loses contact with one's feelings and affects and begins to doubt their validity that symptoms and psychic disturbances appear. Such disturbances can be seen as representing misguided vitality.

How are *guilt* and *shame* related? Feeling and experiencing guilt is no affect! Guilt involves shame but is directly coupled to an event where one feels that one acted in a wrong way. In this sense, shame is subordinate to guilt, which involves reflecting upon the shame one feels. Thus, guilt first develops after shame has become established. What one feels ashamed of is oneself or one's inadequacy.

Pride can be seen as the opposite pole to *shame*. In contrast to shame, pride leads to a feeling of wanting to show oneself to others. Feeling that one has reason to be proud implies the existence of an intentional, goal-directed striving which, often after hard work, has led to success. It is important that an individual establish goals. When such goals are achieved, the individual experiences the affect of *joy* and can thus feel pride. In praising another person, it is important that the praise be linked with something the person strives for. Otherwise, it has little value and is likely to be understood as simply something that is said, without emotional content.

DEVELOPMENT OF AFFECTS

Affects represent *primary motivational forces*, providing the infant from the very start information on how to behave toward the world outside, and providing those nearby information on the feelings the infant is experiencing. This forms the basis for the interaction and communication with the surroundings which the young child gradually builds up.

The earliest affective exchange occurs as a rule through the mother imitating the infant's affects, which she gains access to through the infant's facial expressions and movements. This is a process termed *intoning* (Stern, 1991). This is more than simply imitation. Most intoning occurs at an unconscious and nearly automatic level. It involves the adult who is close to the infant "mirroring" back the infant's affects. In this way, the infant becomes acquainted with its different affects. A capacity for intoning can also be regarded as a prerequisite for *empathy*.

During the first two years of life, the *expressing of affects* occurs primarily by means of laughter, crying and screaming. During this period, the child has no opportunity of using words to express its affects or feelings. It is not before the age of two that the child is able to say, "I'm angry." Thus, the child at first simply expresses its affects and feelings directly and only later is able to use words to describe them.

During a third period in development, from the age of about 6 to 11, the affects become linked with *emotions*. The child is able then to more readily describe the feelings it experiences in terms of a coherent chain of events in which feelings of one kind are followed by feelings of another kind. One may hear a 12-year old say, for example, "When I came into the room I was surprised to see that Henry was there too. The next thing I thought of was that he hadn't

phoned me up and I was angry at that. But I got over it and we gave each other a hug because we hadn't seen each other for a long time."

