COLLECTION OF THEORETICAL CONCEPTS
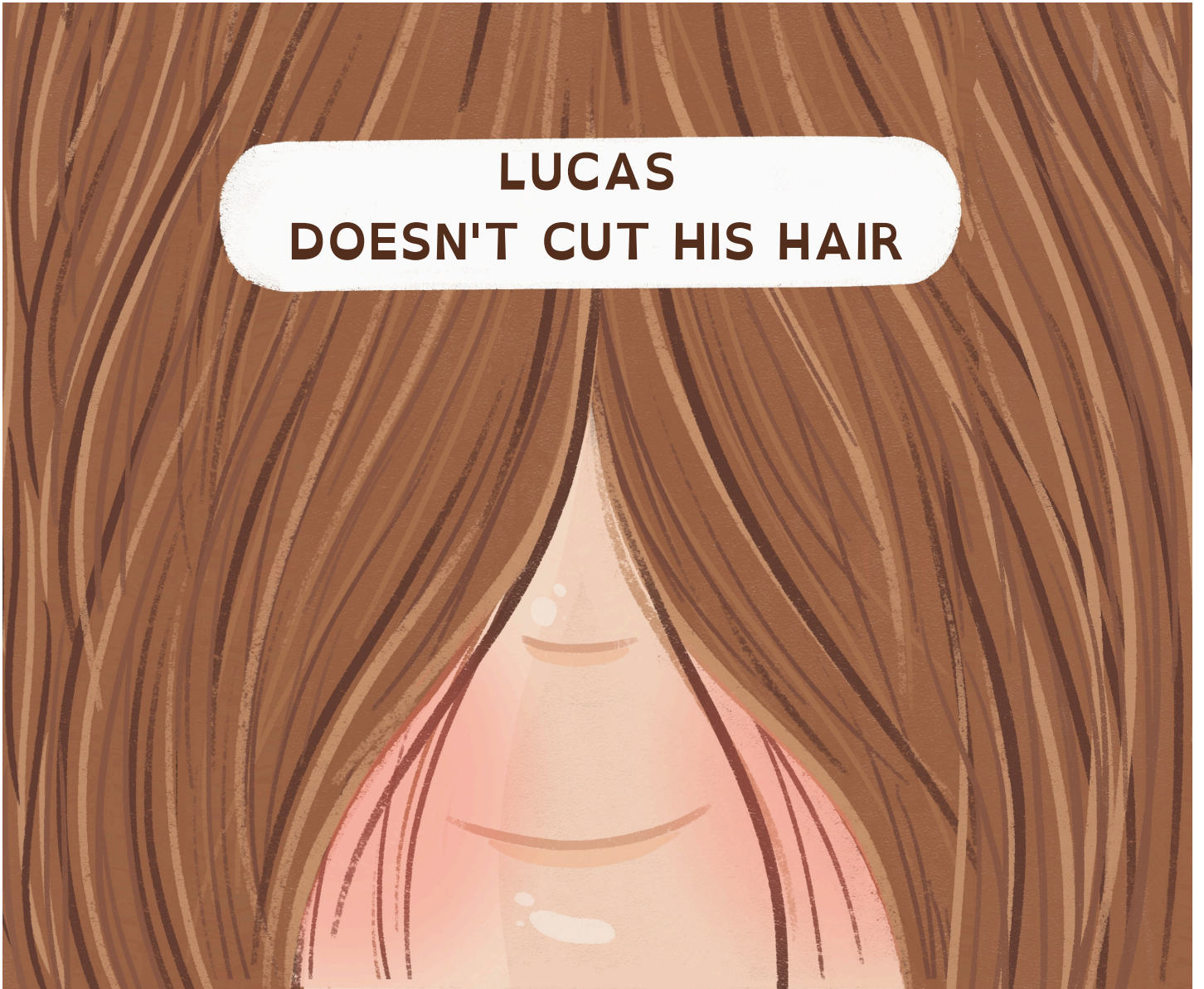

LUCAS
DOESN'T CUT HIS HAIR

This document compiles the main theoretical concepts addressed in the book "Lucas doesn't cut his hair". For each concept, a structured outline is followed, encompassing its definition, characteristics, how it is reflected in the story, and references.

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CONCEPT 1: COGNITIVE INFLEXIBILITY: CHARACTERISTICS AND IMPACT IN DAILY LIFE

Concept

Cognitive inflexibility is defined as the inability to switch between modes of thinking, and hence a difficulty to adapt to changing rules or face unplanned events.

