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## **DIRFloortime: An Innovative Approach to Supporting Development Through Connection and Understanding**

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# DIRFloortime: An Innovative Approach to Supporting Development Through Connection and Understanding

Jessica Townsend, OTD-S

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Power of Play (POP) Pediatric Therapy

## Introduction

One in six children in the United States has one or more developmental disabilities or other developmental delays (CDC, 2021)

- Delays like these can have an impact on a child's foundational ability to learn, communication, and interact with others (New York University Langone, 2021)
- An innovative approach to treatment of developmental delay commonly used among therapists is called DIRFloortime®.
- This approach is being recognized as the next generation of evidence-based interventions for autism spectrum disorder (ASD)
- DIR can also be used to support development for neurodivergent and neurotypical persons throughout the lifespan



## Site Description

POP Pediatric Therapy

- Outpatient pediatric therapy clinic located in Forest Park, IL.
- Target population: children ages birth – 18 years old with various diagnosis and conditions
- Mission Statement:
  - "Pop! Pediatric Therapy is a multi-disciplinary clinic providing therapy using a respectful and inclusive lens while supporting families using a developmental, individualized and relationship based approach." (POP Pediatric Therapy, 2022)
- Services offered:
  - Occupational Therapy
  - Speech Therapy
  - Physical Therapy
  - Early intervention
  - Mental Health Services

## Summary of Needs Assessment

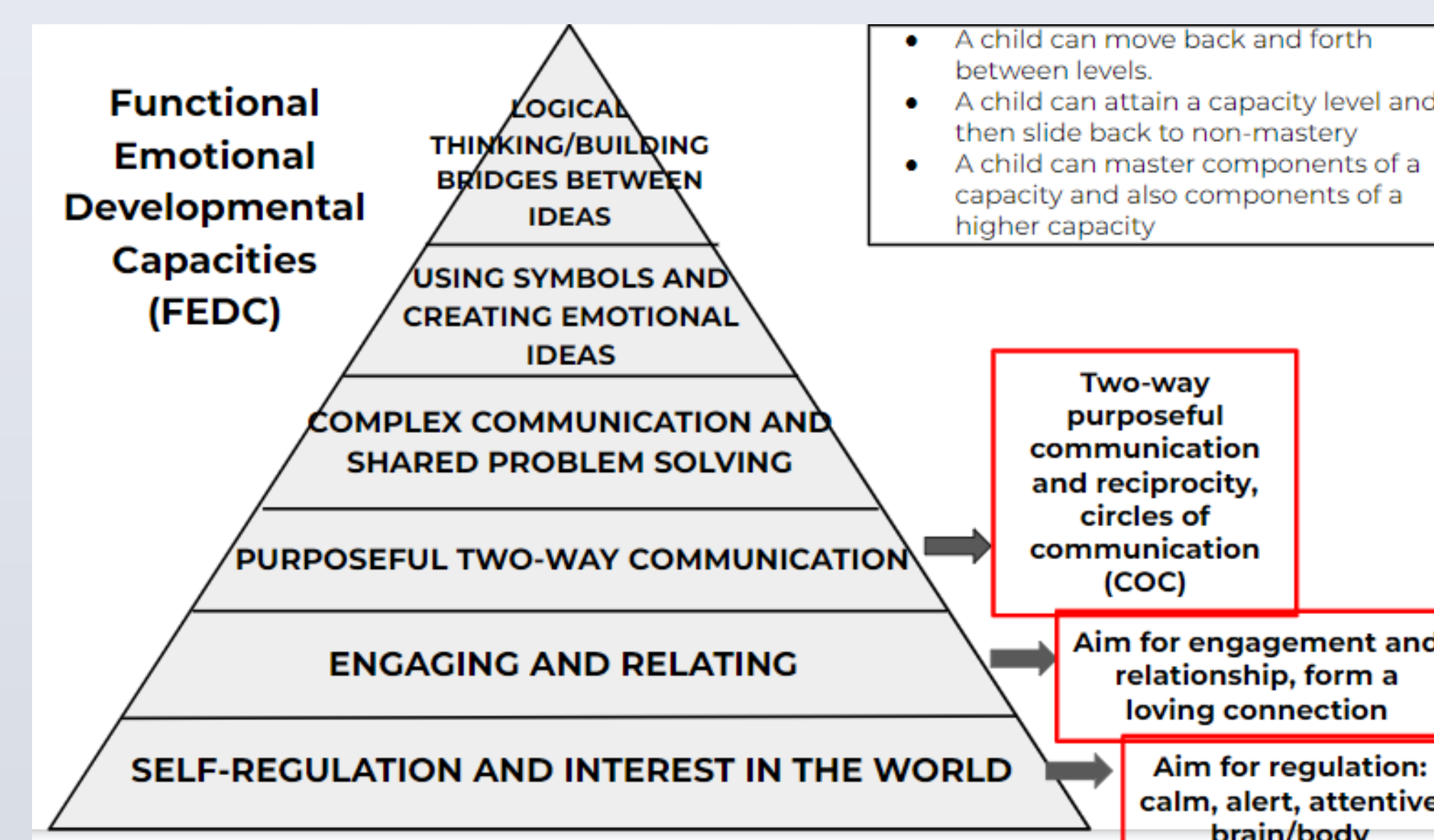
Identified site needs:

