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■ Socio Emotional Development



What is Socio-emotional Development?

It is easier to understand how important physical growth and development is for kids – but what about the emotional development? When children grow taller, or learn to walk, it's so obvious to see. Yet when kids understand how to share, take turns or make their own friends, it's often not noticed. In fact, we're more likely to notice the lack of social and emotional skills in our children than how accomplished they become as they grow. The emotional aspect of development relates to a child understanding and controlling their internal emotions while balancing external social elements of interacting with other people and family. Healthy social and emotional development allows children to:

Develop relationships

Master the ability to initiate, discover, play and learn

Develop persistence and attention

Self-regulate their behaviour

Develop emotional range

The development of the social and emotional health of a child is essential to his appropriate behaviour, understanding of life and transition to adulthood. Social emotional development helps shape a child into what he will become later in life by teaching proper reactions to emotional matters. Social skills are all about a child's ability to cooperate and play with others, paying attention to adults and teachers, and making reasonable transitions from activity to activity. Emotional development is the process of learning how to understand and control emotions.

Social and emotional stages are measured through the skills children develop as they grow. Although it is easier to see physical growth, the development of the social and emotional health of children are just as essential for their overall development and transition to adulthood. Social emotional development helps shape a child into what he will become

later in life by teaching proper reactions to emotional matters.

Social emotional skills are measured in a child's ability to cooperate and play with others, paying attention to adults and teachers, and making reasonable transitions from activity to activity and the control of emotions.

Social and emotional skills occur naturally in children and a child's social emotional development begins at birth. As children grow, they become aware of their behavior, and begin to understand the difference between appropriate and inappropriate. Moral reasoning usually begins around age 4 and children start to develop friendships and show interest in imaginative play and dramatics. At school age, children retain knowledge and add to it with new learning and most children are able to express their emotions through verbalizing. Although bouts of jealousy among peers are common at this age, positive reinforcement and training by the parents will help children understand and control their emotions. Disobedience is also common at this age, and parents who have mastered their social emotional skills will be able to cope positively with this challenge.

Adults, teachers and providers shape the growth of children. Parents who are actively and positively involved in their children's lives have the unique opportunity of laying a solid foundation of honesty and integrity. Caregivers promote healthy development by working to support social emotional wellness in all young children, and make every effort to prevent the occurrence or escalation of social emotional problems in children at-risk, identifying and working to remediate problems that surface.

Social emotional development does not end at a certain age, and can become complicated during adulthood as one continues to learn to interact with family and peers. Well-grounded social and emotional development during childhood will give that person the ability to handle the situation with a calm, honest demeanor.



Caregivers' role in Socio-emotional Development

Children need to learn to interact with their peers and with adults in a socially acceptable way, which allows them to eventually form healthy relationships and fit into social situations comfortably. Your interaction with your young child establishes the building blocks for healthy social development. By giving your baby lots of love and by attending to his needs you establish a bond with your baby, which allows him to grow in a comfortable, confident and socially healthy atmosphere.

As a preschool child develops improved language skills, social development plays an important role in his life, as he becomes more involved with the people around him. At this stage of social development friendships become more important. Preschool children often play with same-sex friends, and begin forming 'best friend' bonds with certain peers. Companionship, attention and approval become more important to a child. Children at this age often like playing apart from their parents, either on their own or with other children. But children at this stage of social development often still need an adult close by to get materials or settle disputes. Social development skills can be a challenge at this age as children are often required to compromise, take turns and share for the first time in their lives.

Social development at the preschool age often revolves around learning how to share toys. Although children are beginning to interact more with their friends and play together as opposed to just playing beside a friend, their play is not usually very organized. They don't typically set goals or stick with a theme

when playing. But if an adult is organizing a game, they are developing the ability to play along and follow the rules.

Children's social development tends to revolve around a friendship of only a few friends. Children at this age start to develop a sense of humor and laughter becomes a fun way to express their happiness.

A child who has the opportunity to join an early learning program is given opportunities for developing healthy social development. Children have opportunities in an early learning setting to learn to work together, to compromise, to share and take turns, and to empathize with their peers. Child social development is also encouraged in a Early Child Development program through opportunities to play and develop friendships with peers. Dramatic play areas within a ECD program allow a child the opportunity to engage in imaginary play with their peers which is an excellent way to foster social development.

