



## Narrative CPD Activity – Discovering the inside perspective

### The four types of emotional expression

When a practitioner is presented with a child communicating whilst in a distressed state, the important aspect is the distress, rather than the way it is being expressed.

We can 'listen to' the feelings the child is expressing, and empathise with the needs which these feelings reflect, and sometimes overlook the content. The content of the child's communications may often be misleading because children who cannot express their emotions directly ("I am angry"), may often do so indirectly ("Fxxxxx cow! I hate you!").

If we treat the content of this 'indirect' response as a breach of social boundaries, then we are missing the point. We can instead recognise the statement as a poorly formed communication of feelings and try to understand the root causes.

#### Four communications modes

People communicate verbally and nonverbally, and they can use those methods to express their feelings directly or indirectly (also known as 'refractively'<sup>1</sup>).

Verbal direct	Child says, "I feel angry!"
Verbal refractive/indirect	Child says, "you're stupid and ugly!!"
Nonverbal direct	Child shows angry face, turns away from teacher, sits with crossed arms and hunched shoulders
Nonverbal refractive/ indirect	Child damages teacher's personal property (to make the teacher feel what they are feeling).

Children with social emotional and mental health often find it hard to communicate feelings verbally and directly. Nonverbal refractive displays are particularly difficult to manage – when a child kicks over the waste bin or throws books the teacher must respond but has limited personal investment in the books or the bin. **But what if the child scratches the teacher's new car with a coin?**

Ideally, we learn to communicate our concerns including any negative feelings back to the child in a safe way. Even the kicking over of the bin will have had some personal impact on the teacher – some additional stress - irritation that the lesson is disrupted and raised anxiety about delays in whole class progress, perhaps...

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<sup>1</sup> Because the response comes back at an odd angle (as through a prism) rather than reflecting what went before.