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ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime

The Growing Brain

From Birth to 5 Years Old

A TRAINING CURRICULUM FOR
EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONALS

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Unit 5: Social–Emotional Development

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Learning Objectives

1. Understand how social–emotional development unfolds in the first 5 years and how to support it in young children.
2. Identify areas of the brain involved in social interactions and emotional reactions.
3. Understand the role of relationships and attachment in social–emotional development.
4. Understand the effect of stress on social–emotional development.
5. Understand the development of empathy.



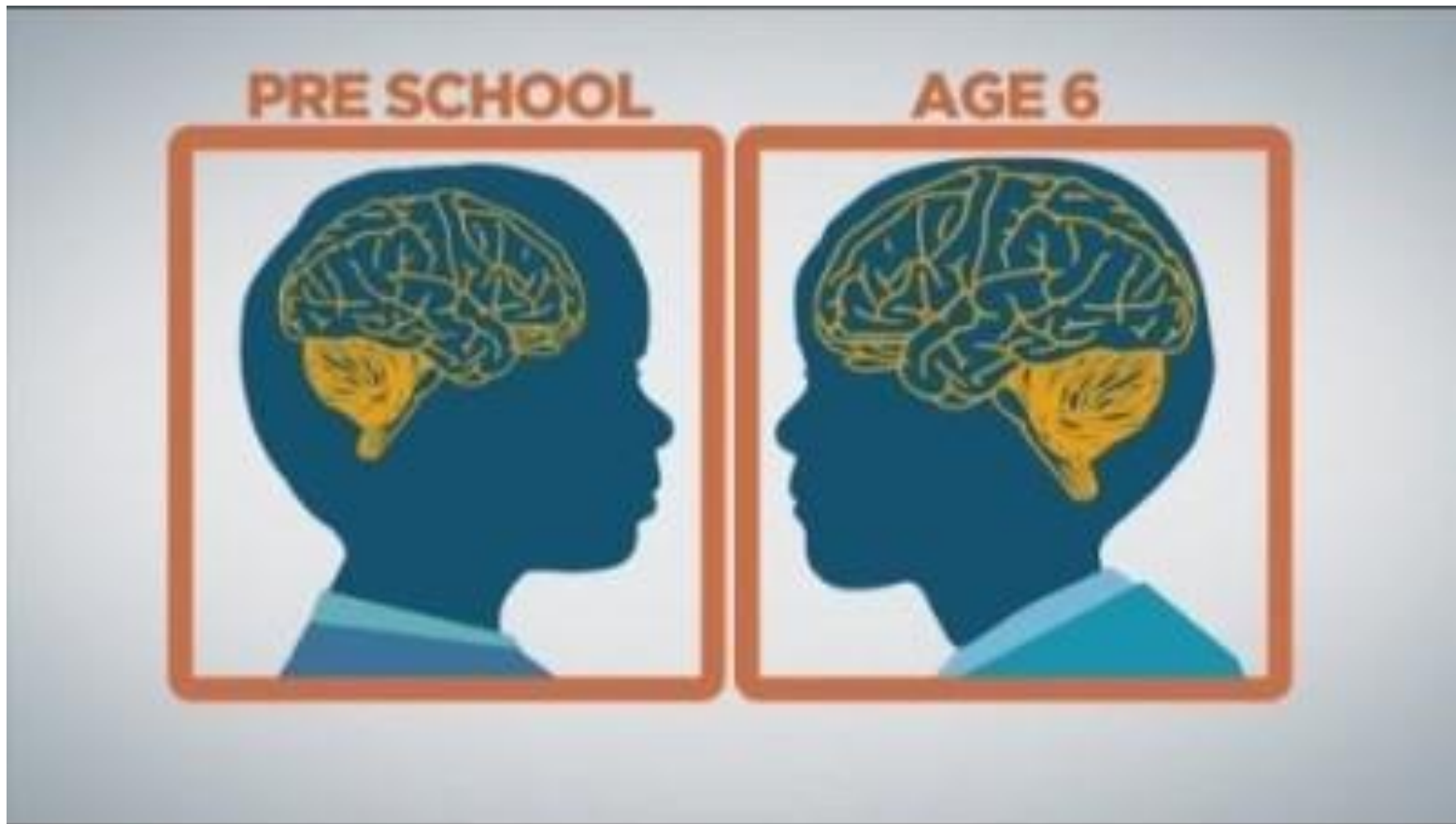
What Is Social–Emotional Development?



