

Socio-Emotional Development in Children

Socio-emotional well-being is established through nurturing relationships and community experiences. It allows children and adults to grow into caring, emotionally healthy individuals. The ability to understand emotion, initiate and maintain secure relationships are all important aspects of early social-emotional functioning. The causes of different emotions and the thoughts and beliefs they represent begin to be understood by children 4-5 years of age. It is during this time that a child learns how to meet other children, how to solve problems, how to take turns, and how to communicate effectively. However there are some differences between children. Parenting style, parent-child attachment, parent-child conversations, and the parents approach to discipline all have an effect on a child's emotional understanding.

Self Concept: Young children develop their self-concept very early in life. Parents can assist in forming a child's self-concept by recognizing unique qualities that the child possesses, and by paying attention to the child's temperament.

Self Confidence: Children with self-confidence have a feeling of internal worth which in turn makes it easier for them to face challenges and to work with others. When children lack this confidence, their focus tends to be on failure rather than success.

Self Esteem: Compliment your child often. Encourage your child to make nice comments about and show appreciation for others. Encourage them to make their own choices. Show that your child's opinion is important by actively listening while they are speaking. Explain reasons for your actions, and encourage your children to try new and challenging activities.

Additional tips to keep in mind:

- *Honest Recognition and Praise:* Parents should focus on being more specific when praising their children. Instead of saying "good job," point out something specific that the child has done. For example, if a child is coloring tell them how well they did by staying within the lines, or how you love the many different colors they used.
- *Respect:* Show respect by offering your child choices and by respecting their decisions. By showing confidence in your child's ability to make decisions, parents are able to build their self-esteem. Make sure to explain the reasons behind set rules or decisions that are made. Try not to talk about children in front of them unless they are included in the conversation.
- *Competence:* Encourage your child to make their own choices and to be independent. Provide experiences and activities that will encourage their success. Provide opportunities that are challenging, but not frustrating. Offer activities that encourage creativity which allows children to express themselves. Present opportunities for children to interact with others their age and to discover how to get along with them (e.g. play dates).
- *Model behavior:* Model the behavior you would like to see as it is the best way for children to develop socially, including being respectful (saying please and thank you and asking for their help with tasks). Be sure to give a comment to your child when they are behaving appropriately (e.g. thank you for chewing with your mouth closed, I like how you said thank you for that gift).

- *Sharing from the heart:* Create an environment of kindness and generosity as children will then be able to naturally ‘share from the heart.’ Explain how sharing and being considerate makes others feel happy and good too.

Childhood gives children a chance to learn about the world and others. To support their socio-emotional development, it is necessary for children to experience people and situations that model effective behavior, healthy expressions of emotions and positive social interactions as this will enable them to develop their own ways of dealing with everyday life challenges.

By Sharla Astels. Sharla is a 2nd year Masters student in Marriage and Family Therapy, currently working at Family Services of Central Alberta. For more information about many parenting topics call 403-343-6400, or go to www.fsca.ca