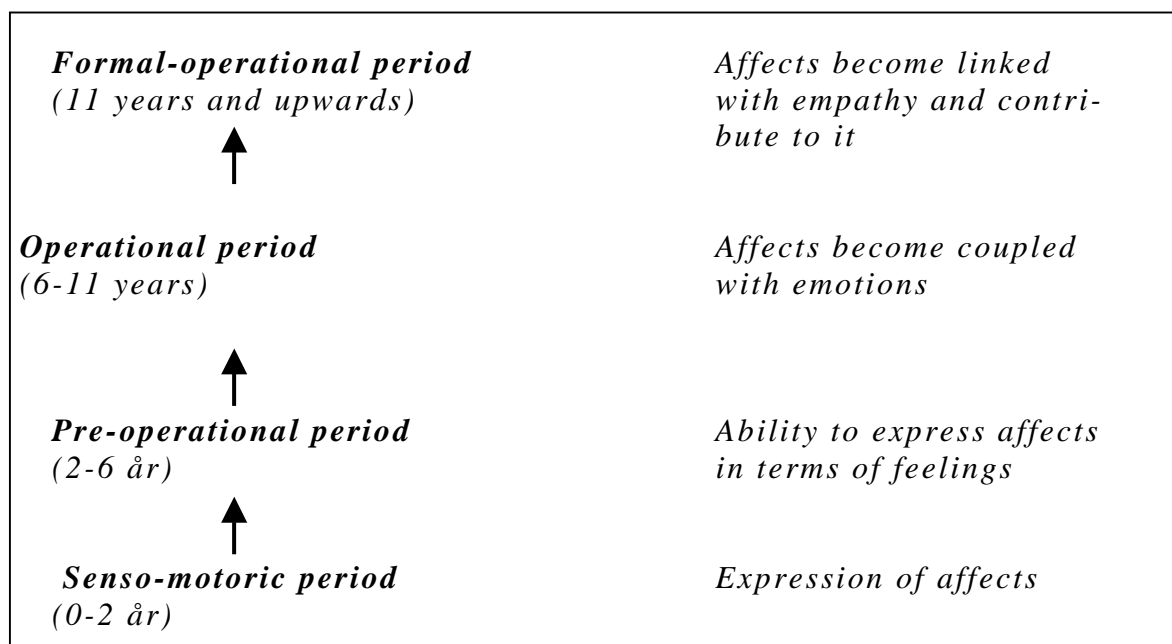


Figure 3. Development of affects as linked with the stages of development described by Jean Piaget.

During the fourth and last period of development, from 11 years of age and upwards, affect development becomes complete through *empathy* becoming an increasingly obvious trait. It involves the child's becoming increasingly conscious of persons' differing in the thoughts and feelings that a given situation evokes and in how they experience the situation. Saying, for example, "I understand just how you feel, since I've been in a similar situation myself," may not be empathy, but rather a form of overidentification in which one has difficulties in differentiating between what one has experienced earlier and what the other person is currently experiencing.

To a large extent, affects are oriented toward relationships. They tend to come about in relations with others or when we relate to them mentally. We combine our nine different affects in a highly individual way. To understand another person, it is thus important that we take account of the experiences he or she has had with anger, joy, sorrow and the like. We need to gain insight into the person's personal history. Nevertheless, there are basic qualities that affects possess which to a considerable extent are universal.

Affects are forerunners originally to what become our thoughts, feelings and actions. Three different levels of behaviour can be distinguished here. Suppose a two-year old boy is playing in the park while his mother is sitting on a bench reading a book, looking up now and then to see whether Jack is still there. Suppose she sees that Jack, after having rolled down a short slope about 20 meters away, gets up and begins running to a slide about 50 meters away, but then stops and turns to his mother. What happens then with Jack's thoughts and feelings?

- At an **emotional level**, Jack feels uneasy at being so far away from his mother.
- At a **behavioural level**, Jack stops and turns to see his mother sitting on the bench reading.
- At an **cognitive level**, Jack solves the problem of being so far away from his mother by either calling to her or running back toward her.

Gradually, as the child develops, it forms increasingly complex and composite patterns of such elements, patterns that are unique for each and every person. The emotional reactions that arise in different situations represent mixtures of elements having their basis in different affects.

DEFENSES AGAINST FEELINGS THAT BECOME TOO STRONG

In the course of evolution, human beings have developed not simply means of taking in information but have also developed different types of Defenses against feelings becoming too strong. Ideally, we should make use here of a highly differentiated and flexible set of defences which only are utilized when really needed. As will be discussed below, such defences should not be activated simply by fantasies that lack a basis in reality. Otherwise, instead of being functional, they hinder the individual's development.

Psychic defences are often activated when conflicts and feelings of shame or guilt threaten one's psychic balance. The processes involved are automatic and more or less unconscious. *Shame*, like *disgust* and *dismell*, are affects that have a clear connection with relationships, their frequently arising in contacts with others and serving to regulate the degree of distance or closeness to others one has. Each of these affects, in fact, tends to increase one's distance to others. Shame is difficult to bear if it becomes too strong, such as when one feels, "I should be ashamed for not being as good as others, for not being as intelligent and for being worthless and repulsive." In such a case, when shame becomes too strong, Defenses against it tend to be activated (Nathanson, 1992). Various types of defence strategies can be seen as reflecting what one did and experienced as a child:

- **Withdrawal.** Here one avoids others and may look down at the ground and bite one's lips. One may also degrade oneself by saying to oneself, "I've done this because I'm stupid."
- **Avoidance.** Here one does everything possible to avoid getting into a situation in which one feels ashamed. One tries to divert attention from anything that can lead to feelings of shame. The painfulness of feeling ashamed can also lead to one's acting as though one were superior, to arrogance, or to lack of consideration for others. Shame is often at the basis for envy and jealousy as well.
- **Attacking others.** Quite apart from being destructive or using violence, people are able to think of countless ways in which they can get the best of others. Rather than feeling ashamed of their own weaknesses, they may attack someone who seems weaker than they or inferior. This may involve slander, contempt, rejection, being unfriendly, making ironic remarks, talking down to the other person, or being tyrannical, all to protect themselves against feelings of shame.
- **Attacking oneself.** One can also avoid rejection by others and the feelings of shame that follow this by anticipating this occurring and taking actions to save face. One way of doing this is to play the role of the clown. Another is to do to oneself the very thing

one is afraid others will subject one to, avoiding in this way being attacked. In doing this, one allies oneself with the evil one wishes to avoid.

