



# Speaking for Children

What's best for our youngest children is best for everyone!

## Tips on Nurturing Your Child's Social-Emotional Development

Relationships are the way babies come to know the world and their place in it. Positive parent-child attachment provides the loving context necessary to comfort, protect, encourage, and offer a buffer against stressful times. It is through relationships that young children develop social-emotional wellness, which includes the ability to form satisfying relationships with others, play, communicate, learn, face challenges, and experience emotions. In addition, nurturing relationships are crucial for the development of trust, empathy, compassion, generosity, and conscience.

In a nutshell, social-emotional wellness is the developing capacity to experience and regulate emotions, form secure relationships, and explore and learn—all in the context of the child's family, community and cultural background.

First 5 Sonoma County offers the following tips on how parents can promote young children's healthy social-emotional development.

### Be affectionate and nurturing

A cute baby makes us want to coo, gurgle, and entertain to see that wonderful baby smile. Feelings of affection can be a little harder to come by during prolonged crying spells or tantrums—but fortunately, most of us can find our feelings of love and desire to

nurture our child even during trying times. Touching, holding, comforting, rocking, singing and talking to your baby are interactions that are much



more than meets the eye—they also provide precisely the stimulation her growing brain needs. Loving touches and encouraging words send messages to your child that she is somebody special. And when she feels she is loved for who she is, she learns how to love others that way, too.

### Provide your child with responsive care

Observing what your child is doing, listening to what he is saying, and learning about his individual way of approaching the world is important. (Is he a jump in and "let's go" child or a sit back and "take it slow" child; is he a child who lets you know how he feels when he feels it or a child who's pretty laid back?) These clues teach you what makes your child tick. These clues allow parents and caregivers to make better educated guesses about why a child behaves as he does, and to respond in a way that is productive and supports his development. When a child feels re-

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sponded to and understood he develops confidence and good self-esteem.

### Help your child learn to resolve conflict in a healthy, appropriate way

Around age two, toddlers are developing an awareness of "self" and sharing can be especially hard. They know what they want when they want it, but their brains are not yet fully capable of understanding another person's feelings or point of view. In addition, self-control is also just beginning to develop. Though toddlers can understand what you mean when you say not to take something from others, they have a hard time keeping themselves from acting on their impulses.

Adults' impulse control gets tested from time to time; for toddlers the test occurs many times a day. The ability to exercise greater self-control comes with time, brain maturation, practice, and with the help of caring adults. By helping your child name her feelings, and letting her see and practice ways to control her impulses, she learns over time how to do it herself. This helps her learn how to resolve conflicts on her own.

### Help your child experience the joy found in the "give-and-take" of relationships

Simple, playful interactions teach your child that you care for him, like being with him, and understand his needs. He will also begin to understand that his actions affect other people's feelings and actions. In time, as he has the opportunity to experience satisfying relationships, he'll learn that he feels good when he makes others feel good. This will help him build healthy relationships and a positive sense of self as he grows. Learning about the give-and-take of relationships will help him get ready a little later to play with other children and to share—around 3 years old or so. He is also learning to recognize his own feelings and to care about others' feelings.

### Nurture your child's respect for differences

Young children are not inhibited by the rules of social etiquette and naturally voice their curiosity about the differences in skin color, size and weight, and physical ability that they observe. You play a significant role in helping your child appreciate the differences and enjoy the similarities of others. She also learns about respect for others when it is modeled by you and other adults in her life. She can grow to realize that every person is unique and deserving of respect.

### Limit TV and other "screen time"

Television takes time away from hanging out together—and time away from children playing, solving problems, interacting, and actively learning about the world around them. When your child does watch, you can enhance the experience by talking with her about the show—what he thought it was about, which characters he liked and disliked, how what happened made him feel.

### Promote an appreciation for your own and others' culture

Parents' culture strongly influences the way a family copes and gives love and nurturing. Culture also affects social-emotional development in many other ways—and both are reflected in a child's daily routines during her first years of life. Since these values and beliefs affect the most basic aspects of child care, including holding, bathing, feeding, sleeping, dressing, diapering, and toileting, it is worthwhile to discuss these beliefs with your child's caregivers. Cultural differences also affect decisions about when a child should be able to begin self-help skills, how she should express her feelings, and how and when adults should talk to babies and toddlers. Having a child may make parents reflect about their own values and beliefs for the first time.

*Adapted from ZERO TO THREE.  
www.zerotothree.org*

### About First 5 Sonoma County

First 5 Sonoma County funds children's health insurance and programs that improve childcare quality, help children succeed in school, and help parents provide safe and nurturing environments for their children. For more information on *First 5 Sonoma County* and its programs, please call 565-6626 or visit [www.first5sonomacounty.org](http://www.first5sonomacounty.org)