Ways to Encourage Social and Emotional Development

Social and emotional development means how children start to understand who they are, what they are feeling and what to expect when interacting with other people. It is the development of being able to:

- Form and sustain positive relationships.
- Experience, manage and express emotions.
- Explore and engage with the world around them.

Positive social and emotional development is important. This development influences a child’s self-confidence, empathy, the ability to develop meaningful and lasting friendships and partnerships, and a sense of importance and value to those around him/her. Children’s social and emotional development also influences all other areas of development.

Parents and caregivers play the biggest role in social and emotional development because they offer the most consistent relationships for their child. To nurture your child’s social and emotional development, it is important that you actively engage in quality interactions like these on a daily basis, depending on the age of your child.

**Infant/baby:**

- Cuddle and touch your baby gently.
- Respond to your baby’s coos and cries.
- Hold your baby while feeding him/her.
- Be predictable and consistent.
- Name feelings like happy, mad and sad.

**Around age 1:**

- Set fair and consistent limits and help your child learn limits by saying “no” in a firm, quiet voice.
- Develop and maintain consistent routines.
- Encourage curiosity.

**Around age 2:**
• Be calm and comforting after outbursts.
• Be consistent with what your toddler can and cannot do.
• Talk to your toddler and use words for feelings.
• Encourage and praise your child.

**Around age 3:**

• Help your child include others in playing, sharing and taking turns.
• Support your child to develop trust in other consistent adults.
• Support appropriate expression of feelings.

**Around age 4:**

• Pay attention when your child is talking.
• Give your child opportunities to play with other children.
• Say positive things to your child.

**Around age 5:**

• Gently and consistently help your child manage feelings and control behavior.
• Be patient and responsive to questions.

For more information on how to encourage a child’s development, visit our page on Encouraging Healthy Development.