

PROMOTING YOUR CHILD'S SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Positive Development of Young Children's Emotional Well-Being and Social Competence provides the foundation for the lifetime ability to successfully play, love, learn, and work within the home, school, and community.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE AND SCHOOL SUCCESS

Social and emotional school readiness is critical to a successful kindergarten transition, early school success, and even later accomplishments in the workplace. Children who are not successful in the early years of school often fall behind from the start and may be plagued by later behavioral, emotional, academic, and social development problems. The child who is socially and emotionally ready for school and thus ready to learn has many, though, not all, of the following characteristics: he or she is confident, friendly, has developed or will be able to develop good relationships with peers, and is able to concentrate on and persist at challenging tasks. The child must also be able to effectively communicate frustrations, anger, and joy and must be able to listen to instructions and be attentive.

Children do not "become" socially and emotionally ready for school in a single day. Social and emotional competence is rooted in the relationships that children experience in the early years of their life. During infancy, their major social and emotional milestone is the development of a secure attachment with their mother, father, or primary caregiver. Toddlers begin to master the concepts of self-awareness, independence, and self-control. During the preschool years, children learn the words that describe feelings and how to express them in ways that are acceptable. They are learning how to solve problems and stick with challenging tasks. They are developing the social skills needed to develop and maintain friendships.

Children who master the social and emotional milestones during the infancy, toddler, and preschool years are more likely to make a successful transition to school.

BUILDING YOUR CHILD'S SELF-ESTEEM

A child's sense of self-worth is a major factor in deciding your child's future. How they feel about themselves will affect their choice of friends, how they get along with others, and how they develop their potential. Their self-esteem influences all aspects of their lives.

Your child's self-esteem is a precious thing and should be handled with great care. It is crucial for your child's healthy development and future well being. It also has a great deal to do with how your child behaves now and later.

Here are some helpful hints to foster a sense of self-worth while protecting a child's self-esteem:

- Don't call children names or label them with derogatory words.
- Don't use sarcasm.
- Avoid talking about your children within their hearing. Even if the story is cute, it might be embarrassing to your child.
- When things go wrong, focus on the behavior that is unacceptable, not the child.
- Compliment, praise and encourage.
- Praise without words. Smiles and hugs are always well received by young children.
- Avoid compliments with riders, like, "You did this well but..." or "Fine, now if you would only..."
- Use praise that lets children know that they have been helpful.

Here are some helpful hints to help you build confidence in your child:

- Cherish child's individuality.
- Avoid comparing a child to other children.

- Don't do things for children that they can do for themselves.
- Let children answer some of their own questions.
- Spend time with them & let them see that you enjoy being with them.

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DEVELOPING SELF-CONTROL

The growth of self-regulation is a cornerstone of early childhood development that cuts across all domains of behavior. Self-control and the ability to regulate emotions are important skills that children begin to develop during the first five years of life. Self-control is the ability of the child to comply with requests, adapt their behavior to a given situation, postpone action, and behave in social acceptable ways. As children develop self-control, they are able to make decisions, solve problems, cooperate with others, and follow simple rules.

The foundation of self-control begins in infancy. The environment is important as the infant is soothed by the cessation of hunger or discomfort and by external stimuli such as holding and rocking or the sight, sound, or smell of the primary caregiver. They gradually develop the ability to begin to soothe and stimulate themselves. The ability to regulate oneself increases during the toddler years. As their understanding of the environment increases they are able to experience more complex emotions. They are beginning to be able to evaluate and respond to events in context and evaluate their own behavior in relation to external standards (what is forbidden and what is allowed) and their own feelings. They begin to feel pride in their own accomplishments and shame at their wrongdoings.

During the preschool years children become more able to control their behavior and regulate their emotions. They become increasingly able to use rules, strategies, and plans to guide their behavior. The ability to regulate emotions and control behavior becomes increasingly important for children's establishment of successful relationships with peers. The ability to regulate emotions and control behavior is important for success as the preschooler enters public school.

RECOGNIZING AND EXPRESSING FEELINGS

An important component of self-control is children's learning to recognize feelings in themselves and others.

- Talk to children about both positive and negative feelings.
- Give your child names for their feelings. Children must learn to label their feelings before they can express them appropriately.
- Talk to your children about what makes them happy, sad, scared, etc.
- Help children label feelings when you read to them. How would that make you feel?
- Help your child identify other's feelings based on their behavior. "Helping you sister make her happy."
- Help your children find ways to calm themselves. "You look excited. It will help if you takes some deep breaths"

TEACH YOUR CHILDREN THE STEPS IN SOLVING PROBLEMS

Identifying ways to solve interpersonal problems is an important component in self-control. You can teach problem-solving skills to preschool children. Children need the following skills in order to learn to effectively solve problems.

1. The ability to pay attention and listen.
2. Able to understand the concepts of "some/all", "not", "or", "and", and "same/different".
3. Identify their own and others feelings and recognize the difference between feelings and behavior.

Problem-solving teaches your child how to think, not what to think. The steps in teaching your child problem-solving are:

1. Helping children define the problem. “Both Sam and I want to play with the same toy.”
2. Talking about feelings.
3. Brainstorming possible solutions to the problem.
4. Thinking through the consequences for each of the solutions.
5. Deciding what to do.

You can model problem-solving for your children by telling them the various steps as you solve a simple problem. Find books in which the characters solve a problems and discuss the steps with your children. Have your children use puppets to act out solving a problem, such as, which book to read.

Remember it is the process of learning how to think about conflict and solving problems that is critical, rather than getting correct answers.

RESOURCES FOR PARENTS TO HELP IN TEACHING PROBLEM SOLVING

For Now and Forever: A Guide for Families on Promoting Social and Emotional Development. The Devereux Foundation.

Myrna B. Shure, *Raising a Thinking Child: Help Your Young Child to Resolve Conflicts and Get along with Others* (Simon & Schuster Paperback, March 1996) and *Raising A Thinking Child Workbook* (Research Press)

The book and workbook can be used by parents to help their young children learn problem-solving. It is based on the successful “I Can Problem Solve” model which has been used in preschool settings.

Myrna B. Shure, *Raising a Thinking Preteen: The “I Can Problem Solve” Program for 8- to 12-year-olds.* (Henry Holt, 2000)

This new book was written to help parents of 8- to 12-year-olds teach problem-solving skills to their children.