

It's good to be me!

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.



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*, *Getting along*, *Feelings matter*, and *Further resources*.

Kelly's story



Seven-month-old Kelly rolled onto her tummy and reached her arm out towards her favourite squeaky toy. Her mum, Louise, watched attentively as Kelly tried and failed, and tried again, to reach the toy. Kelly began to show some signs of frustration so Louise gently offered some encouragement, talking to Kelly in soft tones and inching the toy closer so it was within Kelly's reach. Patiently, Louise supported Kelly until she was able to grasp the toy in her little hand. Kelly looked up at her mum who was smiling proudly. "See, you can do it!" Louise said while Kelly giggled and cooed happily.





Developing a positive sense of self

From birth, children are developing their personalities and becoming more independent. Having positive experiences and receiving warm and responsive care lets children know that they are worthy and loved. This contributes to them developing a positive sense of self. As children experience success from their efforts in interacting with others and exploring their world, children develop self-confidence and see themselves as capable. This provides children with the motivation to continue to engage in new experiences and to feel optimistic about the future.

Babies use responses from others to form a positive sense of self, such as when their carers show enjoyment in a game they are playing together or acknowledge and comfort them when they are upset. Children form an image of themselves as loveable and capable from these patterns that build up over many interactions. For babies, these interactions are mainly with their parents and other significant carers.

Toddlers are busy exploring their world and are becoming more assertive ("Me do it"), as they develop more confidence to do things for themselves. However they are still learning and will need to check in with their supportive carers from time to time for reassurance and guidance. For example, providing toddlers with limited choices prevents them from becoming overwhelmed from having too many options, while giving them an opportunity to achieve some control over their environment, making them feel good about themselves. Toddlers still think that others have the same thoughts and feelings as they do and that adults can read their minds. (e.g., if a toddler is feeling cross about something they might think that you are cross too and need your reassurance and support to manage their feelings).

Preschoolers are developing more independence and self-control and see themselves as 'doers'. They are often exuberant, enthusiastic and boisterous. Children learn that they may have different thoughts and feelings from others. They are also learning to make predictions about how their behaviour might affect others. They become better at making decisions and solving problems on their own and are building their self-esteem through relationships with other children and adults.



It's good to be me! is continued on the next page





What early childhood services might also be doing

In addition to interacting with children in similar ways as parents and carers, staff at early childhood services might also be:

- ✦ setting clear and consistent limits to help children learn what is expected and develop their child-appropriate self-control and confidence
- ✦ using predictable routines to support children's sense of security and confidence
- ✦ providing a variety of activities and experiences to develop children's skills
- ✦ arranging experiences that allow children to choose their own learning opportunities
- ✦ talking with you about your child's interests and development.

What parents and carers can do

- ▶ Spend time simply being with your child (e.g., playing with them and enjoying each other's company).
- ▶ Let children know they are important by responding consistently to their needs.
- ▶ Be caring, affectionate and loving with your child – this helps them know they are worthy and lovable.
- ▶ Have fun with your children, choose to do things with them, share laughter and joyful moments (e.g., "I would like to go for a walk with you.").
- ▶ Act as a comforting and familiar presence and encourage and enjoy their venturing out and exploration of their world whilst welcoming them back and being available for them to retreat to when they are feeling unsure.
- ▶ Encourage and acknowledge children's efforts.
- ▶ Let children know it's ok to make mistakes and support them to learn from them (e.g., "That is a tricky puzzle. Have another try" or "We can clean it up together. There you go.").
- ▶ Have conversations with children about their experiences including listening to their point of view and non-verbal communications, as children's behaviour shows how they are feeling (e.g., acknowledging their efforts and frustration, encouraging them and letting them know you are there to help if needed using words, smiles and hugs).
- ▶ Encourage children to explore and play and try new things for themselves (e.g., discover how a new toy works).
- ▶ Support children to make everyday decisions and choices (e.g., limit choices to one or two options as having too many choices can be overwhelming for young children).



Children learn to feel good about themselves and their capabilities as they explore their world and have positive experiences.



Further information on developing children's sense of self can be found in: '*Everyday learning about confidence and coping skills*' (2007) by Pam Linke, Early Childhood Australia Everyday Learning Series.

The following websites may also be of interest – www.kidscount.com.au, see 'Understanding children's experiences and <http://raisingchildren.net.au> – see '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.



Australian Government
Department of Health and Ageing



The KidsMatter Early Childhood information sheets are resources that have been developed in collaboration and with funding from the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing. While every care has been taken in preparing this publication, the Commonwealth does not accept liability for any injury or loss or damage arising from the use of, or reliance upon, the content of this publication.