- Experience, expression, and management of emotions
- Ability to establish positive and rewarding relationships
- Intrapersonal and interpersonal processes (how one feels about oneself and in relationship to others)

Strong, positive relationships help children develop trust, empathy, compassion, and a sense of right and wrong.

How Baby Brains Develop



Social–Emotional Development

Birth to 12 Months Old



ZERO TO THREE

- Secure attachment
- Babies learn who they are by how they are treated.
- Key milestones include:
 - ✓ Read and respond to adult cues and signals.
 - ✓ Use simple gestures.
 - ✓ Seek and develop relationship with one particular adult.
 - ✓ Express distress and other negative emotions when separated from their primary caregivers.
 - ✓ Influence others.

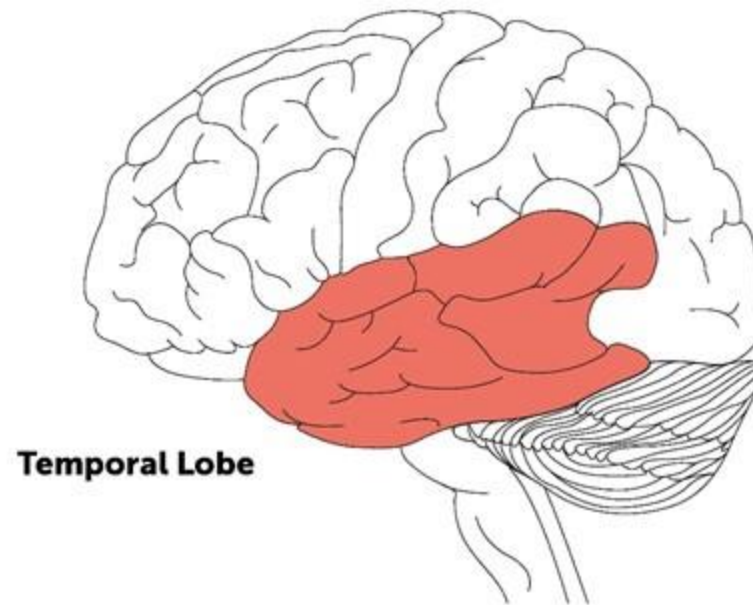


Social–Emotional Development From 12–24 Months Old



ZERO TO THREE

- A growing awareness that they are separate individuals—that others have thoughts and feelings that may be different from their own.
- Independence and the emergence of “NO!”
- Language growth



Social–Emotional Development From 12–24 Months Old



Key milestones include the following:

- ✓ Back-and-forth interactions
- ✓ Feel secure to explore independently
- ✓ Begin to take turns
- ✓ Recognize self in the mirror or a picture
- ✓ Become more independent
- ✓ Cooperate by helping to put things away
- ✓ May become angry if activities are interrupted or if don't get their way
- ✓ Respond to simple commands
- ✓ May hit, bite, or fight over a toy
- ✓ Imitate adult behaviors in play
- ✓ A range of emotional expressions
- ✓ Begin interactive play
- ✓ Gestures, sounds, and/or words

Social–Emotional Development From 24–36 Months Old

- Recognize they are fully separate beings
- Increase in interactive play
- Increase in symbolic thinking
- Feelings still trump thinking
- Aggression, frustration, whining, clinging, possessiveness, extreme emotional shifts and even biting and hitting

Social–Emotional Development From 24–36 Months Old

Key milestones include:

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

Social–Emotional Development From 3–5 Years Old



- Growth in the prefrontal cortex enables greater self-control and executive functions improve.
- Children play more collaboratively with peers but still need help learning to manage their emotions.
- Self-concept (awareness of how others see them) is developing rapidly.

Social–Emotional Development From 3–5 Years Old

Key milestones include the following:

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



Brain Development and Social–Emotional Development



The developing brain is affected by experiences and interactions.

Experiences Shape the Structure and Functioning of the Brain

- 1 million neural connections per second
- Influenced by early experiences



Video—Early Experiences





How did this father provide meaning to his child's behavior?

- Positive early experiences lead to strong neural networks and healthy development.
- Negative experiences lead to challenges in many areas of functioning.