- Support speech language therapists' through DIR/Floortime training
- Help build SLP's knowledge of DIR/Floortime model particularly pertaining to regulation and engagement
- Develop virtual resource with video footage of clients
- Provide information on the DIR/Floortime model, specifically functional emotional developmental capacities (FEDC) 1-3

## Literature Review Summary

Floortime is an intervention that is used to promote an individual's development through a respectful, playful, joyful, and engaging process (Interdisciplinary Council on Developmental and Learning Disorders [ICDL], 2009)

- The Floortime approach is of particular interest to occupational therapists since it takes place in the participant's environment and is centered on the child's main occupation, which is play (Dionne & Martini, 2010)
- Adding a modest home-based DIR/Floortime® parent training approach may yield clinically meaningful improvements in attention and initiation for children with a range of developmental challenges (Pajareya & Kongkasuwan, 2019)
- Ratcliff et al. (2021) published a cross-sectional quantitative research study that utilized 1,420 children and adolescents with ASD between the ages of 6-17. Results of this study determined that emotional regulation is a barrier to participation in occupations in children/adults with ASD.



The Functional Emotional Assessment Scale (FEAS; Greenspan et al., 2001) is used within the DIR model as a bottom up approach to treatment

**Developmental** →  
• FEDC - emotional development of the child

Look at the child's development through the lens of the FEDC. Figure out where the child is at developmentally so that you can meet them there and provide further support

**Individual-Differences** →  
• Unique profile

Consider the child's unique profile and skill-set (sensory, motor, social-emotional skills, communication development) and contemplate how these distinct differences impact development and relationship

**Relationship-Based** →  
• Forming meaningful connections

Floortime uses the power of relationships and human connections to promote development. Establish a trusting and loving relationship with the child so that they may feel free to safely express themselves on a social, cognitive, and linguistic level

DIRFloortime® (also referred to as Floortime) is the application of the Developmental, Individual-Differences, & Relationship-Based (DIR) model in practice. This approach is being recognized as the next generation of evidence-based interventions for autism.

## Capstone Project Description

The purpose of this capstone project was to explore Floortime as a holistic intervention approach and gain understanding of the power of connection and relationship in supporting development. My focus areas were clinical practice skills and program development.

Goals:

1. Complete DIR 101 certification course via ICDL to use in practice with pediatric population
2. Develop a virtual resource for parents, POP staff members, and future POP students with information on the DIR/Floortime model, specifically functional emotional developmental capacities (FEDC) 1-3
3. Build an understanding of the power of connection and relationship in supporting development through clinical practice skills utilizing the DIR/Floortime approach

