

Social and emotional learning: Suggestions for families

Parents and carers have a critical role to play in guiding and supporting children's social and emotional learning. Social and emotional skills develop with practice.

Everyday situations present lots of opportunities for children to learn and practise skills for coping with emotions, managing relationships and solving problems. You can help children build the skills they need by providing effective coaching.

How parents and carers can help

Encourage discussion of feelings

Encourage children to talk about how they are feeling. Listen with empathy so they feel understood. Help them see that feelings are normal and that all feelings are okay, it is important to understand them, and that understanding and talking about feelings helps you to manage them.

Support children's confidence

Help children identify and develop their strengths by encouraging them to have a go at things and find activities they enjoy. Praise their efforts, celebrate their successes and encourage them to keep trying and learning.

Provide opportunities to play with others

Playing with other children provides practice in important social skills such as sharing, taking turns and cooperation. Help children develop their skills by praising their appropriate play behaviour, for example: "I noticed how nicely you shared your toys. That made it fun for both of you."

Lead by example

Parents and carers are important role models. Children learn how to behave by observing and imitating the behaviour of those around them, particularly adults. When you model positive ways of coping with strong feelings like anger, it helps children feel safe and shows them ways that they can manage strong feelings too.

Give children choices

To develop responsibility, children need practice in making choices that are appropriate for their age and experience level. You can help children build decision-making skills by encouraging them to explore options and helping them think through the reasons for their choices. Involving children in family decision-making (that you are in charge of) helps them develop skills for responsible decision-making and encourages cooperative family relationships.

Encourage creative problem-solving

Asking questions that help children think of alternative solutions supports their thinking and problem-solving skills. When problems arise you can explore them together by asking questions, such as: "What could you do about that?" or "What do you think might happen if you try that?"

Teach children to use assertive communication skills

Show children how to confidently and respectfully communicate their thoughts, feelings and needs to others in an assertive way, for example: "I really don't want to play that game. It's too dangerous. Let's play a different game instead."

Some possibilities for parents and carers

Parent or carer says, "I'm getting too angry. I need some time out to think about this."

Parent or carer says, "I'm feeling really tense. I need to take some deep breaths to calm down."

Admitting to having difficult feelings is not a sign of weakness or failure. It sets a good example for children by showing them that everyone has difficult feelings at times and that they are manageable.

This resource is part of a range of KidsMatter Primary information sheets for families and school staff. View them all online at www.kidsmatter.edu.au



Australian Government

Department of Health and Ageing

