

Social development: Suggestions for families

Family relationships and expectations have a major influence on children's social development. Family relationships set the foundation for children to relate to others. Children learn how to manage relationships by observing the ways that parents, carers and other family members relate to others.

How parents and carers can help

Teach social and emotional skills

Teach children social skills such as listening to others, taking turns, making friends and resolving conflict. Emphasise skills for cooperative and respectful relationships and acknowledge children's efforts to use them. For ideas about how you can teach social and emotional skills, see the range of KidsMatter Primary information sheets on social and emotional learning.

Use positive discipline

Setting reasonable expectations for children's behaviour, and communicating them clearly and respectfully, sets the tone for cooperation. Being consistent and positive in your approach to discipline communicates to children that they are valued, even if a particular behaviour is not. For further ideas, see the KidsMatter Primary information sheets on effective discipline.

Talk about values

Read stories that emphasise values with your children. Ask their opinions on whether they think a particular action is respectful, responsible, caring etcetera. Discuss the pros and cons of different kinds of values for promoting effective social relationships. Make talking about values and opinions part of everyday conversation, for example, by talking about things you see on TV.

Capitalise on 'teachable moments'

When something happens that requires a response which draws on values, it presents a 'teachable moment'. Ask children to think about what the problem is and what they could do to improve the situation. For example, when feelings have been hurt you could ask your child's opinion of what the person might be feeling hurt about. Extend your child's thinking through asking questions like, "How could you find out what Jo is feeling sad about?" and "What do you think you could do to help?"

Involve children in family discussions and decision-making

Encouraging children to contribute to family discussions and decision-making gives them practice in listening to others' views and seeing things from different angles. Listening and contributing to family discussions helps children understand what your values are and shows them that their voices are valued. Involving children in these ways in family discussions and decision-making promotes respectful and responsible behaviours.

Promote a strong sense of identity

When parents and carers notice and acknowledge what children do to help, it shows children that their contributions are worthwhile. This gives them a sense of pride and encourages them to 'do the right thing'. Help children to work out ways to stand up for what they believe in and let them know that you are proud of them when they do. This helps children to build confidence in their own strengths and values.

Supervise media use

It is very important for parents and carers to supervise children's media use and ensure that the things they view are appropriate for their age and level of understanding. When children are repeatedly exposed to violent or inappropriate media images they can see these things as normal. Children often imitate the behaviour they see on TV or on the internet.

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



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