

Volume

7



GUIDE

**Nurturing Early Learners**  
A Curriculum for Kindergartens in Singapore

# SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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# Introduction

Children need to develop a positive sense of themselves in relation to their peers, family and community. As they gain a better understanding of themselves and learn to respect the uniqueness of others, they will begin to build positive relationships with others. Therefore, it is important that teachers provide a supportive environment in which children feel secure about discovering who they are and expressing their emotions, including feelings such as anger and fear.

Social and Emotional Development relates to children's awareness of their personal identity and ability to:

- Manage their own emotions and behaviours
- Show respect for diversity
- Communicate, interact and build relationships with others
- Take responsibility for their actions

Development of social and emotional skills is a reiterative process. Teachers need to carefully plan for the acquisition of these skills through children's everyday experiences and play in the pre-school setting and make use of the teachable moments that occur in these daily experiences to teach children to regulate and manage their feelings, thoughts and behaviour.



## Social and Emotional Development in the Early Years

The knowledge and skills in Social and Emotional Development are based on the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Framework implemented at the primary, secondary and pre-university levels.

When children develop self-awareness, they are able to identify their strengths and abilities. Building upon these strengths and abilities, children will grow in confidence and develop a positive self concept (i.e. feel good about their own competence and characteristics). With a good sense of self identity they learn to manage their emotions and behaviours, which in turn, help them to build positive relationships with others and make responsible decisions.

Thus, the social and emotional skills emphasised in the pre-school years include:

- Self-awareness and positive self concept
- Self-management
- Social awareness
- Relationship management
- Responsible decision-making

## Self-awareness and Positive Self Concept

Children who have a clear understanding of their own strengths will develop positive self concept and self-worth. They will be able to identify their likes and dislikes, and recognise what they can or cannot do. They can identify their emotions and tell others how they feel, for example, talk about the food or toys they like or dislike during “Show and Tell” and suggest games they are good at when playing with their friends.



*Opportunities for children to experience success during play help them develop confidence in what they can do.*

## Self-management

Children tend to see things from their own perspective. Hence, they may express their thoughts and emotions with little consideration for the feelings of others and may not be aware that their actions can affect others.

They need to acquire basic self-management skills which include being aware of different feelings they have and recognising that some feelings are positive, such as happiness, friendliness and love, and can be shared with others. They will also learn that negative feelings such as anger, jealousy and fear, must be managed in a socially acceptable manner. For example, when they are angry, they should negotiate disagreements with their peers instead of hitting or shouting at them.

With these basic self-management skills, children will be able to exercise self-discipline and take personal responsibility to express their negative emotions (e.g. anger and frustration) appropriately and exercise control over impulsive behaviours.



## Social Awareness

Children with social awareness are able to recognise the feelings and perspectives of others, appreciate diversity and show respect for others regardless of differences.

Special events which provide opportunities for children and families to put on costumes representative of their cultures, share about ethnic food and celebrate festivals help raise children's awareness about the unique practices and values of different cultures.



*Children learn to respect diversity and become more aware about different cultures through platforms such as Racial Harmony Day.*

## Relationship Management

Children need to learn that there are many possible outcomes to a difficult situation and that they have a role to play in managing the outcomes when they are working with others. Therefore, children should be given opportunities to solve problems and resolve conflicts. Children can also help to set classroom and game rules so that everyone learns to cooperate and take turns to ensure activities and games are completed. As children experience the benefits of working well with others, they will learn socially acceptable behaviours such as taking turns and showing respect by listening to the views of others.



*Children learn to form positive relationships when they are given many opportunities to work and play with others.*

## Responsible Decision-making

Children need to learn to be more responsible for themselves and their actions. Teachers should help children do things for themselves rather than actively doing things for them. As children become more independent, the need to make decisions increases.

Decision-making helps children take responsibility for their own actions. It helps them solve their problems in a considerate, mutually satisfying way. Children need opportunities to think through problems and explore different options. Children who are encouraged to reason and to have explanation for these reasons are more likely to consider the effects and consequences of their choices.

### Summary

Children become more motivated to learn when they are able to understand and manage their emotions, interact with others and make responsible decisions. When they experience success in completing a task with others and enjoy the satisfaction of being able to contribute positively, they will be more willing to cooperate and collaborate with others.





## Learning Goals for Social and Emotional Development

We cannot assume that social competence will develop naturally as children mature. Activities should be intentionally designed and implemented and teachable moments are leveraged to promote social and emotional development.

The learning goals for Social and Emotional Development focus on the need for teachers to guide children to:

- Manage and express their emotions in appropriate ways
- Build positive relationships with others
- Recognise that everyone is unique and show respect to the people whom they interact with
- Reflect on their choices when making decisions

The examples in this chapter illustrate how teachers can provide opportunities for children to acquire knowledge, skills and dispositions of the learning goals.