At the preschool stage of social development children learn gender roles, which is to say that they learn the behaviors that are typically expected of girls or boys. They also realize the physical differences between girls and boys. You can further assist in child social development by encouraging your child's socially acceptable behavior through consistent and positive discipline.

Socio-emotional Stages in Children

One major area of social development is playing. Play is an important way for your toddler to try out new skills and imitate the things she sees around her. Through some kinds of games — such as puzzles and shape sorters — they refine their developing motor skills. Through others — games of pretend

Newborn to 1 month

Newborns begin to smile in their first month. The first smile you see may well be while your baby is sleeping, but by the end of the first month, you will likely find yourself rewarded with smiles specifically directed at you.

6 to 9 months

Along with an increased awareness of their surroundings, some infants this age also develop what is commonly referred to as stranger anxiety. While some 6- to 9-month-olds start showing increased fear of strangers and distress when their parents leave the room, others may not react this way until well after their first birthday.

12 to 18 months

Kids begin to explore independently. Being a 12- to 15-month-old typically involves beginning to venture out on one's own more. Toddlers at this age often feel comfortable exploring away from their parents when in familiar surroundings. That's not to say that some don't still show signs of stranger anxiety and a strong affinity for their parents, but rest assured that this phase of development will soon give way to more independent exploration in the months to come, if it hasn't already.

As your toddler becomes more independent, don't be surprised if she also develops an attachment to a comfort object, something that gives her a constant sense of security.

18 to 24 months

At this age, toddlers learn to deal with new emotions. Many 18- to 24-month-olds show anxiety around other toddlers, especially if they are unfamiliar, and also become anxious in anticipation of unpleasant events. And while temper tantrums are not necessarily a new phenomenon at this age, toddlers often perfect them as they approach 2 years of age.

2 years

The typical 2-year-old has also learned how to soothe himself and starts to become more aware of other people's emotions, reacting to anger and affection among other family members.



with dolls and other children — they sort out emotional conflicts and make sense of their place in the world.

Most 2-year-old toddlers engage in what is known as parallel play. They stay close together and imitate each other, but their

actual interactions are limited. Even if there seems to be little give-and-take in these sessions, they are valuable because they lay the groundwork for later, more cooperative play.

If your child is not regularly exposed to other children in a play group or day care setting, now is a good time to build his circle of friends. As you do so, aim to keep organized playtime short (an hour or so for younger toddlers; two hours for older ones) and be prepared for more than a little pushing, shoving, and grabbing of toys. These struggles are not necessarily hostile; toddlers have a limited range of social behavior, but they usually manage to work things out without much interference from parents — and learn valuable skills in the process.

3 years

While attending to the physical care of your preschooler, you will also find she thrives on a great deal of emotional and intellectual nourishment, and much of this comes from play. While manipulating simple household objects such as cardboard tubes and empty cartons, children give themselves valuable lessons in counting, cause and effect, and problem solving. And by finding new purposes for ordinary objects, they learn to think creatively.

4 years

Between 3 and 4 years of age, children make a big transition when it comes to play, moving away from parallel play towards a much more interactive form of play with others. When engaging in pretend play with other children, your child will learn about cooperation and sharing.

Role-playing is an important way for preschoolers to attempt to understand the adult world. Talking aloud as they direct their own actions or those of other children is a way of sharpening their language skills. Devising their own pastimes and accomplishing the tasks they set forth for themselves are real confidence builders.

Play also affords children the opportunity to act out their feelings. Young preschoolers often act out common household scenes. A parent's role in play begins with offering a variety of experiences. Outings as simple as a trip outside can be a source of fascination to a preschooler.

Even more important is your participation in your child's games. Your praise of your child's efforts is very important. Display their creations whenever possible, whether by magnet on the refrigerator or framed and hung on the wall.

5 years

At 5 years old, your child might start school. Adjusting to kindergarten and all that goes along with school is perhaps one of the biggest accomplishments of most 5-year-olds.

6 years

While some 6-year-olds are just preparing to enter kindergarten, the majority have successfully adjusted to "real" school and are now ready to conquer first grade as they thrive on new friendships, figure out how the world works, and become independent.





