

Getting along

Early childhood is when children begin developing their social and emotional skills which influence children's mental health and wellbeing, now and in the future. Children learn these skills through their important relationships including families, caregivers, peers and early childhood staff.

Developing social skills in early childhood

From birth, children delight in positive social interactions with people. Babies spend almost every waking minute developing their first relationships with parents and caregivers. Through these first relationships, children learn that they can trust others to care for them, get their needs met and enjoy life with others. As they grow, children begin to form a wider network of relationships including friendships with peers and other adults in their lives. However, relationships with their significant caregivers remain a central influence on children's lives.

Parents and carers provide a secure base from which children explore the world around them. Children turn to their parents and carers when they need comfort or are feeling unsure and need reassurance. When faced with new people and situations, children are guided by the emotions and behaviour of their parents and carers. As children's skills and self-confidence grow, they become more independent and have more control over their behaviour.



Further information about developing children's social and emotional skills is available in the other KidsMatter Early Childhood Component 2 resource sheets, including *Social and emotional development*, *Growing together in relationships*, *It's good to be me!*, *Feelings matter*, and *Further resources*.



Gayle's story



Three-year-old Kira stood nervously watching Ross and Tamara playing with her building blocks. Kira was happy to have her friends over for a play, and wanted to join in, but wasn't sure how. Kira's mum, Gayle, noticed and decided to offer some help.

Getting onto her knees to talk to Kira, Gayle asked "Would you like to play with Ross and Tamara?" Kira nodded but looked doubtful.

Gayle suggested "How about you say to Ross: 'That looks fun. I could help you build that!' ". Kira looked over to Ross and then back to her mum, looking unsure. "Tell you what—I'll sit beside you while you do". Kira gave Gayle's suggestion a try and before long Kira, Ross and Tamara were laughing together and taking turns in knocking down each other's towers. Gayle quietly withdrew, feeling pleased Kira was having so much fun.



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What early childhood services might also be doing

- ✦ Leading by example by using social skills, such as negotiating, considering others' needs, and solving problems with your child and others.
- ✦ Encouraging social and imaginary play using props and dress-ups.
- ✦ Creating opportunities to practise social skills, such as sharing for older children, by having them work on joint projects, such as building together.
- ✦ Developing strategies to help children join in with others.
- ✦ Teaching children to embrace and explore the different places, things and people in their environment.
- ✦ Talking with you about your child (e.g., sharing ideas about how they play with others, their likes and dislikes).

What parents and carers can do

- ▶ Engage in face-to-face interactions, such as playing and talking with your children.
- ▶ Arrange opportunities for your child to play with other children (e.g., play dates, play-groups).
- ▶ Support your child to learn skills such as sharing and helping others (e.g., helping to pack up their toys).
- ▶ Talk with your child about how other people use facial expressions and body language in addition to talking, to show their thoughts and feelings (e.g., when someone turns away when you're playing with them may signal that someone needs a break).
- ▶ Support your child to develop respectful behaviours by using them yourself (e.g., by saying 'please' and 'thank you', 'hello' and 'goodbye' in your interactions with your child and others).
- ▶ Using everyday situations to talk with your child about the links between feelings and behaviours will help them to develop socially acceptable behaviour (e.g., throwing toys in frustration, bouncing with excitement).



Getting along with others is a key skill for life! Children learn and develop their social skills through their daily experiences with others, especially their significant caregivers.



The following booklets contain further information on developing children's social skills:

"Everyday learning about getting along with others" (2009) by Bower, L., & Jones, W., Early Childhood Australia Everyday Learning Series.

"Everyday learning about friendship" (2004) by Hammer, M., & Linke, P., Early Childhood Australia Everyday Learning Series.

"Your social baby: Understanding babies' communication from birth" (2001). Murray, L., & Andrews, L., Melbourne: ACER Press.

The following websites may also be of interest to you:

www.kidscount.com.au – particularly the topics 'Responding to children' and 'Understanding children's development' and <http://raisingchildren.net.au> – particularly topics such as 'Behaviour', 'Connecting & Communicating', 'Development' and 'Play & Learning' under the babies', toddlers' and preschoolers' tabs.

This resource and further information on the national KidsMatter Early Childhood initiative is available to download at www.kidsmatter.edu.au. KidsMatter Early Childhood welcomes your feedback which can be submitted through the website.



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