

# Social and emotional skills

A guide for Parents, Educators and Teachers



Helping children  
to become  
actively involved  
in the world  
around them.

Social and Emotional Skills – A guide for Parents, Educators and Teachers

Published by Alison Stone

Proudly funded by the Australian Government

Project Coordinator: Alison Stone

ISBN: 978-0-9924923-6-6

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Printed in Australia.



**Australian Government**

**Department of the  
Prime Minister and Cabinet**

# What are social and emotional skills and why are they important?



Social and emotional skills and understandings help children to become actively and happily involved in the world around them. They include how children experience, express, and manage their emotions as well as how they establish positive and rewarding relationships with others. There is a strong connection between healthy social-emotional development and academic success, because children who are happy, confident and secure will find it easier to learn.



Help your child to talk about her feelings.



Learning to deal with strong emotions.



Making eye contact from a very young age is important, helping build essential connections.



Parents are the most important (and influential) people in a child's life.

By providing a warm, trusting and loving relationship you will give your child a great head start. It will give them the confidence and security they need to be successful social-emotional learners. Children are very observant and responsive to your own emotions, so how you manage these and get along with others will have a tremendous impact on their development.

Children will also have other significant adults in their life that they learn from. Often this is another family member, or a neighbour, teacher or coach.

## Things that help

- Encourage your child to try new things and help them to see what they are capable of.
- Let your child know you are pleased with their efforts.
- Give your child opportunities to play with other children their age.
- Model kind and generous behaviours when interacting with other adults and children.
- Show and name your feelings. Let your child see when you are happy or sad. This helps them to develop empathy for others.
- Establish daily routines. These help children to feel confident and secure. They will learn that events can happen in an organised way. Routines that are predictable but flexible are best.
- Acknowledge your child's feelings. Help them talk about what they feel and how they are feeling. Teach them that it is normal to sometimes feel angry, sad or frustrated.
- Comfort your child when they are upset.





“Establish daily routines. These help children to feel confident and secure.”



## Social-Emotional Skills for School

A child's social and emotional learning continues throughout their years at school, and like academic learning, it takes time. At school, children will be navigating many social interactions with a range of adults and peers. They will be expected to have a go and then persist with challenging tasks, to follow instructions and be attentive. These things can all be learned with careful guidance, lots of opportunities for practice and by letting children know when they're doing well or needing some help. Remember it is important to encourage your children to persist even if tasks sometimes seem difficult.

Children will of course make mistakes in their social learning journey, just as we did as children – this is just like when they are learning to read and write. We should be aware that this will occur at some stage. Social learning is tricky, and the mistakes children make while they are learning to manage themselves and their relationships with others can challenge us as adults. When children are learning to deal with strong emotions like anger, frustration and disappointment, their mistakes can look like deliberate naughtiness. When they struggle to follow instructions or pay attention, it can be seen as defiance. It is important that adults understand and support children during these times.

## Things that help

- When children make mistakes, correct them in the same way that you would any learning error. Point out what you want to see instead, for example: “I was talking to Sam just now and you interrupted. Can you say excuse me.” Notice and acknowledge as soon as you see the ‘instead’ behaviour.
- Help your child to learn and practise waiting, especially for highly preferred things and activities.
- Practise taking turns, and talk about how this is fair and makes it more fun for everyone. Board games are great for this learning.
- Teach, model and practise attentive listening, with body facing and eyes looking at the person you are listening to.
- Recognise and celebrate when your child does these things well.

It is sometimes assumed that children will or should just know ‘how to behave’, or that they will learn from experiencing the consequences of making a mistake. For example, children might be told not to be rude if they interrupt a conversation or call out when they want attention, without ever having been taught a better way to get attention. Many children get into trouble at school for these kinds of mistakes. They may know that what they have done is not ok, but not what they should do instead. When asked, they may tell you they’ve ‘been naughty’ but struggle with the detail of exactly how.

It is much easier to respond helpfully to these mistakes if we remember this is all a normal part of learning to

manage emotions and the many social skills needed at school. This learning is quite difficult for everyone and very difficult for some.







## Making friends

Making friends and being part of a group becomes very important to children in their primary school years. This means they need to learn how to play fairly, to share, and to understand and respond appropriately to how others are feeling. Knowing what the most important skills for friendship are and helping our children to learn them will make their time at school happier and more successful.

- Playing games well: playing fairly means following the rules, making sure everyone has a turn, being a good winner and a good loser!
- Being positive: knowing how to give and receive compliments.
- Taking risks: approaching and joining in, which can be really challenging for some children, and practice helps.
- Cooperating: negotiating, suggesting and persuading rather than bossing.
- Being interesting: listening and asking good questions, telling an interesting story and having an interesting conversation.
- Standing up for yourself: telling someone to stop annoying you, firmly but nicely, is quite a challenge! Saying no, asking an adult for help.






## Managing anger and disappointment

For some children, managing anger and coping with disappointment are particularly difficult. Both are very strong emotions, and teaching how to manage them when the child is calm is very important. When a child is in the middle of a meltdown or totally focussed on the event that has disappointed them, they are not able to be rational or attentive.



## Things that help

- Make sure children have the words to describe how they are feeling. It helps if you model different emotions. There are lots of stories and games that make learning about emotions and how to deal with them a fun activity.
  - Teach and encourage your child to express their feelings, particularly when they are showing non-verbal signs of negative emotion.
  - Once children can recognise and label their emotions, you can teach them how to calm down or cope with certain feelings. The 'turtle technique' is fun and gives children the steps they need to take to calm themselves and have some control in difficult situations. You can teach them to: 1. Recognise that you feel angry and stop. 2. Go into your shell and take three big breaths and think three calming thoughts e.g. 'I can play in the next game', 'Everyone goes out eventually', 'I'm in charge of my feelings'. 3. Come out of your 'shell' when calm and think of some solutions to your problem. Teach this technique to your child when they are calm.
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- Prepare your child to cope with disappointment by rehearsing with them what to do in different situations that could be disappointing . "I know you want Jay to pick you for his team, but if you're not chosen what can you do to stay calm?" "When we get to the library, the book you want might be out. What will you choose instead?" Teaching children to think things like 'maybe next time' helps.
  - Notice and comment when your child stays calm. It's important to recognise that controlling your emotions and behaviour is hard work, so frequent and strong reinforcement for doing so is a must.



## Paying attention and focussing on a task

This is a big one at school and is more difficult than ever before with the increasing availability of electronic devices. Children today (and many adults) have become used to interrupting one task to check on another, paying continuous partial attention to each. Their brains are switching back and forth, making focussed learning difficult. To engage productively in their learning at school they need to learn to focus on one thing at a time for sustained periods.



### Things that help

- Model focussed behaviour: avoid checking your phone while talking to or playing with your child or others.
- Limit your child's time on the iPad, computer or game console to a short period each day.
- Remain with and encourage sustained effort with homework.

# Acknowledgements

Author: Louise O’Kelly

Photography: Kate Gillham

Design and Layout: Digital Ink

Printed by Mercury Walch

## **Children featured in photos:**

Georgia Clarke, Ruby Clark , Jenna Whitney, Takira Kamaric, Kodie Kamaric, Amelia Cantrell, Lily Cantrell, Elisha Rana, Oscar Kelly

## **Reference:**

Turtle Technique

[http://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/ttyc/TTYC\\_RoutineBasedSupportGuide.pdf](http://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/ttyc/TTYC_RoutineBasedSupportGuide.pdf)