



SOCIAL EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES



*After identifying age-appropriate behavior and creating a strong foundation of trust with a child, try these strategies.

META COGNITIVE TALK



Similar to self-talk/radio talk, model your problem-solving strategies at home by narrating your thought process. *"I can't find the car keys to the van. We need to drive to Grandma's soon. I'm going to give myself 5 minutes to look for them and if I can't find them, I'll take a deep breath and make a new plan."*

THE RIGHT SPACE



All behavior is appropriate and has its place. When able, help your child find the right space for the right emotion. Needing to yell? Let's head outside or check if you're hurt. Needing to move? Let's try the trampoline. Ready to eat? Let's head to the table and find a seat. Want some space? Let's try asking and then head to your room or the quiet corner.

SET CLEAR EXPECTATIONS



Before heading into a new space or activity, set expectations of what actions are expected. *"We're heading into the grocery store and will be looking for items on our list. While we're in there, you'll get to sit in the grocery cart. To keep our bodies safe, we need to stay sitting down. You can ask for a break."*

LABEL EMOTIONS

ENTHUSED

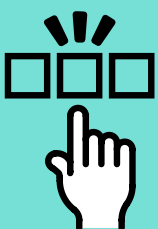
When your child can't find the words, try narrating them from their perspective. *"I'm mad because I can't play with the dinosaur toy right now but I want to. Mom hid it and I'm frustrated."* Avoid "solve it" phrases like "Use soft hands," until after your child has regulated. ↩

SAVE "SOLVE IT" PHRASES



What to do and solve it phrases, such as "soft hands", "catch a bubble", or "use your words" skip you acknowledging what your child is trying to communicate with their behavior and just provides the quick solution. Wait until a child is regulated enough to receive the alternative strategy. Regulation can happen faster if you state the emotion and what they're trying to communicate first.

BUILD IN CHOICES/ FLEXIBLE THINKING



When able, build in a realistic, appropriate choice. *"We're headed into our car seat for a quick drive. Should we skip to the car or walk like a slow sloth?" "Your brother looks sad. We might need to change our plan. Let's ask your brother what's wrong."*

CHECK -INS



Use a quick check-in routine that requires little words or movement to use with your child. This can be a simple thumbs up or thumbs down, a code word, or short phrases like "woot woot" for feeling good, "womp womp" for feeling sad, or "woot womp" for feeling mixed ways.

DEVELOP "I CAN" MOTOR SKILLS



Enable your child to function independently in a new setting. Help them choose their snack and be able to open items inside by themselves. Teach them to zip up their coat, change their shoes, and load and unload a backpack. A lot of communication/ emotional breakdowns happen at times of transition that require these skills and a child starts to feel behind.

DECREASE SCREEN TIME



Screen time can overstimulate a developing brain and when that stimulus stops, a child will seek other sensory input to replace it. This can include hitting, yelling, or other forms of acting out that usually enable a strong reaction from those around them.

FEED THE SECOND BRAIN



Your stomach is your second brain and can control and trigger emotions. Try to incorporate a balanced diet remembering that exposure counts. Not ready to try broccoli? Let's touch it, sniff it, break it, or lick it. After 200* exposures, your child is typically ready to embrace it.

FLEXIBILITY IN START TIME



When a child can confidently request something, try delaying the start time first by a few seconds, then up to a minute. *“Thanks for telling me you want a snack. I’ll get that in 1 minute. Watch the timer and then we’ll make it together.”* This can then build to sequencing a needed task first. *“I see you’re ready for a snack. First, let’s wipe up the table so we’re ready to eat.”* This will increase your child’s patience and ability to see needed tasks before requests.

INCREASE GREEN TIME



Studies show children can regulate emotions faster and prepare their minds for learning new and difficult concepts fast outside. Try going for a walk, a bike ride, or eating snacks outside before attempting a new activity or learning task.

BALANCE ISOLATED PLAY



While isolated play can be an important practice in independence for everyone, children need opportunities to play with other peers and adults to support emotional learning and communication. Try scheduling dedicated play time with either a caregiver or a preferred peer.

PRACTICE STRATEGIES

PRACTICE

Sometimes referred to as role play, practice scenarios where your child might have big emotions and what to do. When the situation arises, they can default to these skills as needed. You can act out someone taking a toy, needing to change a plan, having to leave a favorite place, or feeling frustrated about learning a new task like zipping a zipper or opening a snack.

TRUST FIRST



The most important foundation for developing any social skill is trusting the person you are interacting with. If your child is struggling in a new setting with new peers, allow time to build trust and understanding before demanding a known skill be generalized to new people.

Remember...

CHILDREN CHECK FOR BOUNDARIES

Often times when a child is acting out, they are checking for a boundary of safety. Similar to the instinct of pushing the safety bar of a roller coaster to see how much give there is, a child may push against you to see where the firm boundary is. Although difficult, be consistent and know it’s normal for some tantrums, dysregulation, and aggression as your child develops and grows.

CREATE YOUR OWN COMMUNITY OF SUPPORT

If the big people are okay, the little people can be too. As a primary caregiver, model self-care and positive peer interactions by embracing your own community of support. This can include other parents, community members, or family in addition to your professional support team.

KNOW TYPICAL DEVELOPMENT

It is easier to know what skills need support in development when you know the typical milestones. Set realistic expectations as you celebrate what your child can do and then focus on what should develop next. Ask your service provider for help in identifying what these stages should be.

COREGULATION

As we consciously work towards helping a child regulate their feelings when they’re too big to handle on their own, we build a strong trust of coregulation that can develop age-appropriate social emotional skills.