People with cognitive inflexibility become less capable of re-thinking their beliefs upon new information or switching between different ways of thinking. Cognitive inflexibility results in a set of cognitive traits that are inflexible.

Due to this, cognitive inflexibility is typically deemed maladaptive, as opposed to cognitive flexibility, which involves the ability to alternate between different styles of thinking. Cognitive flexibility is essential for numerous tasks, including empathizing (Yan et al., 2020) and cooperating with others (Roy and Dugal, 1998), where individuals must seamlessly transition between diverse perspectives.Cognitive inflexibility could be shown and recognized by some externalizing behaviors such as insistently repetitious behavior; perfectionism; compulsions; perseveration; agitation or aggression and self-injuring behaviors. Some internalizing behaviours as obsessions, anxiety and depression may also indicate cognitive inflexibility.

How to observe in the story

In Lucas's case, his reluctance to visit the hairdresser can be attributed to various factors, including the presence of cognitive inflexibility. Specifically, Lucas seemed unprepared for unexpected experiences and events, requiring a series of measures and strategies to ease his apprehension.

To help Lucas become more accustomed to the idea, his parents employed several tactics. They engaged in pretend play, acting out scenarios of visiting the hairdresser. Additionally, they initiated discussions with Lucas about the upcoming appointment, prominently displaying the date on a calendar in the kitchen. They even adjusted their route home from school to pass by Eduardo's hair salon, hoping to familiarize Lucas with the location.

Despite these efforts, Lucas still exhibited some nervousness when the hairdresser was mentioned. Ultimately, his parents took further steps to alleviate his concerns by thoroughly explaining the haircutting process and what to expect at the salon. When the day of the appointment arrived, Lucas, although still a bit apprehensive, felt more at ease knowing what to anticipate. This preparation enabled him to feel more comfortable during his haircutting session with Eduardo.

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CONCEPT 2: OVERSTIMULATION OF SPACE VS. SENSORY-RESPECTFUL SPACES

Concept

The dichotomy between "Overstimulation of space vs. Sensory-respectful spaces" refers to the necessity for prioritizing the sensory needs of certain children, starting with the environments they encounter daily.

Depending on the concept: types, characteristics, warning signs.

Sensory overload occurs when one or more of the body's senses are overwhelmed by excessive stimuli. This can happen in various settings, such as a crowded restaurant with loud music or encountering strong scents from passersby. When sensory overload occurs, the brain struggles to process the influx of information, resulting in discomfort ranging from mild to intense.

While everyone experiences sensory overload at some point, some children and adults face it regularly, making everyday situations challenging, particularly in their living spaces. Hence, it's crucial to adapt these spaces to meet their special needs and transform them into sensory-respectful environments.

Children may exhibit signs of discomfort from sensory overload, including anxiety, irritability, restlessness, or non-verbal behaviors such as covering their eyes or ears, crying, or avoiding specific places or situations.

Various triggers, such as crowds, loud noises, tight spaces, strong odors, or sudden changes in light and temperature, can contribute to sensory overload. Recognizing these triggers and the accompanying signs and symptoms in children is vital for parents and caregivers. Their swift intervention and presence in the overloaded sensory space can help alleviate the child's distress and manage their reactions effectively.

Choosing sensory-respectful spaces for children's experiences is essential, as it provides a supportive environment that caters to their sensory needs and promotes their well-being.

How to observe in the story

The salon of Eduardo was a scary place for Lucas. It was noisy, with hair dryers and clippers buzzing all around. Lucas got very nervous and Eduardo couldn't cut his hair.

In Eduardo's salon, there were various stimuli that overwhelmed Luca's senses and his brain.

Unfortunately, some of those stimuli couldn't change. However, what made the difference was how Lucas's parents made the "strange place" more familiar to him by incorporating daily routines that anticipated what would happen at Eduardo's salon.

Every strategy the parents employed aimed to familiarize Lucas with the idea of going to "Eduardo's place," especially by passing by Eduardo's hair salon on the way back from

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school. This simple action provided Lucas with a preview of the salon's environment, making it more acceptable to him.

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CONCEPT 3: SOCIAL SKILLS IN EARLYCHILDHOOD AND THE RELATIONSHIPS WITH STRANGERS IN THEIR INNER CIRCLE

<u>Concept</u>

There are several different social skills that are indicative of child development.

