MILESTONES:
UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILD'S SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT FROM BIRTH TO AGE 5

Children are born with the need and desire to connect with those around them. When teachers and practitioners and parents and caregivers establish positive relationships with children from birth through the early years, and value their diverse cultures and languages, children feel safe and secure, laying the foundation for healthy social and emotional development. This process affects how children experience the world, express themselves, manage their emotions, and establish positive relationships with others.

Social and emotional development involves several interrelated areas of development, including *social interaction*, *emotional awareness*, and *self-regulation*. Below are examples of important aspects of social and emotional development for young children.

Social interaction focuses on the relationships we share with others, including relationships with adults and peers. As children develop socially, they learn to take turns, help their friends, play together, and cooperate with others.

Emotional awareness includes the ability to recognize and understand our own feelings and actions and those of other people, and how our own feelings and actions affect ourselves and others.

Self-regulation is the ability to express thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in socially appropriate ways. Learning to calm down when angry or excited and persisting at difficult tasks are examples of self-regulation.

DID YOU KNOW?

Research shows that a strong social and emotional foundation in early childhood powerfully impacts children's later positive attitudes and behaviors, their academic performance, career path, and adult health outcomes![1] For more information, see *Social and Emotional Development Research Background* in this series.

KEY SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL MILESTONES AT VARIOUS AGES

The following examples represent developmental milestones for most children at each given age.

Remember, every child develops at her own pace and has diverse learning needs and approaches. Tuning in and being aware of your child's specific needs and where they are developmentally can help you adjust your environment and daily activities. But if you are ever worried about your child's development, don't wait! Talk with your child's doctor if you have concerns. Acting early can make a big difference. Get tips to help at www.cdc.gov/Concerned, CDC's Learn the Signs. Act Early and Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive!

BIRTH TO 2 MONTHS:

- May briefly calm himself (may bring hands to mouth and suck on hand).
- Tries to make eye contact with caregiver.
- Begins to smile at people.

4 MONTHS:

- May smile spontaneously, especially at people.
- Likes interacting with people and might cry when the interaction stops.
- Copies some movements and facial expressions, like smiling or frowning.

6 MONTHS:

- Reacts positively to familiar faces and begins to be wary of strangers.
- Likes to play with others, especially parents and other caregivers.
- Responds to own name.

9 MONTHS:

- May show early signs of separation anxiety and may cry more often when separated from caregiver and be clingy with familiar adults.
- May become attached to specific toys or other comfort items.
- Understands "no."
- Copies sounds and gestures of others.

12 MONTHS:

- May show fear in new situations.
- Repeats sounds or actions to get attention.
- May show signs of independence and resist a caregiver's attempt to help.
- Begins to follows simple directions.

18 MONTHS:

- May need help coping with temper tantrums.
- May begin to explore alone but with parent close by.
- Engages in simple pretend or modeling behavior, such as feeding a doll or talking on the phone.
- Demonstrates joint attention; for example, the child points to an airplane in the sky and looks at caregiver to make sure the caregiver sees it too.

2 YEARS:

- Copies others, especially adults and older children.
- Shows more and more independence and may show defiant behavior.
- Mainly plays alongside other children (parallel play), but is beginning to include other children in play.
- Follows simple instructions.

3 YEARS:

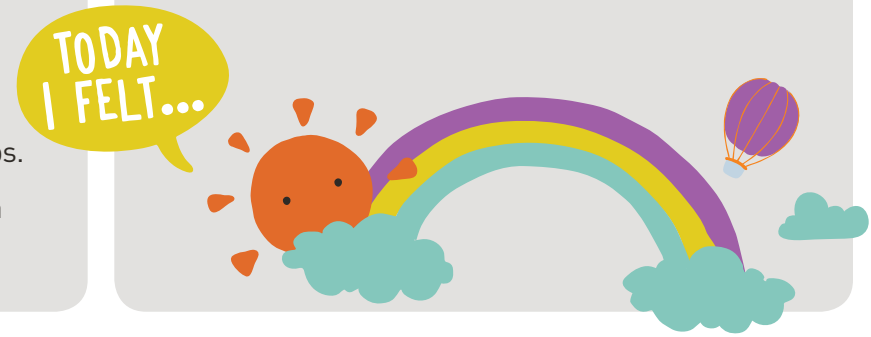
- May start to understand the idea of "mine" and "his" or "hers."
- May feel uneasy or anxious with major changes in routine.
- May begin to learn how to take turns in games and follows directions with 2-3 steps.
- Names a friend and may show concern for a friend who is sad or upset.

4 YEARS:

- Cooperates with other children and may prefer to play with other children than by herself.
- Often can't tell what is real and what is make-believe.
- Enjoys new things and activities.

5 YEARS:

- May want to please caregivers and peers.
- Is aware of gender.
- May start recognizing what is real and what is make-believe.



For additional resources on supporting your child's learning and development, check out tip sheets on early language development and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) and social emotional development.

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NOTES

1. Damon E. Jones et all, "Early Social-Emotional Functioning and Public Health: The Relationship Between Kindergarten Social Competence and Future Wellness," *American Journal of Public Health* 105(11) (2015): 2283-2290.