

Tip Sheet: *Explicitly Teaching Social and Emotional Skills with Infants*



SE Skills to Focus On

- Creating a Predictable, Nurturing Environment
- Social Skills
- Recognizing and Talking about Emotions

To teach Creating a Predictable, Nurturing Environment, try these activities:

- Build a personal relationship with the infants in your care by talking, singing, and reading together every day. These simple activities help young children feel special and loved as well as supporting early development.
- Provide warm, responsive, and consistent care. Taking time to learn about the infants in your care by reading their cues. Do they need attention? Are they hungry? Do they have a dirty diaper? Learning about these cues will help you respond to their needs consistently and sensitively.
- Use collaborative work groups to reinforce the importance of working together to solve problems and achieve goals.

To teach Social Skills, try these activities:

- Play back and forth games such as peek-a-boo or taking turns cooing back and forth. These activities support the beginning stages of social skills and support later social development.
- Model ways to handle different emotions such as responding calmly to situations, showing kindness to others helps them learn how to behave and what to expect in future relationships.
- Copy infants' facial expressions to help develop skills that will support interacting with others.

To teach Recognizing and Talking about Emotions, try these activities:

- Talk to an infant about how you think they are feeling will help them recognize that you are paying attention to their needs and wants. You can say, "You look so sad...Let's see if we can make you feel better".
- Support self-calming skills by allowing infants to suck on their fingers or hands. This is the first step for managing emotions.
- Learn to read the cues of infants in your care, this will be helpful to respond to the emotions that they are expressing. (If the infant is turning away, crying, or squirming they could be overwhelmed and may need a break where you calmly comfort.)

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Some things to think about:

The moment children are born, it is important for them to feel safe, secure, and loved, so they can form strong social and emotional foundations.

***Did you know?** Research shows that a strong social and emotional foundation in early childhood powerfully impacts children's later positive attitudes and behaviors, academic performance, career path, and adult health outcomes! For more information, see Social and Emotional Development Research Background in this series.*

You may do this by reflecting on the following ideas:

- Using daily routines as learning experiences, supports meeting common developmental milestones or NMELG indicators in a very natural way. When infants are included in their caregiving, they are learning about the world as it pertains to them, and their understanding of themselves and others. (Social emotional development)
- Curriculum for infants should be built around transitions and basic routines that the child will already be experiencing every day. There are many routines throughout the day in which infants are engaging with their caregiver, such as greetings, feedings, diapering, sleep and exploration.
- Allowing and encouraging children to express their feelings — both positive and negative — can support their emotional development. How children and families express emotions often depends on their cultural background and it is important to honor these values.

Ideas borrowed from US Department of Education: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/earlylearning/talk-read-sing/feelings-teachers.pdf>; these ideas and more can also be found through our UNM ECSC Training Supporting Infants & Toddlers: www.nmels.org.