



# ARKANSAS HEALTHY CHILDREN HANDBOOK

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## Chapter 3 **Social-Emotional Development**

### **Chapter Content**

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Ten (10) Ways to Support Children's Social-Emotional Skill Building



Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education

## Chapter 3 Social-Emotional Development

**Social-Emotional Development** is the foundation for behavior, academics and mental health. Children who learn healthy social-emotional skills in preschool will do better in kindergarten. In elementary school they will do better academically and have more friends.

Early problem behaviors such as aggression, anxiety, noncompliance, lack of friends and tantrums indicate a lack of social-emotional skills. Children who do not learn social-emotional skills in preschool are more likely to have bigger problems later such as school failure, delinquency or substance abuse.

The preschool period is a critical time for children to learn to control their thoughts, feelings, attention, impulses and behavior: that is, to learn social-emotional skills. Humans are not born with these skills. Humans are born with the capacity to learn. Teachers and caregivers must teach social-emotional skills just as they teach washing hands or learning colors and shapes.

A child's ability to successfully develop social-emotional skills is highly dependent on warm, nurturing, responsive caregivers. Providers can share information on the importance of social-emotional skills with parents, teach specific skills to children and patiently support children while they learn these skills through daily practice.

**Emotional development** is the process of learning to recognize and express one's own emotions, regulate or manage emotions and understand the emotions of others.

**Social development** is the process of developing skills to form positive relationships with adults and peers, play with others and handle challenging situations.

**Emotional literacy** is the ability to recognize, label and understand feelings. This is one of the most important skills children learn in early childhood.



### TEACH SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SKILLS – STRATEGIES

**Teach Feeling Words:** Teach children to name their own feelings and the feelings of others. This helps them control emotions, get along with others and solve problems. Teach feeling words during routine activities and during play. Accept children's feelings. Do not minimize their feelings. Teach children to use words to express feelings to others instead of hurtful actions. Read books that talk about feelings.

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**Teach a Calm-Down Routine:** Just telling a child to “calm down” is not enough. Teach calm-down steps such as taking deep breaths, counting to five, and acknowledging each other’s feelings. It is natural for a young child to scream or act aggressively when they feel strong emotions. They need calm, patient adults to teach and allow them to practice how to calm down.

**Teach Children to Ask a Grown-up for Help:** Children do better in school when they know to ask a teacher for help. Children who have never learned to trust adults and ask for help when needed are more likely to have problems later. Teach that asking for help is a good thing. When children consistently ask a grown-up for help and then receive patient help from an adult, they gain a sense of control in their life. That’s part of learning self-control.

**Teach Children to Make Good Choices:** Children who have some control in their life have less need for tantrums. Help children learn to make good choices by giving just the choices that are okay. Such as: a choice between two things (red or blue smock, or an apple cut up or whole). Follow through to make sure a child acts on his or her choice. Praise for making a good choice.

### USE STRATEGIES TO PREVENT TANTRUMS

- Give the child a heads up before transitions. (“In 5 minutes it will be time to stop playing.”)
- Notice when a child is becoming frustrated. Help the child identify the feeling and the problem.
- Ignore a tantrum if child is not hurting self or breaking anything. Adult anger, threats and punishment can make tantrums worse.
- If you can’t ignore the tantrum, take child to a quiet place and hold in a loving way.
- Once the child is calm talk about the problem and help find a solution.
- Do not reward a tantrum. Giving a screaming child candy after you’ve said “no” will make it more likely another tantrum will occur.
- Praise a child for calming down. Be a calm example.



### RECOGNIZE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A TANTRUM AND A MELTDOWN

Tantrums occur when children resist adult authority and attempt to exert their independence. A meltdown occurs when the child is unable to cope with his/her environment (e.g., overstimulated, hungry, tired, or stressed). For a tantrum, reengage and reassure the child after he or she is calm. For a meltdown, provide comfort. For both, be a calm example.

**Teach Children to Follow Rules:** Rules (limits) help a child learn what is acceptable and what is not. Practice following rules is practice learning self-control. Help children learn to follow rules:

- Teach and consistently enforce developmentally appropriate rules.
- Let children know the consequences for not following the rules. (Throw the block and you cannot play with it again until tomorrow.)
- Follow through with the consequence calmly and firmly.
- Praise children for following the rules.
- Calmly remind of a forgotten rule to give the child a chance to do it right.

### TEACH CHILDREN PROBLEM-SOLVING STEPS

Problem solving is a difficult but important skill. All children have disagreements with peers. Those who are helped through problem-solving steps do better in school, now and later. Those who are simply put in time-out do not learn a better way. It will take much practice. With patient, consistent help, young children can learn to problem solve. When a disagreement arises, calmly walk the children through the steps.

