

## Parent Handout—Unit 5

# Supporting Social–Emotional Development

Research clearly shows that young children's social-emotional development is one of the most important influences on success later in life, both academically and socially. Starting from birth, babies learn who they are by how they are treated. Loving relationships provide young children with a sense of comfort, safety, and confidence. They teach young children how to form friendships, communicate emotions, and deal with challenges.

Here are some of the skills that support healthy social–emotional development: making friends, showing anger in a healthy way, figuring out conflicts peacefully, taking care of someone who has been hurt, waiting patiently, and following rules. Like any skill, young children develop these abilities in small steps over time.

### What you can do:

**Tune in to your child's cues and follow his lead.** For example, your 10-month-old might start kicking, babbling, and grabbing at mealtime to show you he really wants to hold his own spoon. You know that he's not yet able to feed himself, so you give him a baby spoon to hold in his hands while you continue feeding him with another. This is responsive care because you took the time to think about what your baby's behavior means and figured out a way to support him.

**Tune in to your child's unique needs and approach to the world.** What are her likes and dislikes? Which toys are her favorites? What daily schedule works for her? What experiences does she thrive on, and for which does she need more support?

**Be affectionate and nurturing.** Touching, holding, comforting, rocking, singing, and talking to your baby all send the message that he is special and loved. While it's easy to be affectionate when babies are cute and cuddly, it's also important to nurture babies when they are difficult, fussy, crying a lot, or colicky. When you can be there for your baby during the tough times, children learn that they are loved for who they are—no matter what.

**Help your child feel safe and secure.** You help your baby feel safe and secure when you respond to her cries and other communications—for example, picking your baby up when she lifts her arms in the air as if to say, "Up!" Babies also feel secure when they get lots of affection from you and when their days are predictable. It is the love and trust you share that helps your child learn that you will always be there for her. This trust gives her confidence.

**Establish routines for your child.** Knowing what to expect helps babies feel safe, confident, and in control of their world. Try to keep daily routines, like meals and bedtime, in the same order and at the same general time each day.

**Help your toddler become a confident problem solver.** Give your child some time to try to figure out a problem on his own—like how to get his rain boots on. When you see him start to get frustrated, give him the help he needs to master the challenge. For example, you may line up the boots with the feet in the correct position and then suggest the child lean on a chair while he slides a foot in.

**Praise the process, not just the result.** The goal is to help children feel good about their efforts, not just the outcome. When you notice your child's efforts ("You are working so hard on that puzzle, really thinking through where each piece fits"), it lets her know how important it is to be persistent and keep trying.

**Help children learn to resolve conflict in healthy, appropriate ways.** You have probably noticed that toddlers want what they want when they want it. They have little self-control, which means they are not very good at waiting and also have a hard time stopping themselves from acting on their desires.

- **Show them how to share.** You might set a kitchen timer to give them a visual reminder of how long they have to wait for their turn. Comfort children who have trouble coping with waiting. Help them get involved in something else in the meantime.
- **Play turn-taking games.** Try taking turns hitting a foam ball off a tee, passing balls around a circle, or playing together in water or sand. Activities like these help children "practice" the art of sharing.

**Help your child understand her feelings, and show that you have confidence she can cope.** "You are feeling sad that Carly got the cupcake with the butterfly on it that you wanted. I know that's hard, but now you can choose the blue cupcake or the green one." Teaching children the words for emotions is important because, over time, it gives children the ability to talk about their feelings instead of acting them out.

**Help your child express his feelings in age-appropriate ways.** Offer acceptable ways to share strong feelings. For example, toddlers can rip paper, stomp their feet, or throw a foam ball when they are very mad. Help your little one understand there are many healthy, non-hurtful ways of expressing feelings.

**Encourage early friendships.** Children need practice to learn to share, take turns, resolve conflicts, and experience the joy of friendship. Playing with peers helps children develop all of these important skills. When you provide fun choices for activities, a safe, supportive environment for play, and the needed guidance to help children share and resolve conflicts, they will discover the pleasure of early friendships.

**Help your child see others' points of view, which encourages empathy.** "Casey is feeling sad because his daddy just said good-bye. Let's see if he wants to read a book with us."