

Me, You, We

Social-emotional learning for children ages 2 to 5 and their adults

This kit is filled with ideas to help your child develop and practice their social-emotional skills.

What is social-emotional development?

It is how children learn...

- To understand themselves
- To connect to and behave with other people
- To be independent and make good choices



What are some social-emotional skills for young children?

They are important skills, like learning to...

- Understand how you feel and put a name to it
- Manage big feelings and control your behaviors
- Make sense of other people's feelings
- Find ways of caring about other people's feelings
- Work nicely with others by following directions and taking turns
- Solve your own problems

Children need strong social-emotional skills for everyday life and success in school. These skills provide children with the tools they need to be themselves. They also help children make friends, and become good at working, playing, and learning together.

All social-emotional skills take time to learn, and it is important to start when children are young. Even babies are developing these skills! Your child can practice social-emotional skills through play and everyday interactions. But they need your love, support, and patience too!



What's in the Kit

- Lots of materials for adults and children to use together
- Activity sheets to give you ideas of how to practice social-emotional skills with your child





Tips for using this kit (and for practicing social-emotional skills, in general!)

- **Spend time with your child.** The activities in this kit are for adults and children to do together. Sit on the floor and play with your child. Show interest in what your child is doing.
- **Let them explore.** Many children need time to explore materials before they try a specific activity. Let your child play with the materials in the kit. When you think they are ready, try something from one of the activity sheets.
- **Stick to your routines.** Young children feel safe and ready to learn when you follow a routine. Regular playtimes, mealtimes, and bedtimes are important—and full feelings, turn-taking, and following directions. Try to be consistent with your routines. Lots of changes can make learning new things even harder.
- **Offer encouragement.** Social-emotional skills are not easy. Your child might not get something right the first time. Offer praise when you see them being willing to try something again and again.
- **Try to be patient.** Each child develops social-emotional skills at their own pace. And many adults ask children to do things before they are really ready. Take a deep breath and let your child practice.
- **Show your feelings.** Everyone has feelings. Talk about how you feel. Model healthy ways of expressing your own feelings.
- **Be silly.** Tell jokes, do funny dances, and laugh. Having a good time together helps build strong connections.
- **Take breaks.** Learning social-emotional skills is hard work. If you or your child need a break—take one!
- **Follow your child's interests.** The activity sheets in this kit suggest some activities to try. But there are lots of other ways to do things. Notice what your child is interested in—and follow their lead!

Play Matters!

Play is the very best way for children to practice their social-emotional skills. By playing on their own, next to, or with others, children learn about themselves and the world they live in. They...

- Explore feelings
- Build confidence by making their own choices and doing things in their own way
- Grow from their mistakes and successes
- Learn about others
- Practice seeing things from other people's point of view

Play is a powerful tool for learning.

Happy, Sad, Mad

Learning to understand feelings

Children experience lots of different feelings. Every feeling has its own name. But each child feels and shows their feelings in different ways.

The Basics

Everyone has feelings. Babies might smile when an adult makes a funny sound or cry when hungry.

As children get older, it is important for them to learn to show their feelings with words and actions. Are they sad? Mad? Scared? Children get frustrated when adults do not understand them. And adults cannot help without knowing what children are feeling.

Sometimes a child might not know what they are really feeling. Understanding feelings takes practice.

Note

Supplies that are underlined can be found in your kit.

Things to Try with Ages 2 to 5

Exploring Faces

- Point to each face on the face chart and name the feeling. Talk about how you know which feeling a face is showing. "I can see this face is sad because the eyebrows are down." Look in the mirror. Make the faces on the face chart together. What are your eyes doing? Your mouths?
- Invite your child to use pieces of playdough to make a face on a plastic plate. Ask how their playdough face is feeling and when they might feel that way. "When do you make a happy face like this? When you're dancing?" Make more faces with different feelings.

Getting Started

Feelings can be positive or negative, and both are okay! Let your child express their feelings. Listen to their words. Say aloud things you notice. "I see your fists are in tight balls. Are you feeling mad? Or maybe scared?" Give your child time for their feelings. Sometimes adults want to make things better too quickly!