These include sharing, cooperating, following directions, using eye contact, use of manners, and understanding personal space.

These are useful skills that will allow children to be successful in the social world.

Social skills help children form positive relationships, have conversations, develop body language, cooperate, share and play together. Social skills also help establishing positive interactions with strangers in their inner circle.

Social skills are vital in maintaining positive interactions with others. Many of these skills are crucial in making and sustaining friendships. Social interactions do not always run smoothly and an individual needs to be able to implement appropriate strategies, such as conflict resolution, when difficulties arise during interactions.

Children experiencing difficulties with social skills may exhibit behaviors such as avoiding eye contact or struggling to take turns during conversations, leading to challenges in initiating or concluding interactions appropriately. Additionally, they may speak with unusual speed, stress, rhythm, intonation, pitch, or tone of voice.

Issues with using appropriate body language, such as standing too close or too far from others, can result in a failure to employ polite forms of communication, like saying "please," "thank you," "hello," and "goodbye." Furthermore, they may struggle to comprehend humor, sarcasm, idioms, and non-literal language (e.g., 'This place is a pig sty!') , thus missing out on nuanced aspects of communication.

Children with these difficulties might not seek clarification when confused or when situations are unclear. They may also struggle to respond appropriately to teasing, anger, failure, or disappointment and may lack empathy or imagination (i.e. not being able to imagine what it is like to be somebody else or in their situation), making it challenging for them to understand others' perspectives or navigate new or unforeseen situations effectively.

Boundaries/the midway distance from strangers

Knowing how close or far away to stand from other people is one of our many social skills. For most of us, there is no need to think about this. . For some children with cognitive inflexibility, this may not happen naturally. Hey may require support to understand how far or close to stand to someone and why this is important.

For some children experiencing cognitive inflexibility, strangers are perceived as dangerous, while other children may struggle to understand and maintain their personal body boundaries, potentially becoming overly intimate with strangers

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Teaching and assisting children in recognizing safe or expected strangers can be quite challenging for their caregivers, especially in determining the appropriate proximity or distance from them. Indeed, while it's crucial to help children identify the various types of unknown or unfamiliar people they may encounter daily, it's equally important to ensure they understand the expected types of interactions with these strangers.

How to observe in the story

Lucas is an energetic boy who loves playing with his friends and has a lot of fun at school.

With the help of his parents and teachers, Lucas likely feels comfortable at school. Through their guidance, he has integrated himself into this community, feeling safe and accepted.

The challenge for Lucas lies in accepting and feeling at ease with a new stranger: Eduardo, the hairdresser. Overcoming initial distrust and establishing a positive rapport with Eduardo is essential. Accepting Eduardo as a trusted figure within his circle is key for Lucas, allowing him to confidently undergo his haircuts.

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CONCEPT 4: UNDERSTANDING AND UTILIZING VISUAL ANTICIPATORS

Concept

Social interactions are integral to daily life, where the ability to understand and anticipate others' actions plays a crucial role. Furthermore, Anticipatory planning of movements allows for acting smoothly and efficiently by avoiding time-consuming corrective movements.

For children experiencing cognitive inflexibility, anticipatory planning of movements is not straightforward, making it crucial to assist them with visual anticipators.

Visual anticipators encompass a variety of tolos such as images, videos, tales, objects and movements. These aids assist children in their performance and help them predict the sequence of complex actions.

Children's exposure to visual anticipators enables them to develop a solid understanding of objects and the actions linked to them.

Visual anticipators could be successfully implemented in daily life, within a protected and well-known place, so that the child could learn how and when that stimulus should occur.

How to observe in the story

In Lucas's story, his parents employed several key visual anticipators to help him prepare for the hair salon visit. They hung a calendar in the kitchen, marking the day of the salon appointment, and created a social story featuring a boy similar to Lucas who also faced hair-cutting reluctance. Additionally, they explained the salon procedure and how his hair would be cut in detail. Alongside these direct methods, they engaged in less explicit activities like playing hairdresser with Lucas's dad, using toy scissors and a hairdryer on a doll. These interactions allowed Lucas to become familiar with the salon experience and its tools, ultimately reducing his anxiety about the upcoming visit. Through play and exposure to the sequence of actions, Lucas was able to anticipate and feel more comfortable with the salon experience.

