



Early Intervention Clearinghouse

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Spring 2015 • Volume 28, Issue 1



Building Your Child's Social Skills Can Bring Lifelong Rewards

By Jenna M. Weglarz-Ward

With such a focus on academic achievement in the media and schools, social and emotional skills are sometimes overlooked. However, social and emotional development lays a solid foundation for lifelong growth and learning.

Social skills include developing relationships with others; turn-taking in play, conversation, and daily routines; and learning to be part of a group. Emotional skills include recognizing their own and others' feelings, learning to control and express their feelings, and seeking comfort when upset as well as sharing successes and celebrations. These skills begin to develop at birth and continue throughout a person's life.

Let's see how social and emotional skills build into lifelong skills.

Developing Rewarding Relationships

Relationships between children and caregivers are the first and most important partnerships of life. These relationships are transactional in nature. This means that not only does the parent respond to the child's cues, actions, and efforts, but the

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SOCIAL SKILLS

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child responds to the parent's. They develop a relationship together, responding, reacting, and reciprocating to each other. Children who develop in responsive and secure relationships with caregivers demonstrate greater development in other areas such as thinking, attention, and play. These relationships also show children that relationships with others are beneficial and rewarding. This encourages children to seek out relationships with other people, including siblings, peers, teachers, and eventually their own children.

Understanding and Controlling Emotions

We all have had a time when we need to control our emotions to make it through a situation, such as when your boss asks you to do just one more thing when your list is already full. You need to be able recognize that you are overwhelmed and understand how to cope with this emotion to complete the task. Children are no different. Children need to identify and express a range of feelings as well as appropriate ways to deal with each feeling. Building these skills while children are infants and toddlers is important for school readiness. Regulating emotions allows children to focus on school tasks such as sitting, paying attention to teachers and other students, and completing tasks.

Taking Risks and Gaining Rewards

Creating reliable and responsive relationships with adults allows children to take calculated risks in their experiences. The knowledge that someone is available to help them as needed provides a safe and secure environment to explore and learn.

Think of a newly crawling baby. He toddles away from his caregiver, going farther and farther each time, often taking a look back to make sure his caregiver is ready to help when needed. This child not only increases his locomotion skills but also learns more about the ob-



jects he encounters (that speck of dust on the carpet) and problem solves around obstacles he encounters (that pillow in the way of his favorite toy).

Later in life, when a child is learning to read, it is necessary to take the risk to try to read a new word even if she has never seen it before. A child has to be able to go for it and try that word out. It may be wrong the first time or two, but that child knows that if at first you don't succeed, try and try again, just as he learned when he was crawling.

Getting Along With Others—Job Security!

Being able to get along with others is vital to success in the world. The most common reason for losing a job is not lack of skills but trouble working with others, inconsistency, dishonesty, and inflated egos. Building skills to work with others begins with father and baby re-

sponding to each other during a feeding to sharing a favorite toy at child care or from waiting for a turn to talk at the dinner table to understanding when Mom's tired and needs a quiet moment. These are all important to navigating life's ups and downs.

It might sound crazy that the cuddling you are doing with your baby right now will impact his high school test scores or that game of catch with your toddler will impact her career path. However, these foundational social and emotional skills are really lifelong skills needed to develop physical, language, and thinking skills as well as finding a place within the many groups of people we encounter throughout our lives.

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How I Communicate

Although they may not say their first word for almost a year, babies communicate with you immediately. Their behaviors, including eye contact, hand movements, and body positioning, convey their thoughts and feelings. As caregivers, you can “study” your baby by listening, watching, and responding to him or her. Below is a list of ways your baby is communicating with you.



Children birth to 6 months old

- I cry to let my caregiver know what I need.
- I show my distress by sucking on my hand or turning away.
- I stop crying when someone talks to me quietly.
- I turn toward faces, voices, and sounds.
- I imitate sounds I already know.
- I show excitement when I want things to continue.

Children 6 to 12 months old

- I begin to understand social gestures.
- I wave bye-bye.
- I may say dada or mama to refer to specific people.
- I look at what others are looking at.
- I use nonverbal requests and gestures to let caregivers know what I want (e.g., pointing to objects, raising arms to be picked up).

Children 12 to 24 months old

- I begin to talk with recognizable words.
- I understand simple verbal directions (“go get your shoes”).
- I initiate routines and games like peek-a-boo.
- I ask a lot of questions, such as “What’s this?”
- I can talk about things that are not in sight.