Socio-emotional Stages in Children

Socio-emotional Stages in Children

The checklist provided in this digest includes attributes of a child's social behavior and preschool experience which teachers should examine every three or four months. Consultations with parents and other caregivers help make the attributes and assessments realistic and reliable.

In using the checklist, teachers should pay attention to whether the attributes are typical. This requires sampling the child's functioning over a period of about three or four weeks. Any child can have one or two really bad days, for a variety of reasons; if assessments are to be reasonably reliable,

judgments of the overall pattern of functioning over a period of about a month is required.

Healthy social development does not require that a child be a "social butterfly." The quality rather than quantity of a child's friendships is the important index to note. Keep in mind also that there is evidence that some children are simply shyer than others, and it may be counter-productive to push such children into social relations which make them uncomfortable. Furthermore, unless that shyness is severe enough to prevent a child from enjoying most of the "good things of life," like

birthday parties, picnics, and family outings, it is reasonable to assume that, when handled sensitively, the shyness will be spontaneously outgrown.

Many of the attributes listed in the checklist indicate adequate social growth if they USUALLY characterize the child. This qualifier is included to ensure that occasional fluctuations do not lead to over-interpretation of children's temporary difficulties. On the basis of frequent direct contact with the child, observation in a variety of situations, and information obtained from parents and other caregivers, a teacher or caregiver can assess each child according to the checklist.

Teachers can observe and monitor interactions among the children and let children who rarely have difficulties attempt to solve conflicts by themselves before intervening. If a child appears to be doing well on most of the attributes and characteristics in the checklist, then it is reasonable to assume that occasional social difficulties will be outgrown without intervention.

However, if a child seems to be doing poorly on many of the items on the list, the adults responsible for his or her care can implement strategies that will help the child to overcome and outgrow social difficulties. If a child seems to be doing poorly on many of the items on the list, the adults responsible for his or her care can implement strategies that will help the child to establish more satisfying relationships with other children.

Finally, it is also important to keep in mind that children vary in social behavior for a variety of reasons. Research indicates that children have distinct personalities and temperaments from birth. In addition, nuclear and extended family relationships obviously affect social behavior. What is appropriate or effective social behavior in one culture may be less effective in another culture. Children from diverse cultural and family backgrounds thus may need help in bridging their differences and in finding ways to learn from and enjoy the company of one another.

The Social Attributes Checklist

I. Individual Attributes

The child:

1. Is USUALLY in a positive mood
2. Is not EXCESSIVELY dependent on the teacher, assistant or other adults
3. USUALLY comes to the program or setting willingly
4. USUALLY copes with rebuffs and reverses adequately
5. Shows the capacity to empathize
6. Has positive relationship with one or two peers; shows capacity to really care about them, miss them if absent, etc.
7. Displays the capacity for humor
8. Does not seem to be acutely or chronically lonely

II. Social Skill Attributes

The child USUALLY:

9. Approaches others positively
10. Expresses wishes and preferences clearly; gives reasons for actions and positions
11. Asserts own rights and needs appropriately
12. Is not easily intimidated by bullies
13. Expresses frustrations and anger effectively and without harming others or property
14. Gains access to ongoing groups at play and work
15. Enters ongoing discussion on the subject; makes relevant contributions to ongoing activities
16. Takes turns fairly easily
17. Shows interest in others; exchanges information with and requests information from others appropriately
18. Negotiates and compromises with others appropriately
19. Does not draw inappropriate attention to self
20. Gains access to ongoing groups at play and work
21. Interacts non-verbally with other children with smiles, waves, nods, etc.

III. Peer Relationships Attributes

The child is:

22. USUALLY accepted versus neglected or rejected by other children
23. SOMETIMES invited by other children to join them in play, friendship, and work.



Shyness in Children

Shyness is a common but little-understood emotion. Everyone has felt ambivalent or self-conscious in new social situations. However, at times shyness may interfere with optimal social development and restrict children's learning.

WHAT IS SHYNESS?

The basic feeling of shyness is universal, and may have evolved as an adaptive mechanism used to help individuals cope with novel social stimuli. Shyness is felt as a mix of emotions, including fear and interest, tension and pleasantness. Increases in heart rate and blood pressure may accompany these feelings. An observer recognizes shyness by an averted, downward gaze and physical and verbal reticence. The shy person's speech is often soft, tremulous, or hesitant. Younger children may suck their thumbs; some act coy, alternately smiling and pulling away.