More! 

Things to Try with Ages 2 to 5

Puppet play

- Invite your child to choose one puppet for themselves and one for you. Ask your child's puppet how they are feeling. "Hi Pig! How are you feeling?" Act out different feelings. "Cow is sad because he didn't get a turn on the slide." "Rabbit is excited to see grandma today!"
- Set out some blocks and things from your recycling bin (egg cartons, toilet paper tubes). Invite your child to create a small, pretend world for the puppets. Listen to the story your child is creating. Introduce feelings to their play. Ask the puppet your child is playing with how they feel. "Oh no, Lion, you dropped your cookie! How do you feel?"



Colorful feelings

- Give your child two or three colors of finger paint. Encourage them to make dots, lines, or shapes on their paper. Talk about how the colors make you each feel. Maybe red makes them feel happy. Maybe it makes you feel mad. It's okay to be different!
- Listen to music as you paint together. Play soft music, then loud. Slow, then fast. Try music with different instruments. Ask your child to tell you about their painting. How does the music make them feel?



Everyday Interactions

Talk about the feelings of the people or animals in the book you are reading. Ask your child when they feel those same feelings.

During a quiet moment, talk about your child's day. How did playing at the playground feel? How about when they lost their ball?

Model, Notice, Practice

**“Your grandpa sent
us a nice card.
It makes me happy!”**

Model when you have feelings and name those feelings.

“I see tears coming out of your eyes. I know this is making you very sad.”

Notice your child's feelings. Name the feelings and tell them how you know what they might be feeling.

“Let’s try to make a disappointed face.”

Practice making faces that show different feelings. With time, your child will learn to communicate their feelings with words and actions.

Deep Breaths and Happy Dances

Learning to manage feelings

Really happy, really sad, or really mad—feelings can be hard to manage. When a child can manage their feelings, they are able to show their feelings without losing control.

The Basics

Everyone has big feelings. Babies often cry to tell you how they feel. Older children might also cry, but they have more ways of showing their feelings. They might “go wild” when they are excited or act out when they are upset.

Learning to manage feelings is about choosing healthy ways to handle them. For example, a child can be frustrated, but they can also learn to stay calm. Even adults sometimes have a hard time controlling their feelings!

Note

Supplies that are underlined can be found in your kit.

Things to Try with Ages 2 to 5

Blowing and popping bubbles

- Show your child how to take a deep breath in. Then blow out slowly to blow bubbles. Invite your child to blow bubbles while you hold the wand. Long, slow breaths in and out make great bubbles. They also help children calm down.
- Invite your child to think of things that make them upset. “I feel frustrated when I can’t watch a video!” “I feel disappointed when I can’t eat ice cream!” Encourage your child to pop the bubbles with a clap or a stomp. It’s okay if it gets silly!

Getting Started

First, acknowledge how your child is feeling. Then, help them find ways of showing their feelings without hurting themselves or others. “It’s okay to feel mad. But it’s not okay to hit someone. Let’s practice asking for a turn.” Learning to manage big feelings takes lots of patience from both children and adults.

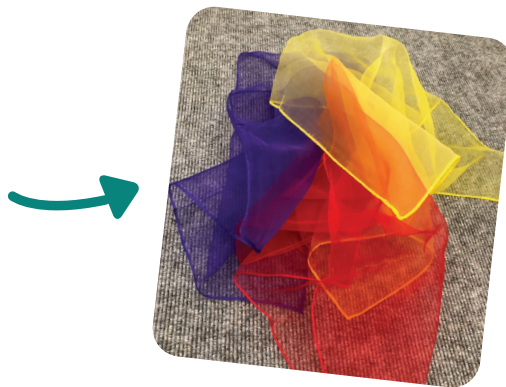


More! 