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CONCEPT 5: SENSORY HYPERSENSITIVITY

Concept

Sensory hypersensitivity is defined as an increased awareness of and reaction to external stimuli. For children experiencing cognitive inflexibility, this can lead to difficulties in responding appropriately to their environment and everyday situations. In fact, sensory hypersensitivity can affect their daily life, education, and social interactions, often resulting in a wide range of confusing and sometimes negative behaviours.

Children with sensory hypersensitivity face challenges in seeking out experiences that facilitate learning about themselves and their environment, as well as understanding internal and external cues. They may find it difficult to receive and respond to sensory information effectively. For example, they may have a strong aversion to certain sensory triggers like light, sound, touch, taste, or smell.

Children with sensory hypersensitivity may tend to avoid certain activities and experiences. They might struggle with filtering and processing the sensory information they encounter during everyday activities, which can result in feeling overloaded or overwhelmed, leading to distress as evidenced by their behaviour. If their sensory needs are not effectively supported, this can lead to avoidance, withdrawal, inattention, and challenging behaviours.

- Auditory: Some children experience difficulties processing sounds, making it difficult for them to filter out the unwanted noise. Common background sounds that others may not notice can become constant distractions and overwhelm them. Certain noises may make them feel anxious as they do not know what they are and how to respond.

- Tactile: Some children exhibit heightened sensitivity to physical contact. For them, touch can be painful and uncomfortable, impacting their relationships with others. They may have strong aversions to certain textures and only wear specific clothing. Additionally, some children may become acutely aware of clothing seams and labels, and resist having anything on their hands and feet. Those who are oversensitive to touch may walk on tiptoes, dislike being stroked or tickled, and appear to overreact when they experience physical discomfort.

How to observe in the story

The rejection of a haircut by Lucas may be linked to sensory issues, causing him to avoid being touched and feel fearful of loud and discomforting noises. The loud sounds produced by hair dryers and razors in the salon can overstimulate Lucas's auditory sensitivity. Additionally, the hairstylist touching his hair, the itchiness from the cut hair and the vibration of the razor machine on his headmake Lucas very uncomfortable due to an overstimulation of his tactile senses. These sensations lead Lucas to systematically refuse to have his hair cut.

To address Lucas's hypersensitivity, his mother decided to use different sponges and brushes to help Lucas get used to different sensations on his head. For the vibrations, she used a massager typically used for back pain relief. Meanwhile, his father purchased a doll so they could play together, simulating activities like washing and drying hair, enabling Lucas to become familiar with these tools and the noise of the hair dryer.

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CONCEPT 6: CHILDHOOD REASONING IN NEW SITUATIONS

Concept

Reasoning is a vital function of the human mind that helps us make sense of the world. It involves using our existing knowledge to navigate new situations and face new problems.

Young children constantly seek explanations for the things happening. They attempt to construct a series or network of explanations to comprehend the world around them and their role within it. This network is shaped by their experiences and social understanding, adhering to its own set of rules.

Children may experience fear of the unknown, which arises when they lack or perceive the absence of information about something. As a result, they may exhibit intolerance towards uncertainty, feeling uneasy when they don't have enough information to to fully understand a situation. The cognitive process in children includes various aspects, such as perception, memory, thoughts, symbols, reasoning, problem solving and understanding logical processes such as cause and effect.

During this critical stage of development, parents and caregivers play a crucial role in supporting and nurturing children's cognitive growth. By providing opportunities for exploration, problem-solving, and engaging in activities that stimulate their reasoning skills, parents can help their children develop essential cognitive abilities.

How to observe in the story

Lucas felt fearful about going to the hair salon because it was an unfamiliar place with strangers. Despite understanding the consequences of not cutting his hair, he was reluctant to get a haircut because it involved situations he found unpleasant and unfamiliar. Additionally, he valued his hair as part of his entity.

To foster Lucas's reasoning and actively help him understand the process, Lucas's parents brought him to Eduardo's salon. There, Lucas observed how Eduardo worked and watched other children getting haircuts. Additionally, Lucas's parents played with him, allowing him to experience the haircutting process firsthand.

Through visual observation and hands-on play, Lucas gained practical explanations of how the haircutting process works and what it entails. This interactive experience enabled him to better comprehend the procedure and alleviate any fears or uncertainties he may have had.

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CONCEPT 7: ANXIETY AND PHOBIA

Concept

Anxiety is one of the most prevalent mental health issues that can impact young children. It is characterized by a sense of unease, including feelings of worry or fear, which can range in intensity from mild to severe depending on the individual's age and stage of development. When anxiety manifests as an exaggerated or unrealistic fear of a specific situation or object, it is categorized as a phobia.