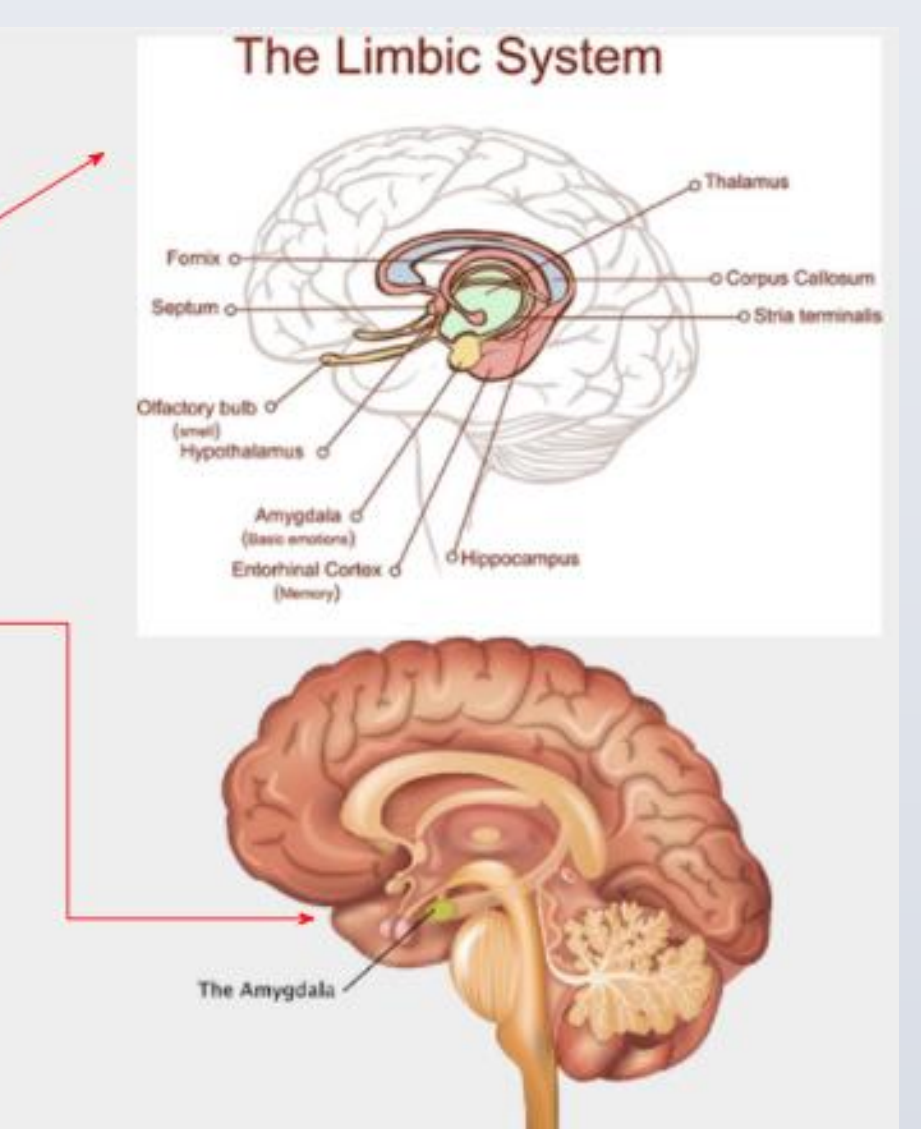


## Learning Objectives Achieved

1. Completed DIR 101 certification course via ICDL to use in practice with pediatric population
2. Developed a slide deck with video footage of children from treatment sessions with additional information on the DIR/Floortime model, specifically functional emotional developmental capacities (FEDC) 1-3. This resource will remain at the clinic to be used as a learning tool for parents, POP staff members, and future POP students
3. Built an understanding of the power of connection and relationship in supporting development through clinical practice skills utilizing the DIR/Floortime approach

### Breakdown of Stress in the Brain

- The amygdala is part of the brain's limbic system
- The function of the **amygdala** is to regulate anxiety, aggression, fear conditioning, emotional memory, and social cognition
- The Amygdala works to preserve memories and attach memories to specific emotions (creates positive and negative associations)



## Implications for OT Practice

Pediatric occupational therapists who are versed in childhood development and seek to support growth and expansion through attainment of milestones should be familiar with the DIRFloortime® approach, which is based on the DIR® model developed by Dr. Stanley Greenspan and his colleagues in the 1990s

- DIR/Floortime is a holistic and client centered approach to treating developmental delay through meaningful and joyful connections
- Occupational therapists proclaim commitment to a client-centered approach to treatment, meaning that they respect and value their clients' right for autonomy and personal choice
- Occupational therapists must become familiar with the Floortime approach, as directly aligns with occupational therapists' standards for care

## REFERENCES & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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