Things to Try with Ages 2 to 5

Feelings and movements

- Play some music or sing songs. Fast music, then slow. Soft, then loud. Talk with your child about which type of music matches different feelings. “How does the fast music make you feel?” Dance with the scarves to the music.
- Invite your child to make up a different movement for each feeling. Maybe a clap for feeling happy? A twirl for excited? A jump for upset? Encourage them to use their new movements to dance out their feelings.



Squeeze it! Squish it!

- Encourage your child to play with playdough in their own way. Offer some tools from your home, like forks, straws, and cookie cutters. Playing with playdough focuses children’s minds and can be very calming.
- Squeeze the playdough really tightly! Make shapes and squish them. Talk about when your child might feel worried or mad. Practice calming down by squeezing and squishing those feelings!



Everyday Interactions

Practice “calming down” as part of your daily routine. Take deep breaths together. Count to ten. Or do some simple stretching.

Use cardboard boxes, blankets, and pillows to make a cozy corner in your home. Fill it with things that will help your child relax—maybe stuffed animals, crayons and paper, and books. Invite your child to use their cozy corner as a place to take a break when they are having a big feeling.

Model, Notice, Practice

**“I’m getting really upset.
I will take a break.”**

Model healthy ways to respond to your own big feelings.

“You chose to put your arms behind your back instead of hitting your sister. Nicely done!”

Notice when your child chooses a healthy way to handle their feelings. Let them know why you like their choice.

“I see you’re having a hard time with your feelings. Do you want to try blowing bubbles? Or squeezing a squishy ball?”

Practice making healthy choices with your child. Give options or ask what ideas they have.

More Than Me

Learning about others

"I am happy. But you seem sad?" It is hard to imagine how others feel. But it is a skill that children need to play with others and make friends.

The Basics

From the time they are babies, young children need to feel loved by a caring adult—like you! They cannot learn to understand and value others, if they do not feel understood and valued themselves.

Children often notice that another person is having a big feeling. They see another child crying and wonder why. And they might want to find a way to help, but don't know how.

Making sense of other people's feelings is harder than making sense of your own. It takes time for young children to develop this skill. But it is an important step towards working and playing nicely with others.

Note

Supplies that are underlined can be found in your kit.

Things to Try with Ages 2 to 5

What does this face mean?

- Pick a feeling from the face chart, but don't tell your child which one you chose. Make the face and invite your child to guess which feeling it is. Give hints. "Yay! I went to the park today!" Pick a different feeling and try again.
- Give yourself and your child each a plastic plate. Use playdough to make faces on your plates. Take turns guessing the feelings for each face and what might be causing those feelings. "Yours has a surprised face! Did she see a flying dog?" "Mine has a sad face. What do you think made him sad?"

Getting Started

Thinking about other people's feelings and knowing how to respond with care is complicated. Model these skills for your child. "I can tell that you are scared. I will hold your hand to help you feel better." Talk about others' feelings and how you might help. "She is sad because she dropped her ice cream. I will get her another one." Be patient as your child learns to think about others.



More!

Things to Try with Ages 2 to 5

Pretend play

- Pretend with your child and the puppets. “Pig is feeling sick. What can we do to help him feel better?” Act out helping the puppet feel better together. Make up other stories that show caring. “It’s Duck’s bedtime. How can we help her get ready?”
- “Let’s pretend the puppet is the teacher. Would you like to be the teacher?” Encourage your child to pretend to be someone who cares for others, like a babysitter, doctor, or firefighter.



It’s for you!

- Invite your child to use the finger paints to make a painting for someone they love. Ask, “Who are you painting this for? What colors do you think they might like?” Help your child add some words to the painting. Then put it in the mail or take a photo to send by email or text message.



Everyday Interactions

At mealtimes, talk about the things each person likes or does not like. “You like broccoli. But your sister does not. Do you think your uncle likes it?”

Point out the feelings of the people in the books you read. Then talk about how another person in the story responds to those feelings.

Model, Notice, Practice

“Your sister is crying because she fell. I’m giving her a hug to help her feel better.”

Model caring behaviors. Your child starts showing caring behaviors by imitating what you do.

