

Social and Emotional Learning



Supporting children's social and emotional development

Babies are born communicators and are capable of experiencing and expressing a wide range of emotions. Through their many positive interactions with caregivers, they learn to feel good about themselves and to enjoy relating with others. They also learn how to manage a range of feelings and to communicate effectively to get their needs met.

As babies grow into toddlers and later preschoolers, they can manage more things by themselves but still need guidance and support from their caregivers. Toddlers want to please adults and also to be themselves. They do this by imitating others and build their self confidence by 'helping' during everyday experiences such as cooking, cleaning, and shopping. They also adapt their behaviour according to their caregivers' responses and are learning ways to cope with conflict and to solve problems through their relationships with significant adults in their lives.

Preschoolers develop their social and emotional skills through a wide network of social relationships including other adults and children. Supported by their increased language, thinking and planning capabilities, preschoolers are more able to wait for things they want, to negotiate solutions to everyday problems and make decisions for themselves and with others.

Children's social and emotional skills are developing all the time. Skills may develop differently for different children. Children benefit from having many learning and practise opportunities.

Why social and emotional learning (SEL) is part of KidsMatter Primary

Social and emotional learning is about learning how to manage feelings, manage friendships and solve problems. These are essential life skills that support wellbeing and positive mental health. Social and emotional skills promote children's ability to cope with difficulties and help to prevent mental health problems. Children who have developed social and emotional skills find it easier to manage themselves, relate to others, resolve conflict, and feel positive about themselves and the world around them.

KidsMatter emphasises teaching social and emotional learning as a way of promoting children's mental health. Social and emotional learning provides practical skills that all children can learn and apply to everyday situations. Learning skills such as self-awareness, effective communication and conflict resolution can also help to prevent the development of mental health difficulties in children who might otherwise be vulnerable. In this way teaching children social and emotional skills helps to promote resilience – the capacity to cope and stay healthy in spite of the negative things that happen through life.

What does social and emotional learning have to do with learning?

Research has shown that children's learning is influenced by a range of social and emotional factors. How well children do at school is affected by things such as:

- how confident children feel about their abilities
- how effectively they are able to manage their own behaviour
- how well they can concentrate and organise themselves
- how effectively they can solve problems
- how positively they are able to get on with teaching staff and with peers
- how effectively they take into account others' needs
- how well they can understand and accept responsibilities.

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