

GROWING IDEAS

Friends & Feelings: Social-Emotional Development in Young Children

What is social-emotional development?



Social-emotional development involves the ability to form close, secure relationships and to experience, regulate, and express emotions.

Social-emotional growth is affected by a variety of factors, such as an individual's unique biology and temperament, as well as life experiences.

- "Social" refers to how individuals interact with others.
- "Emotional" refers to how individuals feel about themselves, others, and the world.

Why support young children's social-emotional development?

In recent years, new research shows that healthy social-emotional development is a powerful predictor of school readiness and later success in life. When children feel good about themselves, have positive relationships with others, and know how to regulate their emotions, they are

more likely to do the following:

- Succeed in group situations, such as school or community settings.
- Be able to concentrate and learn.
- Effectively communicate their feelings.
- Develop confidence and self-esteem.
- Develop attachments.

What is attachment and how is it related to social-emotional development?

Attachment refers to the caring relationships that develop between a child and important people in his or her life. These special relationships help a child feel safe, as well as develop trust and independence. Secure attachments to primary adults provide the foundation for social-emotional development.

Care and education professionals can support the development of attachments by the following:

- ensuring every child has a primary adult who is there daily to provide support and help develop strong, positive relationships;
- responding promptly and appropriately to children's verbal and non-verbal messages;

- getting to know every child well, including family members, beliefs, and family culture in order to understand, appreciate, and honor family perspectives;
- using observations, reflection, and actions to ensure every child is cared for, respected, and develops positive self-esteem; and
- encouraging emotional self-regulation.

What is emotional self-regulation and how is it related to attachment?

Emotional self-regulation refers to a child's ability to control emotions and impulses. It is influenced by the quality of attachments and by developmental level.

- As infants, children need adults to help them deal with strong emotions, but as they grow and learn, children develop self-control.
- Children begin to develop an awareness of their own emotions and to understand that other people have emotions, too.
- Interactions with family members, caregivers, peers, and other community members influence a child's emotions and ability to cope with feelings.

How can adults support the social-emotional growth of young children with and without disabilities?

- Respond to each child's needs with warmth and respect by smiling, touching, or talking.
- Model appropriate behaviors by interacting with other adults and children in ways that create a climate of kindness and generosity.
- Recognize and respond to pro-social behavior.
- Acknowledge and identify children's feelings.
- Understand and adapt for each child's body rhythms, personality and abilities.

Care and education professionals can design quality inclusive environments that help children feel supported by the following:

- Create routines that are predictable, but flexible.

- Design learning spaces that are orderly and allow for quiet alone time, small group time, and busy, active play.
- Provide learning materials that are stored and organized so that all children can reach and use them.
- Have pictures, photos of familiar people, and artwork created by children displayed at child's level.
- Offer a variety of materials and toys that are developmentally appropriate and support interactions, such as blocks, puppets, balls and dress-up clothes.

When needed provide extra support to help children build relationships by offering:

- guidance in learning how to make and keep friends;
- supportive words to help children express their feelings; and
- opportunities to help or do something special with adults or peers.

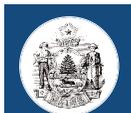
Plan the curriculum to include social and emotional learning activities, such as the following:

- During group time, use puppets, pictures, and books to name, describe, and learn about feelings.
- Provide opportunities for children to express feelings and ideas through play, art, music, movement, sensory, and other activities.
- Offer activities that match children's interests, preferences, and learning styles.

Where to learn more:

See "[Friends & Feelings: Social-Emotional Development in Young Children — Selected Resources](http://ccids.umaine.edu/resources/ec-growingideas/socemores/)" online at <http://ccids.umaine.edu/resources/ec-growingideas/socemores/>

See "[Friends & Feelings: Social-Emotional Development in Young Children — Virtual Toolkit](http://ccids.umaine.edu/resources/ec-growingideas/socemovtk/)" online at <http://ccids.umaine.edu/resources/ec-growingideas/socemovtk/>



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