# Learning Goal 1

**Learning Goal 1:** Develop an awareness of personal identity

Key knowledge/skills/dispositions	Examples of what children's learning and development look like...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify own strengths, likes and dislikes, and needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Share personal interests and opinions with peers and teachers</li> <li>Talk about self, family and community with others (e.g. their family members, their neighbours, the foods, toys, books, activities they like or dislike)</li> <li>Describe self by using personal qualities and strengths</li> <li>Suggest games and activities that they are good at or prefer</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify and recognise emotions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognise and label emotions (e.g. joy, fear, sadness, anger)</li> <li>Tell others about their needs, likes and dislikes, as well as emotions</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a positive self concept (i.e. feel good about their own competence and characteristics)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>develop confidence in carrying out simple tasks</li> <li>show a positive view of themselves</li> </ul> </li> <li>Develop a sense of identity as Singaporeans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognise what they are able to do and their own uniqueness (e.g. how they are the same and/or different from their peers)</li> <li>Perform basic life skills (e.g. dressing, washing up, putting things away after use) independently</li> <li>Talk about their work (e.g. drawing and artwork) with peers and/or teachers</li> <li>Talk about places of interest and different ethnic food in Singapore</li> <li>Take part in and talk about celebrating events such as National Day and ethnic festivals such as Chinese New Year, Hari Raya, Deepavali and Christmas</li> <li>Talk about what they like about Singapore</li> </ul> <p><i>Note: The examples of children's learning and development are neither age specific nor exhaustive. Teachers have the flexibility to provide appropriate learning opportunities based on their children's abilities, interests and developmental needs.</i></p>



## Example 1: Identify own strengths, likes and dislikes, and needs



### Learning Objective:

Children will talk about what they can do and what they like/dislike.

### Activity:

Create an "About Me" Poster

- On a large sheet of paper, ask a child to lie down lengthwise. Use a marker to trace the outline of his/her body.
- Ask him/her to draw or paste pictures that depict what he/she can do and like/dislike on the outline.
- Put up the children's posters around the classroom. Children can add more information to the posters throughout the week.
- They can also draw or write on their friends' poster.

## Example 2: Identify and recognise emotions



### Learning Objective:

Children will identify facial expressions and associate them with different feelings.

### Activity:

Have children look into the mirror and make different facial expressions. Ask:

- *Can you make a happy face?*
- *Can you smile as widely as possible? Can you show your teeth as you smile?*
- *Can you make a sad face?*
- *Can you make an angry face?*
- *How would you look when you are grumpy?*

Explain that our faces can tell people a lot about how we are feeling. Let children draw or paint faces with different expressions and talk about the emotions on the faces that they have created. This will help them learn the words to describe the different feelings. Encourage them to talk about times when they felt these same emotions and what caused them.



Children learn about different types of emotions as they imitate the facial expressions shown on picture cards.



Children draw and identify the facial expressions of different feelings.



## Example 3: Develop a positive self concept

(i.e. feel good about their own competence and characteristics)



### Learning Objective:

Children will develop confidence by carrying out simple tasks in the classroom.

### Activity:

Each day, or week, children pick a card from a “Responsibility Box”. The card describes a task that they are responsible for the week.

Examples of responsibilities described on each card:

- Put away toys after play
- Clean up table after use
- Place all rubbish and unwanted scraps in waste-paper basket
- Set table for snacks
- Set table for lunch
- Wipe table after snacks
- Wipe table after lunch
- Wipe classroom table at the end of the day
- Arrange toys/displays neatly on shelves
- Place stationery neatly in containers

## Example 4: Develop a sense of identity as Singaporeans



### Learning Objective:

Children will talk about the local dishes in Singapore.

### Activity:

- Prepare some local dishes (e.g. roti prata, nasi lemak, satay, chicken rice) for children to taste and talk about how each dish is different from the other.
- Have children guess the ingredients used for each dish. Lead children to identify the main ingredients that make the dishes have a distinctive taste.

Children learn about different ethnic culture by comparing the taste of different ethnic food.



Set up a restaurant at the Dramatic Play Centre where children can role play the preparation of some common local dishes and serve the dishes to their "customers".

## Learning Goal 2

**Learning Goal 2:** Manage their own emotions and behaviours

Key knowledge/skills/dispositions	Examples of what children's learning and development look like...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Express and cope with emotions appropriately without harming self, others and property</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use appropriate language or 'feeling faces' picture cards to express their feelings</li><li>• Share and talk about feelings (e.g. anger, fear, sadness) with trusted adults</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Self-regulate their behaviour<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- be aware that their actions can have both positive and negative effects on self and others</li><li>- recognise the need to control impulsive actions and words</li><li>- discuss appropriate ways to control impulsive actions and words</li><li>- redirect their reactions to negative feelings</li></ul></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Talk about how their words and actions can have both positive and negative effects on themselves and others</li><li>• Restrain from acting impulsively or according to one's own desires</li><li>• Manage anger and frustration by practising self-calming techniques (e.g. stop and think or walk away before reacting to the situation)</li><li>• Talk to and reason with peers instead of hitting and/or shouting when in a disagreement</li><li>• Remain composed and do not act out in frustration even when wishes are not met (e.g. when they are not selected to answer a question to which they know the answer or are not given the priority to play a favourite game)</li></ul> <p><i>Note: The examples of children's learning and development are neither age specific nor exhaustive. Teachers have the flexibility to provide appropriate learning opportunities based on their children's abilities, interests and developmental needs.</i></p>



## Example 5: Express and cope with emotions appropriately without harming self, others and property



### Learning Objective:

Children will describe how they feel in different situations.

### Activity:

Get the children to role play their reaction to the following situations:

- They receive a birthday present
- A big dog barks at them
- They hear a loud thunder one rainy day
- A friend accidentally knocks their blocks down

As the children act out their emotions, encourage them to describe how they feel. Model the use of words to describe their feelings. For example, “*Ahmad looks scared. He feels scared when a big dog barks at him*”. Use photographs, books about feelings and pictures to point out facial expressions and body language associated with a variety of feelings. Encourage children to talk about how they can cope with emotions and express their emotions appropriately.

## Example 6: Self-regulate their behaviour and be aware that their actions can have both positive and negative effects on self and others



### Learning Objective:

Children will be aware that there are positive ways of dealing with anger.

