



Social and Emotional Well-being

What Are Social-Emotional Skills?

Social-emotional skills are essential for connecting with others! They help us manage our emotions, build healthy relationships, and feel empathy.

Some examples of social-emotional skills in use are:

- Recognizing if someone is sad, and asking if they're ok.
- Expressing yourself with your friends in a different way than with your parents.
- Understanding your thoughts and feelings, and being able to relate to others.

While these skills may sound complex, social and emotional development begins at a very young age.

Social-Emotional Skills: Know the Basics

When does social and emotional development begin?

Babies start learning these skills from birth! As soon as they begin interacting with the people who care for them, they begin to develop an understanding of feelings.

How do parents impact social-emotional development?

Parents help to nurture social-emotional skills so kids develop healthy relationships with friends and family members. Even as a baby, your little one is picking up on how you respond to their social and emotional needs. They feel safe at home and in your presence.

Kids with healthy social-emotional skills are more likely to succeed in school, work, and life. Social-emotional skills help kids:

Make friends and keep friendships

Gain confidence

Resolve conflicts

Manage stress and anxiety

Learn social norms

Make appropriate decisions

Resist negative social pressure

Learn strengths and weaknesses

Gain awareness of what others are feeling

What you can do to help your child's social-emotional development:

Be a model of the emotions and behaviors you want your child to show. You are your child's first teacher and they look up to you as a role model.

Be responsive to your child's emotions and behaviors. Responding will help to develop trust between you and your child.

Ask open-ended questions, such as "What would you do?" to help develop problem-solving skills.

Use stories to talk to your child about different social situations and how each person might be feeling.

Encourage kids to try new things and learn how much they can do.

Play games to teach kids how to take turns, win and lose, share, and negotiate.

Ask your child questions when they are upset. These questions can be about why they are upset, or offering alternatives to understand the root of their unhappiness. For example, "Would you like to brush your teeth or take a bath first?"

Sit with your child when using a screen (not recommended before 18 months) and make it a social activity, e.g. asking them questions or playing turn-taking games.

0-3 Months

- Begins to smile in response to their caregivers, also called a social smile
- Develops more facial and body expressions
- Can briefly calm themselves, e.g. sucking on thumb
- Recognizes they are having fun and may cry when playing stops
- Makes eye contact and looks at people while interacting

4-6 Months

- Is usually happy when surrounded by cheerful caregivers
- Responds to and copies some movements and facial expressions
- Develops an awareness of their surroundings and expresses a desire to engage, e.g. banging objects or toys



7-9 Months

- May show anxiety around strangers
- Plays social games, e.g. peek-a-boo
- Learns the meaning of words when they're used consistently
- Enjoys looking at self in a mirror
- Becomes more "clingy" when leaving caregiver, e.g. reaches for caregiver when being held by someone else



10-12 Months

- Attempts to display independence, e.g. crawling for exploration or refusing food
- May show fear around unfamiliar people and objects
- Tries to get attention by repeating sounds and gestures
- Enjoys imitating people in play

1-2 Years

- Shows defiant behavior to establish independence, e.g. having tantrums
- Does not understand what others think or feel and believes everyone thinks as they do, e.g. gets upset when no longer the center of attention
- Enjoys being around other children, but not yet able to share easily
- Can play independently for brief periods of time

2-3 Years

- Copies others in more complex tasks, e.g. cleaning, cooking, self-care
- Shows affection towards friends
- Shows an increasing variety of emotions
- Upset when there are major changes in routine
- Seems concerned about personal needs and may even act "selfishly"



3-4 Years

- Starts cooperating more with others during play, e.g. sharing toys
- Can sometimes work out conflicts with other children, e.g. taking turns in small groups
- Uses words to communicate needs instead of screaming, grabbing, or whining
- Becomes more independent in daily activities, e.g. may choose own clothes to wear



4-5 Years

- Has more developed friendships and maybe even a "best friend"
- More cooperative with rules
- Understands and is sensitive to others' feelings
- Understands the difference between real life and make believe
- Has changes in attitude, e.g. is demanding at times and cooperative at times