Although most defences function at an unconscious level, some of them can also be used consciously. For example, one may defend oneself against something which is predictably unpleasant by maintaining control and failing to respond to what the other person does.

Repression is a type of defence which involves "forgetting" things that are uncomfortable. Another type of defence of similar aim, called *projection* and illustrated above, is to attack others instead of confronting one's own shame. This amounts to transferring a strong feeling of dissatisfaction with oneself and directing it at others instead. Still another type of defence is *denial*, which is a frequent reaction to grief or sorrow. It can lead to a person's saying, "No, he can't possibly be dead. His death never occurred." In an acute crisis, such a reaction can also be highly functional, protecting one against a sense of shock and suffering one is unable to bear immediately. *Regression* is still another type of defence. This is frequently encountered in children when, under pressing circumstances, they behave as though they were younger than they actually are and suddenly begin using baby talk. Regression is also frequent among adults.

The list of defences that are possible can be made much longer, those mentioned simply exemplify these. Defenses are used in many situations for protecting us from being disturbed by conflicts or by feelings that are excessively strong, keeping them out of our conscious thinking. If the conflicts involved are serious ones, this may prevent us from dealing with them adequately. Unless one's personality is sufficiently strong, this may hinder one's development generally. For example, if Defenses against feelings of shame have too strong an influence on behaviour, this may lead to one's conception of reality being distorted, one's possibly perceiving there to be threats when none are present. One's perception, motor behaviour, speech and thinking can all be affected by this. It is not unusual that one falls into negative and unrealistic patterns of thinking that become largely automatic and are to one's disadvantage.

Feelings are a driving force here, yet when these are out of balance they easily become a hindrance.

Pride is the opposite to *shame*. It develops in part through a combination of the positive affects of *joy* and *interest*. From the very beginning, a child's behaviour is directed at development and mastery. The experience of succeeding at these, in childhood or later, produces a *joy at being competent*. This in turn results in a feeling of *pride*. One then feels able to deal successfully with new challenges and enjoys others' being conscious of one's presence. In contrast, if one feels ashamed of what one has accomplished, one tends to avoid either marking one's presence or showing others what one has done.

The feeling of pride tends to bring forth a desire to learn new things and to develop. One's feeling of self-esteem is also closely linked with feeling of being competent. The joy that pride produces tends to result in a desire to be noticed (Nathanson, 1992), whereas shame, in contrast, leads to a desire to not be seen by others. From this, the importance of developing and of experiencing self-esteem is obvious. This requires repeated experiences of succeeding, something which is very much needed by a person who has become filled with negative affects and the associated feelings of shame and lack of self-esteem.

The development of *self-discipline* provides us the tools for dealing with many problems. It is important that we first overcome difficulties before rewarding ourselves for having done so. This can be regarded as the only way of living that functions properly (Peck, 1989). One can also express this by saying that the only way of solving the problems one encounters is to deal with them effectively.

A person who has serious learning difficulties is often plagued by the affects of *distress* and *anguish*. These are strong affects that can limit the person's desire to learn and to further his or her own development. It is not unusual for the basis for this to be in *fear* having come to dominate the person's thoughts, all of this at the cost of the positive affects of *interest* and *joy*. This in turn can result in the individual's developing an unjustified expectation of being subjected to attack. Many persons of this sort have failed to experience a genuine feeling of closeness to others.

Aggressive behaviour toward others can be seen as a type of defence against depression and feelings of distress that has its basis in a loss during childhood of something that had once been experienced in a very positive way. It is not unusual for the person in question to have grown up under very undesirable conditions involving strong conflicts between the parents. Such a person often has repeated divorces and may display drug abuse.

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