### Activity:

Read the book “When Sophie Gets Angry – Really, Really Angry” by Molly Bang with the children. Have children recall the story and talk about how Sophie became upset and how she took the time to cool off and regain her composure. Talk about how Sophie’s sister and mother were affected by Sophie’s anger. Encourage children to share their experiences and how they managed or should have managed their anger.

## Learning Goal 3

**Learning Goal 3:** Show respect for diversity

Key knowledge/skills/dispositions	Examples of what children's learning and development look like...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Recognise that everyone is unique in the following ways:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>physical characteristics (e.g. hair, skin, colour, height, size)</i></li> <li>- <i>race</i></li> <li>- <i>ability</i></li> <li>- <i>opinion</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talk about how they are the same or different from their friends (e.g. their physical features)</li> <li>• Recognise that others may feel differently about the same situation</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Show respect to the people that they interact with</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take part in and talk about events such as Racial Harmony Day (e.g. through the sharing of ethnic food, costumes, beliefs and cultural practices)</li> <li>• Speak in respectful ways with peers and teachers</li> <li>• Respect others' feelings, rights and belongings by               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- listening to what is said and accepting their differences in views</li> <li>- observing and listening to identify others' feelings based on their facial expressions and gestures</li> <li>- turn-taking in a group setting (e.g. wait for their turn to talk/show a picture to the teacher/play at learning centres)</li> <li>- keeping quiet when others are talking</li> <li>- not laughing when someone makes a mistake or is in pain</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Recognise feelings and show understanding of what others are going through and how they are feeling through actions and/or words</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Show concern by asking how others are feeling</li> <li>• Offer help to people in need</li> <li>• Show affection to and acceptance of others</li> <li>• Mix around and play with different friends throughout the week</li> </ul> <p><i>Note: The examples of children's learning and development are neither age specific nor exhaustive. Teachers have the flexibility to provide appropriate learning opportunities based on their children's abilities, interests and developmental needs.</i></p>



## Example 7: Recognise that everyone is unique



### Learning Objective:

Children will recognise that everyone has a unique thumbprint.

### Activity:

- Use an inkpad and get each child to make a thumbprint in the centre of a piece of construction paper. Have each of them use a magnifying glass to examine their own thumbprint and talk to a partner about what they see.
- Have them compare the patterns and lines found on their thumbprints and talk about how they are the same or different. Highlight that everyone is unique and has different thumbprints.
- Have children create pictures using their thumbprints.



*Children examine their thumbprints and see that everyone has different thumbprints. This helps children realise that everyone is unique.*



## Example 8: Show respect to the people you interact with



### Learning Objective:

Children will speak in respectful ways with peers and teachers.

### Activity:

- Read the story “The Grouchy Ladybug” by Eric Carle and talk about acceptable social behaviours and polite ways that children should speak to each other.
- Children can re-tell the story using words such as “please”, “excuse me” and “thank you” and enact the story using props.

## Example 9: Recognise feelings and show understanding of what others are going through



### Learning Objective:

Children will show empathy towards others.

### Activity:



- Show the children an object. Have the children close their eyes and draw the object on the drawing paper. Get the children to open their eyes and draw the object again.
- Lead children to compare the differences between their drawings (with their eyes closed and eyes opened) and have children talk about their experiences.
- Discuss with the children some of the difficulties the visually impaired might face in their life.

## Learning Goal 4

**Learning Goal 4:** Communicate, interact and build relationships with others

Key knowledge/skills/dispositions	Examples of what children's learning and development look like...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Show appreciation and care for others</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Show appreciation for the positive things that others say to them or do for them</li> <li>• Demonstrate care and concern for others (e.g. notice when others are feeling sad or unwell and offer encouragement; thank others for their effort in helping)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Work and play cooperatively in a group</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask peers to join in during play or request to join peers in play</li> <li>• Ask for help to complete a task when necessary</li> <li>• In a group setting,               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- pay attention</li> <li>- be friendly and helpful</li> <li>- wait for their turn to speak and play, and indicate their intention to do so</li> <li>- share toys, tools and resources</li> <li>- work with other children to complete a group task with guidance</li> <li>- be attentive to what others say, think and feel</li> <li>- observe differences and learn to accommodate them (e.g. when they observe a peer in not willing to share toys, they may try negotiate for turn-taking instead of fighting over them)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Build relationships with others</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use different ways to establish and maintain friendships (e.g. by sharing food/toy with a peer, initiating a conversation, joining in play, inviting peers to play, smiling, helping others)</li> <li>• Use friendly ways to manage disagreement/unhappiness</li> </ul>



Key knowledge/skills/dispositions	Examples of what children's learning and development look like...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Communicate thoughts, ideas and feelings effectively with others through words, gestures and actions</i></li> </ul> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look at teachers/peers when speaking with them</li> <li>• Share personal information such as experiences and feelings with teachers/peers</li> <li>• Use an appropriate way to express a need or when experiencing a strong, negative emotion</li> <li>• Speak and act politely with peers and adults at work and at play, using words like 'please' and 'thank you'</li> </ul> <p><i>Note: The examples of children's learning and development are neither age specific nor exhaustive. Teachers have the flexibility to provide appropriate learning opportunities based on their children's abilities, interests and developmental needs.</i></p> 

## Example 10: Show appreciation and care for others



### Learning Objective:

Children will show care and concern for others.

### Activity:

- Have the children think of someone who cared for them and talk about how they can show appreciation to the person.

Examples include:

- Make a craft for the person
  - Make and send a “thank you” card to the person
- Provide art and writing materials for children to carry out their suggestions.

## Example 11: Work and play cooperatively



### Learning Objective:

Children will understand the importance of cooperation.

