

# Early Childhood Social Emotional Development

## Newborn – 2 months

- Anticipates in relationship with caregivers through facial expression, gazing, fussing, crying
- Begins to smile at people
- Can briefly calm himself (may bring hands to mouth and suck on hand)
- Tries to look at parent
- Reflexively asks for a break by looking away, arching back, frowning, and crying
- Participates in and initiates interactions with caregivers through vocalization, eye contact, fussing, and crying
- Developing capacity for self-regulation of body rhythms (with help of caregivers): regulation of sleep–wake and feeding–elimination cycles

## 4 Months

- Smiles spontaneously, especially at people
- Likes to play with people and might cry when playing stops
- Copies some movements and facial expressions, like smiling or frowning
- Increasing initiation of interaction with caregivers
- Begins to regulate emotions and self soothe through attachment to primary caregivers

## 6 Months

- Knows familiar faces and begins to know if someone is a stranger
- Likes to play with others, especially parents
- Responds to other people's emotions and often seems happy
- Likes to look at self in a mirror
- Uses caregivers for comfort and security as attachment increases
- Is likely to be wary of strangers

## 9 Months

- May be afraid of strangers
- May be clingy with familiar adults
- Has favorite toys
- Strongly participates in, and initiates interactions with, caregivers
- Lets you know when help is wanted and communicates with facial expressions, gestures, sounds or one or two words like “dada” and “mamma”
- Watches reactions to emotions and by seeing you express your feelings, starts to recognize and imitates happy, sad, excited or fearful emotions
- Unusually high anxiety when separated from parents/caregivers
- Is likely to be wary of, and anxious with, strangers
- Expresses positive and negative emotions
- Learns to trust that basic needs will be met

## 12 Months

- Is shy or nervous with strangers
- Does not like to be separated from familiar people, may cry when mom or dad leaves
- Has favorite things and people
- Shows fear in some situations
- Repeats sounds or actions to get attention
- Plays games such as “peek-a-boo” and “pat-a-cake”
- Enjoys communicating with family and other familiar people
- Seeks comfort, and reassurance from familiar objects, family, caregivers, and is able to be soothed by them
- Begins to self soothe when distressed
- Understands a lot more than he can say
- Expresses feelings with gestures, sounds and facial expressions such as they may hand you a book when they want to hear a story
- Expresses more intense emotions and moods
- Moves away from things that upset or annoy

## 18 Months

- Likes to hand things to others as play
- May have temper tantrums
- May be afraid of strangers
- Shows affection to familiar people
- Plays simple pretend, such as feeding a doll
- May cling to caregivers in new situations
- Points to show others something interesting
- Explores alone but with parent close by

## 2 years

- Copies others, especially adults and older children
- Gets excited when with other children
- Shows more and more independence
- Shows defiant behavior (doing what he has been told not to)
- Plays mainly beside other children, but is beginning to include other children, such as in chase games
- Conscience is undeveloped; child thinks *“I want it, I will take it”*

## 3 Years

- Copies adults and friends
- Shows affection for friends without prompting
- Takes turns in games
- Shows concern for a crying friend
- Understands the idea of “mine” and “his” or “hers”

- Shows a wide range of emotions
- Separates more easily from mom and dad
- May get upset with major changes in routine
- Conscience is starting to develop; child thinks *“I would take it, but my parents will be upset with me”*

#### **4 Years**

- Enjoys doing new things
- Plays “Mom” and “Dad”
- May verbalize needs more than simply being expressed in actions
- Is more and more creative with make-believe play
- Would rather play with other children than by himself, is starting to play with other children and share
- Cooperates with other children
- Often can’t tell what’s real and what’s make-believe
- Talks about what she likes and what she is interested in
- Has developing capacity to self soothe when distressed
- Understands the cause of feelings and can label them
- Needs adult help to negotiate conflict
- Is starting to manage emotions
- Begins to develop ongoing friendships with other children

#### **5 Years**

- Wants to please friends and wants to be like friends
- More likely to agree with rules
- Likes to sing, dance, and act
- Is aware of gender
- Can begin to tell what’s real and what’s make-believe
- Shows more independence
- Is sometimes demanding and sometimes very cooperative
- Is becoming more independent from family
- Needs structure, routine, and limits to manage intense emotions
- Is asking lots of questions
- Is learning about differences between people
- Takes time making up his mind may show pride in accomplishing tasks
- Conscience is starting to develop, child weighs risks and actions; *“I would take it but my parents would find out”*

Adapted from:

Davies, D., & Troy, M. F. (2020). *Child Development, Fourth Edition: A Practitioner’s Guide (Clinical Practice with Children, Adolescents, and Families)* (Fourth ed.). The Guilford Press.