Children 24 to 36 months old

- I ask lots and lots of questions such as “Why?”
- I use sentences.
- I start and engage in short conversations.
- I can talk about things happening in the past and future.

Adapted with permission from the “What I Am Like” handout created by the Parents Interacting with Infants (PIWI) project at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

 For more information on child development, see the Illinois Early Intervention Clearinghouse Web site at <http://eicclearinghouse.org>.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois Department of Human Services, Bureau of Early Intervention.



How I Feel

Like adults, infants and toddlers have complex emotions. However, they do not yet understand what they are feeling and how to express it to you. As they grow and develop, they learn how to identify the wide range of human emotions and how to cope with them. Additionally, they become aware that other people have feelings too. As a caregiver, you can learn to interpret and understand what they are feeling, provide the appropriate names, and model ways to respond to their emotions. Below is a list of ways your baby is showing his or her emotions.



Children from birth to 6 months old

- I show pleasure and excitement when I see caregivers.
- I may seem wary of unfamiliar people, places, and activities.
- I love to repeat my actions over and over.
- I am delighted when people or things respond to my efforts.
- I am frustrated and angry when I can't make things happen and don't know why.

Children from 6 to 12 months old

- I feel secure with familiar people and may show anxiety around strangers.
- I am generally happy and self-assured.
- I show anger by stomping my feet and hitting.
- I show affection to my caregivers and other familiar people.

Children from 12 to 24 months old

- I show delight and pride in my achievements.
- I feel fear and anger but may try to hold back my tears.
- I want to explore my independence.
- I have a true "personality."
- I may separate willingly from my caregiver, especially if prepared in advance.

Children from 24 to 36 months old

- I am aware of myself and of my actions with others.
- I know that I am the same and different from others.
- I show empathy with how others feel.
- I sometimes hurt others intentionally.
- I am learning to share.

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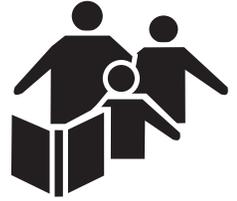
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How I Understand

Children are sponges for knowledge. They learn through exploring the places, people, and things around them. They love to get messy, wander, and repeat things to gain a clear understanding. As a caregiver, you can create a secure, safe, and supportive relationship with your child. You can play with your child and give them information through your actions and reactions to their attempts at communication, experimentation, and activity. Below is a list of ways your baby is starting to understand the world around him or her.



Children from birth to 6 months old

- I watch, listen, touch, and hold.
- I like shiny and bright colors.
- I recognize familiar people and routines.
- I repeat actions that have an interesting effect.
- I am learning that I have an effect on other people and things.

Children from 6 to 12 months old

- I bang things together.
- I love containers and put things in them and take them out repeatedly.
- I search for hidden objects.
- I anticipate what is coming next.
- I know I can cause things to happen, and I know things can happen to me.

Children from 12 to 24 months old

- I like to explore everything and try new things ... over and over again.
- I try to categorize things.
- I try to involve others in my play.
- I am beginning to think before I act and plan out my actions.
- I like to imitate and pretend daily activities (e.g., sweeping, rocking babies).

Children from 24 to 36 months old

- I can play cooperatively with partners more advanced than I am (e.g., parents, siblings).
- I focus on one thing at a time.
- I treat objects as if they had human properties.
- I can see things only from my perspective.
- I pretend about nondaily events (e.g., doctor visit, vacation).

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Resources for Social-Emotional Development

Books

The Attachment Connection: Parenting a Secure and Confident Child Using the Science of Attachment Theory. Ruth P. Newton, New Harbinger, 2008. (Call # BF 723 .A75N565 2008)

This book shows how paying attention to the emotional needs of your child, particularly during the first five years of development, can help him or her grow up happy, secure, and confident.

Foundations of Responsive Caregiving: Infants, Toddlers, and Twos. Jean Barbre. Redleaf Press, 2013. (Call # HQ 778.5 B37 2013)

Infants, toddlers, and 2-year-olds grow best when they are loved, cared for, and valued as unique individuals. This book will help you provide children with high-quality care in a responsive learning environment.

Promoting Resilience for Now and Forever: A Family Guide for Supporting the Social and Emotional Development of Preschool Children. Mary Mackrain. Kaplan Early Learning, 2013. (Call # BF 723 .R46 M33 2013)

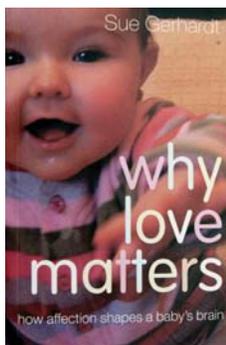
This book offers simple strategies for families to support young children's healthy social and emotional development through enjoyment of everyday activities that promote three key protective factors: initiative, self-regulation, and attachment/relationships.