### Activity:

- This game may be played outdoors. Using masking tape, stick pieces of newspaper together to form an island. Have children imagine that this island is surrounded by crocodile-infested water.
- The children will have to work cooperatively so that more children can get out of the crocodile-infested water.
- They will be required to work together to fit as many children as possible on the available space.

## Learning Goal 5

**Learning Goal 5:** Take responsibility for their actions

Key knowledge/skills/dispositions	Examples of what children's learning and development look like...
<p>Children may on their own or with teachers/peers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Consider possible options/actions to manage a situation</i></li><li>• <i>Consider the effects/consequences of the options/actions (e.g. consider own and other's safety when moving about, working with tools)</i></li><li>• <i>Reflect on their choices</i></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Suggest ideas/actions to resolve differences in play and group activities</li><li>• Consider/discuss the effects of their ideas/actions in different scenarios, e.g.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- when a disagreement arises during play, children could suggest playing together or playing with different toys;</li><li>- consider own and other's safety during activities/transition/routines</li></ul></li><li>• Show appropriate social and classroom behaviour, e.g.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- identify and follow classroom rules and routines, and directions given at school (e.g. help to pack up after play, put their personal belongings at designated areas)</li><li>- take care of school and public property (e.g. classroom furniture, plants in the park)</li></ul></li><li>• Recognise own mistakes and are willing to apologise when necessary</li></ul> <p><i>Note: The examples of children's learning and development are neither age specific nor exhaustive. Teachers have the flexibility to provide appropriate learning opportunities based on their children's abilities, interests and developmental needs.</i></p>



## Example 12: Consider possible options/action to manage a situation



### Learning Objective:

Children will learn to seek help from an adult to solve a problem.

### Activity:

- Conduct a picture talk using pictures/photographs showing children involved in different conflicts.
- Have the children determine which they can solve themselves and which they cannot. Have the children suggest some choices when dealing with conflicts.
- For each picture, ask the children to decide if they want to negotiate and solve the problem, apologise when one is at fault or walk away to cool off if one is angry.

## Example 13: Consider the effects/consequences of the options/actions (e.g. consider own and other's safety when moving about, working with tools)



### Learning Objective:

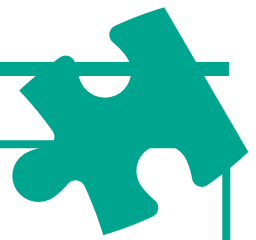
Children will propose different ways to deal with a situation and consider their consequences.

### Activity:

Have children role play situations that might arise in children's daily experiences and have children suggest some possible options to manage the situation. Lead them to talk about the consequences of the actions.

Possible situations:

- Two children having only a piece of biscuit
- Some children did not allow another child to join in the play



## Summary

Teachers need to consider the learning goals highlighted in this chapter when planning experiences to promote social and emotional development in children. Opportunities to develop and master these knowledge, skills and dispositions should be intentionally planned. Teachers should also leverage on teachable moments during children's playtime, transitions and routines.







## Strategies for Social and Emotional Development

Children's social and emotional well-being develops through their relationships with parents, teachers and the people in the community. Teachers who are warm and responsive are more likely to promote strong social and emotional skills in their children.

There are various classroom strategies that can be used to promote social and emotional development of children to help them grow into confident learners.

These strategies include:

- Modelling positive behaviours
- Using dramatisation and role play
- Planning routines and transitions
- Seizing teachable moments throughout the day
- Engaging children in small group activities
- Using stories, rhymes, songs and puppets
- Collaborating with families

## Modelling Positive Behaviours

A practical way for children to learn a concept or skill is by seeing and doing. As such, teachers can model behaviours such as being empathetic, admitting mistakes that they make and taking responsibility for their actions. Teachers can enhance the learning of a social skill or disposition by making explicit what they are doing (e.g. pointing out how she demonstrates empathy or saying as she passes a block to a child, “It looks like you need another block. Can I share mine with you?”).

## Using Dramatisation and Role Play

Role play provides opportunities for children to act out the role of a particular person or a character in a familiar story. This allows them to explore issues, attitudes, behaviours and values.

Through dramatisation and role play they can:

- Take on the perspective of others
- Engage in constructive dialogue with others
- Communicate feelings, ideas and points of view
- Reflect on the opinions and attitudes of other people

Involving children in the planning of scenarios at the Dramatic Play Centre also provides opportunities for children to play cooperatively together and negotiate for the role that they will play. Role play also allows children to show empathy for others because they have “tried to be” someone else for a while (e.g. when they act out roles of patients and doctors in a “medical clinic” or customers, store managers and cashiers in a “supermarket”).



*Children take on the perspective of others as they role play as doctors, nurses, firemen and construction workers at the Dramatic Play Centre.*



## Planning Routines and Transitions

Routines and transitions provide teachers with natural opportunities to inculcate social skills and self-regulation. For example, teachers can emphasise turn-taking while waiting to use the toilet or to get their snacks. Routines and transitions provide opportunities for children to practise and develop knowledge and skills for Social and Emotional Development in authentic contexts and enable them to understand the relevance of these skills.



*Children learn to self-regulate when they have to wait for their turn to take their snacks. In addition, children will grow in confidence when they are able to do things for themselves.*

Rules might be set to facilitate classroom management and children can be involved in the setting of these rules. In the process of making rules, they learn to listen to one another's views before making decisions and develop a sense of shared responsibility for what goes on in the classroom. Having ownership of these rules, children are more willing to cooperate with each other, show mutual respect and exercise self-control. Rules should also be used to help protect children and to safeguard their well-being.



When children are given opportunities to decide on class rules, they learn about commitment and responsibility.

