

FEELINGS and CONNECTIONS Matter

Supporting Social Emotional Development
3 to 5 Years



Department of Health

Online Version



Watch Video

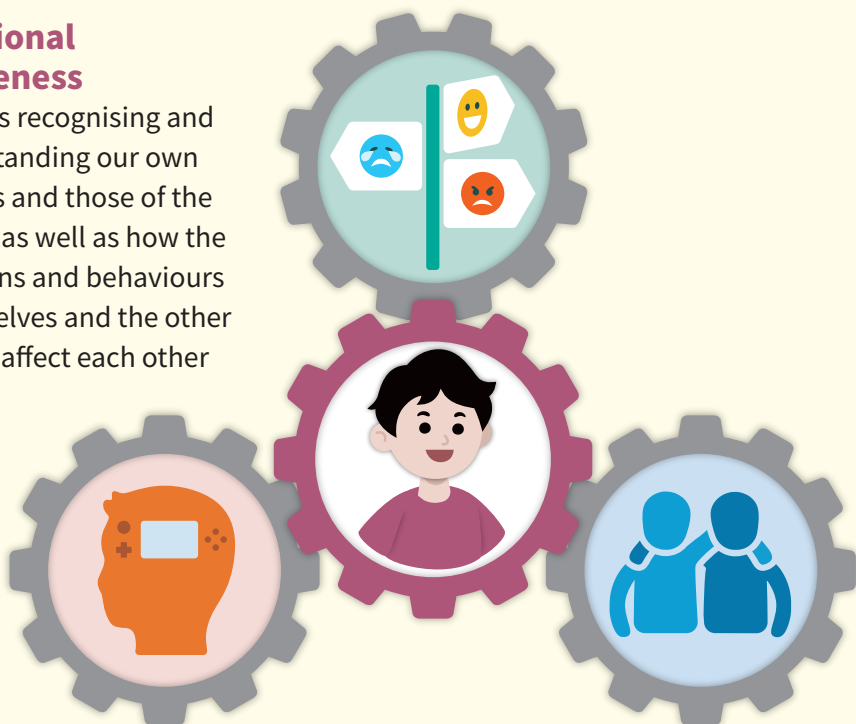


As your child enters preschool years, her social emotional performance increasingly influences her everyday life. At home, she could better show her feelings and concerns for the others' needs. At kindergarten and in the community, rather than playing in parallel with other kids, your child could now interact and collaborate with peers. She also demonstrates better abilities to regulate emotions and follow social rules. Research suggests that these **social and emotional skills** develop with age and have lasting influence on children's performance in the other aspects, such as learning and behaviour.

Social and emotional development has the following components, which are **interrelated**, **inseparable**, and develop **sequentially** in line with children's overall cognitive development:

Emotional Awareness

involves recognising and understanding our own feelings and those of the others, as well as how the emotions and behaviours of ourselves and the other people affect each other



Self-Regulation

refers to the ability to express our feelings and needs, and to control behaviours in appropriate ways

Social Interaction

includes getting along with the others, establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships

A Closer Look at "EMOTION"

We are all born with emotions, positive or negative, which are **spontaneous responses** that serve the **functions** of prompting us to **take care of our needs**, respond to our immediate situation, as well as **communicate and connect with others**. For example, when your child is irritated and even breaks into tears after trying repeatedly in vain to assemble his blocks, his expression of frustration help you see his need for your guidance to calm down and cope with setbacks. **No matter what emotions a child expresses, they are neither right nor wrong.**



Research suggests that negative emotions do not simply disappear through avoidance, denial or suppression, so learning to be **aware, understand and embrace** the emotions of ourselves and the others is important to our mental health. Although a child may behave undesirably when he experiences negative emotions, by **accepting and supporting him through all emotional ups and downs** and **directing him to express his feelings appropriately**,

his caregivers can lay a solid foundation for his **social, emotional and overall development**.

Keys to Support Social Emotional Development

Your child's sense of security is the foundation of healthy social and emotional development, which could be nurtured when you



Provide a safe and loving environment where your child could explore and learn



Encourage and help your child to **recognise and regulate emotions**



Through play and everyday interactions, **guide** your child to **develop social skills**

Social and Emotional Milestones

In no time your child is entering the preschool years, where she needs to learn to get along with peers and deal with social norms in different settings (e.g. kindergarten). Preschoolers exhibit the following characteristics in the social emotional aspects:

3 to 4 years old

Children can

- Full of curiosity, likes novelties and is eager to make new attempts



Parents may

- If it is safe, step aside and let your child explore in her way. Respond to her needs when she needs you (e.g. when she is in danger or feeling upset)



- May confuse imagination with reality, for instance, she may treat her doll as her playmate and carry it around, become terrified by unfamiliar images as she perceives them as monsters, etc.