Shyness is distinguishable from two related behavior patterns: wariness and social disengagement. Infant wariness of strangers lacks the ambivalent approach/avoidance quality that characterizes shyness. Some older children may prefer solitary play and appear to have low needs for social interaction, but

experience none of the tension of the genuinely shy child.

Children may be vulnerable to shyness at particular developmental points. Fearful shyness in response to new adults emerges in infancy. Cognitive advances in self-awareness bring greater social sensitivity in the second year. Self-conscious shyness--the possibility of embarrassment--appears at age 4 or 5. Early adolescence ushers in a peak of self-consciousness.

WHAT SITUATIONS MAKE CHILDREN FEEL SHY?

New social encounters are the most frequent causes of shyness, especially if the shy person feels herself to be the focus of attention. Adults who constantly call attention to what others think of the child, or who allow the child little autonomy, may encourage feelings of shyness.

WHY ARE SOME CHILDREN MORE SHY THAN OTHERS?

Some children are naturally shy: they are more likely than other children to react to new social situations with shy behavior. Even these children, however, may show shyness only in certain

kinds of social encounters. Researchers have implicated both nurture and nature in these individual differences.

Some aspects of shyness are learned. Children's cultural background and family environment offer models of social behavior. Some parents, by labeling their children as shy, appear to encourage a self-fulfilling prophecy. Adults may cajole coyly shy children into social interaction, thus reinforcing shy behavior.

There is growing evidence of a hereditary or temperamental basis for some variations of dispositional shyness. In fact, heredity plays a larger part in shyness than in any other personality trait. Adoption studies can predict shyness in adopted children from the biological mother's sociability. Extremely inhibited children show physiological differences from uninhibited children, including higher and more stable heart rates. From ages 2 to 5, the most inhibited children continue to show reticent behavior with new peers and adults. Patterns of social passivity or inhibition are remarkably consistent in longitudinal studies of personality development.

Despite this evidence, most researchers emphasize that genetic influences probably account for only a small proportion of self-labeled shyness. Even hereditary predispositions can be modified. Adopted children do acquire some of their adoptive parents' social styles, and extremely inhibited toddlers sometimes become more socially comfortable through their parents' efforts.

WHEN IS SHYNESS A PROBLEM?

Shyness can be a normal, adaptive response to potentially overwhelming social experience. By being somewhat shy, children can withdraw temporarily and gain a sense of control. Generally, as children gain experience with unfamiliar people, shyness wanes. In the absence of other difficulties, shy children have not been found to be significantly at risk for psychiatric or behavior problems.

In contrast, children who exhibit extreme shyness which is neither context-specific nor transient may be at some risk. Such children may lack social skills or have poor self-images. Shy children have been found to be less competent at initiating play with peers. School-age children who rate themselves as shy tend to like themselves less and to consider themselves less friendly and more passive than their non-shy peers. Such factors negatively affect others' perceptions. Shy people are often judged by peers to be less friendly and likeable than non-shy people. For all these reasons, shy children may be neglected by peers, and have few chances to develop social skills. Children who continue to be excessively shy into adolescence and adulthood describe themselves as being lonelier, and having fewer close friends and relationships with members of the opposite sex, than their peers.