“You are petting your stuffed bear nice and gently! How is your bear feeling?”

Notice when your child is showing care to others—even stuffed animals!

“Your brother is mad because you took his cookie. Please give it back. You can ask for your own cookie.”

Children need to practice making good choices that work for both themselves and others.

Listen, Think, and Do

Learning to follow directions

“Please wait.” “Eat your spaghetti with your fork.” “Give your friend a turn.” Learning the skills to follow directions helps children learn to behave nicely with others.

The Basics

Babies can be good at following simple directions, like “give the ball to mama”. Young children need to develop many skills to be good at following more complicated directions. They need to be able to listen. They need to be able understand what they are being told and remember each of the steps. And they need to have the right skills to be able to do what was asked.

At the same time that children are learning to follow directions, they are also building their independence. They are testing their ability to do things their own way. So they might not always want to follow your directions!

Note

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Things to Try with Ages 2 to 5

Twirl, dance, and freeze

- Wave a scarf high above your head. Invite your child to copy you. Then shake it low down by your toes. Let them copy you again. Do one movement at a time. Try clapping, jumping, or twirling. Then let your child be the leader.
- Do two movements at the same time for your child to copy. Wave the scarf high above your head and jump. Or wave it while you twirl. Do the actions quickly or slowly. Add music and encourage your child to follow your moves. Take turns being the leader!
- Play a game of “freeze dance”. Explain the directions. When the music starts, everyone dances. When the music stops, everyone freezes and stays as still as they can.

Getting Started

It is easier to follow directions when the directions are clear. Use words your child will understand. “Put your blocks on the shelf.” Let your child finish one task before giving directions for another task. Learning to follow directions takes practice and lots of patience!



More! →

Things to Try with Ages 2 to 5

Obstacle course

- Line up three pillows or other soft objects on the floor to make a simple physical challenge for your child. “Crawl from the first pillow to the second pillow. Then from the second pillow to the third pillow.” Try “walking like a cat” or “hopping like a rabbit” or “slithering like a snake”.
- Combine a few challenges together to make an obstacle course. Use something to jump over, like pillows. Add something to crawl under, like a chair or table. And add something to go around, like stuffed animals. Give clear directions. Then... “Ready, get set, go!” Change the order of the challenges and try again.
- Go outside! Draw an obstacle course using sidewalk chalk. Make lines to walk on, circles to jump to, spirals to twirl on, and more. Try the obstacle course while walking, running, or hopping. Give clear directions each time.



Everyday Interactions

Cook or bake together. Read each direction in the recipe aloud. Ask your child to help you figure out what it means. Then do it together.

Children love being helpful. Give them a helping job with a specific direction. “Put the forks on the table for dinner, please.”

Model, Notice, Practice

“You want me to line up the blocks like train tracks? Good idea! I will do that.”

Model following directions—even some that your child gives you!

“I like the way you brushed your teeth. You put the toothpaste on the brush first.”

Notice when your child is following directions. Name what they did well.

“Please put your blocks in the bin.” ... “Oops! You put your blocks in a pile on the floor. Try again.”

Learning to follow directions takes practice. Try not to get upset. Sometimes your child is doing their best!

My Turn, Your Turn

Learning to take turns

Taking turns is an important part of playing and working together, but it is not easy. Children need a lot of practice and help from adults to learn to do it well.

The Basics

A baby smiles. An adult smiles back. Then the baby smiles again. This back-and-forth is a first step in learning to take turns.

Turn-taking can be hard when young children really want something. They may want a turn with a crayon that someone else is using. Or they may be using a crayon and not be ready to let someone else have a turn.

Turn-taking involves lots of waiting and managing emotions. These skills can also be difficult. The more your child practices taking turns, the better they get!

Note

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Things to Try with Ages 2 to 5

Ball toss

- Play a simple game of tossing or rolling a ball between you and your child. Explain the rules. “First, I will pass the ball to you. Then, you will pass the ball to me.” Try passing the ball as slowly as you can. Try going faster.
- Make the rules a little more complicated. Count to three before each pass. Or make a silly face each time you pass. Or pass the ball using only your feet. Say, “rule change!” and explain the new rule. Take turns making up new rules with your child.