Some suggestions for guiding children in the process of making rules:

- Conduct rule-making discussions as a response to a particular need or problem. Present the situation to the children and ask them what can be done about it.
- Emphasise the reasons for rules. Explain that the purpose of rules is to make the classroom a safe and happy place for everyone. When children suggest a rule, ask, "Why do we need that rule?" or "Why is that a good rule?"
- Children tend to think of rules as restrictive and negative. So lead them to think constructively of things that they can do and to phrase rules in a positive way. For example, instead of "Don't tear pages off books", say "Be gentle with books".
- Record rules and visuals in a simple way and display them on a chart as a constant reminder.

## Seizing Teachable Moments throughout the Day

Teachable moments can occur anytime during the day in a pre-school setting. These are authentic situations for children to develop and practise knowledge and skills in the area of Social and Emotional Development.

Teachers could involve the children to think of constructive ways to deal with a problem, provide feedback on their ideas, offer suggestions and encourage them to try out the best options. For example, teachers might describe what the child did and the reaction they witnessed by saying, *"I saw you and John wanting to play the blocks at the same time and you suggested taking turns. That's a good idea because, this way, both of you had a chance to play with the blocks."* As children become aware that they can deal with difficult situations without direct assistance from adults, they gain a sense of social mastery.



*Children develop and practise social skills as they learn to negotiate for their turn to play in the play house.*

## Engaging Children in Small Group Activities

When children work and play in pairs or small groups, they develop important social skills. They learn how to interact politely with others, work cooperatively, listen to one another and negotiate or resolve conflicts that are likely to arise. Sand and water play are examples of such activities as they encourage children to explore materials, problem-solve and try out ideas together. When children are engaged in small group activities, teachers could encourage interaction and acknowledge their positive attitudes and dispositions.



*Children learn to work cooperatively in a small group when they help each other to open the metal can.*

## Using Stories, Rhymes, Songs and Puppets

Stories, rhymes and songs can be used to support children's social and emotional development. They can be used as a platform for children to talk about issues, feelings, etc. By responding to stories, children can work out their feelings and clarify their thoughts. Such responses can be in the form of discussions, drawings, spontaneous writing or role play.

As children begin exploring their world, they often feel uncertain and, at times, fearful of new situations. Using puppets helps to create a safe environment for them to express and talk about these emotions.

A class puppet can be used and placed in a “comfort corner” in the classroom to encourage the children to share and express their feelings when they feel the need to talk things through.



*Children use puppets to communicate their feelings and thoughts with others.*



Puppets can also be used in discussions to:

- Explain a situation or problem
- Refer to important rules and behaviours
- Offer specific ways to resolve a problem
- Provide interesting alternatives to manage conflicts
- Suggest significant consequences of one's action

## Collaborating with Families

Families play the most important role in children's social and emotional development. They have many opportunities in their daily interactions to

- Guide children in decision-making and problem-solving
- Assist children in managing their anger
- Help children feel proud about their culture and who they are

Teachers need to work with families so that expectations of the children are consistent both at home and in the pre-school centre. Teachers should share with families the strategies used in the centre so that families can use the same strategies at home. Information for families could be disseminated through newsletters, parenting fact-sheets, parent education workshops, etc.

Family members (e.g. siblings, uncles, aunts, etc.) and people working in the neighbourhood are excellent resource people. They can be invited to share their interests, hobbies, skills and jobs with the children. Such involvement strengthens the home-pre-school centre collaborations and help children relate positively to others in their immediate environment.



*Children learn to relate better with people in the community as parents are invited to the pre-school centre to share about their occupation or interests.*



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## Summary

Children's social and emotional well-being is being developed when they are given opportunities to interact positively with others. Teachers play a major role in ensuring these opportunities take place in the classroom. Besides the provision of suitable materials, teachers should also adopt appropriate strategies to promote social and emotional development. Adopting these strategies helps to ensure that children are given the opportunities to become aware, learn, practise and develop skills that will nurture them into confident and socially responsible individuals.







## Organising the Learning Environment

A warm and secure environment makes it easier for children to explore new experiences involving both materials and people. By organising an environment that nurtures the development of emotional security and appropriate social behaviours, teachers also facilitate children's learning in other areas.

In defining the environment, we include not only physical space, equipment and furniture but people, time and experiences.

## Creating a Warm and Positive Learning Environment

Teachers can help children cope with the challenges they encounter each day by providing a supportive environment which allows the children to develop confidence and feel secure about

- Discovering who they are
- Expressing their emotions, including feelings such as anger and fear
- Making known their ideas and views even though they may be different from others
- Building a positive sense of themselves in relation to their peers, family and community

In addition, teachers should convey a sense of care and security when interacting with children and managing their behaviours. For example, holding a child's hand when talking to him/her about an appropriate behaviour that he/she should exhibit helps the child feel safe. Such teacher behaviour promotes a feeling of safety and security and help children learn to express their emotions to trusted peers and adults.



*The child is more willing to explore with new materials when supported by the teacher.*

Teachers need to be involved in children's play by supporting their interests, conversing with them and acknowledging their efforts through praise and encouragement. With a positive classroom climate, children will feel secure and supported, and be willing to experiment, try new things and express their ideas.



*The teacher supports her children's exploration by interacting with them and acknowledging their efforts.*

## Organising the Physical Environment

Teachers need to consider the organisation of furniture, equipment and play materials when planning learning experiences for children as this influences the way children act and respond. The arrangement of furniture and the demarcation of the different learning centres will determine the areas children play and explore. It will also influence the way children work as a group. Effective organisation of the environment will minimise the number of conflicts that might occur among children.