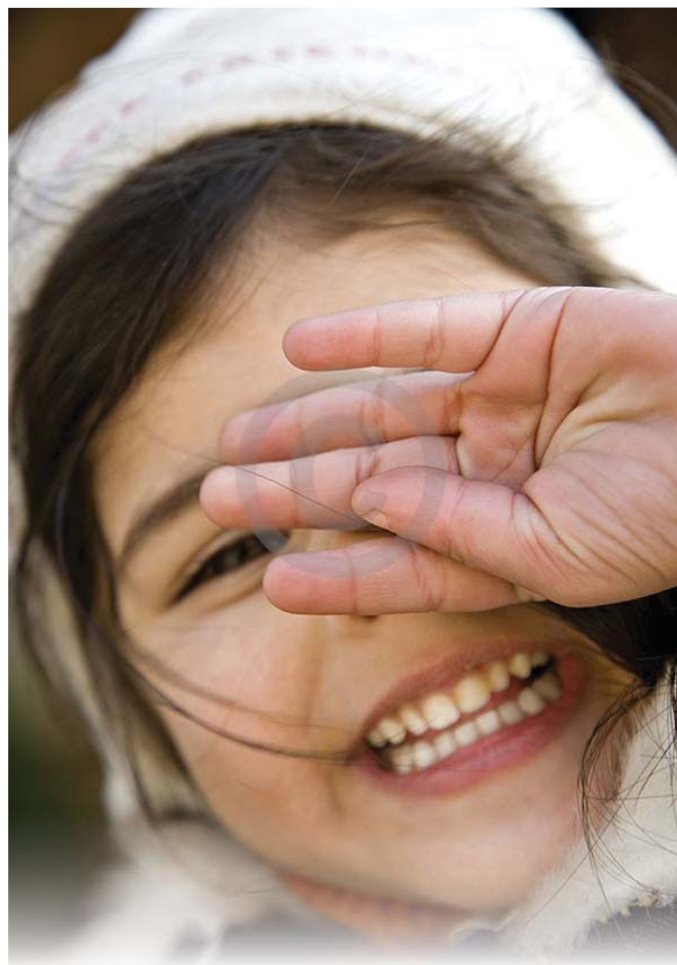
STRATEGIES FOR HELPING A SHY CHILD

Know and accept the whole child

Shyness is only one aspect of the child's personality. Being sensitive to the child's interests and feelings will allow you to build a relationship with the child and show that you respect the child. This can make the child more confident and less inhibited.

Build self-esteem

Shy children may have negative self-images and may feel that they will not be accepted. Reinforce shy children for demonstrating skills and encourage their autonomy. Praise



them often. Children who feel good about themselves are not likely to be shy.

Develop social skills

Reinforce shy children for social behavior, even if it is only parallel play. Also, opportunities for play with young children in one-on-one situations may allow shy children to become more assertive. Play with new groups of peers permits shy children to make a fresh start and achieve a higher peer status.

Allow the shy child to warm up to new situations

Pushing a child into a situation which he or she sees as threatening is not likely to help the child build social skills. Help the child feel secure and provide interesting materials to lure him or her into social interactions.

Remember that shyness is not all bad

Not every child needs or wants to be the focus of attention. Some qualities of shyness, such as modesty and reserve, are viewed as positive. As long as a child does not seem excessively uncomfortable or neglected around others, drastic interventions are not necessary.

Conflict Resolution

In the past two decades, our understanding of the early roots of children's social behaviors and the importance of those emerging behaviors in the development of overall competence has expanded dramatically. What understandings from this knowledge base can help us support young children as they develop strategies for dealing with complex interpersonal relationships among their peers?

Aggression and cooperation represent two critical features in the child's social domain. What do they have in common? Both emerge from the child's strong developmental push to initiate and maintain relationships with other children, beginning at a very early age. Peer relationships provide critical opportunities for children to learn to manage conflict and work towards establishing intimacy. Aggression and cooperation are two possible strategies for dealing with the normal conflicts of early peer interactions. Both have important roots in early family interactions, both are responsive to adult expectations and values, and both can be responsive to environmental factors.

DEFINITIONS AND EMERGING FEATURES

"Aggression" is defined here as any intentional behavior that results in physical or mental injury to any person or animal, or in damage to or destruction of property. Aggressive actions can be

- accidental actions, in which there is no intentionality;
- instrumental actions, in which the child deliberately employs aggression in pursuit of a goal; or
- hostile actions, in which the child acts to cause harm to another person.

Because peer interactions in their earliest forms emerge from play in which infants treat each other as they would treat a toy or interesting object—for example, one baby reaches over and grabs the cheek of another—unintentional aggression is a common and natural form of behavior for infants and toddlers. These accidental behaviors can enable young children to achieve desired results (for example, grabbing a toy from another child) and, in a short period of time, can easily develop into instrumental forms of aggression.

Aggressive behavior is a deterrent to friendships and social success. Studies indicate that young children cite aggressive behavior as a significant reason for disliking others. Research also indicates that aggressive behavior is responsive to environmental influences and can be encouraged or discouraged by experiences in home and school.

Aggression should not be confused with assertion—behavior through which a child maintains and defends his or her own rights and concerns. Assertive behavior reflects the child's developing competence and autonomous functioning and represents an important form of developmental progress. Assertiveness also affords the young child a healthy form of self-defense against becoming the victim of the aggressions of others.