Getting Started

Make sure everyone knows the rules. Turn-taking can be even harder if your child does not know what to expect or when their turn might come. Use clear language. “First me. Then you. Then me.” If the rules change, make sure your child knows the new rules.



More! 

Things to Try with Ages 2 to 5

Build together

- Invite your child to line up all the blocks with you. Take turns adding one block at a time to the line. Explain the rules. “First, I’ll put down a block, then you put down a block, then me... until we run out of blocks.”
- Build a tall tower with your child. Explain that you will each take turns adding blocks one at a time until the tower falls. Start building! It doesn’t matter if the tower topples—you can build it again and again.



Chalk drawings

- Go outside! Invite your child to choose one color of sidewalk chalk. “Let’s make one drawing together. We can take turns using only the color you chose.” Then pass the chalk back and forth. “I’m adding some flowers. What are you going to add next?” (You can also do this inside with sidewalk chalk on a piece of cardboard.)
- Start with a simple story starter. For example, “One day, the dog put on a hat...” Explain the rules and take turns adding a little bit to the story. Use sidewalk chalk to draw a picture of your story together.



Everyday Interactions

Talk about turn-taking as it happens during your daily routines. For example, when you’re each pouring cereal from the box or waiting in line at the store.

Invite your child to cook or bake with you. Take turns adding ingredients and stirring.

Model, Notice, Practice

“I will wait until you are done. Then it will be my turn.”

Model being patient and waiting your turn. Your child learns from your example.

“I see that you’re having a hard time waiting. It will be your turn again after your sister’s turn.”

Notice when your child is getting upset. Remind them of when it will be their turn. Waiting is hard, but it’s important to learn.

“It’s not your turn to use the train yet. You can color while you wait.”

Sometimes your child just can’t wait any longer. Practice finding other things to do while they wait for their turn.

Figuring It Out

Learning to solve problems

Stuck zippers! Snatched toys! Spilled milk! Learning to be a good problem-solver helps children be independent and feel more comfortable trying new things. It also helps them enjoy playing with others.

The Basics

Problems come in all shapes and sizes. A young child might not be able to reach the sink or might want a turn on the slide. Sometimes these problems come with big feelings.

Problem-solving starts early. Babies learn by testing things out again and again. So do young children! Problem-solving involves creativity and a willingness to keep trying. With practice, children can become really good at solving their own challenges.

Note

Supplies that are underlined can be found in your kit.

Things to Try with Ages 2 to 5

Search everywhere

- Invite your child to play hide-and-seek. Take turns “hiding” and “seeking”. There is problem-solving in finding places to hide and in figuring out where someone else is.
- Play hide-and-seek with puppets. Show your child two puppets. Then hide each puppet in a different spot. Give your child one hint at a time. “Cow is somewhere warm and cozy.” “Cow is having a nap.” “You found it! Cow was under the blanket!”

Getting Started

The very best way for young children to become good problem-solvers is through play. Play gives children time to try things out and make their own choices.

Sometimes children need help when things get challenging. Work together to come up with lots of possible ways to solve the problem. Let your child choose one solution to try. Sometimes their choice might work, other times it might not. Help them learn from their mistakes. “How else could you try that?”



More! →

Things to Try with Ages 2 to 5

Building challenges

- Challenge your child to use the blocks to build a tower on their own. Each time the tower falls, ask, “What could you try differently next time?” Let them try and try again.
- Mix it up! Add other building materials to the blocks from your recycling bin. Challenge your child to build a tower using the blocks, yogurt cups, toilet paper tubes, and whatever else you have. This is harder because the materials might not all fit together easily.
- Challenge your child to use the blocks to build a home for a puppet. What happens if it rains? Try adding other building materials to make a roof.
- Try more building challenges with blocks and things from your recycling bin. Build a home big enough for more than one puppet. Build a way for the puppet to get across a road. Build something big enough for your child and the puppet to fit inside together. (You might need to add some pillows and blankets!)



