



Social Emotional Learning Parent Tips

Do you ever experience BIG emotions in your children? If so, it's normal! Social emotional learning (SEL) is an essential aspect of your child's development, big emotions and all. Helping children manage their emotions in a healthy way is another aspect of their education. Children need time, maturity, instruction, and practice to manage emotional responses. Learning to navigate emotions and solve their problems leads to self-regulation. This skill set, being able to express, control, and re-direct emotions, is one of the predictors of later academic and social success. Bruce Perry, M.D., Ph.D. explains, "Healthy self-regulation is related to the capacity to tolerate the sensations of distress and anxiety that accompany an unmet need (respond vs. react). Healthy self-regulation is related to teaching children to recognize their needs and find positive ways to meet their needs."

Playtime is the training ground for social emotional learning. When playing, children have an opportunity to practice communication skills, learn to share, cooperate, resolve conflict, and build friendships. Time and intentionality are needed to instill these life skills. Beverly Lonsbury, Ph.D. states, "Children become what they practice. As they learn to make guesses about how other children feel and what they might need, they are practicing essential skills that help them show empathy and kindness toward others." Play provides an opportunity to train children to be socially aware of themselves and others.

Also, within the context of play, children act out emotions they are dealing with in life. Help your children put words to feelings by identifying emotions, using descriptive words such as frustrated or disappointed rather than simply mad or sad. Guide your children in problem solving to alleviate angst. When children practice with adults, they are better able to manage future stressful situations. This is especially crucial with the current pandemic, social unrest, and other stressors.

Children are multi-sensory learners, using all five senses to investigate and examine their world. In providing a variety of hands-on experiences, we allow children to experiment and try new skills. Failure to master a skill and the frustration that follows can be used to encourage perseverance and problem-solving. When a skill is mastered, it can be built upon for more difficult tasks or applied to other areas of learning.

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