



Getting to know you!

Welcome to this first module of Delving a Little Deeper. In this module (consisting of 5 audios & Companion Notes), we will discover some rich seams of understanding that help us interpret our children's behaviours and so better navigate their early years.

We strongly advise that you read the Companion Notes for each Audio. Leaving some time before moving onto the next one gives us the opportunity to reflect, notice, and discover new ways to relate to our young children.

Little Sponges

Have you heard...

Someone describe a young child as a 'little sponge'?

Or maybe you see them imitate someone important to them?

When we take a moment to be curious, we will soon see that children absorb *everything*...'Little Sponges' describes them well.

As a toddler, my eldest child would pick up a toy phone, put it to his ear and just giggle into the mouthpiece. It was odd. Why did he not imitate chatting into the mouthpiece? I was curious... what was he doing?

Then the realisation dawned... His behaviour showed me that I often laughed when on the phone with friends and family. His behaviour was simply a reflection of what he saw and heard me do. And... I would need to be careful... what else I did I do and say in his presence that my little toddler-sponge would absorb?

In the audio, Jo shares her experience of her three-year-old daughter setting up an 'office' which exactly mimicked Jo's desk and office space.

Understanding key phases in childhood

Theorists recognise that early childhood is a crucial time for their subsequent development. They acknowledge that the success (or otherwise) of each stage depends on the preceding one. Yet these early years are probably the least understood and the most difficult to interpret for adults who are now parents and care givers.

The heavyweights in this field focussed on different aspects of child development (Vygotsky, Erikson, Piaget, Bowlby, Ainsworth etc.). More recently, researchers have helpfully shown us how all aspects are interlinked, intertwined.

We particularly like the way that Maria Montessori helpfully defines three distinct phases of childhood; partly because of the wonderful description she gives to the first stage - the *ABSORBENT MIND* which covers the first 6 years of life, including the embryonic (or antenatal) stage. Sponges absorb and this is therefore a perfect description for this stage of development, which embraces all aspects of their development.

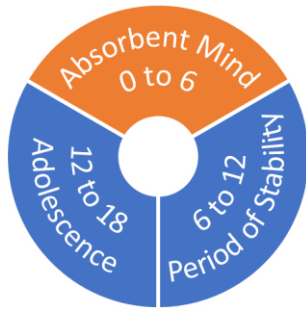


SET 1 Delving *a little* Deeper
Getting to Know You!

Caroline in conversation with Dana and Jo

Set 1: Audio 1
Companion Notes

[Other stages she described as the *PERIOD OF STABILITY* (6 to 12 years) and *ADOLESCENCE* (12 to 18 years)].



'Getting to Know You' will focus on the first stage. We will see how all areas of a child's development are connected and how the child's *Absorbent Mind* is foundational for the rest of childhood and through to adulthood.

We do this by considering some real examples, which shine a light on what is happening in a child's inner life, enabling us to interpret their behaviours and get to know what is going on in 'secret'.

A Life Force

Janey was in a hurry. She had been held up and was short of time to get to school to pick up her daughter. She explained to her 2-year-old son,

"Sorry Joe, we're late. You'll just have to go in the buggy."

But Joe was having none of this. He liked the walk to school. The route took them past a set of low garden walls which he liked walking along, jump off and then walk along the next and the next and the next. He realised that this was not going to be possible if he was strapped in the buggy. Janey coaxed a bit but then (now harassed) she lifted him into the buggy. Joe arched his back, kicked his feet and resisted LOUDLY! Not unkindly, Janey found herself using pressure to push him into a seated position and yanking the straps over his resistant body. They were off, with Joe continuing to object most of the way to the school gate.

Later, Janey complained to her partner:

"Joe was unbelievably difficult this afternoon. He's definitely in his terrible twos."

Maybe you've seen such a situation, or even experienced it first-hand.

Every child is born with an essential *life force*, a *powerful urge*. Evident from the moment of birth, this drive is powerful, a strong **motivating energy** urging the new-born to survive (take their first breath) and grow (sucking reflex to feed). Neither are needed when they are in the womb, they are not taught how to breathe or suck. Instead, a primal life force instinctively propels them to do what is needed for their survival after their physical birth. This same *powerful life force* continues throughout the first phase of childhood as children continue their quest for survival and independence. This powerful, urge *propels* them to explore, discover and experience their new world.

Why is this important?

We have given emphasis to the words above to help us realise that whatever we call it, this *life force* is something hugely powerful. It has an energy that is not controllable. **All** young children have this internal urge, driving them. This is key as it helps us look at some behaviours and consider what is behind them.



Was Joe really being difficult or naughty?

If we accept that Joe's behaviour was being governed by a *powerful drive*, urging him to practise balancing and jumping, something that he knew was possible on the walk to school, we can begin to interpret Joe's behaviours differently. Could the strength of his resistance be that his powerful inner motivating urge needed to be expressed. The energy needed to go somewhere. In his case, the energy made him kick, arch his back, and protest loudly! In one sense it was good that he could release the energy like this. Another child may internalise it.

