

Play & Grow

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL
DEVELOPMENT



"CHILDREN MUST BE TAUGHT HOW TO THINK, NOT WHAT TO THINK."

MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

Welcome to the "Growing Together" Collection! We have curated this collection of play-based activities and resources designed to help kids develop — all while having fun! While supplies last, we also include a small toy at our monthly events tied to each developmental area. Please supervise your children closely while they are playing with toys to ensure there are no choking hazards.

This resource is also mindful of children with different developmental needs, such as Autism. The activities are designed to be inclusive, offering various ways to engage and support every child's unique journey in emotional development. The age range is 0-5 years who are chronologically older but developmentally at this age.

Each series will focus on a type of child development:

- sensory
- gross motor
- fine motor
- cognitive development
- language development
- social-emotional

If you have any questions, the Autism Society Inland Empire is here to help. We have Resource Specialists who can be reached by email at info@ieautism.org or call us at 951.220.6922.



**Autism
Society**
Inland Empire



Your local Autism connection

Social Emotional Skills

Social-emotional development for toddlers involves learning to understand and manage their emotions, build relationships, and develop social skills. This stage is crucial as it helps toddlers form healthy relationships, communicate their feelings, and navigate social interactions.

KEY ASPECTS OF SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Emotional Regulation: Toddlers learn to identify and manage their emotions, such as happiness, sadness, anger, and fear, and find appropriate ways to express them.

Empathy: They begin to understand and respond to the feelings of others, such as comforting a friend or sharing toys.

Social Interaction: Toddlers engage in interactive play with peers, learning skills like sharing, taking turns, and cooperating.

Independence: As they grow, toddlers become more independent, exploring their environment and trying new things while still seeking reassurance from adults.

Communication: Developing the ability to express needs and feelings verbally is a significant milestone, including using words to describe emotions and communicate effectively.



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT

As parents of toddlers, you play a vital role in your child's social-emotional development, which is really important between the ages of 0-5. This is the time when your little ones start forming strong bonds with you and other caregivers, helping them feel secure and loved. Through these early relationships, they learn essential skills like sharing, cooperating, and taking turns—skills that are crucial for making friends and navigating social situations later on.

Encouraging your child to understand and express their feelings is key! Whether it's a happy moment or a frustrating one, helping them use words, gestures, or even facial expressions to communicate their emotions will benefit them immensely. Plus, when children engage in positive social interactions, it strengthens their brain connections, giving them the emotional security they need to explore the world around them with confidence.

When your toddler develops strong social-emotional skills, you'll notice they can focus better, follow instructions, and cooperate with other kids and teachers. This foundational experience builds resilience and self-assurance, preparing them to face new adventures in school and beyond. By nurturing these skills, you're setting your child up for a bright and happy future full of healthy relationships!



UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT



Social-Emotional milestones help parents and educators track a child's ability to understand emotions, build relationships, and navigate social interactions. By understanding what skills a child is working on, parents can provide appropriate opportunities and activities to promote growth.

Below is a general guideline of what to expect in children ages 0-5 years:

Infants 0-3 Months:

- Recognizes caregivers' voices and faces.
- Calms when comforted.
- Starts to smile in response to others (social smile).

4-6 Months:

- Shows excitement or distress through facial expressions and sounds.
- Begins to recognize familiar people.
- Laughs and enjoys social interactions.

7-12 Months:

- Develops attachment to caregivers, may show separation anxiety.
- Responds to name and emotions of others.
- Engages in simple social play (peek-a-boo).

UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT

Toddlers (1-2 Years)

- Expresses a range of emotions (happiness, frustration, fear).
- Shows affection to caregivers (hugs, kisses).
- Displays stranger anxiety but warms up over time.
- Imitates behaviors of adults and older children.
- Begins to play alongside others (parallel play).
- Uses simple words or gestures to express needs.
- May show early signs of empathy (comforting a sad peer).

Preschoolers (3-4 Years)

- Plays cooperatively with other children (associative play).
- Shows interest in making friends.
- Takes turns and shares (though may struggle at times).
- Understands and follows simple rules in games.
- Expresses a wider range of emotions and may begin to manage them.
- Uses words to express feelings rather than only actions.
- Shows increased independence but still seeks adult reassurance.

Pre-K (4-5 Years)

- Engages in cooperative play (group activities, role-playing).
- Understands and discusses emotions in themselves and others.
- Shows empathy and concern for others.
- Follows more complex rules and directions.
- Handles conflicts with words instead of physical actions.
- Forms strong friendships and may have a “best friend.”
- Shows confidence and willingness to try new things.