Plasticity

- Neuroplasticity is the brain's ability to change itself based on an individual's experience.
- Early childhood is a period of both opportunity and vulnerability.
- The longer children have been exposed to negative experiences, the harder it is and the longer it takes for brain circuitry to become reorganized when exposed to new experiences.





Use It or Lose It



- The brain has more connections than it can use.
- *Pruning*—connections that are not used



Attachment



- Babies are wired to connect.
- Quality caregiving allows secure attachment.
- Secure attachment allows exploration.
- Pattern of interactions → child's expectations for relationships (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978)



Early Social Interactions



- Social partners
- Communication and positive emotions
- Children who expect to be treated lovingly, respectfully, and sensitively are more likely to develop relationships that are characterized by these attributes (Lamb, Morrison, & Malkin, 1987).

Activity

- With your group, read the scenario card on your table and answer the following questions:
 - You will need a timekeeper and a reporter.
1. What “it” might mean?
 2. What would you do?
 3. How does your response support brain development?



The Impact of Stress on Social–Emotional Development

- Emotionally unavailable or unsupportive caregivers
- Stressed caregivers pass stress to children (Cummings & Davies, 2010).
- Changes in routines can cause stress (Schechter et al., 2004; Schwerdtfeger & Goff, 2007).
- Stress → challenging behaviors → parental stress





Experience of Stress

- Parents' responsiveness to children
- A "secure base" for children
- Damage to children's feelings of trust and security (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1988)
- Affects long-term neurological and physiological health



Video





Empathy

- Recognize/imagine the emotions and feelings of others and respond sensitively
- Requires “shared interpersonal experiences” (Decety, 2010)





Examples of Empathy



Sharing a toy.



Laughing or a smiling.



Calm response.

***Remember to validate ALL emotions,
including the difficult or challenging ones.***



Key Messages

- The developing brain is affected by children's experiences and interactions with the important people in their lives.
- Adults play a critical role in supporting young children's social and emotional development.
- Brain connections are experience dependent; early experiences last a lifetime.

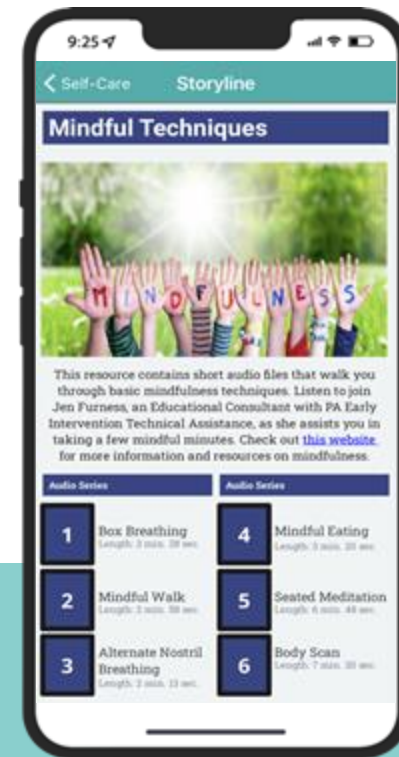
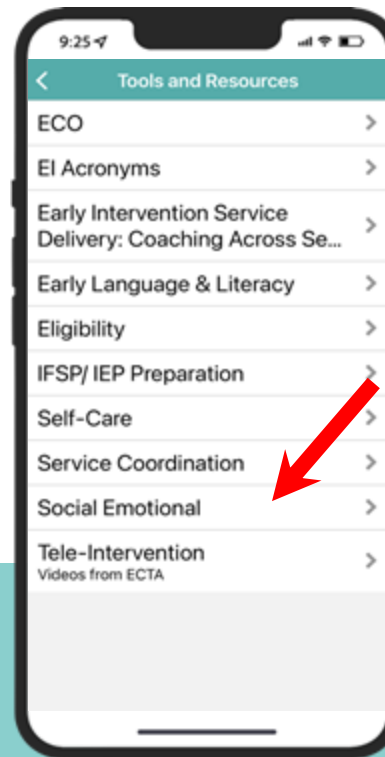


Action Planning

**In the next ____ days,
I aim to _____.**

**One thing that will help me achieve my
goal is to _____.**

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Final Thoughts



Resources

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