

Take Home Tips

Early Learning

Understanding Emotional Development: “All About Me!”

By nature, young children are egocentric: they view the world from their own perspective. Emotional development is important for later success in school, at home, in communities, and in society. A large amount of emotional growth occurs during the first five years of life, and children need the adults in their lives to guide this growth.

Major stages in emotional development

Development can be divided into three critical stages. As parents and caregivers, you can help your child learn social emotional skills by guiding, modeling, and forming positive, secure relationships with them.



1. Birth to one: noticing emotions

- Babies are noticing how things make them feel. Respond promptly and consistently to your infant’s needs, so your baby develops a sense of security. This will promote bonding and help to establish a positive relationship.
- When your baby feels secure in their needs being met, they will feel more curious and confident about exploring new things.
- Encourage self-soothing. Thumb sucking or security items like a small blanket help your child to soothe themselves and is one of the first steps in regulating emotion.
- Demonstrate emotion yourself, in words and expressions. Model desirable behaviors.

2. Two to three: expressing emotions

- As your child learns new words and gains more independence, they will experiment with expressing emotion in new ways. This can be frustrating for both your child and you as they learn about healthy vs. unhealthy expression.
- Stay calm, especially when your child isn’t. Parents can’t model acceptable behavior or coach a child through their frustration when they are having a tantrum themselves.
- Validate emotions. People of all ages are entitled to their emotions, so validate your child’s frustration with phrases like, “I know it’s so frustrating to have to stop,” or, “I can see you’re really mad you can’t have that right now!” As adults, it is important to respond with clarity, kindness, empathy and firmness. We need to maintain limits and not give in to a toddler’s every demand—but remain sensitive and kind in doing so.

- Frustrations will happen! What matters most is how you handle them. This applies to toddlers and adults alike. As adults, you can help your child by modeling acceptable ways to handle frustration.
- Give your child language to name and explain their emotions. Having phrases like, "I'm mad!" allows your child to focus on putting words to their feelings rather than melting down. This can help them to feel more in control of their emotions.
- Offer lots of positive reinforcement! "I'm so proud that you asked David for a turn" and "You did such a good job waiting for your turn" are good ways to celebrate progress and build your child's self-confidence.

3. Three to five: managing emotions

- As your child enters preschool and kindergarten, there is an increased opportunity for independence and growth. Your child will need to develop coping strategies for managing in this new environment.
- Model coping strategies and practice them together. This could be deep breathing, going to a quiet place, or asking someone for help.
- Have realistic expectations. Your preschooler's view of the world is still egocentric, but they are gradually gaining understanding of how others might feel and begin to show sympathy.
- Validate! Remind your child that their feelings are normal, and that they can learn to manage them. Big feelings can feel scary!
- As your child moves towards cooperative play, their egocentric views will be challenged by peers with other viewpoints. These play-based experiences are important in developing real life skills! Allow your child ample, unhurried time to play and explore.

Source: Church, Ellen Booth. Ages & Stages: All About Me.

Retrieved from: <https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/ages-stages-all-about-me/>

Source: Meinke, Hannah. Understanding the Stages of Emotional Development in Children.

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