SIGNS TO WATCH FOR

Remember that every child develops at their own pace. Recognizing signs of social-emotional development delay in children ages 0–5 years old is essential for early intervention and support. Early support can greatly improve a child's ability to develop strong social-emotional skills. Here are some key markers to watch for at different stages:

Infants (0-12 months)

- Limited eye contact or lack of social smiles.
- Little to no response to caregivers' voices or facial expressions.
- Difficulty calming down when comforted.
- Lack of interest in people or surroundings.
- Does not show preference for familiar caregivers.

Toddlers (1-2 years)

- Rarely seeks comfort when upset or does not show affection.
- Limited gestures (e.g., waving, pointing, clapping).
- Does not engage in social play (peek-a-boo, pat-a-cake).
- Shows little interest in other children.
- Has difficulty expressing emotions or reacting appropriately.

Preschoolers (3-4 years)

- Struggles with taking turns or playing cooperatively.
- Has trouble understanding and expressing emotions.
- Avoids eye contact or struggles to engage with peers.
- Shows frequent tantrums, aggression, or extreme shyness.
- Does not respond to others' emotions or lacks empathy.

Pre-K (4-5 years)

- Difficulty forming friendships or interacting in group settings.
- Trouble following instructions or routines.
- Limited ability to express feelings verbally.
- Frequent emotional outbursts or withdrawal from social activities.
- Shows little interest in imaginative play or role-playing with others.



HOW TO SUPPORT A CHILD WITH SOCIAL EMOTIONAL DELAYS

Supporting a child with social-emotional development delays can feel overwhelming for any parent, but please know that you are not alone. Your love, patience, and willingness to help your child grow are already making a huge difference. Every child develops at their own pace, and with the right support, they can build the skills they need to thrive.

If you feel your child needs extra help, reaching out to professionals is a sign of strength, not failure. Pediatricians, early intervention programs, child psychologists, or occupational therapists can provide tailored strategies to support your child's development. The sooner your child gets support, the better their progress will improve.

You are doing an incredible job, and your child is lucky to have you. Social-emotional development takes time, but with patience, love, and the right support, your child can flourish. If you ever feel lost or overwhelmed, remember—you are not alone, and help is always available.

PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

As a parent of a toddler, you may find yourself wondering about your child's social and emotional development. It's naturally a time of exploration and learning, but if you have any concerns about delays in these areas, know that you're not alone. Consulting with professionals can provide the support and guidance you need.



Start with your pediatrician, who can conduct initial screenings to identify any potential issues and refer you to specialists if necessary. If your child is under three years old, you might be able to access free early intervention programs through early start services or explore options covered by your medical insurance for various developmental support services.

It's essential to recognize that many types of professionals specialize in helping young children. Child psychologists can help address emotional and behavioral concerns. Occupational therapists can work on developing fine motor skills, sensory processing, and social-emotional skills. Speech-language pathologists play a crucial role in speech and language development, which is closely connected to social interactions. Behavioral therapists focus on modifying behaviors and teaching coping strategies, while social skills therapists can help improve interactions with peers.


Remember, seeking help early can lead to significant advancements in your child's development, setting a strong foundation for their future. Don't hesitate to reach out for support when needed!



**Check out the Autism
Society's Resources including
links to Early Start Services.**



SOCIAL EMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES

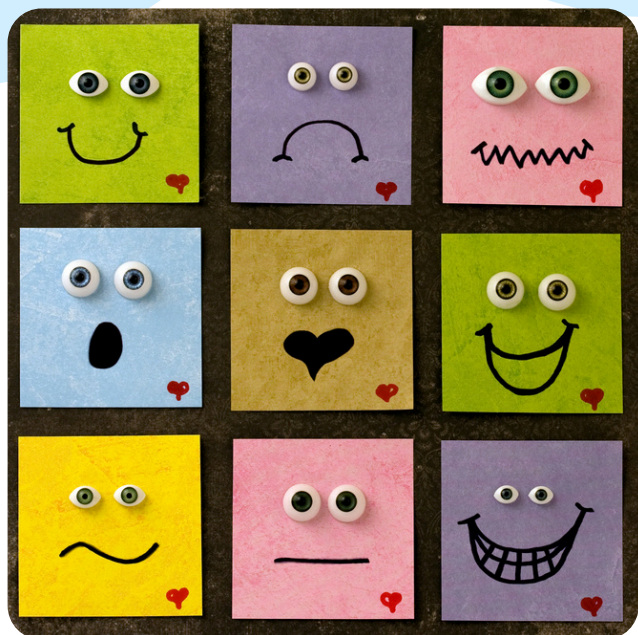


As parents of young children, your role in shaping their emotional development is incredibly significant. Children under 5 are like sponges, absorbing everything around them, including how to understand and manage their emotions.

