

Tips to Promote Social-Emotional Health Among Young Children



What Parents of Young Children Can Do:

-  Catch your child being good! Praise your child often for even small accomplishments like playing nicely with brothers or sisters, helping to pick up toys, waiting their turn, or being a good sport.
-  Find ways to play with your child that you both enjoy every day. It is especially important to try and reconnect for a few minutes after separations. Include some type of regular physical activity such as a walk or bike ride around the neighborhood.
-  Seek ways for your child to play with other children of the same age. Make sure they are watched by a trusted adult.
-  Make time for a routine that includes regular family meals when parents and children can sit and talk about their day together. Play the "high-low" game by taking turns sharing the best and not-so-good parts of the day.
-  Model behaviors that you want to see in your child. Parents are their child's first and most important teachers, and what they do can be much more important than what they say. Be especially careful of criticizing teachers or other trusted adults in front of the child.
-  Set limits for your child around safety, regard for others, and household rules and routines that are important to you. Ask others to use these with your child.
-  Be consistent with limits for your child and encourage all caretaking adults to use the same rules. If you must enforce a rule, do this with supportive understanding. Don't give in, but do quickly forgive. Do not hold a grudge for past mistakes. Encourage learning from mistakes so that they do not happen again.
-  Teach your child to ask for help and identify who can help them when they need it. Find opportunities to show them how to ask for help.
-  Everyone experiences anger and stress! Help your child to find acceptable ways of working through these feelings. It is okay to be mad but never okay to hit or destroy.
-  Listen to and respect your child. Remind your child that they can always come to you to discuss concerns, fears, and thoughts. Calmly discuss the issues and talk to your child's pediatrician with any concerns you might have as a result.
-  Give choices when your child is oppositional (e.g., would you like me to carry you upstairs to bed or would you like to walk?) Help your child think of the consequences of their choices when they are demonstrating oppositional behavior.

This tip sheet was adapted from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)