*The learning centre is a clearly defined area that helps children recognise what they can do in that space.*

The following are some questions that teachers can ask themselves as they go about setting up a socially and emotionally supportive environment where children feel a sense of belonging and safety:

- Are displays, materials and resources attractively placed/arranged?
- Are children's works displayed to attract appreciation by parents, teachers and children themselves?
- Do the spaces make children feel comfortable?
- Are the children's materials grouped together based on how they are used?
- Are learning centres clearly defined so that children recognise what they can do in that space?
- Are there spaces for a variety of activities: quiet, active, and large or small group?



*Children feel good about themselves when their artworks are prominently displayed.*

## Organising and Selecting Resources

Thoughtfully arranged resources in an environment that is tidy, neat and beautiful encourage children to be respectful of their environment. Children develop a positive self concept when they are able to access the materials on their own. A sense of responsibility is also nurtured when they are given the opportunity to put the materials back to where they have taken them from.



*When resources are neatly organised, children can access them and put them away easily.*



A well-resourced environment with sufficient provisions for children encourages them to decide what and how they would like to explore and experiment with the resources. Such resources should include the following types of games and manipulatives:

- Construction and manipulative toys such as wooden blocks and interlocking cubes/bricks which enable children to work together on a common project
- Puzzles which encourage cooperation to complete the task
- Board games which help children learn to take turns, enjoy winning and to accept losing gracefully
- Dressing-up games and playing with puppets which support children's language and social development by encouraging them to communicate with each other and express their feelings and ideas

To promote social and emotional development, teachers can select materials that provide the opportunities for children to interact with one another. For example, teachers can plan for children to engage in familiar games that require them to play in small group. Playing in groups encourages children to negotiate with one another, take turns and make responsible decisions. Materials could also be provided to help children discover their strengths when playing alone. For instance, children can learn that they are particularly good with their fine motor skills when they take part in lacing activities. This could improve their self-esteem. Sufficient provision of dress-up clothes, costumes, puppets and props encourage children to participate in dramatic play. Through such role playing activities, children take on the perspective of the characters and learn to empathise with others.

Provision of suitable materials in the Reading Centre is also useful for children's social and emotional development. There are many picture books and information books about self concept, feelings, conflict management, dealing with fears and dislikes, sense of self-worth and working together as a team. They are excellent means to provoke a discussion on issues that will help children:

- Identify conflicts and acceptable ways to deal with them
- Understand wrong-doings and appropriate behaviours
- Recognise negative emotions and means to overcome or manage them

## Fostering a Respectful Environment

An appropriate social-emotional environment respects children's individuality and need for privacy. This means that each child has a place to collect and keep his/her "valuable" and "unique" things. There should be space for their pictures and work to be displayed attractively in the classroom. There should also be a place where a child can retreat to when things get too busy for him/her, or when he/she becomes tired.

A respectful environment provides children with sufficient time to explore the given space and resources, and not rushed through their play. They should be allowed time to do the things that they want to do, otherwise play can become a frantic experience for them.

### Summary

A warm and secure learning environment together with positive teacher-children relationships help children feel safe and secure. This increases the children's confidence and encourages them to explore, initiate their own learning and discover what they can do. Provision of thoughtfully selected resources in a well-organised learning environment will also provide opportunities for children to interact with one another, build relationships and make responsible decisions.

## Chapter

# 5



## Observation and Assessment

Social and emotional development begins at birth and progresses rapidly during the pre-school years. Acquisition of social and emotional skills is a reiterative process. As such, on-going observations of what children know and can do provide information to help teachers better understand and support children as they develop socially and emotionally.

## Observing and Documenting Children's Learning

Observation to assess children's social and emotional well-being and monitor their communication with others is best conducted when children are interacting with one another. At times, children volunteer information about their own activities, making comments about what they like and dislike and what they are able or unable to do. These provide teachers with the opportunities to observe how children relate to their peers, the extent to which they may have attained certain skills and what areas they may need to develop in.

Different contexts lend themselves better to assessment of different learning goals. Depending on the learning goal that the teacher plans to observe, he/she could:

- Choose which learning centre or activity to watch
- Identify children's artefacts or completed task to analyse
- Decide what information to find out from the child

Teachers need to consider the following when assessing children's social and emotional development:

- Any child can have a few really bad days, for different reasons. If assessments are to be reasonably reliable, observation and analysis should be made of the overall pattern of behaviours over a period of at least three or four weeks.
- Children will outgrow occasional social difficulties without intervention. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that children will strengthen their social skills, confidence and independence by being entrusted to solve their social difficulties beginning with some support but increasingly without adult assistance.
- Cultural contexts affect social behaviour. What is appropriate or effective social behaviour in one culture may not be in another. The teachers' role is to help bridge their differences, yet find ways for children to learn from and enjoy the company of one another.



*Observing children when they are engaged in play allows the teacher to see if they have learnt to play cooperatively with one another.*





*Observing children when they are playing a game that involves turn-taking enables the teacher to see if the children can self-regulate and wait for their turns.*

### **Observation to Assess Self-awareness and Positive Self Concept**

Teachers can listen to children's conversation or sharing during "Show and Tell" sessions and observe if children are able to describe themselves in terms of concrete characteristics such as their name, physical appearance, feelings and competence. For example, when asked about his/her self and family, a child with self-awareness will be able to talk about his/her family members and the food and toys he/she likes or dislikes. A common observable behaviour demonstrating that children feel good about their own competence and characteristics is when they are able to recognise what they are able to do. For example, when they say "I can jump this high!" or "I can brush my own teeth". Being able to perform basic skills such as putting away their toys independently or pouring water into a cup during snack time are observable behaviours that the teacher can capture on camera and choose as samples to illustrate how the child has developed confidence in carrying out simple tasks.



