# Shyness, social anxiety & social-emotional functioning

Dr Dawn Watling

Department of Psychology

ROYAL HOLLOWAY UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Shyness, unsociability, and social avoidance

Social anxiety

Social phobia

Social Anxiety Disorder is one of the most prevalent anxiety disorders with an estimated lifetime prevalence between 7% and 12% (NICE, 2013).

# Shyness & Social Anxiety

- Continuum of social fears in the general population (McNeill, 2010)

Shyness →

Fearlessness

'Normal' Fears and Anxieties

Social Anxiety Disorders

# Social Anxiety Disorder in children
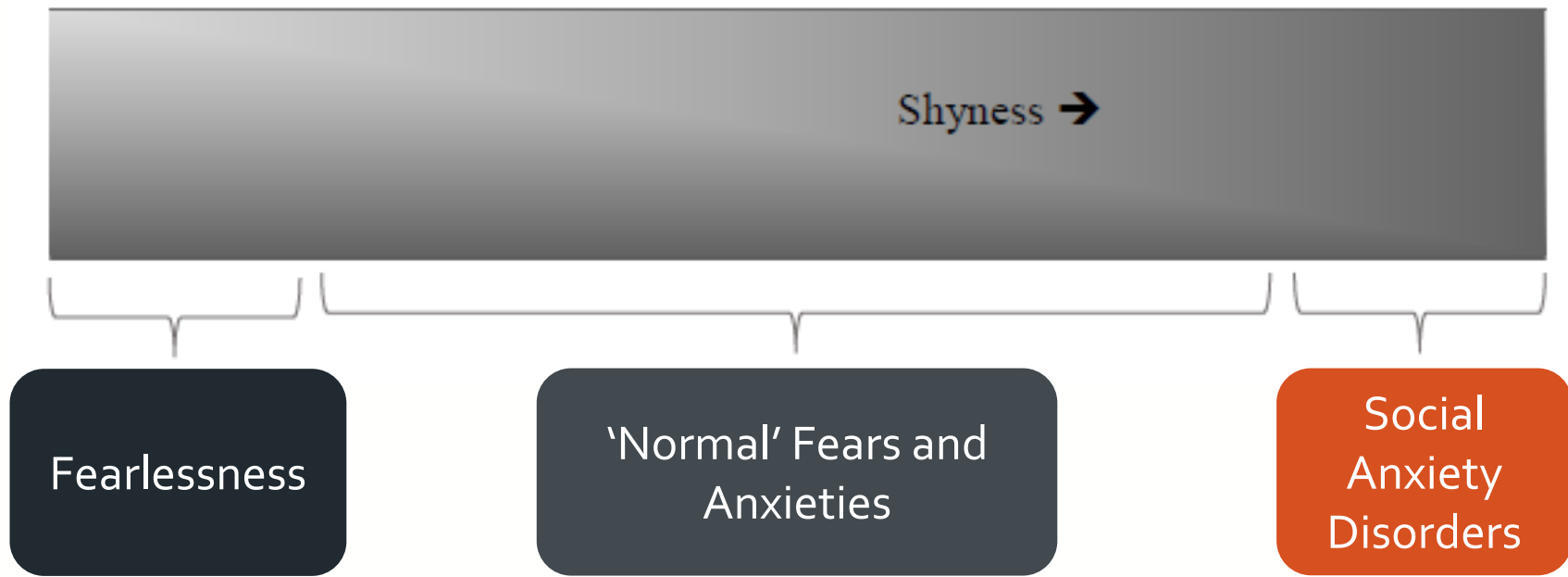
## How might children differ from adults (NICE, 2013)?

- May be more likely to cry or 'freeze' or have behavioural outbursts such as tantrums.