Much evidence suggests that children who exhibit instrumental

and hostile forms of aggression during the preschool years have been exposed, in early family interactions, to adults who encourage, model, or condone aggression by using discipline techniques that are punitive, rigid, and authoritarian; ignoring or permitting aggressive actions by the child and other children; providing or tolerating aggressive toys or aggressive images from television, movies, and books in the child's surroundings; or modeling aggression in their own interpersonal interactions.

"Cooperation" is defined here as any activity that involves the



willing interdependence of two or more children.

It should be distinguished from compliance, which may represent obedience to rules or authority, rather than intentional cooperation. When children willingly collaborate in using materials, for example, their interactions are usually quite different than when they are told to "share."

Cooperation, like aggression, has its roots in very early, even preverbal, social interactions. Studies on the origins of pro-social behaviors, which include cooperation, suggest that family variables related to the development of pro-social behaviors include parental discipline techniques that are authoritative rather than authoritarian and that offer the

child free expression of affection and nurturance. These techniques involve the use of high expectations; competent communication; and inductive reasoning, in which parents engage children in explanations of the reasons for family rules and limits. Children who demonstrate a number of cooperative strategies and can attend to the needs of others while also asserting and defending their own rights are more likely to be socially successful and to establish reciprocal, mutually satisfying friendships than are other children.

TECHNIQUES FOR REDUCING AGGRESSION AND FOSTERING COOPERATION

Because aggressive behavior can emerge as a normal behavior during the second and third years of life, it is important not to assume that such behaviors represent a personality trait. When adults assume that children are being intentionally aggressive, the expectation for undesirable qualities can become established and can lead to a “recursive cycle” in which children come to fulfill the expectations set for them.

Aggressive toddlers or preschoolers can benefit from support and encouragement for replacing aggressive behaviors with more socially productive alternatives. Important techniques include helping young children

- label and verbalize their feelings and those of others,
- develop problem-solving approaches to conflicts,
- seek and obtain assistance when in difficulty, and
- notice the consequences of their aggressive actions for their victims.

Age-appropriate anger management techniques, and discussion of the causes and consequences of interpersonal conflicts, can help both young children and their caregivers deal with emerging aggressive behaviors. Adult guidance that is consistent, supportive, non-punitive, and includes the child in understanding the reactions of all participants and the reasons for limits, will help even very young children cope with aggressive behaviors.

How can parents and teachers recognize and foster the cooperative behaviors which all children demonstrate as they develop? They can

- acknowledge children’s efforts to initiate social interactions in appropriate ways,
- affirm helping behaviors,
- use positive discipline techniques and communicate their power,
- communicate positive regard and high expectations for all young children, and
- support each child’s struggle to resolve interpersonal conflicts.
- Of critical importance are classroom strategies that
- promote cooperative, rather than competitive, endeavors;
- foster dramatic play techniques and reflective strategies for thinking about and discussing social interactions; and
- enable children to get to know and trust each other and work towards truly interdependent activity.

PROGRAM POLICIES THAT FOSTER THE

DEVELOPMENT OF COOPERATION

Many children begin to show interest in peers as early as eighteen months. Early childhood educators can support the emergence of trusting and positive interpersonal strategies by encouraging the formation of play groups and regular social interactions that are supervised in a supportive manner. Children benefit from consistent and sustained relationships in which they can build trust, understand and predict the responses of their peers, and gain confidence in their ability to cope with conflict interactions. Continuity of relationships can be nurtured. The grouping of friends and acquaintances across the years of program service enables children to develop and build on successful relationships.

Early childhood programs can help parents understand and



deal with the full range of young children’s emerging social repertoires. Parents often need help in addressing the common aggressive behaviors of young children in a nonjudgmental and constructive manner. Educators can encourage parents to provide regular opportunities for children to develop productive and sustained friendships by providing continuity of access to potential friends, inviting friends or potential friends to play at home, and helping children to continue to see good friends even if they lose daily and convenient contact.

CONCLUSION

Our emerging knowledge about the complex factors that enter into the development of social competence in the young child can be put to valuable use. Young children can benefit from the understanding support and guidance of the adults who help them develop constructive strategies for dealing with the challenges of early peer relationships.