*Children carrying out various life skills confidently and independently suggest that they are sure of their capabilities and have a positive self concept of what they can do.*



Additionally, teachers could seek to understand children's self-awareness, thoughts and inclination through their artworks. For example, teachers may use children's drawings of their favourite food items as platforms to talk about why they like certain food to help them identify their likes/dislikes. Observing children during routines such as snack time and eliciting information from them by asking questions such as, "I see that you want a second helping of carrot sticks for snack today. Do you like eating them?" allows teachers to see if the child is able to articulate his food preferences.

## Observation to Assess Self-management

Teachers can observe if children are able to express and cope with their emotions appropriately without harming others by finding out if they are able to use appropriate language to express their feelings. For example, when a child's toy is snatched by a classmate, he/she responds by saying, "No! I am playing with it" instead of crying or hitting the classmate, or when he/she is upset, he/she is able to share and talk about how he/she feels with the teacher.

Though the most common way of gathering information about children is watching and listening to them in an unobtrusive way, teachers can elicit responses from a child directly and probe the thinking behind a child's responses or behaviour. For example, a teacher can provide prompting questions such as "Anna, it was kind of you to share your book with Arul. Do you think Arul was happy that you shared with him?" or "Why do you have to wait for your turn to play in the sand pit?"

## Observation to Assess Social Awareness

Children demonstrate a respect for diversity when they exhibit behaviours such as listening to what the other person is saying and accepting views that are different from theirs. This can be observed especially when children are engaged in group activities or a group setting that requires discussion (e.g. planning what to bring for a visit to the old folks' home or what they can make as gifts for the centre or neighbourhood cleaners in appreciation of their work to keep the environment clean). Other behaviours that teachers can observe if a child demonstrates social awareness include:

- If a child is willing to wait for his/her turn to speak
- If a child listens attentively to what his/her peers have to say
- If a child contributes ideas that take into consideration the interests of his/her peers during a discussion



Children use the dice to decide who should play next and learn turn-taking.

## Observation to Assess Relationship Management

Children demonstrate the ability to build and manage relationships with adults and their peers when they are able to work and play cooperatively in a group and, in the process, show their appreciation and care for others through words, gestures and actions. One area to observe would be children's ability to engage in effective and appropriate conversations with others. This would include the ability to exercise appropriate turn-taking, (e.g. not interrupting and remaining engaged in the conversation), being sensitive to the listener's needs, (e.g. his/her fear about the topic discussed) and the use of polite forms of speech (e.g. "may I", "please" and "thank you").



*Children learn about the need to follow rules while playing a board game together.*

The Dramatic Play Centre could be set up as a restaurant and a group of children may decide to play together with each taking on different roles as the "customers", "waiters/waitress" and "cashiers". Teachers may observe how the "customers" are ordering their food and if they are using words like "please" and "thank you", or if they are willing to practise turn-taking for different roles. While observing, teachers can make narrative records or anecdotal records of how two children interact with each other, and later interpret each child's behaviour. With careful observation, teachers can extend and stimulate children's imaginative play by making casual comments, offering suggestions or adding more props.



*The teacher observes children at play and notes the ways they socialise with each other.*

Children often have to learn how to access groups they would like to join in. Teachers could discuss with children possible ways to be accepted into the activity. Important lessons for children to learn include learning to wait, watch and look out for possibilities to enter the group and the language and tone they use with the other children.

Another area to observe would be children's behaviours during group activities. Teachers can find out if they exhibit high levels of positive interaction that is governed by social norms such as sharing and helping, volunteering ideas to others and supporting and accepting ideas of others.

As children form friendships, teachers can look out for their ability to:

- Communicate clearly
- Exchange information with each other
- Share information about themselves
- Establish common grounds such as something both enjoy or can do together
- Compromise and negotiate when conflicts arise



*Children exhibit their ability to care for others when they help each other put on the vest before a painting activity.*



*Children exhibit the ability to build positive relationships with others when they play and solve problems together.*

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## Observation to Assess Responsible Decision-making

Observing children as they resolve conflicts that occur during play and group activities provides teachers with information about how the children consider possible options/actions to manage conflicts and make responsible decisions. For example, three children may want to water the plants at the same time but there are only two watering cans. The teacher can observe what the third child does to get his/her turn to water the plants or, if necessary, facilitate a discussion on how this problem may be addressed (e.g. get the children to suggest some ways that all three can water the plants together and choose an idea that they can agree upon).

Children who are able to think of the effects/consequences of their chosen options/actions would demonstrate appropriate behaviours, such as abide by classroom rules and routines set. They might suggest or consider ideas and actions to resolve differences amicably. If they are observed to be willing to apologise for their mistakes on their own, instead of being prompted by the teacher, then they are clearly able to take responsibility for their own actions.

Children can be observed as being able to exercise perspective taking if they are able to describe what others might feel and think, such as *"He wanted my toy. I didn't want to give it to him"*. With perspective taking, the child is developing the ability to be aware of another person's feelings. Such behaviours can be captured in moments when children are helping another person, taking about the needs of others and responding to empathetic statements made by adults or other children.

## Examples of How Observations are Documented

### Example 1



#### Context:

Kai Jie and Karen were playing a matching game. They had to pick a card to match it with another card that showed the same facial expression.

#### Teacher's Anecdotal Record:

- Kai Jie placed two different faces together and Karen told him that the faces were different and that it was incorrect. Kai Jie chose another card and tried again.
- Kai Jie waited while Karen played her turn. Kai Jie cheered when Karen was able to identify and match the faces correctly.
- Karen waited while Kai Jie played his turn and clapped when he matched the faces that are the same.

