

DOMAIN 3: SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

By nature, humans are social creatures. Children learn to be around others as they construct knowledge about the world through social interaction. Healthy children in all cultures form early attachments with significant adults. These relationships form the foundation for later emotional, social, language, and cognitive development. Throughout all phases of life, people interact with one another.

Even though emotions are a universal human phenomenon and social behavior is observed constantly in the world around us, social development and its embedded emotional development are challenging to define and measure. The challenges stem from:

- The broad range of behaviors and concepts included within social and emotional development
- The difficulty of assessing processes that are primarily internal, and therefore, not always visible processes
- Social and emotional variability among cultures and situations

Social development and emotional development serve as the foundation for relationships and interactions that give meaning to a child's experiences in the family, at school, and in the larger community. Researchers consistently find that critical brain development in the first five years is foundational for competence in social and emotional skills.

RATIONALE

Social development and emotional development are predictors of a child's overall success in school and in life. Relationships play a central role in:

- Fostering a child's social and emotional well-being
- Providing a sense of stability and belonging
- Supporting a child to make the most of learning opportunities

Successful social development and emotional development require secure, consistent, responsive, and physically and emotionally nurturing relationships. With guidance and through playful interactions, children develop skills to cooperate, negotiate, lead and follow, be a friend, and express feelings in socially and culturally acceptable ways. These skills include the ability to read body language, communicate non-verbally, and show sensitivity to others' feelings.

Forming warm, responsive bonds and intimacy with others offers security to children, as well as protecting them emotionally from negative effects associated with poverty, violence in the home or community, parental depression, and other stressors that endanger mental health and social adjustment.

GENERAL DEFINITION

Together social development and emotional development encompass a child's ability to interact effectively with adults and children. They represent closely interrelated skills in that each is acquired in a relatively predictable sequence. For example, a child who establishes warm responsive interactions from adults (social development) is also developing emotional skills for self-regulation and control. These skills typically precede the development of relationships with peers and groups.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Young children's ability to form and sustain social relationships with adults and other children is at the heart of their social development. A child's social relationships with adults can be understood in terms of the child's sense of trust and opportunity to interact easily with adults, and to recognize adults as safety nets for their behavior and feeling. A child looks to adults for guidance, cues, and information on how to act, think, and feel.

As children develop, the ability to establish relationships with peers influences how they view themselves and the world. Building friendships assists a child to cooperate, form and maintain relationships, and negotiate. Meaningful play experiences offer the child key opportunities to practice cooperation, compromise, and turn-taking. Such interactions with peers imply an understanding of others' rights and the ability to balance one's own needs with those of others.

A child can develop successful social relationships while recognizing and appreciating similarities and differences in other people, as well as knowing how to interact comfortably with children and adults who may have different characteristics, cultures, and life experiences. Positive social relationships are formed and maintained when a child develops adaptive social behavior. The effects of different behaviors are understood as a child adapts to diverse settings and participates positively in group activities. Finally, social competence is demonstrated when a child shows empathy when understanding, respecting, and showing sensitivity toward other children.

EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A child's ability to recognize and express feelings and to understand and respond to the emotions of others are foundational emotional skills. Central to the understanding of emotional development is the overall perception of self; including traits, feelings, abilities, motives, and social roles. Self-efficacy is an aspect of emotional development where a child develops a belief that one can succeed in accomplishing what one sets out to do. Self-efficacy creates feelings of self-confidence, competence, and positive emotions that a child must have to be successful in learning tasks at home and at school.

As a young child grows toward emotional competence, the self-concept evolves, where one begins to answer the question: "Who am I?" and, then, "Who am I in relation to others?" This set of skills helps a child to successfully and sensitively interact with others.

Emotional development includes acknowledging emotions and the ability to manage or regulate them in both personal and social contexts. A child's ability to successfully identify and label emotions and effectively express the range of feelings is a healthy aspect of emotional well-being. Emotional expression includes expressing primary emotions (joy, anger, fear, disappointment), emotions linked to sensory stimulation (disgust, delight, horror), and self-appraisal emotions (pride, satisfaction, shame, guilt).

SUPPORTING INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES, LANGUAGE, AND DIVERSITY

Children's social identity is shaped by many factors including gender, race, cultural and family background and values, language, religion, abilities, life experiences and circumstances, and temperamental qualities and personality. Family and cultural stories help children build identities. The values and practices of each child's family, peers, community, and culture shape the feelings, knowledge, and expectations that influence social and emotional development.