



What is social-emotional development?

Social-emotional development is a child's ability to express his or her emotions effectively, follow rules and directions, form positive relationships with others, and build confidence. Many things affect social-emotional growth, such as a child's biology, home environment, school environment and life experiences.

Why is social-emotional development so important?

We all know that the ABCs, colors and numbers are essential for school readiness, but to learn in a classroom, children must also be able to manage their feelings, play and work well with others, and pay attention to directions. Children who learn how to do these things are more likely to:

- Establish friendships with other children their age
- Develop stronger speech and problem solving skills
- Follow rules at home and at school
- Concentrate and work through a challenge
- Have confidence to try new things

What can you do to support social-emotional development?

The first five years of life have a big impact on a child's overall social-emotional health. Here are some ways that parents and caregivers can support this area of development:

- **Provide lots of playtime with other children.** This helps your child practice sharing, cooperating and making new friends.
- **Focus heavily on your child's good behavior.** Praising your child regularly (3 times more often than you correct mistakes) helps him or her become confident.
- **Stick to a routine.** A daily schedule of mealtimes, playtimes and bedtime helps your child more easily transition from one activity to the next.
- **Create a visual set of rules.** Make a list of 3-5 rules with pictures to hang somewhere in your home. This helps your child learn boundaries.



By their
SECOND BIRTHDAY,
most children:

- Start to play with other children (e.g., chase games)
- Copy or imitate others, especially adults and older children
- Begin to do things they have been told not to do, in order to see what will happen
- Have facial expressions that show different emotions
- Become easily frustrated and may throw tantrums for little reason
- Want to do things for themselves, like wash their hands



By their
THIRD BIRTHDAY,
most children:

- Show affection for friends without prompting
- Take turns in games
- Understand the idea of “mine” and “his” or “hers”
- Start to use words to express their feelings
- Get upset with major changes in routine
- Can do some things for themselves, like putting on a coat or jacket



By their
FOURTH BIRTHDAY,
most children:

- Would rather play with other children than play alone
- Enjoy exploring new places, such as the park or a friend’s house
- Are more creative with make-believe play or dress-up
- Talk about things they like, such as foods and toys
- Understand the idea of responsibility
- Can brush their own teeth without help



By their
FIFTH BIRTHDAY,
most children:

- Want to be like their friends
- Seek praise from parents and teachers
- Are more likely to follow the rules
- Understand the difference between real and make-believe
- Can distinguish right from wrong and honest from dishonest
- Express their feelings more freely and openly

If your child is having trouble meeting these milestones, or if you have concerns about your child’s development, please take action!

For children between the ages of 2 years 8 months and 5 years 10 months, please call Early Stages at 202-698-8037 or visit our website at www.earlystagesdc.org. All of our services are FREE.

For children under 2 years 8 months, please call Strong Start, the DC Early Intervention Program, at 202-727-3665.



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