

## Tips for Encouraging Healthy Social and Emotional Development in Young Children (2 to 5 years old)

Parents and families play an important role in social and emotional development, one that is both rewarding and difficult. It is important to have realistic, age-appropriate expectations, patience and consistency. Become familiar with typical early childhood developmental milestones so you know what to expect. All children develop at their own pace but, if you are ever worried about your child's development it is important to talk to their doctor right away, because acting early can make a big difference.

### Creating a Positive Environment

It is important to create a predictable, nurturing environment for children to feel safe, and encouraged to learn, play and explore.

- Try to create a consistent routine. Knowing what to expect helps children feel secure, confident and in control. If each day is a little different, talk to your child each morning about what they day will look like for them. For example: "Remember, today you will go to grandma's house after school."
- Be sure to talk, comfort, hug, sing and play with your child throughout their day. When you are loving and responsive to our child's needs, you help them feel safe and develop trust.
- Provide age-appropriate toys and books for your child to learn and play.
- When your child is playing on their own be sure to remain close, so they feel safe.

### Supporting Children in Developing Social Skills

Social skills are critical for lifelong learning, happiness, and long-term success. It's important that your expectations are realistic for child's age for example, toddlers are still learning to share and will likely play next to, instead of *with*, each other.

- Encourage friendships with children their age early so they can practice sharing and taking turns and the joys of friendship.
- Balance allowing children to work through their conflicts and stepping in to teach them the correct way to take turns.
- Encourage pretend play and allow your child to take the lead in developing a pretend story. Play along and add to their story.
- **It is important to know your behavior both negative and positive is a model for your child.** Use your own behaviors to teach lessons on social skills, talked to them about went well and what you can do better next time. For example, if someone cuts you off in traffic and you get upset and yell at the other driver, wait for your feelings to pass. Then explain that it is okay that you got upset when

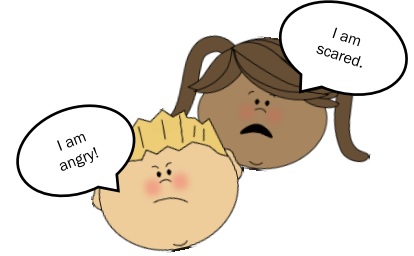


that happened but, yelling didn't do much good and you shouldn't do that next time.

### Recognizing and Talking About Emotions

Allowing and encouraging children to express their feelings both negative and positive—can support their emotional development.

- Discuss the difference between emotion and behavior. Let them know its okay to feel the way they are feeling but there are better ways to express it.
- Say what you think your child is feeling based off their expression and how they are acting.
- Observing out loud feelings and emotions while reading books, watching tv or during pretend play. This will help them learn to identify and express their own feelings. For example, if two dolls are play fighting say: "They are angry. Did they both want to play with that toy?"
- Talk about your own feelings when spending time with them to show how to use words to express themselves. For example, "Reading bedtime stories with you is so much fun, it makes me happy!"
- Be sensitive, nurturing and encouraging. Young children are going through a lot of changes and need hugs and kisses.



### Using Positive Discipline

Setting clear, and consistent limits is one of the most important things parents can do for children. It is important to recognize and celebrate positive behaviors to help build their confidence and encourage them to repeat these behaviors.

- Set limits and point out the consequences of your child's behavior. For example, "After you pushed Sam, he started to cry. It was not nice, and it hurt him. Let's tell him you are sorry."
- Add in fun components during parts of your child's routine that they do not enjoy.
- Work through your child's emotions with them. Try to remain calm when your child is not particularly during tantrums or aggression. After the moment has passed, walk through what happened to identify what triggered the reaction and role play better response they can do in the future.
- Give your child plenty of opportunities to make choices to give them a sense of control. For example, if you ask your child to help set the table allow them to choose between setting the forks, spoons, etc. In the mornings, pick two outfits for them and allow them to choose. Be sure to only give them appropriate options so you the outcome is positive but the child picks.