Everyday Interactions

Use mealtime spills to practice problem-solving. “I see you spilled your milk. Accidents happen. What can you use to help clean it up?”

When reading a book, point out problem-solving. Ask your child what the problem was and how it got solved. Do they have other ideas for how they might have solved the problem themselves?

Model, Notice, Practice

**“I can’t get this bag open.
I could use scissors.
What else could I try?”**

Model when you are solving a problem. Ask your child to help think of possible solutions.

**“You chose to play with
the other truck instead
of taking hers. That was
very nice of you.”**

Notice when your child has made a good choice in how they solved a problem. Use specific words to help them see what was good about their choice.

**“I can see that’s not
quite working. What
else could you try?”**

Practice thinking together. Ask questions like, “What do you think you should do next?” “Can you use this object? I wonder how...”

Stories Full of Feelings

Exploring social-emotional skills through books

Books are great tools to support young children's social-emotional learning. The characters in the stories introduce many different feelings and ways of being a good friend or helper. And many stories also share creative ways of problem-solving.

The Basics

Books are full of characters who face similar things to what children experience every day. They might be excited or worried about trying something new. They might want to play with a group of children and not quite know how. Or they might make mistakes and then find ways of trying again.

Books offer lots of opportunities for you to talk through situations and feelings with your child. And the characters can become role models for young children as they practice their own social-emotional skills.

Reading together is also a great way to enjoy some quiet time with your child—and you can learn a lot about each other too!

Books to Explore Together

“So many feelings! Let's try naming the different feelings.” “How are you feeling today?”

Happy, sad, mad—so many ways to feel! Books can help young children learn to put names to each feeling. Pictures can also help them connect facial expressions, body movements, and colors to those feelings.

Book suggestions:

- *Tiger Days: A Book of Feelings* by M.H. Clark
- *The Color Monster: A Story About Emotions* by Anna Llenas
- *Why Do We Cry?* by Fran Pintadera
- *Lots of Feelings* by Shelley Rotner

Getting Started

Every story has feelings to explore or problems to be solved. Pick your child's favorite book or one you have not read before. Point to pictures and ask questions. Talk about what is happening in the story and in your child's life.

Looking for books?

Visit your local library to find many of these books. Ask your librarian for suggestions!



More! 

Books to Explore Together

“It seems like he might be feeling a little scared.

What did he do to help with that feeling?”

“What else could you do if you were feeling scared?”

Everyone gets scared or frustrated or angry sometimes. Characters can model lots of different ways of working through big feelings. And you and your child can think together about safe and healthy ways for them to handle their own feelings.

Book suggestions:

- *When Sophie Gets Angry—Really, Really Angry...* by Molly Bang
- *Jabari Jumps* by Gaia Cornwall
- *The Rabbit Listened* by Cori Doerrfeld
- *Ruby Finds a Worry* by Tom Percival
- *Sometimes I'm Bombaloo* by Rachel Vail

“Hmm... do you think she is playing nicely with the other children? What would you do differently?”

“What is Bear doing to be a good listener?”

Young children are just starting to learn how to work and play together—and it is not always easy. Taking turns, following directions, and saying kind words are all skills they are practicing. Books can help you and your child talk about what it means to work and play nicely with others.

Book suggestions:

- *Rex Wrecks It!* by Ben Clanton
- *The Magical Yet* by Angela DiTerlizzi
- *Be Kind* by Pat Zietlow Miller
- *The Problem with Problems* by Rachel Rooney

“Let's turn to the next page.

What do you think will happen next?”

Even if a book is not “about” social-emotional skills, there are still lots of social-emotional skills in stories to learn from. Learning to imagine what someone else is thinking or what might happen next are important steps for being able to work together and solve problems.

Book suggestions:

- *Help!: A Story of Friendship* by Holly Keller
- *Saturday* by Oge Mora
- *Russell the Sheep* by Rob Scotton
- *Lali's Feather* by Farhana Zia