- May be less likely to acknowledge that their fears are irrational when they are away from a social situation.
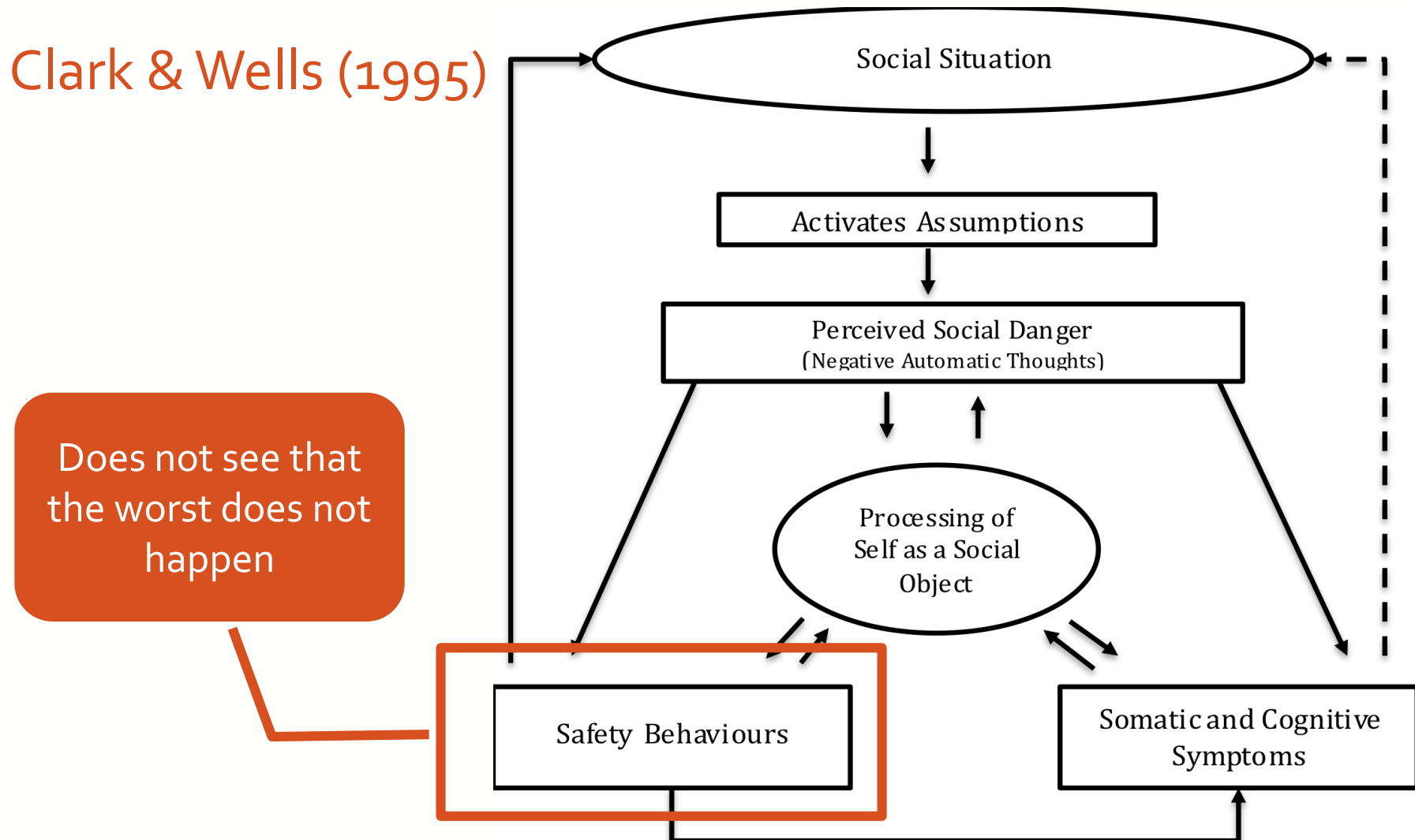
## Aetiology of Social Anxiety

- What factors influence the development of SA?

  - Rapee & Spence (2004): genetics, temperament, cognitive factors, social skills deficits, and environmental influences.

# Social Anxiety Disorder

## Clark & Wells (1995)

Social Situation

Activates Assumptions

Perceived Social Danger
(Negative Automatic Thoughts)

Processing of Self as a Social Object

Does not see that the worst does not happen

Safety Behaviours

Somatic and Cognitive Symptoms

# How do children with higher levels of social anxiety interpret the world around them?

- Discount positive events.

- Catastrophize mild negative events.

- Anticipate negative reactions to mild negative events.

