SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT
BEST PRACTICES

Introduction

Young children's social/emotional growth and learning occurs as a result of their interactions with others and is interconnected with their development in the physical and cognitive domains. Relationships with adults and children in the preschool environment exert a powerful positive influence on children's social/emotional development. A high quality preschool program requires dedicated and qualified teaching staff, working in partnership with children's families, to systematically assist children in developing social competence and confidence.

As children move through the preschool day, their teachers carefully observe and listen to them and adapt their responses to suit individual children's social and emotional needs. Preschool teachers support young students' developing self-concepts and self-esteem by talking with them about their actions and accomplishments and by always showing respect for their feelings and cultures. Throughout the day, teachers coach and guide children as they interact with each other, and they support children's social skills and problem-solving abilities. Within this community of learners, children develop the social and emotional competencies they need to fully immerse themselves in the preschool day and become successful learners.

Standard 0.1:   Children demonstrate self-confidence.
Preschool Teaching Practices

Effective preschool teachers:

- Provide materials and activities to further learning at the child's developmental level and to foster feelings of competence (e.g., knobbed and regular puzzles, looped scissors, open- ended art materials, child-sized manipulatives).

- Make adaptations to the classroom environment to support individual children's needs (e.g., sensory table, quiet spaces, appropriately-sized furnishings, and visuals at eye level).

- Adapt materials and activities to support English and non-English language speakers (e.g., use labels with pictures to help children negotiate the classroom and make picture-word associations, dramatize actions while providing words for the actions in multiple languages, provide simple directions in multiple languages, offer books, music, and computer software in multiple languages).

- Use children's ideas and interests to inspire activities and to engage students in discussions (e.g., tire tracks made by bicycle wheels on the playground can lead to an exploration and discussion of the different kinds of tracks made by an assortment of wheeled vehicles).

- Use open-ended questions to begin a discussion with individual children or groups of children (e.g., "What might happen if ...?" "What would you do if ...?" or "How would you feel if …").

- Model verbal descriptions of children's actions and efforts (e.g., "Anna used the paintbrush to make squiggles.").

- Ask questions that encourage children to describe their actions and efforts (e.g., "Joseph, will you tell Maria how you used the computer mouse to change your drawing?").

Standard 0.2: Children demonstrate self-direction.

• Organize the classroom environment and establish a daily routine that enables children to independently choose materials and put them away on their own (e.g., keep supplies on low shelves, use child-sized utensils, organize centers so that children can maneuver easily).

• Facilitate open-ended and child-initiated activities to encourage independence and self- direction (e.g., Jorge's interest in trains might lead a small group of children to build a train station from materials found in the classroom).

• Use songs, rhymes, movement, and pictures to reinforce independent functioning in the classroom (e.g., post pictures that represent the daily schedule, sing songs to cue transition times).

• Limit whole-group activities to short periods of time with interactive involvement (e.g., body movement, singing, finger-plays).

• Keep transitions short to adapt to children's limited attention spans, and conduct daily routines (e.g. toileting and washing hands) individually or in pairs to avoid whole-group waiting times and to support independence. Limit whole-group transitions and use them as learning times (e.g., "Children who ride the #4 bus may get their coats." or "Children in the Armadillo group may go wash their hands.").

Standard 0.3:   Children identify and express feelings.

Preschool Teaching Practices

Effective preschool teachers:

• Develop children's awareness of a wide range of feelings with appropriate vocabulary during discussions and storytelling (e.g., "The three little kittens lost their mittens. How do you think they felt?").

• Provide literature, materials, and activities (e.g., drawing, writing, art, creative movement, pretend play, puppetry, and role-playing) that help children interpret and express a wide range of feelings related to self and others with appropriate words and actions.

• Model appropriate language for children to use when expressing feelings such as anger and sadness during social interactions (e.g., "James, tell John how it made you feel when he pushed you. Did it make you angry?" "I felt angry when you pushed me. I didn't like it!").

Standard 0.4:   Children exhibit positive interactions with other children and adults.

Preschool Teaching Practices

Effective preschool teachers:

- Comment on specific positive behavior instead of giving empty praise (e.g., "Shadeen, you helped Keisha with her coat. Now she will be warm and cozy.").
- Encourage nurturing behavior through modeling, stories, and songs.
- Encourage the use of manners through modeling and role-playing (e.g., holding the door for a friend, using "please," "thank you," and "excuse me").
- Demonstrate and involve children in respecting the rights of others (e.g., "Devon, first Sheila will take a turn, and then it will be your turn.").
- Encourage expressing needs verbally by modeling appropriate language (e.g., "Ask Nancy if she can please pass the juice to you.").
- Involve children in solving problems that arise in the classroom using conflict resolution skills (e.g., talk about the problem, and the feelings related to the problem, and negotiate solutions).

Standard 0.5:   Children exhibit pro-social behaviors.

Preschool Teaching Practices

Effective preschool teachers:

- Pair or group children to foster friendship (e.g., partners, buddies, triads).
- Provide toys and plan activities to encourage cooperative play (e.g., provide two telephones so children can talk to each other in dramatic play).
- Collaborate with children on activities while modeling language and pretend skills as needed for play (e.g., teacher pretends to be mother or father in housekeeping corner and soothes her crying baby; teacher and children build a block structure; teacher and children make a cave out of a box; teacher pretends to be a mama bear and the children are bear cubs).
- Identify strategies to enter into play with another child or group of children (e.g., bring materials into play, give a play suggestion, be helpful, give a compliment).
- Gauge and provide the appropriate amount of support necessary for children to be successful during activities and play (e.g., teacher demonstrates pretend play skills, and as children become involved in meaningful interaction with other children, the teacher adjusts the level of support).
- Provide opportunities to take turns (e.g., "Maria gets to pull the wagon one time around the yard, and then it is Jack's turn.").
- Provide opportunities that encourage children to share toys and materials (e.g., "There is one basket of markers for Christen and Jameer to share.").