- Try to take her perspective when you play with or comfort her and encourage her to share her feelings; avoid teasing, scolding or scaring her, as this may affect how she sees herself and emotions



- Starts to express her feelings in simple words, although she could not yet express complex emotions such as worry; may sense the others' feelings and tries to comfort her peers



- Talk about her emotions and experiences often in everyday life, and accept all her feelings; when she has strong feelings or even 'tantrums', show empathy and guide her gently and calmly to regulate her emotions, so that she could learn through your modelling to understand and respond to the others' emotions



- Exercises better self-control and follows simple rules (e.g. turn-taking, sharing toys)



- Engage her in interactive and interesting games or activities that involve simple rules (e.g. taking turns to build blocks)
- Do not force your child to share; provide guidance when other children want to take her toys, such as through giving her a heads up about sharing, and giving her time to play with the toy before she has to pass it on



Children can

3 to 4 years old

Parents may

- Enjoys imaginative play and role-playing, and she could cooperate with other children in games



- Follow her make-believe play and creations; coach her to follow social rules when she is around other children



Children can

4 up to 6 years old

Parents may

- Begins to understand and ask what do others think and feel, while he may try to withhold his own thoughts and feelings



- In tackling his questions, follow his interests and guide him to discover answers or solve problems on his own; offer him limited choices to support his autonomy
- Spend time to talk to him daily, listen carefully to what excites or worries him; read books or draw pictures with him to help him express his emotions



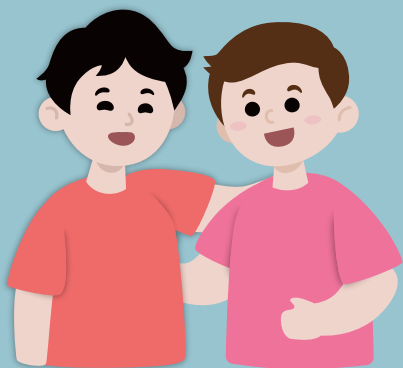
- Could tell the difference between imagination and reality



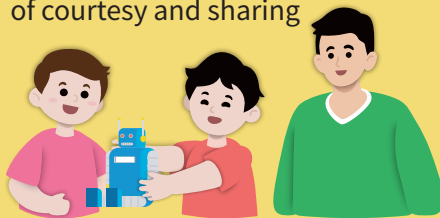
- If he is still frightened by his fantasies, comfort him with empathy and help him differentiate imagination from reality



- Selects his playmates; does not want to be different from his peers



- Give him more chances to play with his preferred playmates, so he may learn social skills in interacting with peers and making friends; teach him to observe the needs and feelings of the other people, and introduce social norms gradually, such as the importance of courtesy and sharing



- Could better regulate his emotions and follow social rules, such as putting his needs into words, sharing toys, asking for permission, and returning what he has borrowed

- Show your appreciation when he tries to control his emotions, or behaves in a considerate, polite, or compliant manner



- Enjoys role-playing with his friends, such as pretending to be parents, chef, or superheroes, etc.; he is often willing to compromise and cooperate with his playmates in group games that involve turn-taking and rules



- Let your child play more with other children; you may also participate in his pretend play, and steer him to resolve conflicts peacefully and show concerns for the others



As your child grows, parents inevitably find it more challenging to handle his behaviour and emotions! However, by giving him proper guidance with love and patience, and setting appropriate rules and limits, he will gradually learn to cooperate; over time, you are supporting his social emotional development and his self-regulation abilities would improve. Refer to the relevant leaflets for more parenting tips:



**Managing the Behaviour
of your Preschooler I**



**Managing the Behaviour
of your Preschooler II**



**Raising an Emotionally
Intelligent Preschooler**

If you have any concerns about your child's social and emotional development, please consult the Maternal and Child Health Centre (MCHC), your family doctor or paediatrician, or other health professionals.



Family Health Service

Website: www.fhs.gov.hk

24-hour information hotline: 2112 9900

The content of the leaflet will be updated.
Please refer to the latest information
on the Family Health Service website.

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