



# Birth to 8 months

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

*How are children learning about feelings and relationships?*

### OVERVIEW

How children think about and manage

- themselves,
- their feelings and behavior, and
- their relationships

is what we call *social-emotional development*.

The development of these skills is as important in children's success in school as are other skills, such as language and literacy and mathematics.

During the first five years of age, children are learning how to

- manage their own behavior,
- recognize, express and manage their feelings,
- notice and respond in caring ways to the feelings of others,
- interact with friends,
- be a member of a group, and
- develop close relationships with adults, including parents, other family members, and teachers.

Children learn these social-emotional skills in close relationships with adults through back-and-forth communication, shared experiences and nurturing guidance. Play is also central to helping children learn these skills. Through play, children practice their social skills, explore feelings, try on new behaviors and get feedback from others. Play allows children to learn more about themselves and others and develop their communication and interaction skills.



## Introduction

*What is my child learning about herself and her feelings?*

- Learning about who you are as a person begins at birth. Babies are born with many abilities—to see, hear, eat, and vocalize (cry and make sounds)—but everything is new to them.
- Babies typically come into the world ready to relate to people, to make eye contact and, soon, to smile.
- They are very interested in the people around them and they learn about themselves through interacting with their people (those who care for them). For example, a child cries because something inside of her doesn't feel right. When her parent gives her milk, she feels better. Soon she learns that the feeling inside means she is “hungry,” and that it will go away when milk comes.
- Your child is also learning about how her people feel about her. When her people smile, talk, listen, respond to her cries and nurture her, she learns that she is lovable and important.

*What is he learning about other people and relationships?*

- Your child is also learning about the people he lives with. He recognizes his familiar people and will smile at them and look at them longer than he does with strangers.
- He will choose to be with familiar people and will seek them out in new or uncertain situations.
- He carefully watches the expressions of his people for messages—are they smiling? are they tense? are they sad?—and he uses these cues to help understand his world. If his parent is holding him and a new person walks up to say “hi,” he will often look at his parent's face to check his response before interacting with the new person.
- He is beginning to predict how certain interactions with people might go. When he gives you a big grin, he waits expectantly for you to smile back. When he reaches up to you, he now anticipates that you will pick him up.



## How are children learning about feelings and relationships? SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- He doesn't yet know that other people have feelings that are different from his own, but he is beginning to express his feelings more clearly and is very interested in watching other people's expressions.

### ***Tips to support your children learning about themselves as people, learning about their feelings and learning about other people***

#### ***Learning about self as a person***

- Smile at your baby and talk to her regularly. Listen and respond to her cooing and other sounds. Loving interactions help your baby feel good about herself and know that she is loved and respected.

*Loving interactions help your baby feel good about herself and know that she is loved and respected.*

- Respond promptly when your child is hungry, sleepy or needs a diaper change or your attention. Prompt responses will help your baby feel safe, loved and trusting in the world.

*Prompt responses will help your baby feel safe, loved and trusting in the world.*

- Talk to your child. In this way you begin to give her words for what she is doing.
  - "I hear you are crying. I think you are hungry. I'll get ready so we can feed you."
  - "You've been playing a long time. You are rubbing your eyes. I think you are getting tired. Let's find your favorite blanket, and I'll put you down for your nap."
  - "I see you trying to roll over, and you keep getting stuck on that arm, but you keep working at it. I know you are going to figure it out."
- Play games with your baby.
  - Simple games like peek-a-boo are delightful for your baby and help remind him that you go away, but you always come back.



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- Naming the parts of his body can also be a playful activity: “Where is your nose?” And then point at or touch it as you say “nose.” “Where is your ear?” And then point at or touch it as you say “ear.”
- Engage your baby playfully in routines like diapering and dressing.
  - “Can you hold your dry diaper while I take your wet one off?” “We are going to put your pants on . . . where are your feet? Oh, there they are! They were hiding in your pants.”
  - All of these games help your child learn about her body and how it works, and they also help your child to feel good about herself!

### **Learning about own feelings**

- Your child will communicate to you through crying, especially in the first months of life. Respond in nurturing, loving ways when your child cries or shows distress.
  - It is important to try to figure how and what your child is asking for when he cries. But even if you have tried everything and he is still crying, he will appreciate you holding him lovingly and telling him that you are still there for him. Your calm presence will help him feel better even if he doesn't stop crying.
- Talk to your child. In this way you begin to give him words for what he is feeling. Babies are sensitive to yelling and other expressions of anger and may be frightened or upset to see it, even if you are not angry at them.
  - “I hear you are crying. Are you feeling sad that papa went outside?”
  - “You are waving your arms in the air. You look so excited to see papa!”
  - Be aware of the way you are expressing your feelings in front of your child. she is sensitive to feelings and is learning how to express her own by watching you.

### **Learning about other people**

- Take time in new situations to help your baby adjust to new people. Some babies like to look at people for a while before they are held by them.



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- If you are planning for a new person to take care of your baby, spend some time helping your baby to get comfortable with the new person. You could visit the new person with your baby for an hour or more before you leave. The first times you leave your baby with a new person, come back after an hour or two, so that your baby begins to understand that you go away and come back.

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