Do all children behave the same way?

Different children may respond differently, but it is important to understand that this primal energy is a powerful motivation; a force driving every child. And it needs to be released - somewhere. If a quieter child is routinely prevented from allowing this energy positive expression, they may hide their deep frustration, ignoring and internalising it. Psychotherapists suggest that this becomes more difficult to treat in the longer term.

Take a little time to think about ...

A recent charged event, when you observed or experienced first-hand a young child seemingly being 'naughty'.

Rehearse the event in your mind.

Now try to re-interpret the same event by introducing the idea of there being a powerful inner driving force behind the behaviour. Ask yourself:

? Was there a driving impulse urging them to do something that they were prevented from doing?

? What happened to the energy? Did it find expression externally or not?

Key moments

Janey looked after herself in her two pregnancies. She ate the right foods, exercised well, stopped drinking and smoking. She stroked her swollen belly, talked, and often sang to her unborn children. Jody did her best to give both children (as physical embryos) the best environment she could as they grew in her womb.

She considers herself a good mum. Not perfect, but then, who is? Today's struggle with Joe had left her tired and she really needed to get through the bath and bed routines. As both children like their snuggly bedtimes, it should be a good end of the day...

Janey cuddles Joe and reads him a story. Her choice. It is written in rhyme and the pictures are lovely. All is well. Joe enjoys the book and soon snuggles down. A peaceful end to her day with him.

She then goes to read to Jody (age 5). She looks at the book that her daughter has chosen but her heart drops. It's too wordy, too long. But then she thinks, "I know it well enough to skip a few lines... she won't notice".



But Jody does notice! She is not impressed when her mum skips some phrases.

She accuses her mum, "That's not right... you missed something!" Although she cannot remember the book word for word, she knows it well enough to recognise that something has been missed. Jody complains. Janey reads a few more pages before trying the same tactic. Another outburst. Jody is now on high alert in case she is short changed – again!

Bedtime is now charged and not the peaceful end of the day that both had wished for.

What did Janey's children gain from their mother before they were born?

As both children developed in the womb, they enjoyed a secure and stable start in life. Janey took care of herself and prepared well for the safe delivery of both children. As developing foetuses, they both *absorbed* the physical conditions of Jody's womb. Their physical development was hidden, creating the unique yet-to-be-born-infant. Within the womb, they also absorbed some of the external landscape of their birth mother (they became familiar with the sound of her voice and the food she ate). In pregnancy, the unborn infant is a 'little sponge' who is developing **physically**.

Why did both children respond differently in the bedtime routine?

Both Joe and Jodie are still 'little sponges', absorbing everything. They both love their bedtime routines and enjoy bedtime stories being read just before they snuggle down. So why did they behave so differently?

Toddler Joe

Joe is simply responding to the snuggly bedtime routine that is a familiar routine. He is soaking up (absorbing) the whole experience (the atmosphere, the rhythm of the story, the routine, his mother's love). He absorbs all these impressions without thought. He has no control over what he takes in, but the whole experience has a direct path to his subconscious memory.

Whatever is stored in his subconscious begins to form who he is. Joe's potential, spirit, and personality are all affected by these experiences. His character and intelligence are being formed. He cannot choose what he should absorb. And because it happens unconsciously, he cannot be reasoned with (the buggy incident shows that!).

Most adults do not realise this. They interpret their children's challenging behaviours through an adult lens. Jodie told her partner that Joe had been 'difficult' and concluded that he was in his 'terrible two's'. We assume they are being unreasonable when in fact they are not yet able to reason.

Babies and toddlers in this stage are little sponges who absorb every experience. They do this without any conscious thought or reasoning.



What about Jodie?

Jodie has 5 years of life experience, and she now has a memory. She still absorbs everything, but now she can make CONSCIOUS choices. She chooses the book she wants read at bedtime.

However, her memory tells her that something has been missed out of the story being read. She reasons with (complains at!) her mother, even though she could not recall exactly what was missed out. As her memory develops, so does her WILL!

Young children in this stage are little sponges who increasingly *know* what they want. They make choices based on memory (their previous experiences) and use their will. They absorb their experiences more consciously and become more social. Parents often see this when their child turns 2 years old.

Let's consider a little...

Take some time to observe a child's behaviour... one in each of these three stages:

1. An unborn child who is developing **physically**.

🔗 What experiences is this child gaining? What can they hear? What can they taste? What emotions are they absorbing?

2. An infant or toddler who is absorbing their world without reasoning.

🔗 What routines do they regularly experience which are being absorbed? Think about possible outcomes in later life.

3. A young child who is absorbing experiences consciously.

🔗 How do they use their **WILL**? Can you reason with them? Do they want to spend more time with others?

And... begin to observe and interpret children's behaviours through this lens. How does it change your attitude?

CELEBRATE & SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS WITH OTHERS ON THE SUBSCRIBER'S FORUM!

Further information, practical guidance and advice are available through

Turning Little Stones &

Delving a little Deeper

See website for details.