

The Structural-Constructivist Architecture of Nurture: Hypothesizing a Parenting Model through the Core Emotion Framework

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Abstract

The emergence of the Core Emotion Framework (CEF) in early 2026, authored by Jamel Bulgaria, represents a paradigm shift in affective science, proposing a "structural-constructivist architecture" to resolve the historical "100 years war" between discrete emotion models and dimensional frameworks.¹ While the canonical documentation of the CEF focuses on psychological optimization and clinical mechanistics in adults, its foundational

principles—organized around a tripartite center system and ten universal operators—offer a fertile ground for a hypothesized parenting model.² This model views the parent not merely as an emotional guide but as a structural architect of the child's burgeoning "unified structural engine," responsible for the calibration, modulation, and meta-stability of the child's affective dynamics.¹

优化后的中文摘要（完全基于文档内容）

本研究以核心情绪框架（Core Emotion Framework, CEF）为基础，提出一种“结构-建构式”的育儿模型假设。文中指出，CEF 由三大中心与十个普遍存在的情绪操作符构成，情绪被视为“由三大中心中的模块化操作符所驱动的功能过程”，而非单纯的反应性状态（引自文中：“情绪并非仅是反应状态，而是由三大中心中的模块化操作符所驱动的功能过程”）。在发展情境中，这些原初情绪力量虽具有生物学潜能，但其整合为统一自我则是一个建构过程，因此育儿被重新定义为对儿童“统一结构引擎”的校准、调节与维稳（文中称其为“用于优化儿童的‘操作符空间’”）。

文章进一步说明，CEF 通过十个操作符为儿童的认知、关系与行动系统提供发展路径，并提出“中心失衡”“融合”“溢出”等结构性失调概念，用以解释儿童行为问题的机制来源。文中写道：“儿童常出现中心优势或中心塌陷……照护者的主要任务是侦测这些失衡并恢复三中心的‘规范流动’。”此外，作者将 CEF 与 DIR Floortime 的六大情绪发展能力进行映射，展示 CEF 如何为发展性差异儿童提供操作层面的支持。

最后，作者指出 CEF 育儿的核心目标是“能力优化”，强调通过居中、解缠、0-10 调节等技术，使儿童的十个操作符能够独立且和谐地运作，从而实现“动态稳定”与“心理繁荣”。文中总结道：“育儿是训练十个原初操作符使其独立且和谐运作的过程。”该模型为发展心理学提供了一种可重复、结构化且科学可检验的理论架构。

Theoretical Foundations of CEF-Informed Parenting

The CEF establishes that emotions are not merely reactive states but functional processes governed by modular operators within three primary centers: the Head, the Heart, and the Gut.² In a developmental context, the structural-constructivist nature of the framework suggests that while the ten primal powers are universal and biologically latent, their integration into a cohesive self is a constructed process.¹ Parenting, therefore, becomes a technical intervention designed to optimize the "Operator Space," where an operator maps a center–process pair to a scalar activation value, formally defined as $O : C \times P \longrightarrow \mathbb{R}.$ ²

The Resolution of the 100 Years War in Child Rearing

Traditional parenting advice often oscillates between the "discrete" approach (teaching children to identify universal labels like happy, sad, or angry) and the "dimensional" approach (focusing on the intensity of arousal and valence).¹ The CEF provides a resolution by treating these "labels" as secondary expressions of the ten core processes.¹ For a parent, this means shifting focus from "What is the child feeling?" to "Which operator is currently active, and is its activation appropriate for the context?".² This move from semantic meaning to operational mechanics allows for a more precise and repeatable structural foundation for behavioral regulation.¹

The Tripartite Architecture as a Developmental Map

The CEF organizes the human psyche into three distinct but interactive functional domains, each representing a different area for potential development and refinement in childhood.²

Center	Functional Domain	Developmental Responsibility	Core Mechanisms
Head	Cognitive & Executive Regulation	Environmental sensing, evaluative clarity, and commitment to choice.	Sensing, Calculating, Deciding. ²
Heart	Relational & Affective Flow	Boundary setting, empathetic expansion, and social role management.	Expanding, Constricting, Achieving. ²

Gut	Action, Embodiment & Motivation	Resource mobilization, value resonance, and adaptive yielding.	Arranging, Appreciating, Boosting, Accepting. ²
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A CEF-informed parenting strategy begins with "Center Rebalancing".² Children often display "Center Dominance" or "Center Collapse," where one domain (e.g., the Gut's drive) overwhelms another (e.g., the Head's calculation).² The caregiver's primary role is to detect these imbalances and apply protocols to restore "canonical flow" and "meta-stability" across the tripartite system.²

