

# Social-Emotional Health

## Preparing Infants & Young Children for School and Life



### What is Social-Emotional Health?

Social and emotional health is an important part of your child's overall health, as important as their ability to walk, talk and read. Social-emotional health is a child's ability to:

- Express and manage emotions like mad, sad and happy in healthy ways.
- Form close relationships with others they know well, like mom, dad, grandma, siblings, teachers, etc.
- Explore his surroundings and learn, showing curiosity and interest in the world.

### What Does Social-Emotional Health Look Like?

#### In Infants:

- Cries, coos and smiles
- Looks at faces
- Seeks comfort from a familiar person
- Shows many emotions
- Enjoys songs and simple games

#### In Toddlers and Preschoolers:

- Shows shyness in unfamiliar places
- Expresses many feelings such as sad, happy, frightened and angry
- Enjoys imaginary play
- Begins to follow simple rules
- Shows emerging empathy with others

### How to Support Your Child's Social-Emotional Health

- Create a routine for your child. Children thrive with structure, clear expectations and predictable routines
- Gently hold and cuddle children often. Parents who show love and physical closeness help their child feel secure & connected
- Consistently meet children's physical and emotional needs
- Follow your child's lead. Join them in one-on-one play and talk about daily activities. Verbal interactions with children help them practice their emerging language skills as well as social skills
- Gently guide children through social situations. Children learn to socialize through practice and experiences
- Be a positive role model. Offer children opportunities to observe you being kind and calming down when upset
- Help children learn a variety of words to express their feelings
- Be sure your expectations match what your child is socially and emotionally ready to do. Expecting more from children than they are capable of can lead to lots of frustration for both children and their families

### What You Can Do to Build a Strong Relationship with Your Child

Particularly in the earliest years, children need support to optimize their social and emotional development. Activities with your child can help you build a strong relationship and, in turn, help establish a foundation for social and emotional well-being. **Here are some ideas:**

Read a book, go for a walk, incorporate talking, reading & singing into everyday routines, play a game, limit screen time, dance to your favorite music, go on a playdate, work on a puzzle, play hide-and-seek, play a game of pretend, draw with sidewalk chalk, bake a cake, go to the park, build a fort or tent with household items, write or sing a song.