Young children may find it challenging to articulate their symptoms and distress because they may not fully comprehend what they are experiencing or lack the vocabulary to describe it. However, for most children, anxiety is a normal part of growing up. For example, young children often feel anxious when separated from their main caregivers or when they encounter unfamiliar or dark places. Anxiety can manifest differently as children grow older. Until the age of two or three, fears and anxieties often revolve around loud noises, strangers, and separation from the loved ones.

In early childhood, anxieties may be centred around concerns about illness, storms, and small animals. As children transition into late childhood, fears related to social interactions and situations become more prominent.

In children under 8 years old, anxiety disorders, along with related problems like obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and traumatic stress disorders, can cause difficulties in managing emotions, functioning within the family, getting enough sleep, and developing social skills.

Signs to look at:

- Lack of concentration;

- Not sleeping and nightmares;

- Not eating properly;

- Getting angry and irritable;

- Constantly worrying or having negative thoughts;

- Feeling tense;

- Needing toilet too often;

- Easily crying;

- Being clingy;

- Often complaining of tummy aches and feeling unwell.

How to observe in the story

Lucas's reluctance to have his hair cut at Eduardo's salon can be attributed in part to his anxiety or phobia. He feels frightened by the loud and unsettling noises of razors and

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hair dryers, as well as by the presence of strangers and the unfamiliarity of the salon environment.

To help Lucas overcome his fear, shared a story about a child like him who also struggled with getting a haircut. They carefully explained everything that would happen at the salon and even visited the establishment to observe Eduardo cutting someone else's hair. Understanding the haircutting process gave Lucas a sense of control over the situation. On the day of his next haircut, Lucas felt less anxious and was able to sit in the chair and have his hair cut successfully.

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CONCEPT 8: THE IMPORTANCE OF ROLE PLAYING GAMES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING

Concept

Play encompasses many activities that are of high importance during childhood. It's a way for young children to explore and interact with their surroundings, involving moving and manipulating objects in their environment. Through play, children exercise and develop motor skills (using their bodies), sensory skills (utilizing their senses), and cognitive/perceptual skills (thinking and understanding), all of which are crucial components of their development.

Play serves as a catalyst for integration, aiding children in navigating various situations and understanding the cultures in which they live. Additionally, it fosters flexibility in thinking, adaptability to new experiences, and proficiency in problem-solving. Through play, children explore their surroundings and cultivate a sense of control over their environment. Moreover, play supports the development of social, intellectual, emotional, and physical skills, contributing to holistic growth and well-being. Roleplay is a particularly powerful tool for early childhood learning. When children engage in roleplay, they can use their imagination freely and independently. They get into character in their play, expressing thoughts and feelings through external actions. In this type of play, children can transform objects and situations while still recognizing their original identities. For example, they can use an object as a character in their play/game instead of using themselves. This enables children to play with others and/or interact with objects.

Roleplay is very beneficial for the development of cognition and skills. It aids in adapting to change, understanding social situations, interacting with peers, making friends, and communicating effectively. Furthermore, pretend play fosters logical thinking and the organization of thoughts, while also facilitating language acquisition. Additionally, it enhances memory, attention span, and concentration skills, contributing to overall cognitive growth and development.

How to observe in the story

Lucas's reluctance to have his hair cut may stem from a lack of understanding about the haircutting process and its implications. Pretend play served as a solution for his father to help Lucas grasp the concept of a haircut while enjoying himself.

During the play, Lucas and his father took on the roles of hairdressers and tended to a doll's hair. Through this playful activity, Lucas gained hands-on experience and comprehension of the haircutting process. Additionally, he became more comfortable with the loud noises from the hairdryer and familiarized himself with the hair salon environment.
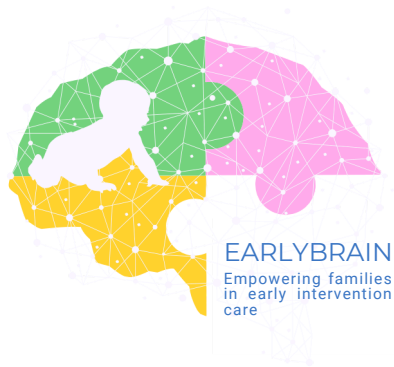
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