

# Tip Sheet: *Explicitly Teaching Social and Emotional Skills with Preschoolers*



## SE Skills to Focus On

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

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

- Build a personal relationship with preschool age children by getting to know their families, their culture, and their interests (through home visits, family questionnaires, classroom observations, etc.).
- Develop a visual schedule that is attuned to children's needs and not adult needs. Provide enough time for active and quiet activities.
- Design a classroom environment that entices, guides, and directs children.

### To teach Social Skills, try these activities:

- Ask children how they feel and notice children's feelings throughout the day. For example, when a child has a concern or problem, ask questions or make comments like, "How are you feeling?" or "It looks like you might be feeling sad about something."
- Talk with children throughout the day about emotions. For example, when reading books to children, label the characters' emotions and point out the facial expression and body language of the characters in books.
- Talk about how you are feeling during the day in appropriate ways. For example, "I am feeling happy today because today we are going on our field trip!" or "I am feeling sad today because I had to take my sick dog to the vet." Direct children to look at your facial expressions and body language as you say, "How can you tell I'm feeling happy today?"
- Talk about how people might feel in different situations to help children understand the different contexts of feelings and that all people have feelings. For example, when reading books or talking with children about their own lives, ask questions like, "Why do you think she felt that way? How could you tell she was feeling sad?"
- Label and define feelings for children when they do not have the words to express how they are feeling. For example, "It looks like you might be concerned that you won't get a turn on the swings today. That feeling is called worried. Let's figure out a plan to help you with the problem if you are feeling worried."

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## To teach Recognizing and Talking about Emotions and Self-regulation, try these activities:

- Ask children how they feel and notice children's feelings throughout the day. For example, when a child has a concern or problem, ask questions or make comments like, "How are you feeling?" or "It looks like you might be feeling sad about something. Want to talk about it?"
- As educator or adult in the child's life, talk about how you are feeling during the day in appropriate ways. For example, "I am feeling happy today because today we are going on our field trip!" or "I am feeling sad today because I had to take my sick dog to the vet." Direct children to look at your facial expressions and body language as you say, "How can you tell I'm feeling happy today?"
- Help children when they need to calm down. For example, when it looks like a child is beginning to get upset say, "It looks like this is a good time to calm down. Let's take a deep breath together."
- Help children frame how they are feeling so that they can talk about the problem. For example, after a child has calmed down, reinforce feeling talk and problem-solving talk by saying, "You took a breath and calmed down, now you can say how you are feeling and what the problem is. Then we can figure out how to solve the problem."
- Model feeling talk and problem solving throughout the day. For example, "I think I need to take a deep breath and calm down. I'm feeling frustrated because I can't find the book I was going to read to you. I'll have to think where I put it. I had it when I walked over to the book nook. If I walk over there, maybe I'll find it."
- Encourage children to share their feelings with each other. For example, when problems arise, encourage children to talk with each other about their feelings and about the problem. This process helps children label their feelings so that they can calm down, talk about a problem and talk about a solution to the problem.
- Help children make the connection that all feelings are ok, but not all behaviors are ok. For example, "It is ok to feel frustrated when you have to wait your turn for your favorite center. It's not ok to push your friend."
- Be a cheerleader for children when they are problem solving! For example, "Tamara, you calmed down and told Jeremiah how you were feeling. Then you talked to Jeremiah about how to solve the problem so you could both play with the blocks. You were both great problem solvers!" Be specific when offering praise to children about their problem-solving efforts.

## Some things to think about:

"Making friends. Showing anger in a healthy way. Figuring out conflicts peacefully. Taking care of someone who has been hurt. Waiting patiently. Following rules. Enjoying the company of others. All of these qualities, and more, describe the arc of healthy social-emotional development. Like any skill, young children develop these abilities in small steps over time." [www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org)

Ideas borrowed from

<https://extension.psu.edu/programs/betterkidcare/early-care/tip-pages/all/talking-with-preschoolers-about-emotions> and [www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org); these ideas and more can also be found through our UNM ECSC Training: *Social and Emotional Support for Young Children*: [www.nmels.org](http://www.nmels.org).