## Outcomes of social withdrawal



- Poorer friendship quality, particularly as less intimacy and companionship.

- Fewer social networks and friends, alongside poorer social skills.

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Friendships  →  Social skills
        ↑_____↓
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Friendships ⟷ Social skills
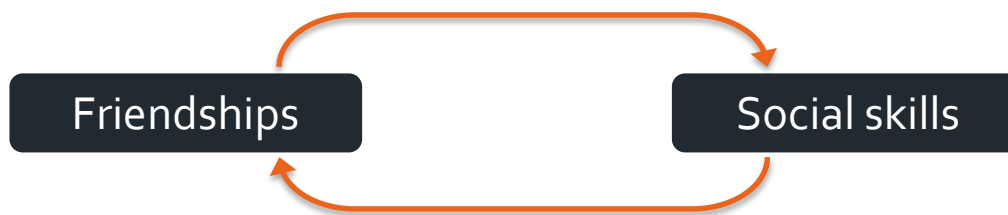
- Increased risk of school refusal, school drop out , and poorer school performance.

# My focus

Identifying what factors are related to social anxiety, with an aim to work with schools and clinicians in tackling 'shyness' before it reaches a clinical stage.

# Relationships with others
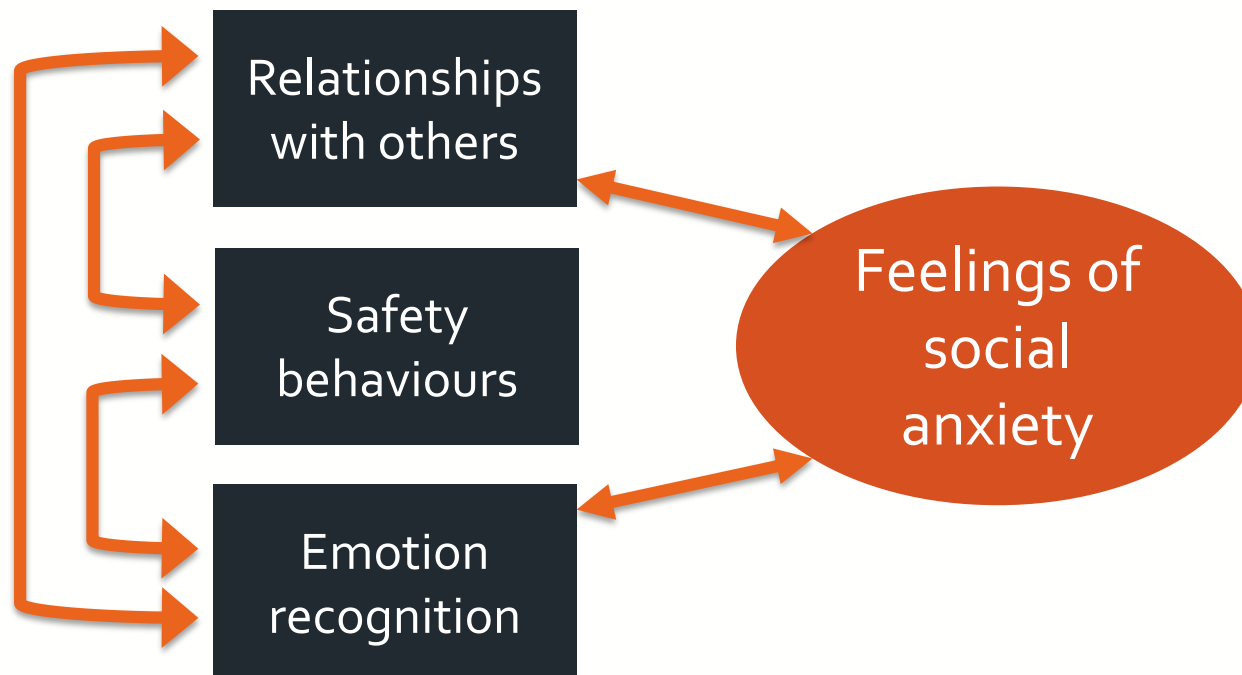
## Importance of attachment relationships

- Adolescents who have attachment relationships with their parents that are more trusting, and that are more alienating tend to have greater SA (41.1 % of variance accounted for).
