



What Is Social and Emotional Development?

Children grow and develop rapidly in their first five years across the four main areas of development. These areas are motor (physical), communication and language, cognitive, and social and emotional.

Social and emotional development means how children start to understand who they are, what they are feeling and what to expect when interacting with others. It is the development of being able to:

- Form and sustain positive relationships.
- Experience, manage and express emotions.
- Explore and engage with the environment.

Positive social and emotional development is important. This development influences a child's self-confidence, empathy, the ability to develop meaningful and lasting friendships and partnerships, and a sense of importance and value to those around him/her. Children's social and emotional development also influences all other areas of development.

Parents and caregivers play the biggest role in social/emotional development because they offer the most consistent relationships for their child. Consistent experiences with family members, teachers and other adults help children learn about relationships and explore emotions in predictable interactions.

To nurture your child's social and emotional development, it is important that you engage in quality interactions like these on a daily basis, depending on the age of your child:

- Be affectionate and nurturing: hold, comfort, talk and sing with your baby, toddler and child.
- Help your baby experience joy in "give-and-take" relationships by playing games like "peek-a-boo."
- Provide your toddler with responsive care, letting them practice new skills while still providing hands-on help.
- Support your child's developing skills; help him/her, but don't do everything for your child, even if it takes longer or is messy.
- Teach social and emotional skills, such as taking turns, listening and resolving conflict.

For more information on how to encourage and support a child's development, visit the [Social and Emotional Milestones page](#).