#### Possible Interpretation/Assessment:

- Kai Jie was able to self-regulate and play cooperatively with his friend. He shared, took turns and encouraged his friend by cheering.
- Despite not being able to match the shapes correctly the first time, Kai Jie did not give up but tried again. This showed that he was confident of his own capabilities.
- Karen was able to self-regulate and play cooperatively with a friend. She shared, took turns, provided guidance in the process and encouraged her friend by clapping.

#### What the Teacher Could Do:

- Provide opportunities for Kai Jie and Karen to play together in small groups of three to four children.
- Have Kai Jie and Karen share with their friends on how they worked together to complete the game.
- Engage both children in more challenging tasks where decision making is needed and guide them in accepting mistakes that they make and negotiating amicably to correct the mistakes.

#### Documentation:

Teacher could document by taking photographs or recordings to show:

- Kai Jie and Karen's conversation throughout the activity to show how they solve problems and make decisions
- Examples of actions to show how each child self-regulate their emotions and behaviours when they encounter differences



## Example 2



### Context:

Three children were playing at the Dramatic Play Centre. Jialing was playing alone while another two children were playing together at the puppet theatre.

### Teacher's Anecdotal Record:

- Jialing approached her peers to ask if she could join them but they said that they had “enough players”.
- Jialing then proceeded quietly to the puzzle table and played on her own. She sat there throughout the playtime and did not make any other attempts to approach any of her peers.

### Possible Interpretation/Assessment:

- Jialing was keen to play with others and knew how to ask without being too assertive.
- She was able to exercise self control and manage her emotions in an acceptable way.
- She lost confidence after the first try.

### What the Teacher Could Do:

- Provide more puppets so that more children can play at the puppet theatre.
- Provide opportunities for children to role play situations where they need to include others in their play and how they should respond to a request to join them.
- Read books about being kind to others and have children practice kind acts in the class.
- Plan activities to help children gain a better sense of self concept and self-confidence to enable them to persevere and be willing to try again in spite of mistakes/failures.

### Documentation:

Teacher could document by taking photographs or recordings to show:

- Jialing's increasing sense of self-confidence
- Her involvement in other group activities.



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## Summary

Assessment of social and emotional skills is an on-going process which requires teachers to make careful observations of children in their daily activities. This process will help them better understand the children. Information gathered about their social and emotional development will help teachers plan and organise an environment that is conducive for holistic development.



# Annex



## List of Children's Literature to Support Social and Emotional Development

Themes	Book Title
About me	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "All About You" by Catherine Anholt &amp; Laurence Anholt</li> <li>• "I'm Special" by Jen Green</li> <li>• "No, David!" by David Shannon</li> <li>• "The Little Engine that Could" by Watty Piper</li> </ul>
Feelings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day" by Judith Viorst</li> <li>• "A is for Angry" by Sandra Boynton</li> <li>• "Cool Down and Work through Anger" by Cheri J. Meiners</li> <li>• "How Are You Peeling?" by Saxton. Freymann &amp; Joost Elffers</li> <li>• "I Just Don't Like the Sound of No!" by Julia Cook</li> <li>• "Ira Sleeps Over" by Bernard Waber</li> <li>• "On Monday When It Rained" by Cherryll Kachenmeister</li> <li>• "The Way I Feel" by Janan Cain</li> </ul>
Sense of Belonging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Daddies are for Catching Fireflies" by Harriet Ziefert</li> <li>• "Families are Different" by Nina Pellegrini</li> <li>• "Sylvester and the Magic Pebble" by William Steig</li> <li>• "Whose Mouse are You?" By Robert Kraus</li> </ul>
Friendship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Happy Birthday Moon" by Frank Asch</li> <li>• "Laura's Star" by Klaus Baumgart</li> <li>• "My Friends" by Taro Gomi</li> <li>• "The Quarrelling Book" by Charlotte Zolotow</li> <li>• "This is the Bear" by Sarah Hayes &amp; Helen Craig</li> </ul>
Cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "It's My Turn!" by David Bedford</li> <li>• "Mr Grumpy's Motor Car" by John Burningham</li> <li>• "Mr Noisy's Helpers" by Roxanne Lanczak Williams</li> <li>• "Playground Problem Solvers" by Sandi Hill</li> <li>• "The Doorbell Rang" by Pat Hutchins</li> <li>• "The Little Yellow Digger at the Zoo" by Betty Gilderdale &amp; Allan Gilderdale</li> <li>• "The Tidy-Up Race" by David Seow</li> </ul>

Themes	Book Title
Care and Respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Be Gentle” by Virginia Miller</li> <li>• “Big Fish, Little Fish” by Alan Durant &amp; Ant Parker</li> <li>• “Boo Hoo Baby” by Cressida Cowell</li> <li>• “Goodnight Owl” by Pat Hutchins</li> <li>• “Harry and the Robots” by Ian Whybrow</li> <li>• “Milo and the Magical Stones” by Marcus Pfister</li> <li>• “Taking Care of Mom” by Gina &amp; Mercer Mayer</li> <li>• “The Mouse Who Ate Bananas” by Keith Faulkner</li> </ul>
Looking After Myself	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Germs! Germs! Germs!” by Bobbi Katz</li> <li>• “Piggy Washes Up” by Carol Thompson</li> </ul>
Manners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Don’t Touch!” by Suzy Kline</li> <li>• “I’m Sorry” by Gina &amp; Mercer Mayer</li> <li>• “I Just Forgot” by Mercer Mayer</li> <li>• “I Want My Dinner” by Tony Ross</li> <li>• “Just Say Please” by Gina &amp; Mercer Mayer</li> </ul>



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