

NEWS YOU CAN USE

News for Head Start, Early Head Start, & Migrant/Seasonal Programs

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FOUNDATIONS OF SCHOOL READINESS: SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The content is also presented in “Hablemos de...El desarrollo social-emocional y su relación con la preparación escolar.”

The relationships between young children and the adults who care for them matter. In fact, these relationships make an important contribution to children’s school readiness. For young children to be able to learn, they need secure attachments to their family and other adults.ⁱ When children feel safe in their relationships, they are able to explore, learn, play, and create friendships with peers. These important skills, all under the umbrella of “social and emotional development,” will last them throughout their lifetime—and it all starts now!

For infants and toddlers, social and emotional development 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.”ⁱⁱ Your program’s school readiness goals, likely reflected in the individual objectives you develop for each child, should focus on helping children develop these crucial social and emotional skills.



“When children feel safe in their relationships, they are able to explore, learn, play, and create friendships with peers.”

In This News You Can Use, we explore some vignettes about social and emotional development and health as they relate to school readiness goals. (See School Readiness Goals for Infants and Toddlers in Head Start and Early Head Start Programs.ⁱⁱⁱ)

Social and Emotional Development

To develop social and emotional skills, babies need adults who are tuned in to them and respond to them appropriately. These attuned relationships are sometimes referred to as serve and return, because the baby “serves” by making a sound, gesture, or expression, and the adult “returns” with a response.^{iv} As we grow to understand more about how children learn, we find research continually demonstrating that “a secure, flexible, and trusting relationship with a primary caregiver prepares infants and toddlers for academic and social competence” throughout their lives.^v Early Head Start staff members who work directly with children and families are in unique positions to establish such attuned relationships and support children’s social and emotional development.

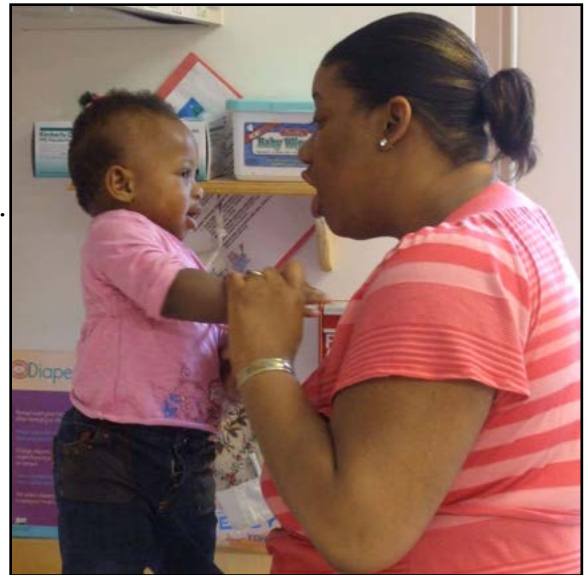


Home visitors and teachers in family child care or center-based programs who model strong relationships can be instrumental in fostering them between parents and their young children. In providing continuity between home and school as children develop their social and emotional skills, you can be one of the important adults in a child's early life.

■ Developing Relationships

(Example for Goal, for young infants)

Kim, an Early Head Start home visitor, is visiting Quyen and her newborn baby, Anh, for the first time. Anh nestles into her mother's arms and relaxes her body into her mom's. As Kim and Quyen talk quietly, Anh stirs and then begins to cry. Quyen murmurs to her and makes shushing sounds. Anh settles back down with a small sigh. Kim points out that Quyen is already learning what Anh's cues mean and responding in a way that calms her daughter, beautifully.



Kim leaves this home visit feeling good. She has witnessed something that is quite ordinary—and quite wondrous. Even this early in Anh's life, Quyen sensitively acknowledges her daughter's cues of discomfort and quietly responds. This moment, likely repeated in various ways throughout their days together, is exactly the kind of interaction that will help Anh believe she has value, can make connections with other people, and can eventually become a successful person herself. It is a good example of what a "serve and return" relationship looks like.^{vi} The very first interactions between a baby and her parents are already creating a foundation for how that child will grow to understand her own emotions, be in relationships with others, and feel safe as she learns and explores. The newborn Anh's social and emotional development has a strong start.

■ Self Regulation

(Example for Goal 3, For toddlers)

Twenty-six-month-old Josie stands at the water table on her family child care provider's porch. She reaches into the water with a scooper and dumps out scoop after scoop of water while singing to herself, "No, no, no, Josie, no, no, no." Her caregiver, Alisa, comes over and gently reminds her to keep the water inside the water table. Once Alisa is right there helping her to follow the rule, Josie is able to pour the water from the scooper back into the table. She looks up at Alisa, who smiles and says, "Yes! That's right!"



Josie plays at the water table often, and she understands the rule that “water stays in the table.” But pouring the water out onto the porch is so interesting that she is having difficulty following it! Josie is using self-talk to remind herself of the rule even as she dumps the water.

Alisa notes that Josie is making progress in her social and emotional development. As Josie says to herself, “No, no, no,” she is working toward the self-regulation needed to follow that rule. In other words, Josie is showing an understanding of the rule, despite having a hard time following it without support.