Comprehensive Analysis of the Ten Operators in Childhood

The "CEF Decalogue" identifies ten specific emotional powers that represent the essential engine of the human psyche.³ In a parenting framework, these ten operators serve as the fundamental building blocks of character development and psychological flourishing.³

The Head Center: Mastering the Cognitive Engine

The Head center focuses on perception, evaluation, and decision-making.² In early childhood, this center moves from raw sensory input to the construction of logical bridges and strategic reasoning.¹⁰

Sensing (O1): The Foundation of Situational Awareness

Sensing is the instinctive ability to read the environment and interpret sensory cues.⁸ For an infant, this operator is the primary mode of engagement with the world—the sights, sounds, and smells of the caregiver.¹⁰ A parent advises the child's development of Sensing by providing a "safe base" that reduces stress, allowing the child to remain "calm enough and alert enough for the task at hand".¹¹ Maladaptive Sensing, often triggered by high-stress environments, can lead to "Sensory Overflow," where the child's Head center is flooded, inhibiting the ability to mentalize or understand the inner worlds of others.²

Calculating (O2): Risk Evaluation and Strategic Planning

As the child matures, the "Left Reflecting Brain" capacity for Calculating emerges, enabling the child to evaluate risks and benefits.⁸ A parent facilitates this by encouraging "analytical drills"—asking questions that require the child to strategize or optimize resources.⁸ This operator is crucial for transitioning from impulsive reaction to intentional behavior, a milestone often reached between 9 and 18 months in the form of "complex communication".¹⁰

Deciding (O3): The Commitment Mechanism

Deciding is a "constant-activation operator" that is binary (engaged or not) and does not scale in intensity.² It represents the child's commitment to action, integrating both cognitive and affective

inputs.² In a parenting context, fostering the Deciding operator means allowing the child to make choices—even simple ones—to build "self-trust and informed decision-making".⁸ This operator is unique because it determines the level of ambiguity the system is willing to carry rather than reducing the ambiguity itself.²

The Heart Center: Navigating the Relational Landscape

The Heart center governs openness, protection, and fulfillment.² It is the seat of interpersonal connections and social dynamics.⁸

Expanding (O4): The Drive for Connection

Expanding is the "Outgoing Heart" drive to create openness, connect, and build empathetic relations.⁸ This operator is highly active during "states of shared joy" between parent and child.¹⁰ Parental encouragement of Expanding involves "face-to-face games" and enthusiastic responses to a child's coos and smiles, which foster the capacity for "intimacy and commitment" later in life.¹²

Constricting (O5): The Refinement of Boundaries

The "Reflecting Heart" capacity for Constricting allows a child to focus attention on details and set precise boundaries.⁸ In parenting, this is the power of "No"—not as an act of defiance, but as a mechanism for self-regulation and protection from emotional overwhelm.² A child who lacks the power of Constricting may suffer from "Relational Diffusion," unable to distinguish their own needs from those of others.²

Achieving (O6): Balancing Multiple Roles

The "Balancing Heart" talent for Achieving empowers the child to manage various tasks and responsibilities while executing with excellence.⁸ For a school-aged child, this means juggling the roles of student, sibling, and friend.⁸ A parent supports the Achieving operator by helping the child "break tasks down" and focus on one part at a time to reduce overwhelm, a strategy consistent with the CEF's emphasis on "structural modulation".²

The Gut Center: The Seat of Action and Meaning

The Gut center focuses on readiness, drive, and meaning/acceptance.² It acts as the "essential engine" for personal growth.⁸

Arranging (O7): Proactive Leadership and Organization

Arranging is the "Outgoing Gut" drive that powers proactive behavior and the readiness to engage in action.⁸ A child demonstrates this operator when they lead a parent to a shelf to get a desired toy, stringing together complex actions to communicate intentions.¹⁰ Parents cultivate Arranging by following the child's lead and then challenging them to solve increasingly complex social problems.¹³

Appreciating (O8): The Internal Applause

Appreciating is the "Reflecting Gut" practice of celebrating achievements.⁸ It reinforces self-worth and fosters a positive self-image.⁸ A parent advises this by modeling "internal applause," ensuring the child learns to acknowledge their own progress rather than relying solely on external validation.⁵