Here are some of our favorite tips to help foster their emotion regulation skills.



LABELING EMOTIONS



Make it a habit to name feelings as they happen, whether it's happiness, sadness, frustration, or excitement.

For example, you might say, "I see you're really happy to see your friend!" This helps them learn to identify their feelings.

Here are some fun and effective activities to help them recognize and understand different feelings:

- **Emotion Matching Games:** Use pictures of people showing various emotions and have your child match them with the correct emotion word or another picture showing the same emotion.
- **Role-Playing:** Use dolls or stuffed animals to act out different scenarios. Ask your child how the doll or animal might be feeling and why.
- **Mirror Play:** Stand in front of a mirror with your child and make different facial expressions. Ask your child to copy you and name the emotion you're showing.
- **Storytime:** Read books that focus on emotions and discuss the characters' feelings. Ask questions like, "How do you think the character feels?" and "Why do they feel that way?"
- **Acting Out:** Take turns acting out different emotions without using words. This helps children understand body language and facial expressions associated with feelings.

CREATE A SAFE SPACE



You play a vital role in shaping your child's emotional development in a way that embraces their identity and experiences. Creating a nurturing environment where your little one feels safe to express their feelings is fundamental. Encourage open communication by letting them know it's perfectly okay to share what they're feeling. When they do, listen intently and without interruption—this shows that their emotions are valid and important.



MODEL EMOTIONAL UNDERSTANDING

Share your own feelings with your child and show how you handle them. For instance, you could say, “I feel sad when it rains because I can’t play outside, but I can read my favorite book to feel better.” This teaches them that it’s okay to experience a mix of emotions and that there are positive ways to cope.



READ BOOKS ABOUT EMOTIONS

Choose age-appropriate stories that focus on feelings. Books can help children relate to characters, understand different emotions, and see how others handle their feelings. Your involvement in this process can help your child build a strong foundation of emotional intelligence that will benefit them as they grow.

- Glad Monster, Sad Monster by Ed Emberley
- In My Heart: A Book of Feelings by Jo Witek
- My Many Colored Days by Dr. Seuss
- The Feelings Book by Todd Parr
- The Pout-Pout Fish by Deborah Diesen
- The Worrysaurus by Rachel Bright
- There Are No Animals in This Book (Only Feelings) by Chani Sanchez
- Today I Feel Silly: And Other Moods that Make My Day by Jamie Lee Curtis
- When I See Red by Britta Teckentrup
- Wild Feelings by David Milgrim

TEACH EMOTION REGULATION TECHNIQUES



Teaching emotion regulation techniques to toddlers involves a combination of modeling, interactive activities, and simple strategies. Here are some effective ways to help young children manage their emotions. See which ones work for your family:

- 1. Name the Feeling:** Help your child identify and name their emotions. Use phrases like "I see you're feeling angry" to validate their feelings.
- 2. Deep Breathing:** Teach your child to take slow, deep breaths when they feel overwhelmed. You can count to three as they inhale and exhale together.
- 3. Count to Ten:** Encourage your child to count to ten slowly when they feel upset. This helps them pause and regain control.
- 4. Use a Calm-Down Jar.** Create a calm-down jar filled with water, glitter, and glue. When shaken, the glitter swirls around, providing a visual focus to help your child calm down.
- 5. Physical Movement.** Physical movement can be a powerful tool for helping toddlers regulate their emotions. Physical activity like jumping jacks or running in place can help release pent-up energy and reduce stress. Simple stretches can also help relax their body and mind.
- 6. Cozy Corner:** Create a cozy corner with pillows and soft toys where your child can go to calm down and reflect on their feelings.



TEACH EMOTION REGULATION TECHNIQUES

7. Use a an Emotion Chart or Emotion Flashards: Use an emotion chart with pictures of different feelings. Encourage your child to point to the emotion they are experiencing.

8. Emotion Stories: Read books or tell stories that focus on emotions when your child is experiencing a strong emotion can be very helpful. Discuss how the characters manage their feelings and relate it to your child's experiences.

9. Modeling. Model healthy emotional regulation by sharing your feelings in an age-appropriate way. For example, "I'm feeling a bit stressed, so I'm going to take a few deep breaths."

10. Praise: Praise your child when they use emotion regulation techniques effectively. Positive reinforcement encourages them to continue using these strategies.

11. Find your child's calming activity: Encourage activities that your child finds calming, such as drawing, listening to music, or playing with a favorite toy.

12. Support Problem-Solving Skills: When conflicts arise, ask, "What can we do to fix this?" instead of solving it for them. Teach them to use words instead of physical actions when upset. Help them think of different ways to handle social challenges.



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