The ability to regulate one’s own responses, actions, and emotions is a critical aspect of emotional and social development that supports school readiness. Again, in early childhood, this process requires the constant support of a nurturing adult. Adults who care for infants and toddlers can support this emerging skill in the following ways:

- Talk to parents and family members about the expectations they have for how their child regulates and expresses his emotions. You might ask questions like, “How do you respond when he cries?” or “How do you remind him of rules?” These sorts of open questions will help you get a better idea of how the family supports self-regulation.
- Include family culture, styles, and preferences in your individual planning for each child.
- When infants or toddlers are unable to manage their feelings, offer appropriate support. For example, if a toddler is having a tantrum and does not want to be touched, you can offer a blanket or stuffed animal and calmly sit nearby, ready to help when the child is ready.
- Help children recognize when they do follow directions by encouraging their successes, for example, by making a point of saying, “I noticed you got your jacket the first time I asked. Thank you.”
- Use words to describe how children are feeling. Try to expand beyond the positive (“happy,” “silly”) and negative (“sad,” “angry”) to include neutral words (“calm,” “patient”). When you tell a child, “You are being so patient waiting for that bottle to warm up,” she begins to learn what patient means. Eventually, when you ask her to be patient, she will understand what you want.^{vii}



Internalizing Routines

(Example for Goal 4, for older infants)

Twenty-month-old Antonio finishes his snack. He looks up at his teacher and shows her the sign for “all done” while he says, “Ah-do.” His teacher, Miss Marisa, says, “Oh, you are all done with your snack? What do we do next?” Antonio gets up from the table, puts his bib in the laundry basket, and walks over to the child-sized sink. “Wa?” he asks, as he looks up at Miss Marisa, waiting for her to turn on the water for him.





Although it may feel like social and emotional goals are hard to observe, they can, in fact, be very concrete. Classroom routines that are followed daily will, over time, become so predictable that children will participate in them with little or no prompting. When you see children get up from their naps and go to the snack table, find their own jackets at outside time, or walk to the changing area when their diapers are wet, you know they have reached an important stage of development: they are internalizing the routines and expectations of your classroom.

When infants and toddlers are in group care, you can support their social and emotional development by making sure that home rules and routines are similar to what they experience during the day. Infants and toddlers need continuity of familiar routines in order to feel safe, secure, and comfortable when they are not at home. Find out from families what they do at home, and try to match that.



Older children who have had this reinforcement can more easily adapt to group environments that are different from those at home. In kindergarten classrooms, it is expected that children can follow rules, routines, and directions without constant adult support. Even beyond school, in most jobs, individuals must follow the rules and expectations of a larger group. To achieve eventual success in school and work, children must learn the foundations of this skill. This learning begins in early childhood.

■ Conclusion

Every day, Early Head Start and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start teachers, family child care providers, and home visitors are creating nurturing, responsive relationships with young children and their families. When a family child care provider holds a baby the same way he is held at home, when a teacher sings a song in a child's home language, when a home visitor points out the positive ways a parent responds to her baby's cues, relationships are strengthened. These nurturing relationships support the growth and development of important social and emotional skills that will serve as a foundation for children's continued learning throughout their lives.

■ Words You Can Use

- **Social and emotional development** Social and emotional development 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.





ⁱZERO TO THREE, *Tips for Promoting Social-Emotional Development* (Washington, DC, 2012).

<http://www.zerotothree.org/child-development/social-emotional-development/tips-for-promoting-social-emotional-development.html>.

ⁱⁱEarly Head Start National Resource Center (EHS NRC), *School Readiness Goals for Infants and Toddlers in Head Start and Early Head Start Programs: Examples from the Early Head Start National Resources Center* (Washington, DC: HHS/ACF/OHS/EHSNRC, June 2012).

<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/ehsnrc/docs/school-readiness-goals-infants-toddlers.pdf>.

ⁱⁱⁱEHS NRC, *School Readiness Goals*.

^{iv}National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, *Young Children Develop in an Environment of Relationships* (Working Paper No. 1, 2004). http://developingchild.harvard.edu/index.php/resources/reports_and_working_papers/working_papers/wp1/.

^vTerrie Rose, "School Readiness Is About More Than Knowing the A-B-Cs and 1-2-3s," *Zero to Three* 33, no. 1 (2012): 17–23.

^{vi}National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, *Environment of Relationships*, 2.

^{vii}Emily Adams, "Teaching Children to Name Their Feelings," *Young Children* 66 (May 2011): 66–67.

STUDY GUIDE

for

NEWS YOU CAN USE

FOUNDATIONS OF SCHOOL READINESS: SOCIAL EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

SUMMARY:

This *News You Can Use* (NYCU) discusses the importance of relationships and how they support infants' and toddlers' emerging social and emotional development. Readers can explore what social and emotional development look like and how adults can support it using the sample goals from *School Readiness Goals for Infants and Toddlers in Head Start and Early Head Start Programs*.



Key Messages:

- Early social and emotional development is crucial to both school readiness and a child's lifetime ability to form relationships.
- Infants and toddlers need adults who care for them (family members, parents, teachers, home visitors, family child care providers) to provide safe, predictable, and responsive relationships.
- Social and emotional development is linked closely with self-regulation.



Think:

- How do the ideas in this NYCU support the work you do with infants, toddlers, and their families?
- What ideas do you already use in your practice? What might you change or add based on what you read?



Reflect:

- Reflect on how your own beliefs about expressing emotions might impact how you respond to children's emotions.
- Think about a time when you had a hard time controlling your emotions. How did it impact your thinking and ability to function?



Discuss:

- Look at the Social and Emotional Development Goals in the *School Readiness Goals for Infants and Toddlers in Head Start and Early Head Start Programs* resource. What are some other examples social and emotional behaviors you have observed in the infants and toddlers you work with?
- What stories can you share from your own work with young children and their families that show how you have supported social and emotional development?



Next Steps:

- Learn more about social and emotional development by reading an article, your state (or another's) early learning guidelines, or an online resource.