- Get on the children's level and say, "This looks like a problem. What happened?"
- Allow each child to tell what happened. Prompt the child to say how it made him or her feel. Ensure the children they will both get to tell what happened. Don't choose sides.
- Do not judge. Calmly repeat back what was said after each child talks. Show with your words and facial expression that you take their problem seriously. ("That does sound like a problem.")
- Next, prompt the children to come up with solutions – brainstorm. ("What can we do next time instead?")
- Again, do not judge their ideas. Talk them through the solutions and help them pick one solution to try. Restate the solution they will try.
- Stay near and observe. Ask if the solution is working. Praise both children if it works. If it doesn't work, start again from the beginning. Talk them through another solution.

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### TEACH CHILDREN HOW TO MAKE FRIENDS

Most children need adult guidance to learn how to make friends. Be near when children are playing. Show and tell children how to use words and actions to practice the skills listed below:

- Ask a friend to play
- Make up games
- Cooperate
- Ask a favor
- Use humor
- Solve problems
- Listen to others' play ideas
- Give ideas for play
- Share
- Play games with rules
- Offer to help
- Apologize
- Comfort others
- Give or receive compliment

Some children may be pushy and aggressive, and some may be the opposite, withdrawn. Either way it interferes with their ability to play with others. Teachers can coach the child by giving him or her the words to say and by helping the child practice words and actions that make friends and keep the play going.

### TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR MAKING FRIENDS AND PLAYING TOGETHER

#### Initiate Play:

- Help a child find a play partner. Coach the child on the words to use to start play. Give the child the words needed to greet or ask to play. Examples: "There's Melissa in the sandbox. Go over and say, 'I'd like to play too.'" "There's Pence and Ellie by the fence. Go over and say, 'Hi, can I play too?'"
- Monitor and support the child while he practices this skill until he gains confidence.

#### Make Friends and Keep the Play Going:

- Teach the child "Let's" statements. Example: "Let's play house."
- Help child with role selections. Examples: "You be the mother," or "Let's take the babies to the doctor."

#### Sharing:

- While engaged with a group of children playing, model sharing and asking others to share. Examples: "May I have a red block? Thank you for sharing." "Yes, I would like to share my crayons with you."
- After the children have seen and heard you sharing and asking for something, coach those who need extra help. Remind them of the words to use.

**TEN WAYS TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SKILL BUILDING IN THE PRESCHOOL CLASSROOM:**

- 1) **Help** a child to persist with a difficult task such as a new puzzle. Use a gentle guiding hand, point and give clues. Make sure the puzzle is not too hard.
- 2) **Help** a child wait for a turn. Offer an alternative activity. Teach the child to ask the peer, "Can I have it next?" Praise the child for patience.
- 3) **Help** a child stay quiet during rest time. Let the child pick the nap music. Praise the child for caring about others and being quiet so they can sleep; give the child a positive consequence for being quiet (such as, "choose an activity after nap").
- 4) **Help** a child use his words, not his hands, on the playground. Actively supervise while on the playground. This allows you to intervene early and guide children to use words to express their emotions. Stay near and join in children's play, following their lead.
- 5) **Help** a child play cooperatively in a center. Start the child out with open-ended questions such as "Who are you going to play with? What are you going to play?" Verbally acknowledge or talk about what the child is playing/doing. Use a buddy system.
- 6) **Help** a child take turns. Use puppets to demonstrate turn taking. Read a story about turn taking. Remind children that everyone will get a turn. Remind of rules.
- 7) **Help** children problem solve during pretend play. Prompt children to identify and try different roles. If children have different play schemes in mind, help them problem solve on how to put their various ideas together.
- 8) **Help** a child who always wants to direct the play. Teach him or her to ask other children what they want to be, and let them help make the play rules and sequences. Help the children pick one idea to do and try another idea next.
- 9) **Help** a passive child voice his or her wishes. Give him or her words to say. Help him or her initiate play and make friends. Stay near and be supportive as needed.
- 10) **Help** children with disagreements. Help children think aloud about the play scenario or game. Allow each to describe their needs and feelings regarding the play. Problem solve on how they could keep the play/game going. Model friendly words and tone of voice. Point out when a child uses friendly words and tone.

**Initially you will need to stay near and help children practice the words and actions needed for social-emotional skill building. Eventually children will be able to perform these skills on their own.**

*Adapted from Social-Emotional Learning Preschool Teacher Training by Patti Bokony and from the Social-Emotional Health topic of TIPS for Great Kids!*