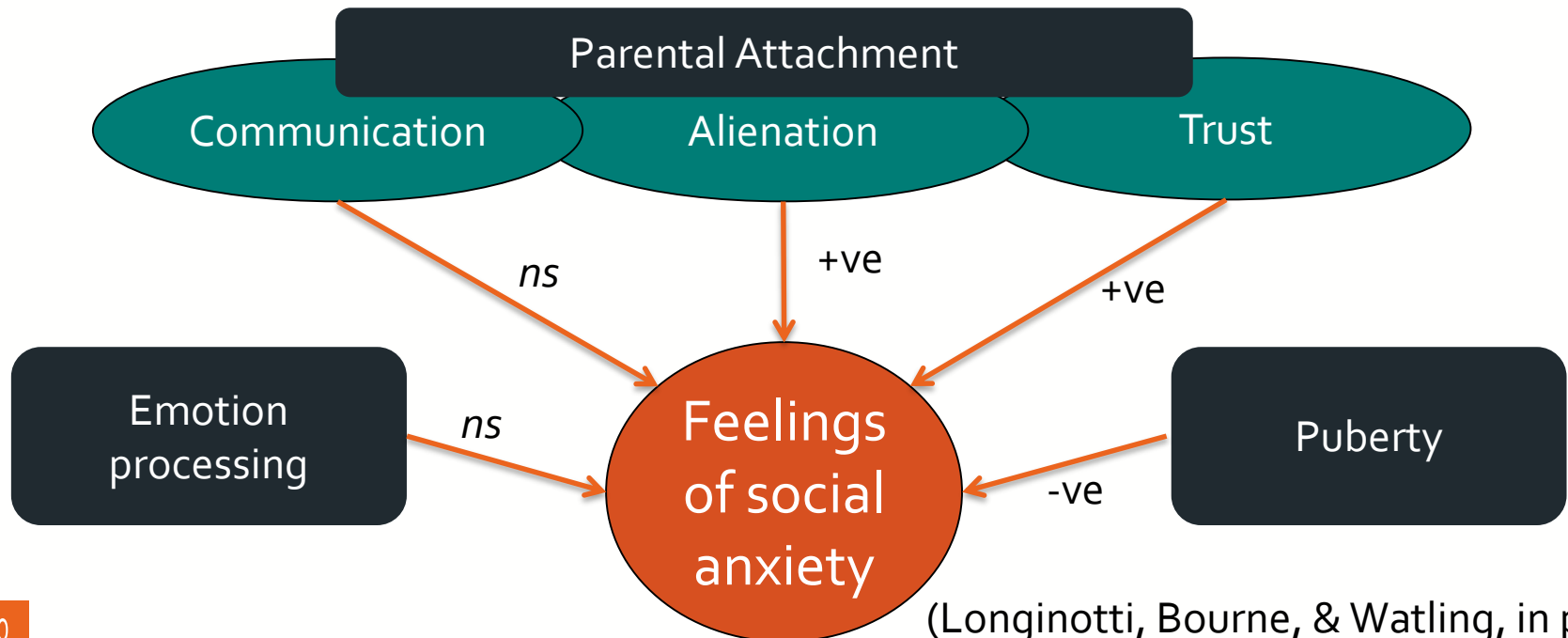


(Longinotti, Bourne, & Watling, in prep.)

## Importance of attachment relationships

- Children who have attachment relationships with their parents that are more trusting, and that are more alienating tend to have more SA (41.1 % of variance accounted for).

- But what about peer attachments… parent alienation is significant until we add peer attachments to the model, then greater peer alienation predicts higher levels of SA (34% of variance accounted for).

(Longinotti, Bourne, & Watling, in prep.)

# Safety behaviours

## Self-presentation tactic use

- Children high in SA use more self-presentation tactics, and do not discriminate between audiences (finding persists one year later; Banerjee & Watling, 2014).

- Findings maintained in adolescents after controlling for depression and mood (Dimmer & Watling, in prep).

