

Handout 5.1

Social–Emotional Milestones From Birth to 5 Years Old

Birth to 12 Months Old

- Read and respond to adult cues and signals
- Use simple gestures to start or reciprocate interactions
- Seek and develop relationships with one particular adult
- Express distress and other negative emotions when separated from primary caregiver
- Demonstrate interest in others
- Influence the reactions and behaviors of others

12–24 Months Old

- Engage with others through complex back-and-forth interactions
- Feel secure to explore independently
- Begin to take turns with support from adult caregivers
- Recognize self in mirror or picture and refer to self by name
- Become more independent; move farther away from caregivers to explore
- Cooperate by helping to put things away
- May become angry if activities are interrupted or if they don't get their way
- Respond to simple commands by adult
- Begin to realize that they can't have everything their own way (but still have a hard time managing when they can't have what they want)
- May hit, bite, or fight over a toy
- Imitate adult behaviors in play
- Show a complete range of emotional expressions
- Begin to move from parallel to more interactive play as he or she nears 24 months
- Ask for what they want with gestures, sounds, and/or words

24–36 Months Old

- More strongly distinguish themselves as a separate person
- Become more aware of gender differences
- Separate more easily in familiar surroundings; need help transitioning to new situations
- Feel strongly possessive of loved ones
- Experience a peak in frustration and tantrums between 24 and 30 months
- Enjoy wider range of relationships; eager to meet new people
- Begin to obey simple rules
- Play simple games

(continued)

- Play more cooperatively with peers
- Communicate about experiences and the thoughts and feelings of others
- Share their own ideas
- Complete complex tasks independently
- Share and exchange materials and objects with others

3–5 Years Old

- Solve more complex problems
- Play more complex games
- Engage in collaborative play with others
- Engage in more advanced pretend play, developing stories with a beginning, middle, and end
- Describe own feelings and wants
- Respond to others' emotional needs
- Comfort others to help them feel better
- Greater impulse control
- Able to use words to express complex feelings
- Regulate attention, thoughts, and feelings with less support from an adult