Boosting (O9): Sustaining Momentum

The "Balancing Gut" of Boosting provides the dynamic force that fuels energy and maintains momentum.⁸ This is the resilient force that allows a child to sustain long-term motivation even when facing obstacles.⁸ In the CEF, parents are encouraged to help children "intensify" their Boosting from 0 to 10 during tasks that require persistence.²

Accepting (O10): The Serenity of Yielding

Accepting is the capacity to let go and release resistance, making space for growth and change by yielding to the natural flow of life.⁸ This is perhaps the most difficult operator for children to master, as it requires "embracing serenity" and recognizing the need for recovery.⁸ A parent supports the Accepting operator by validating that it is okay to "yield to reality" when a situation cannot be changed, which prevents chronic frustration.²

Affective Dynamics and the Parent-Child Interaction

The CEF's "Affective Dynamics" describes how these ten operators move and interact within the individual and between individuals.¹ In parenting, this manifests as the "co-regulation" of activation states.¹¹

Intra-Center and Inter-Center Flow

The framework enforces permissible flows of activation, which a parent must monitor.² For instance, a healthy transition in the Head center moves from Sensing to Calculating to Deciding.² A parent might observe a child who "Senses" a problem but immediately jumps to "Deciding" without "Calculating," leading to impulsive and often dangerous choices.²

Flow Type	Directionality Examples	Parental Intervention Strategy
Intra-Center	Sensing → Calculating → Deciding	"Slow down and think" (stimulating Calculating). ²
Inter-Center	Head (Decision) → Gut (Action)	"Make a plan and do it" (linking Deciding to Arranging). ²

Inward Spiral	Emotional internalization	"Tell me what you're thinking" (moving from Heart to Head). ²
Outward Flow	Social expression	"How can we help them?" (moving from self to other). ²

Inter-center flow is "fully bidirectional," meaning a child's somatic Gut state (e.g., hunger or fatigue) can and should drive Head center evaluation.² A parent who ignores these "Gut signals" may inadvertently cause "Overflow," where the child's unprocessed physical needs overwhelm their cognitive capacity for regulation.²

The 0–10 Modulation System in Daily Parenting

The CEF Method uses a standard scale where 0–10 signifies intensifying and 10–0 signifies quieting or stabilizing.² A parent advises a child's emotional development by teaching them to modulate their own "dials".² If a child is in a state of "Boosting" at a level 10 during bedtime, the parent uses "Stabilization Sequences"—such as slow exhales and grounding—to help the child quiet the operator back to a 0.²

Structural Dysregulation: Identifying and Addressing Imbalances

The CEF provides a technical language for understanding behavioral issues in children through the lens of "Structural Psychopathology".²

Fusion and Chronic Fusion

"Fusion" is a temporary state where the activation of one process alters another.² In a child, this might look like "Anger" (Boosting) being fused with "Strategic Thinking" (Calculating), leading to manipulative behavior.² While temporary fusion is a normal part of development, "Chronic Fusion" is a maladaptive state where processes remain involuntarily co-activated over time.² This leads to rigid, self-reinforcing patterns, such as a child whose "Sensing" of the environment is chronically fused with "Constricting" (fear/boundaries), resulting in avoidant or anxious attachment.²

The Overflow Mechanism

"Overflow" occurs when a process's activation exceeds its home center's capacity and drives activation in another center.² For a parent, recognizing overflow is critical for preventing meltdowns.⁹ When a child's "Heart center" is overloaded by social demands (Achieving), the resulting overflow into the "Gut" might manifest as an explosive Arranging drive (hitting or screaming).² The CEF advises against "active operator work" during overflow, recommending immediate stabilization to avoid flooding the system further.²

The Parent as Practitioner: Protocols for Growth

The CEF Practitioner Manuals (PM-1 through PM-7) provide step-by-step protocols that can be hypothesized for use by parents as "primary practitioners".²

The Centering Protocol for Caregivers

Protocol 1, the "Centering Protocol," is used to establish "architectural clarity".² For a parent, this means:

1. **Head:** Widening awareness to sense the child's environment objectively.²
2. **Heart:** Opening space for empathy and connection, even during conflict.²
3. **Gut:** Grounding themselves to provide a stable, non-reactive presence.²

By practicing Centering, the parent avoids "overflowing" their own emotions into the child, a situation that otherwise increases the child's stress and deteriorates the bond of attachment.¹¹

The Detangling and Structural Disassembly Protocols

When a child exhibits a "fused" emotional state, the parent can use the "Detangling Protocol" to separate the co-activated operators.² For instance, if a child feels "guilt" (a fusion of Constricting and Appreciating), the parent helps the child:

1. **Isolate** the physical sensation of the boundaries being set (Constricting).²
2. **Differentiate** the value they place on themselves (Appreciating).²
3. **Rebalance** the centers so the child can learn from the boundary without losing their self-worth.²

In more chronic cases, "Structural Disassembly" (PM-3) involves a six-stage process to undo deep-seated dysregulation patterns, starting with stabilization and moving toward the restoration of canonical flow.²

Integrative Developmental Alignment: CEF and DIR Floortime

Jamel Bulgaria's work includes a direct comparison between the CEF and the DIR Floortime approach, highlighting the CEF's utility in supporting children with neurodevelopmental differences.³

Mapping Functional Emotional Developmental Capacities (FEDCs)

The DIR model identifies six core capacities that lay the foundation for all learning and development.¹⁰ The CEF architecture provides the "operational mechanics" for these milestones.²

DIR FEDC	Age Range	CEF Operator Alignment	Structural Goal
1. Self-Regulation	0–3 Months	Gut (Accepting) + Head (Sensing)	Mastering the 10 → 0 stabilization loop. ²
2. Engagement	2–7 Months	Heart (Expanding)	Fostering "shared joy" and relational flow. ⁸
3. Two-Way Communication	3–10 Months	Head (Sensing) + Gut (Arranging)	Intentional signal exchange and "circles of communication". ¹⁰
4. Problem Solving	9–18 Months	Head (Calculating) + Gut (Arranging)	Complex communication to achieve specific goals. ¹⁰
5. Emotional Ideas	18–48 Months	Heart (Achieving) + Head (Deciding)	Using symbols/words to represent internal states. ¹⁰
6. Logical Thinking	3–4.5 Years	Head (Calculating) + Head (Deciding)	Building bridges between ideas and cause-effect reasoning. ¹⁰

The CEF suggests that while typically developing children reach these milestones "relatively easily," children with neurodevelopmental differences may require "specific support from caregivers" to master these operators.¹⁰ The CEF Method provides the "operator guides" necessary for this targeted intervention.²

Capability Optimization: The Future of Parenting

The ultimate goal of the CEF is "Capability Optimization"—a holistic approach to identifying and improving the human psyche.⁵ For a parent, this means moving beyond "discipline" to the "strategic optimization of internal resources".⁸

The Mirror Technique for Self-Discovery

A unique parental tool in the CEF is the "Mirror Technique," where the parent mirrors each of the child's ten core operators separately.⁵ This allows the child to "find their true self" by seeing their emotional powers reflected in a clear, undistorted way.⁵ Instead of mirroring a "state" (e.g., "You are angry"), the parent mirrors the "power" (e.g., "I see you are Boosting right now").⁵ This facilitates "Injective Mapping," ensuring that the child's internal operators remain distinct and boundary-preserving.²

Meta-Stability and Long-Horizon Resilience

Technical Specification 14 (TS-14) defines "Meta-Stability" as the system's ability to maintain structural integrity across long time horizons.² A CEF-parented child develops:

- **Operator Durability:** The ability of their "powers" (like Accepting or Boosting) to maintain identity under repeated activation.²
- **Facet Resilience:** The strength to resist long-term fragmentation of functional boundaries (e.g., keeping "Heart" empathy separate from "Head" analysis when necessary).²
- **Modulation Elasticity:** Ensuring that pathways remain flexible and do not become rigid or stuck in chronic fusion.²

Conclusion: Hypothesizing the CEF-Parenting Synthesis

The Core Emotion Framework advises a parenting model that is technically rigorous, somatic-energetic, and structurally focused.¹ By treating the child's psyche as a "unified structural engine," the CEF shifts the caregiver's role from moral instructor to "affective engineer".¹ The framework's emphasis on "Personal Responsibility" and "Balancing Contradicting Powers" ensures that the child grows into a "logical, cohesive, thinking person" capable of navigating the vast complexity of human experience.⁵

In this model, parenting is the process of training the ten primal operators to function "independently and harmoniously".⁸ Through the use of Centering, Detangling, and 0-10 Modulation, the parent ensures the child achieves "Dynamic Stability" and "Psychological Flourishing".² As Jamel Bulgaria posits, the "secret of inner growth" lies within these core emotional powers, and it is the sacred task of the parent to optimize them.³ This hypothesized application of the CEF represents a significant advancement in developmental theory, providing a reproducible, scientifically grounded architecture for the next generation of human potential.¹

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