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**An Intervention for Developing Emotional Expression Abilities in  
Preschool Children and its Implementation During the COVID-  
19 Pandemic**

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## **Abstract**

Mixed emotions are defined as emotional experiences characterized by a mutual appearance of (at least) two feelings, usually of contrasting values (Larsen et al., 2001). The comprehension of mixed emotions is essential to a socio-emotional development, and assists in nurturing a healthy coping with stressful situations (Coifman et al., 2007). There are indications to the fact that, with the help of clues, four-year-olds are capable of reporting mixed emotions in others (Smith et al., 2015), however, the ability to identify mixed feelings is not considered developed prior to age eight (Pons et al., 2004). The present study seeks to examine the impact of an online intervention program based on skills learning principles (e.g., Azaryahu et al., 2019) on understanding mixed emotions in children aged 4-6. The training involves repeated examples of single and mixed-emotions vignettes when mixed-emotion vignettes were paired with iconic mixed-emotion emoticons designed specifically for the current study. The goal is for preschoolers to gain a better understanding of complex emotional states such as those that evoke mixed emotions when they learn to use the symbolic representations of the emotions that arise in those situations. A good understanding of such situations can help children develop a useful coping mechanism and express their feelings in a complex process of adapting to a new educational program. The study was conducted during two quarantine periods that followed the COVID-19 outbreak in March and September 2020 (first and second wave quarantine in Israel). During both quarantine waves, kindergarten children stayed at home with their parents, when during the September quarantine (which we will focus on in the current study) Israeli children did not even start the school year given the quarantine. The participants in the study were 100 kindergarten children collected at three different time periods, with all children experiencing quarantine throughout the study in general, and during the intervention period in particular, in which they did not go to kindergarten. The study was conducted online and included a pretest (week 1, N = 103), training (weeks 2-4, n = 55, only experiment group), a post-intervention test (week 5, N = 100) and a preservation test (week 9, N = 96). The mothers of participating children then filled out a parent questionnaire (week 10 N = 56, second quarantine). The intervention program was found to be very effective in the immediate examination (about a week after the end of the intervention). In this test, mixed emotions comprehension of the experiment group was found to be significantly higher than that of the control group in the two mixed emotion variables. In the preservation

test, which was conducted about a month after the immediate test, no differences were found between the groups, but in examining differences between the groups while supervising the pre-test variables, differences were found between the experimental group and the control group in mixed emotions comprehension. In addition, children who underwent the intervention program were more likely to say that a child starting a new kindergarten wanted to attend it (week 5) and parental self-reports (week 10) indicated that the children in the experiment group adapted to the kindergarten to a greater extent and in a shorter time than the control group children. Hence, the conclusion of the study is that it is possible to promote an understanding of mixed emotions in young children and thus improve their adaptation to a new kindergarten. To do so, intervention programs at an early age, should be based on age-appropriate learning and memory practices.