



## Social and emotional learning: suggestions for families

<https://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/mental-health-matters/social-and-emotional-learning/suggestions-for-families>

### What families of young children can do

Families can support children's developing social and emotional skills by:

- being affectionate and warm
- providing security for children by being consistent and predictable
- having frequent face-to-face interactions, including making eye contact, smiling and laughing together
- responding to your child's signals and preferences (e.g., knowing when to stop playing when your baby turns away signalling they have had enough for now)
- talking with children about what is happening and what will happen next
- being comforting and helping children to manage their feelings
- encouraging children to explore, play and try new things
- using social and emotional skills yourself and showing children how they work (e.g., by talking with children about your own mistakes, saying sorry and trying to make things better for the child you show them that these are a part of life and can be learning opportunities for everyone)
- describing and labelling emotions (e.g., "I enjoyed doing the puzzle together with you. It was fun!"; or "Are you feeling sad today because your friend is not here?")
- storytelling, playing games, singing, dancing, and imaginary play
- supporting children to make choices and solve problems as appropriate for their developmental level (e.g., "Do you want to wear your red dress or your blue dress?")
- providing opportunities for interactions with others (e.g., going to play groups with other children, inviting a child to your home for a play, going to the park where there are other children playing).

Parents and carers have a critical role to play in guiding and supporting children's social and emotional learning. Social and emotional skills develop with practice. Everyday situations present lots of opportunities for children to learn and practise skills for coping with emotions, managing relationships and solving problems. You can help children build the skills they need by providing effective coaching.

### Supporting social and emotional development through relationships

Relationships are strengthened and social and emotional skills developed through repeated experiences of 'give and take', for example, when a baby's coos and babbles are imitated by a caregiver with similar sounds and noises. Having conversations with children as they get older about these 'give and take' interactions helps children to develop their social and emotional skills further. 'Give and take' becomes sharing, cooperating and taking turns and developing friendships with other children. This

helps children to understand the feelings of others and how to think things through before acting.

### Taking time

Take time to really get to know your child through playing with them, observing their patterns and preferences and sharing everyday conversations with them. Being aware of your child's needs, likes, and interests can help you to be more responsive and 'in tune' and also appreciate what is special about them. For example:

- being aware of how your baby communicates when they are tired, such as by yawning, tugging their ear, becoming irritable or less involved in play, means you can help them to get the rest they need
- recognising when your child is happy and enjoying themselves means that you are able to give them more space and time to do the things they like and be sensitive not to intervene too early or try to control your child's experiences.

### Tuning in

Understanding the meaning behind your child's behaviour will help you to respond appropriately with encouragement, comfort and support (e.g., snuggling together and quietly reading a book to allow an irritable child to have some rest). Whilst it is not possible to understand your child perfectly all of the time, snuggling and having cosy moments together provides security and comfort that are important for your child's mental health and wellbeing.

### Being there

- Encouraging and supporting your child to try out new things for themselves and knowing when to encourage and not step in too soon will help to build their confidence and independence.
- Having conversations with your child to help build relationship skills, such as negotiation and compromise (e.g., deciding together what to have for lunch).

### Sharing experiences

- Joining in with children's experiences, celebrating their achievements and sharing joy helps them to know that they are special to you and builds their confidence in forming relationships with others.
- Providing 'teamwork' experiences where each person in the family has a role and can share jobs, such as preparing dinner or tidying up, helps children to cooperate and develop a sense of independence.

## How parents and carers can help older children

### Encourage discussion of feelings

Encourage children to talk about how they are feeling. Listen with empathy so they feel understood. Help them see that feelings are normal and that all feelings are okay, it is important to understand them, and that understanding and talking about feelings helps you to manage them.

### Support children's confidence

Help children identify and develop their strengths by encouraging them to have a go at things and find activities they enjoy. Praise their efforts, celebrate their successes and encourage them to keep trying and learning.

### Provide opportunities to play with others

## Social and emotional learning: suggestions for families

Playing with other children provides practice in important social skills such as sharing, taking turns and cooperation. Help children develop their skills by praising their appropriate play behaviour, for example: "I noticed how nicely you shared your toys. That made it fun for both of you."

### Lead by example

Parents and carers are important role models. Children learn how to behave by observing and imitating the behaviour of those around them, particularly adults. When you model positive ways of coping with strong feelings like anger, it helps children feel safe and shows them ways that they can manage strong feelings too.

### Give children choices

To develop responsibility children need practise in making choices that are appropriate for their age and experience level. You can help children build decision making skills by encouraging them to explore options and helping them think through the reasons for their choices. Involving children in family decision making (that you are in charge of) helps them develop skills for responsible decision making and encourages cooperative family relationships.

### Encourage creative problem solving

Asking questions that help children think of alternative solutions supports their thinking and problem solving skills. When problems arise you can explore them together by asking questions, such as: "What could you do about that?" or "What do you think might happen if you try that?"

### Teach children to use assertive communication skills

Show children how to confidently and respectfully communicate their thoughts, feelings and needs to others in an assertive way. For example, "I really don't want to play that game. It's too dangerous. Let's play a different game instead."

Some possibilities for parents and carers:

Parent or carer says: "I'm getting too angry. I need some time out to think about this."

Parent or carer says: "I'm feeling really tense. I need to take some deep breaths to calm down."

Admitting to having difficult feelings is not a sign of weakness or failure. It sets a good example for children by showing them that everyone has difficult feelings at times and that they are manageable.