  - Greater tactic use was associated with negative peer preference



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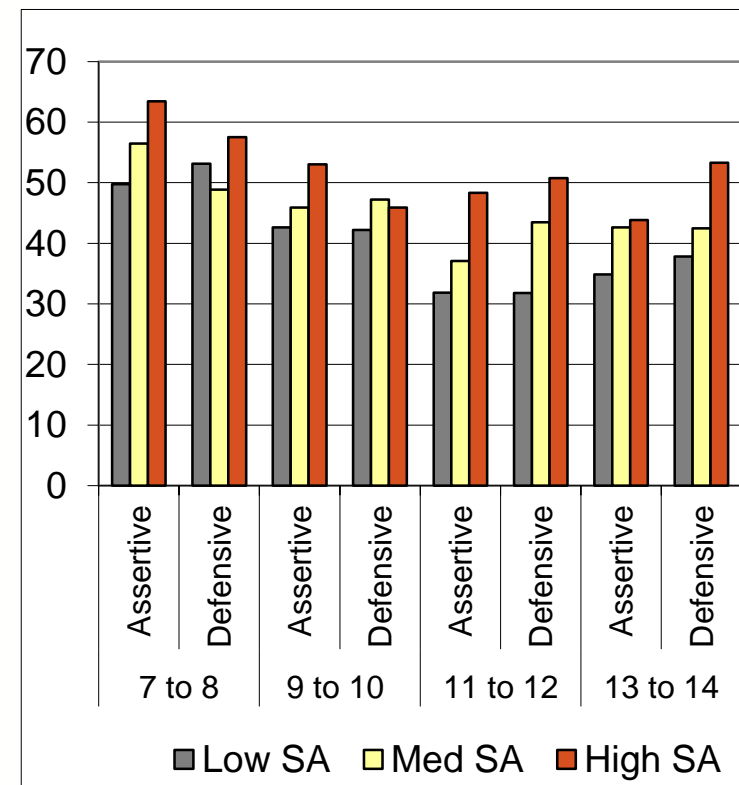
## Reputation management on social media…

- Use of Facebook to manage reputations (does it work).

  - In an upcoming study, over the summer, we will assess how those high and low differ in their 'sharing' behaviour, while tracking eye-movements

  - I also have two new projects (one with adolescents and one with adults) that will look at reported Facebook use and how this relates to feelings of social anxiety.

- Skype conversations

  - Just about to start a study to observe how socially anxious individuals use safety behaviours when engaging in a skype conversation

## Recognition of facial expressions of emotion
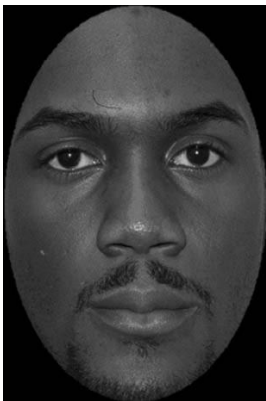


- Children and adults high in social anxiety have:

  - biases in emotion recognition

  - hypersensitivity to emotions

  - interpret ambiguous emotion as negative

## Predicting emotion recognition over time:

- Assessing how emotion recognition may be influenced by SA and laterality for emotion processing.

    - Can we influence the level of bias?

    - What features are important?

- Exploring the role of hormones (through adolescence), links with SA, and laterality for emotion processing.
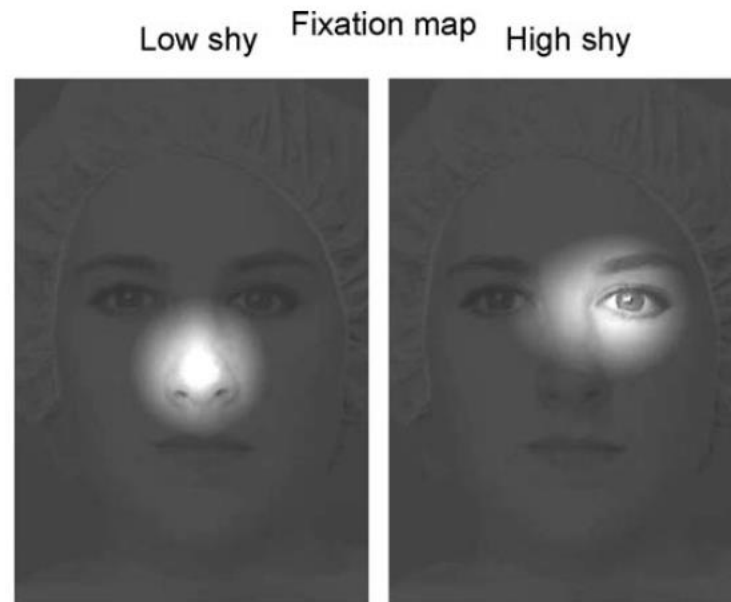


