

BACK TO BASICS

Emotional development

Teachers strengthen emotional development by helping children learn to label, express, understand, and control their feelings. Consider these typical developmental milestones as you help children explore their feelings about themselves.

Infants

- Establish emotional attachments, called bonding relationships, with parents and primary caregivers.
- Develop a sense of security and trust through familiar routines like feeding, diapering, bathing, sleeping, and cuddling, for example.
- Begin to understand that they are unique individuals, separate from parents and other caregivers.
- Look to parents and primary caregivers for reassurance when frightened.
- Develop an attachment to a transitional comfort object like a toy or blanket. These comfort objects offer security and contentment in unfamiliar and stressful situations and transition times.
- Show a fear of strangers, called stranger anxiety.
- Begin to understand that parents and primary caregivers can interpret and respond uniquely to cries of hunger, fear, boredom, or pain.

Toddlers

- Learn to say "No." They use this powerful word to test their independence.
- Recognize and respond to themselves in mirrors.
- Play alone for short periods when parents or primary caregivers are nearby.
- Demand independence in activities like putting on shoes, pouring milk, and turning the pages of a book.
- Let off steam by screaming and thrashing when frustrated, ignored, or overly tired.
- Develop a sense of ownership and use the word "mine" frequently.

Preschoolers

- Continue to explore independence, frequently doing things for themselves but needing the reassurance of a nearby, trusted adult.
- Demonstrate their autonomy by expressing opinions and ideas.
- Delay gratification—for a short time—by waiting to have their needs met.
- Show concern for others (empathy), especially for younger children who are hurt.
- Identify emotional pain—when a pet dies, parents divorce, or a friend moves away—and need help labeling, understanding, and controlling feelings of abandonment and injustice.
- Feel stress, defined as a mental or physical response to strains or daily hassles that result from injury, illness, fear of failure, disaster, blended families, or abuse.

School-agers

- Have sudden and unpredictable mood changes.
- Respond to stress with a range of behaviors including tantrums, moodiness, despondency, depression, over-activity, and sleep.
- Feel deep pain when excluded from an activity but usually forgive quickly and easily.
- Help with chores like setting the table, cooking dessert, and feeding a pet to demonstrate independence and ability.
- Choose friends who mirror their tastes, interests, and skill levels.



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Activities to Promote Emotional Development

Play is an important part of healthy emotional development. Children use play to release emotions, work through feelings, and understand their world better by play-acting in situations they can control. The give-and-take patterns of play allow children rich opportunities to practice the skills necessary to develop healthy emotional development.

We can support young children's play by:

- Providing a large block of time for play
- Setting up areas that invite play
- Providing props for play
- Providing adult support to play



Here are some examples of play areas and props:

- Art - Crayons, Markers, Scissors, Variety of Paper, Glue, Collage Materials
- Dramatic Play - Kitchen, Dishes, Food, Dress-ups, Dolls, Phones, Cash Register
- Manipulatives/Math - Puzzles, Matching Games, Legos, Lacing Cards, Peg Boards, Shapes
- Blocks - Sets of Blocks, Animals, Cars, Trains, Boats, People, Traffic Signs
- Science - Rocks, Feathers, Shells, Leaves, Seeds, Magnets, Magnifying Glasses
- Large Motor - Balance Beam, Climber, Tunnels, Balls, Bean Bags, Riding Toys
- Sensorimotor - Water, Sand, Sensory Table, Sand/Water Toys, Clay, Playdough
- Language/Literacy - Books, Puppets, Flannel Board, Magnetic Alphabet, Writing Boards
- Music - Cd's, Scarves, Rhythm Instruments, Bell Bracelets, Streamers

Here are suggestions to support children's emotional development through play:

Look for ways to get children to interact and play together. If one child is driving his car around, suggest another child pump some gas into it. If the tower keeps falling down, get one child to be the holder, while the other stacks. If a child is wandering, suggest she get a doll and join in.



Build the child's vocabulary about feelings. When a child has many words he has more options for expressing his feelings. When he can express to others how he feels he will have less need to use aggression. Include words that show how we feel when our needs are satisfied like: happy, delighted, pleased, amused, tickled, friendly, sympathetic, loving, curious, fascinated, amazed, astonished, excited, calm, mellow, quiet, relaxed, serene, content, tranquil, engrossed, giddy. Also use words that express how we feel when our needs are not satisfied like: worried, nervous, frustrated, angry, upset, scared, mad, cranky, troubled, gloomy, forlorn, discouraged, dejected, disappointed, frightened, suspicious, apprehensive, hurt, lonely, irritated, irked, exasperated.

Build empathy and sympathy for other children. When a child watches another child who is crying, suggest that he take the crying child a toy or give her a pat. Role-play ways to help if someone: spills their milk, or drops some markers, or knocks over the blocks. Teach all children to establish eye contact and say the other child's name when they want something. Encourage children to ask for help. "Billy could you help me?" "Brittany, I need a friend."

Help children learn turn-taking. Show an object at circle time and have the children pass it around the circle. Say, "Sally pass the car to Jo." Play "Stop-and-Freeze" games with children, by having them freeze when you stop the music, blow a whistle, or ring a bell. Have all the children with black shoes stand up, red bows touch their nose, blue eyes sit down. Set up dramatic play situations. A store, a movie, a restaurant are all places we might have to take turns. Draw the children's attention to the arrival of a new child. Say, "Will wants to play but he doesn't have any playdough. Let's each give him a little of ours so that he can play too." Another idea is to show children how to use a kitchen timer as a turn taker.