

What Is Social Emotional Development Anyway?

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"It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken adults." -Frederick Douglass

Social emotional development is a child's ability to understand the feelings of others, control their own feelings and behaviors and get along with peers. It provides them with a sense of who they are in the world and teaches them how to establish quality relationships with others.



Children are not born with social emotional skills. All of the adults in a child's life (parents, grandparents, child care providers, etc.) have the responsibility to teach and foster these skills. Loving, safe relationships with the adults in their lives provide children with a sense of security, comfort and confidence that gives them the foundation for developing future relationships and a blueprint of how they will treat others around them.

Here are some ways you can help your child develop social emotional skills as they grow:

Start from birth. Actively engage with your infant by making eye contact as you talk, sing a lullaby or play peek-a-boo. Respond to and comfort your crying baby. These positive interactions help your child feel safe. [ZERO to THREE](#) states, "Starting from birth, babies are learning who they are by how they are treated."

Read with your child every day. Not only is this important bonding time for you and your child, it helps your child to develop new vocabulary that they can begin to use to talk about their feelings. Check out [these children's books](#) about emotions.

Allow your child to take [age-appropriate, reasonable risks](#) and to problem solve. Something as simple as letting your toddler get frustrated when their block tower won't stay up and watching as they figure out how to fix it on their own lays a foundation for how they will navigate frustration and obstacles in their life in the future.

Encourage your child to express and name feelings in a healthy way. Modeling your feelings and [talking about them](#) helps your child learn from your example. Recognize when you need a break and communicate that with your child. Talk to your child about times when you have asked for help. Tell your child when you are excited or happy about something.

When children build strong social emotional foundations when they are young, it impacts all areas of their lives as they grow and mature. Most especially, it helps them [develop the resiliency they need](#) to handle stress, persevere through difficult situations and thrive!

This article appeared in 4C for Children's October 2019 Parent Source e-newsletter. You can find more resources at: www.4cforchildren.org