



## **Social and Emotional Development of Young Children**

A child's social and emotional development is directly related to school readiness and accomplishments in life. It is based on the secure attachments that young children make to parents, caregivers and other important people at the beginning of life. Later, the maintenance of ongoing interactions between those important people and the child is fundamental. Parents need to nurture and encourage social and emotional development in their child because many of life's successes depend on that particular development. As a parent or caregiver, try the following suggestions to boost your young child's social and emotional development.

### **12-18 Months**

Your child is now a toddler and feels safe and secure in your relationship. You should continue to talk, listen and respond to her as well as sing songs and nursery rhymes. She should be curious about other people and children, so give her opportunities to play with other children. Help her use her developing language by labeling items for her, and she will begin to say some words in addition to "mama" and "dada." Tell her what you will be doing next

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before you begin to do it to minimize tantrums. She will react to changes in her daily routine, so be as consistent as possible. Show interest in your toddler and continue to cuddle and hug her.

### **18-24 Months**

Encourage your toddler's curiosity by letting him explore people, places and things. He will be asserting his independence by saying "no" frequently. Set limits for him that are reasonable and consistent. Put time aside for your toddler each day and celebrate his new achievements. Continue to read, sing, play, laugh and talk with him often. He is now learning to act loving towards others (especially members of his family that he considers "special people"), so continue to act lovingly and respectfully to him.

### **24-30 Months**

Play along with your toddler as she begins to use her imagination in pretend play. Talk with her and use labels to help expand her vocabulary. Continue to read, sing and play games with her often. Give her the opportunity to be around other children and let her initiate play. She will begin to display challenging behaviors (doing everything her way, whining, etc.), so it is important to continue to set reasonable, firm limits. She is capable of understanding and following simple directions and rules. Talk about fears with her because at this age, she may be fearful of unfamiliar places, people or things. Encourage her to share by taking turns when playing because she may use the word "mine" often.

### **30-36 Months**

Your child is approaching the age of preschool. Encourage him to play independently at times. He will begin sharing with others; remember to praise him for doing so. Help him separate from you in familiar places by involving him in an activity for transition; it should be easier for him at this age. He is capable of expressing a multitude of feelings such as anger, fear and happiness. It is important to talk with him about his feelings (and how to appropriately express them) and the feelings of others because he will begin to display empathy for others at

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this age. Play games, read, tell stories and sing with him; he should be able to do these along with you. Encourage him to pretend play with you and other children and adults.

A child will learn how to develop and care for relationships based on her earliest relationships and attachments. Therefore, it is crucial not only to be responsive to a child's needs, but to make her feel important, secure and loved. This article was largely based on a social and emotional interactive wheel titled *Baby Stages: A Parent's and Caregiver's Guide to Emotional Development of Infants and Toddlers* developed by the Michigan Association for Infant Mental Health and the Michigan Department of Community Health.

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