Low shy    Fixation map    High shy

Figure from Brunet et al. (2009)

# Summary and implications

- Children do not always exhibit shyness (and SA) as we would anticipate.

- We should encourage shy and socially anxious youths' social engagement with friends, but also with less familiar peers.

  - Important to work on an inclusive social environment.

- Be aware that encouraging the use of safety behaviours is not generally helpful for those who are more socially anxious.

- There is a bias in recognising negative or neutral emotions, which can affect reactions in social situations.
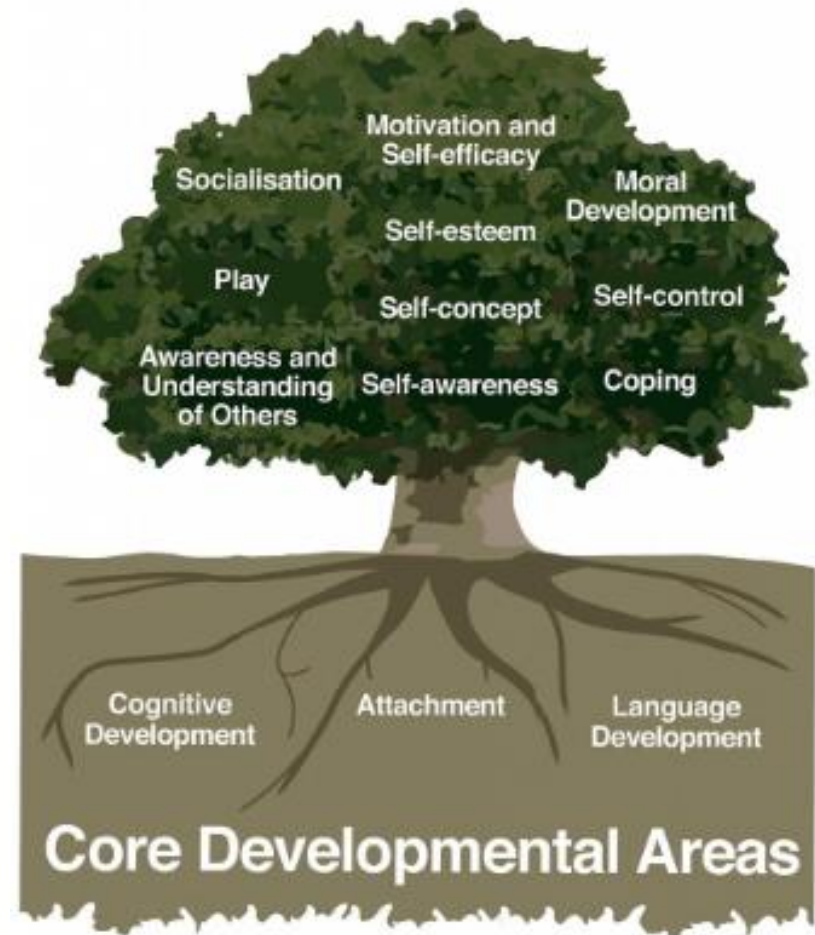
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**A framework for emotional and social development**

Materials endorsed by a team at RHUL, led by Professor Patrick Leman and myself

- Materials written and developed by: Alastair Lidster (Educational Psychologist) and Becci Best (Assistant Psychologist), Beech Lodge School

- Launched 30th June, 2016



**For more information see: www.fagus.org.uk**

# Thank you for listening.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions:
Dawn.Watling@rhul.ac.uk

You can also visit the Social Development Lab website:
http://www.pc.rhul.ac.uk/sites/social_development/site/

 Or tweet: @SocDevLabRHUL


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