

Social-emotional development in young children

Why it's so important and how you can promote it in your program and in the home

Social-emotional development. As early childhood professionals, we hear the term often. We know it's important. But our resources and efforts often skew toward identifying delays and tracking milestones in traditional developmental areas, such as communication, gross and fine motor skills, and problem solving.

While standard developmental screening is essential to ensuring every child has the opportunity for the best possible start, it's clear that early identification of social-emotional concerns is just as critical.



Social-emotional development is critical to a child's future success

What is social-emotional development?

Social-emotional development is a child's ability to experience, express, and manage emotions, develop positive relationships with caregivers and others, and explore their environment with curiosity and confidence.

Why is social-emotional development important?

Children's ability to regulate their emotions and skillfully manage social interactions is critical to their healthy development and future success. Beginning at birth, babies use vocalizations and body movements to begin building relationships. These relationships help young children feel a sense of comfort, safety and confidence—all necessary for forming friendships, communicating emotions and dealing with challenges.

Ensuring that every child has strong social-emotional skills through screening, early identification, and competence-building exercises helps prepare them for school, stop the bullying epidemic, and improve their well-being. And all of this helps set children up for future success! A [recent study](http://bit.ly/AJPHpub) (<http://bit.ly/AJPHpub>), also found significant associations between stronger social-emotional skills in kindergarten and better life outcomes in the areas of education, employment, criminal activity, substance use, and mental health.

How can you promote social-emotional development?

Conduct social-emotional screening on every child.

There's plenty you can do to support healthy social and emotional development in children (more on that below), but your efforts will have the greatest impact if you first identify which children may be at risk so follow-up steps can be planned—including further assessment, monitoring, or mental health services.

If possible, screen all children with **Ages & Stages Questionnaires®: Social-Emotional, Second Edition (ASQ:SE-2)** (<http://bit.ly/ProdASQSE-2>). If a child's score is in the monitoring zone or above the cutoff, take the recommended next steps. This article about **what to do when an ASQ:SE-2 score raises concern** (<http://bit.ly/ASQSE2Concern>) outlines possible follow-up actions.

Use resources to educate staff and families.

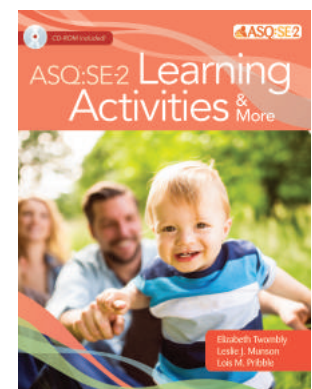
Be sure your program staff and the families you work with also understand what social-emotional development is, why it's important, and where they can find resources to support their needs.

Not sure where to start? National organizations like **ZERO TO THREE** (<http://bit.ly/ZTTweb>) and the **American Academy of Pediatrics** (<http://bit.ly/AAPHealthyChildren>) offer lots of free resources, and ASQ has developed many of our own.

Here are some excellent ones:

- **Social-Emotional Development Guides** – Share these **downloadable handouts** (<http://bit.ly/SEDevGuide>) with parents, caregivers and providers so they know what behaviors to expect at each age interval, from 2 to 60 months. You can also find this information in Spanish in the **ASQ:SE-2 User's Guide** (<http://bit.ly/ASQSE2UG>) on pages 241–258.
- **Activity Ideas by Age** – Give parents ideas on what they can do at home to support their child's social-emotional development. Colorful one-page handouts are available for each age interval, in both **English** (<http://bit.ly/EngASQSE2Activities>) and **Spanish** (<http://bit.ly/SpanASQSE2Activities>).
- **ASQ®:SE-2 Learning Activities & More** – This book and CD-ROM set features, among other resources, a set of nine parent newsletters that correspond to each age interval. Each one explains important social-emotional milestones and shares tips on strengthening this area of development while offering parents warm and encouraging words of wisdom.
- **10 Free Social-Emotional Resources** – Brookes Publishing's *The Inclusion Lab* blog links to a **list of early childhood organizations** (<http://bit.ly/FreeSEResources>) that offer social-emotional tips and tools online.

Available now!



Learn more and order
(<http://bit.ly/ASQSE2LearningAct>)

Find opportunities to share and incorporate resources with parents.

Involving parents in their child's social-emotional development is one of the biggest ways to positively influence behaviors. Think of some different ways you can connect parents with these wonderful resources, including:

- **In-person encounters** – Share guides, activities, and newsletters with parents at back-to-school nights or during parent conferences. Another good time to offer activity ideas is when you meet to discuss screening results.
- **Send regular email updates** – Try emailing parents once a month with age-appropriate activities they can do at home with their child. Suggest a few specific ones in your email, or send the PDF that corresponds with the child's age.
- **Post on your program's bulletin board** – You could include a list of resources or even offer printouts of the guides or activities for parents to take with them. October is Emotional Intelligence Awareness Month, a perfect reason to create a board that focuses on social-emotional development!

For more information on social-emotional development and screening, refer to your [ASQ:SE-2 User's Guide](http://bit.ly/ASQSE2UG) (<http://bit.ly/ASQSE2UG>) or read about [why social-emotional screening matters](http://bit.ly/WhySEScreen) (<http://bit.ly/WhySEScreen>).

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