



A WAY OF BEING WITH CHILDREN

Supporting Social-Emotional Development Tips to Promote Child Well-Being and Resilience



What is Social-Emotional Development?

Social Emotional Development is defined as: “the developing capacity of the child from birth through 5 to form close and secure relationships; experience, regulate, and express emotions in socially and culturally appropriate ways; and explore the environment and learn—all in the context of family, community, and culture” (Yates et al., 2008, p. 2).



“The Center for the Developing Child at Harvard University calls the early interactions between an infant and their primary caregiver “serve and return”. When an infant or young child babbles, gestures, or cries, and an adult responds appropriately with eye contact, words, or a hug, neural connections are built and strengthened in the child’s brain that support the development of communication and social skills. This reciprocal connection in turn, forms the foundation for social-emotional development.”



Components of Social-Emotional Development

- Emotional Awareness
 - Recognizing and making sense of emotions
- Self-Regulation
 - Managing and expressing emotions in an adaptive, safe and appropriate manner
- Social Interaction
 - Relationships and connections with others



Social-Emotional Development Happens in Stages

- 0-2 Months
 - Eye contact, cooing, gurgling
- 2-6 Months
 - Know familiar faces; play starts
- 6-9 Months
 - Respond to own name; fear of strangers
- 9-12 Months
 - Object permanence; enjoy peek-a-boo
- 2 Years Old
 - Parallel play; imitation; independence
- 3 Years Old
 - Show concern for others; collaborative play
- 4 Years Old
 - Collaborative play; magical thinking
- 5 Years Old
 - Distinguish between make-believe/reality
 - Want to please/help others



Serve and Return

The concept of serve and return works like a game of tennis, pickle ball, or ping pong between a child and parent or caregiver. The child “serves” by reaching out for interaction with their caretaker using eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, babbling, words, or touch. A responsive parent or caregiver will “return” their child’s serve by looking at, smiling at, speaking to, pointing at, playing with, or engaging in some other positive way with the child. According to Harvard University’s Center on the Developing Child, “serve and return interactions shape brain architecture” and influence later social-emotional development.

Ways to Promote Social-Emotional Development

- Be affectionate and nurturing
- Provide joyful interactions
- Engage with them at every opportunity
- Play games like “peek-a-boo”
- Respond to their cues
- Regulate yourself before you can regulate baby
- Be consistent/provide a routine
 - Communicate what is next
 - Give time warnings/provide comfort
- Know their developmental stage
- Provide opportunities to practice new skills
- Allow them time needed
- Delight in their new discoveries
- Allowing them to take the lead
- Practice self-care
- Name feelings
- Express your feelings
- Model coping skills



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