


Building Blocks for Young Children

ECCC
Community
Coordinated
Child Care

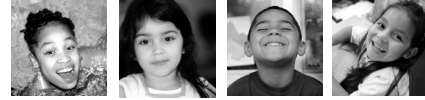


Building Emotional Intelligence



Tears rolled down three-year old Lizbeth's face as her mother left the classroom. Her classmate, Alexia, quietly sat down next to her and began feeding her doll. "Do you want to feed Lucy?" Alexia asked, turning to Lizbeth. "She's still hungry."

Alexia's compassion, understanding and desire to help her classmate demonstrates the development of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is the ability to understand our emotions and the emotions of others and use that information to help ourselves and others. For young children, the understanding of emotions can be very difficult. First, they must understand and identify how they themselves feel, what is causing their happiness or frustration, and then behave appropriately. Additionally, emotional intelligence means respecting the feelings of others, understanding their needs and sympathizing with them. Valuing and dealing with our emotions leads to happiness and success, a process that begins with young children and continues into adulthood.



The different components of emotional intelligence include:

Soothing Negative Emotions Emotions can be painful and young children often become overwhelmed by their emotions. They need help soothing themselves when they are hurt or upset. In time, they will learn how to internalize a parent's caring response to pain and crying. If a child is hurt, a parent should confirm that the pain exists and not tell a child "it doesn't hurt." Sympathy and concern should be shown when children are in distress. Young children also need words to express how they feel in order to develop control over their negative emotions.

Using Anger in a Positive Manner Anger can be positive or negative, productive or destructive. When a child is angry, he is uncomfortable with something happening to him. Children need help using the energy and power of anger to change their situation and get what they need. First, a child's anger must be recognized and identified by the parent. Give your child the words to ask appropriately for what he wants. Sympathize with his frustration. Finally, be clear that certain inappropriate or aggressive behavior will not lead to what he wants.

Naming Emotions Young children feel a variety of emotions and often do not understand how they feel or have the words to express themselves. Negative behavior often results when children do not understand how they feel. When a child does not name or understand his emotions, he may have trouble getting what he wants and acting in positive ways. An emotions wheel or chart with faces showing different expressions is often used to help children identify how they are feeling. Parents should give their children words to use, such as 'frustration', 'scared', 'angry' and 'nervous' so they can express and use their emotions in positive ways. In a group situation, classmates can be told, "Robert is feeling very sad today so let's try to help him feel better."

Understanding and Sympathizing with Others Understanding how others feel is very important in forming friendships and developing relationships with the people around us. Children can only learn how to sympathize with other people when understanding and sympathy is shown to them. Parents should talk about their own feelings. For example, "I had a very difficult day at work today and I am angry." or "I am happy because I spoke to an old friend today." Parents can help children understand another's emotions by teaching them how to respond to a child in distress. "Isaiah is angry because he is not playing with you. Why don't you ask him to join the game?"

Controlling Anxiety and Nervousness Children often face tremendous stress, leading to anxiety, insecurity and nervousness. Children need to learn that a specific problem is causing their anxiety and need help to figure out what needs to be fixed. A trusting, caring relationship is vital to help a child feel secure and protected. Parents guide the child to understand what is causing the problem, giving him words to express his thoughts. Calming techniques, such as deep breaths and relaxing muscles, are used to refocus a child and help him deal with a problem.

10 Ways to Develop Emotional Intelligence

1. Speak in a soft voice to comfort your child and calm the situation.
2. Use distraction to move your child from an upsetting situation to a state of calm.
3. Comforting words and practical help to face a difficult situation remind your child that he is loved.
4. Empathize with your child's feelings so he can better understand his feelings and learn to soothe himself.
5. A quiet environment helps a child who is overstimulated to relax and settle down.
6. Teach your child names for his feelings. Build your child's vocabulary for talking about what goes on inside of him.
7. Teach your child to problem solve and discuss the root of his emotions. His anger directed at a sibling may be caused by a problem earlier in preschool. Help your child figure out what he is angry about.
8. Teach your child calming techniques, like deep breathing. Preschoolers can pretend to blow up a balloon.
9. Teach your child to be assertive in positive ways, by asking instead of grabbing or by turning anger into words of explanation.
10. Limit your child's exposure to television and video games, especially those that contain violence and inappropriate language.



Simple Scenarios Involving Emotional Development

Jose was angry, grabbing toys from his younger sister, yelling at his mother and throwing his truck around the room. Tears streamed down his face when his mother told him to calm down.

Jose's mother took him to another room, calmly talking to him about his behavior. "What happened today that is making you so upset? Can you tell me why you are angry?" They spoke about preschool, what happened during the school day and how he could tell his mother about his problem.

Jessica cried Saturday afternoon because she had no one to play with at home. Her brother was at a friend's house and the other girls in the building were not at home. Her crying intensified until her father stepped in.

"Jessica, I know you feel sad because you wanted to play with Michael today and none of your friends are at home," he said. "Let's play a game now and then I can finish my chores. We can plan earlier to invite your friends over next Saturday to play."

Mitch doesn't understand why his friend Tony won't come out to play. He's not fun anymore, Mitch complains to his mom.

Mitch's mom explains that Tony is sad because his dad moved to a new apartment. "Tony really misses his dad and it may take awhile for him to feel like himself again. You should keep asking Tony to play and tell him when he is ready, you will be waiting for him. Just talk to him everyday and make sure he knows you are still his friend."



Signs of Atypical Behavior

All young children exhibit a wide range of emotions as they face daily situations. Anger and frustration go hand in hand with learning and growing. All children will have “meltdowns” at times, feel anxious and nervous or act aggressively. In preschoolers, separation from parents often causes stress.

Children who exhibit these behaviors on a regular, extended basis may need to be evaluated for atypical development. Often the difference in typical and atypical behaviors in young children is a matter of frequency, duration and intensity. How often does the negative behavior occur, once a week, or once an hour? Does the negative behavior last for a minute or two or most of the day? When the negative behavior occurs how bad is it? Does the child just push aggressively or does the child hit to injure someone else?

Parents should speak regularly with their child's teacher or child care provider to see if severe or negative behaviors exist in the classroom and if so, how the child's behavior is addressed. Strategies to address challenging behaviors at home or school may work in the other environment. If the behavior continues to raise concerns, parents should discuss it with their doctor and ask if a developmental assessment is necessary.

If you need additional information on typical development, or have concerns that your child may have special developmental needs, you can contact Union County Special Child Health Services at 908-889-0950 for an evaluation and consultation.



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