What Children Need to Be Happy, Confident and Successful: Step by Step Positive Psychology to Help Children Flourish. Jeni Hooper. Jessica Kingsley, 2012 (Call # BF 721 .H62 2012)

A guide providing a blend of child psychology and activities that is suitable for professionals working with children as well as parents. As you identify and develop your child's strengths, you increase their opportunities to do well at school and become a happy, confident, well-rounded person.

Why Love Matters: How Affection Shapes a Baby's Brain. Sue Gerhardt. Routledge, 2004. (Call # WL 300 .G368w 2004)

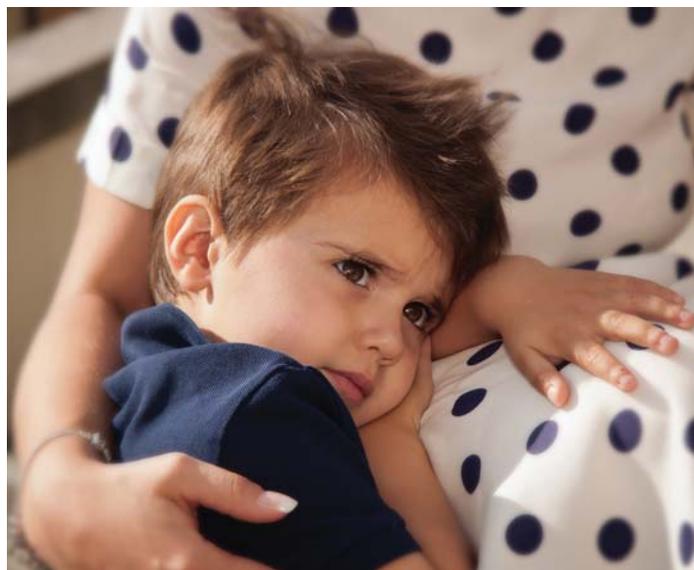
The author contends that babyhood is much more important to our lives than many people realize and that a lot of the behavior that worries us later in childhood has already been shaped by children's experiences in babyhood.



Videos

The Awakening and Growth of the Human. 5-volume DVD series. Infant-Parent Institute, 2009. (Call # WS 350 .T86i 2009 vol. 1-5)

A series of training films on the psychosocial development of infants and their families, these five DVDs examine how parents and children fall in love with one another and what happens when there are problems that interrupt the growth of those bonds.



Family Based Prevention. Series 6, Social & Emotional Development in Young Children. 155-minute DVD. Purdy Productions, 2012. (Call # WS 105.5 .E5 P972 2012)

The video features research-based yet practical strategies for working with children and families and nurturing healthy, socially competent children.

Websites

Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning

<http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/>

This website is focused on promoting the social emotional development and school readiness of young children birth to age 5. The site includes many resources for families.

Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children

<http://challengingbehavior.fmhi.usf.edu/>

This website takes the research that shows which practices improve the social-emotional outcomes for young children and creates FREE products and resources to help caregivers.

Little Kids, Big Questions: A Parenting Podcast Series

<http://www.zerotothree.org/about-us/funded-projects/parenting-resources/podcast/>

This 12-part podcast series from Zero to Three helps translate the research of early childhood development into parenting practices that mothers, fathers, and other caregivers can tailor to the needs of their family.

The Whole Child: The ABC's of Child Development

<http://www.pbs.org/wholechild/abc/index.html>

This PBS program provides parents and early care providers information on the physical and social-emotional development of children from birth to age 5.

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Illinois Calendar

June 7–12, 2015

Jacksonville

*Institute for Parents of Preschool Children
Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing*

Contact: University of Illinois at Chicago,
(800) 322-3722, Institute@exchange.dsc.uic.edu
<http://www.illinoisdeaf.org/Documents/Outreach/PI2015F.pdf>

June 16–17, 2015

Normal

Summer Early Intervention Mini Camp

Contact: Kelly Harness (217) 479-4393
kelly.hararness@illinois.gov

June 25, 2015

Evanston

The Child Welfare Legal System: What Happens After a DCFS Call?

Contact: Allison Levine, (847) 256-7334
The Theraplay Institute
allison@theraplay.org

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Early Intervention (ISSN 1058-8396) is published quarterly.