

## Social Emotional Health

- What social & emotional health is (getting along with others and managing emotions)
- Why it's important and how it's connected to later success/school success
- How to help support your child's social & emotional health/what to look for
- Who you can contact if you have concerns about your child's social/emotional development (Early On)

## How to Improve Your Child's Social and Emotional Health

Your infant or toddler is more than just an adorable bundle of cuteness. Even before they are born they become a little sponge, ready to absorb everything around them. During the years 0 – 3, their brain absorbs every word, kiss, touch, smell, sound and experience, and uses them to grow strong connections in their brain. These connections are important, especially the ones that help them develop good relationships with others, show appropriate emotions and adjust to new situations. They will impact your child's health, happiness and ability to learn and succeed.

### Creating a nurturing environment

A stable, nurturing environment with loving adults shapes a child's world more than any other thing during their first three years. Spending time cuddling your child, talking with them and playing lets them know that they are loved and important. They will feel safe and secure when they are surrounded by caring adults. This feeling of security will help them be self-confident and ready to learn when they reach preschool. It will also help them have close relationships and friendships as they grow.

When your infant babbles and coos, it's their way of asking for your attention. Respond to your baby by making noises and faces back and encouraging them to interact. Your infant is learning how to communicate, both by making sounds and listening to your sounds and responding back to them. When they enter school, they'll be better able to listen to their teacher and classmates and follow instructions. It also helps them be aware of what others are feeling and relate to them.

### Dealing with your toddler's emotions

Young toddlers start to show many new emotions, including being happy, sad, fearful and angry. They need to learn how to handle these new feelings. If your toddler is upset, you can help them by remaining calm, offering comfort, like a hug or a favorite toy or blanket. Then, teach them the words to go with their feelings. By helping them name their emotions, for instance, angry or frustrated, they can learn to express themselves by talking instead of yelling, biting or hitting. As they grow, they'll be able to handle situations that are upsetting, speak up for themselves when something makes them uncomfortable and stay calm during conflicts.

You may be eager to start working with your older toddler on letters and numbers, but it's even more important to help them learn how to share, get along with others, and communicate. Focus your time together on helping your child learn words and language while building your relationship by snuggling up to read books and getting down on their level when you play together. You'll help them build the

language connection in their brain and, at the same time, create positive feelings about their relationships with people. These positive feelings help them develop the emotional tools to show care and concern for others and be better able to get over disappointment.

The most important thing for infants and toddlers is warm and responsive relationships with caregivers and a stable home. Stresses, like violence in the home or neighborhood, or being ignored or neglected, can actually interfere with brain development and cause slow development and learning. This can also show up as behavior and mental health issues as your child grows into an adult. Starting with simple things, like responding to a smile, or pointing to an object, builds important connections during the infant and toddler years that grow even stronger in teen and adult years. These connections will help with reasoning and problem solving, sticking with a task and eventually becoming an independent adult.

### How to get help

Sometimes, a child may have trouble with social and emotional skills. This can interfere with their development, also known as a developmental delay. If you think this might be the case, talk to your pediatrician. In addition to wellness visits, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children be screened for general developmental milestones at regular times. If you get help addressing developmental delays between birth and age 3, you can make a difference in your child's development well past the school age years. Talk with someone in your community who is familiar with services for young children in your area, call 1-800-EarlyOn, or visit [Early On](#).

For more information and ideas about how you can help your child learn and thrive, visit [MiKidsMatter](#).