

What is Social- Emotional Development?

By Kristin Reinsberg, MS, LMFT

How do children start to understand who they are, what they are feeling, what they expect to receive from others? These concepts are at the heart of their social-emotional wellness. They contribute to a child's self-confidence and empathy, her ability to develop meaningful and lasting friendships and partnerships, and her sense of importance and value to those around her. Children's social-emotional development influences all other areas of development: Cognitive, motor, and language development are all greatly affected by how a child feels about herself and how she is able to express ideas and emotions. Professionals sometimes define healthy social-emotional development in young children as *early childhood mental health*. Healthy social-emotional development includes the ability to:

- Form and sustain positive relationships
- Experience, manage, and express emotions
- Explore and engage with the environment

Children with well-developed social-emotional skills are also more able to:

- Express their ideas and feelings
- Display empathy towards others
- Manage their feelings of frustration and disappointment more easily
- Feel self-confident
- More easily make and develop friendships
- Succeed in school

Social-emotional development provides the foundation for how we feel about ourselves and how we experience others. This foundation begins the day we are born and continues to develop throughout our lifespan.

The greatest influence on a child's social-emotional development is the quality of the relationships that he develops with his primary caregivers.

Positive and nurturing early experiences and relationships have a significant impact on a child's social-emotional development. They also influence how the young child's brain develops. An **attachment relationship** is an enduring one that develops during the first few years of the child's life. It is built upon repeated interactions between the infant and the primary caregiver. These interactions mainly involve attempts by the infant to achieve physical and emotional closeness and the caregiver's responses to these attempts. They have a lasting influence on how the child feels about himself, how he thinks and interacts with his world, and what he comes to expect from others.

References:

James Hymes' Understanding Your Child by Kadija Johnston, LCSW

Lerner, C. & Dombro, A.L. (2000). Learning & Growing Together: Understanding Your Child's Development. Washington, D.C.: ZERO TO THREE

Nelson, J., Erwin, C. & Duffy, R. (2007). Positive Discipline: The First Three Years. New York, NY: Three Rivers Press.

- See more at: <http://www.abilitypath.org/areas-of-development/social--emotional/what-is-social-emotional.html#sthash.s00Kev6H.dpuf>