Social Emotional Development and Learning

What is social and emotional development and learning?

When children start to understand who they are, what they are feeling, and what to expect when interacting with others, they are developing their social emotional skills. Families and educators play the biggest role in a child's social emotional development because they engage in consistent, securely attached relationships.

Why are social and emotional skills important?

Learning social emotional skills is an important part of development during childhood as it influences a child's self-confidence and ability to:

- empathize,

- identify, express, and soothe emotions,

- engage in positive relationships with peers, and

- expand their problem-solving skills.

Understanding Social Emotional Milestones

Being aware of social emotional milestones in early childhood will support planning age-appropriate activities:

- **Infants** are at the early stage of social emotional development. They are ready to learn how to engage in simple back and forth interactions with other children and adults and notice others in distress.

- **Toddlers** are at the emerging stage of social emotional development. They are ready to learn how to play next to other children with similar toys and practice taking turns and problem solving with adult help.

- **Preschoolers** show increasing mastery of social and emotional development. They are more aware of others' thoughts and feelings, and they are ready to engage in cooperative play, include other's ideas, follow agreed upon rules, describe social problems, and suggest effective solutions.

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What can educators do to support social emotional development and learning?

Children draw on social experiences to develop an understanding of the world around them, which is why supportive relationships and inclusive environments are necessary for children's social emotional development and learning.

Supportive Relationships

- Acknowledge children's emotions (i.e., look at the child, verbally identify the emotions you see, provide co-regulation if they need soothing, use visuals to help them determine how they are feeling, etc.)

- Comment positively and descriptively when children are using social skills and expressing their emotions in appropriate ways

- Use naturally occurring opportunities throughout the day to practice social skills or emotional competencies (i.e., taking turns, waiting, sharing, identifying, expressing, and soothing emotions, etc.)

- Support children to reflect on their use of social skills or emotional competencies either individually or in groups

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- Individualize instruction of social skills or emotional competencies (i.e., one-to-one instruction as needed, use different prompting strategies, provide social emotional visuals, etc.) based on children's developmental needs

Inclusive Environment

- Teach children that all emotions are valid and provide support for how to appropriately express them (i.e., identifying and labelling feelings, reading scripted stories, singing songs about emotions, posting emotions visuals, providing a calming area and kit, gathering for an emotions check-in with pictures, etc.)

- Intentionally plan for co-operative play activities where children can practice friendship skills and learn about empathy (i.e., large floor puzzles, building blocks, joint artwork opportunities, etc.)

- Foster a 'work together attitude' during routines like cleaning up (i.e., pairing children to clean-up certain areas together)

- Join in play, without directing, to support and expand a child's interactions with peers

- Use both child-initiated and adult-led settings to teach problem solving, providing a variety of materials when necessary (i.e., problem solving visuals and kit)

For more information on social emotional development and learning:

The National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations (NCPMI):
https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/Pyramid/overview/index.html

The Future of Children: 9 Research briefs and articles on social emotional development and learning – 2017 VOLUME 27 NUMBER 1 SPRING 2017.
https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/FOC-Spring-Vol27-No1-Compiled-Future-of-Children-spring-2017.pdf

Issue Brief: Social and Emotional Learning in Canada
http://www.carthyfoundation.org/Social%20and%20Emotional%20Learning%20Issue%20Brief.pdf

Center on the Developing Child: Children's social emotional development is built into the architecture of their brains
https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/childrens-emotional-development-is-built-into-the-architecture-of-their-brains/