

Social and Emotional Health

Preparing infants and young children for school and life

Social and emotional health is an important part of your child's overall health, as important as their ability to walk, talk and read. Social and emotional health is a child's growing ability to:

- express feelings like mad, sad and happy in healthy ways (without hurting self or others)
- develop close relationships with others they know well, like mom, dad, grandmother, siblings, teachers, etc.
- explore his surroundings and learn, showing curiosity and interest in the world.



Social and emotional health starts at birth when infants turn toward their parent's voice and calm with a gentle touch. Developing social and emotional health in the early years is critical, and prepares children for school and life.



What Does Social-Emotional Health Look Like?

IN INFANTS . . .

- Cries, coos and smiles
- Looks at faces
- Seeks comfort from a familiar person
- Shows excitement
- Enjoys songs and simple games

IN TODDLERS AND PRESCHOOLERS . . .

- Shows shyness in unfamiliar places
- Begins to show feelings for others
- Expresses many feelings such as sad, happy, frightened and angry
- Enjoys imaginary play
- Listens to gentle reminders



What Can You do to Support Social and Emotional Health?

- Gently hold and cuddle children often.
- Enrich children's daily routines such as meal, bath, and nap times, by sharing looks, smiles, conversations and stories.
- Attentively respond to children's attempts to communicate with you through facial expressions, gestures, cooing, babbling, and words.
- Take time to follow a child's lead. Join them in floor-time play, and talk with them about their activities whenever possible.
- Gently guide children through social situations: Babies love to look at other babies. Toddlers and preschoolers learn to socialize through practice and experiences that are supported by caring adults.
- Be a positive role model: Offer children opportunities to observe you being a kind and caring person and taking time to safely calm down when upset.
- Help children learn a variety of words to fully express their feelings.
- Comment on the positive things that children do.



Loving eye contact builds trust and security.

2012 August

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