

Enhancing your Child's Social and Emotional Intelligence at Home

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Westport Social Skills Curriculum

Themes

- Establishing Classroom Community
- Friendship
- Problem-solving
- I Messages, e.g., “I feel _____ when you _____ because _____”
- Exploring your Uniqueness
- Diversity
- How to Handle Difficult Situations
- When to Tell a Responsible Adult

The Guiding Principles of *The Responsive Classroom Approach*

1. **The social curriculum is as important as the academic curriculum.**
2. How children learn is as important as what they learn
3. The greatest cognitive growth occurs through social interaction
4. To be successful academically and socially, children need to practice and learn specific social skills. Five particularly important skills are cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control (CARES).
5. Knowing the children we teach – individually, culturally, and developmentally- is as important as knowing the content we teach
6. Knowing the families of the children we teach is as important as knowing the children we teach
7. How we, the adults at school, work together is as important as our individual confidence: lasting change begins with the adult community.

Teaching Practices

Morning Meeting

- Greetings, share, group activity

Hopes and Dreams

- Students articulate academic or social goals for school that are realistic and obtainable

Rules and Logical Consequences

- Develop classroom rules
- Clear and non-punitive consequences
- Teaches responsibility and self-control

How can I reinforce skills at home?

- For children to demonstrate appropriate social skills, they need to be able to accurately perceive emotions, demonstrate empathy and problem-solving skills, and use appropriate language with peers and adults.
- Help foster your child's **emotional intelligence** outside of school.

What is Emotional Intelligence?

“The ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional meanings, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote better emotion and thought.”
(Goleman, 1995; Mayer & Salovey, 1997)

Why is Emotional Intelligence Important?

Children who are emotionally intelligent are able to:

- Regulate their emotional states
- Soothe themselves when upset
- Experience fewer infectious illnesses
- Focus attention better
- Relate to and understand other people, even in difficult social situations
- Develop friendships with other children
- Achieve better academic performance

(Gottman, 1997)

Emotion Coaching Strategies

- You are your child's most important role model!
- Using emotion coaching strategies can improve your child's emotional communication and social interactions with peers and adults
- Teaching your child ways to appropriately express and label feelings, regulate their emotional responses, and problem-solve

Step 1: Be Aware of Your Child's Emotions...

....as well as, be aware of your own, by developing your own self-awareness.

- Express your feelings in a respectful way
- Manage emotions to avoid losing control. If necessary, parents should “take a breather” and return to the situation when calm.
- All caregivers make mistakes. If a caregiver loses their temper, it is important to apologize and repair their interaction.

Step 2: Opportunities for Intimacy and Teaching

- Acknowledging emotions helps children learn skills to soothe themselves
- Negative feelings dissipate when children can talk about their emotions, label their emotions, and feel understood
- Addressing feelings that are “low in intensity” before the possibility of escalation allows for the opportunity to practice listening and problem-solving

Step 3: Listen Empathetically and Validate Your Child's Feelings

- Use your eyes to **watch for physical evidence** of emotions
- Use imagine to see situation from **child's perspective**
- Use **words to reflect back**, in a soothing, noncritical way, what you heard
- Caregivers should be attentive and use a relaxed manner when speaking. Remember, that **children can read body language!**
- **Sharing observations** may work better than probing questions to begin a conversation. For example, state, "You seem a little tired today," instead of, "Why do you feel sad?"
- **Share experiences** from your own life of when you've experienced certain emotions.

Step 4: Help Verbally Label Emotions

- Helps the child to transform uncomfortable feelings into something that is definable and a normal part of everyday life
- Labeling emotions can have a soothing effect on the nervous system, helping children to recover faster from upsetting events.
 - Children who can self-soothe “are more likely to concentrate better, have better peer relationships, higher academic achievement, and good health.”
- Help children find words to describe their feeling. Don't tell children how they should feel.
- Validate that it is ok for children to feel multiple emotions at the same time

Step 5: Reinforce Problem-Solving Skills

1. Identify Goals

- Empathize and label feelings. Ask open-ended questions, e.g., “Is it something that happened today?”
- Want help children reach the point to ask, “What am I going to do about this problem?”

2. Think of Possible Solutions

- Brainstorming process depends on child’s age and developmental level
- Role-play and fantasy may be helpful for younger children
- Discuss connection between possible solutions and their consequences

Step 5: Reinforce Problem-Solving Skills cont...

3. Evaluate Proposed Solutions Based on Your Family's Values

- Encourage child to think about each possible solution and ask:
 - Is this solution fair? Will this solution work? Is it safe?
 - How am I likely to feel? How are other people likely to feel?

4. Help Your Child Choose a Solution

- Assist child in choosing solution but be mindful that they also learn from mistakes.
- If a child chooses a solution and it fails, help him/her move onto another possibility. Discuss why initial solution did not work.
- After choosing a solution, develop a plan to follow through.

Emotion Coaching Tips

- Believe in the positive nature of human development
- Avoid excessive criticism, humiliating comments, or mocking
- Use scaffolding and praise to coach your child
- Ignore your “own agenda”
- Avoid “siding with the enemy”
- Think about the child’s experiences in terms of similar adult situation
- Don’t try to impose your solutions on your child’s problem
- Empower the child by giving choices and respecting wishes
- Be honest with your child
- Be patient with the process
- Understand your base of power

Importance of Playdates

- Compromise and negotiate with peers
- Initiate play and social interactions
- Explore the feelings and perspectives of others
- Develop and construct play routines and ideas of their own
- Expand communication skills and play
- Understand their own needs to prevent disruptions in peer interactions and play sequences

How can I foster playdates at home?

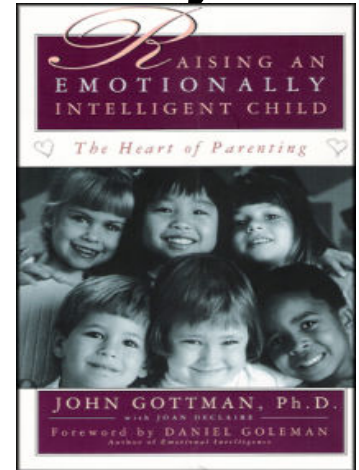
- Plan ahead: talk to your child
- Put away toys that are difficult to share
- Be mindful of timing
- Plan some activities ahead of time
- Observe your child's behavior
- Discuss the playdate with your child

References

Gottman, J. (1997). *Raising an emotionally intelligent child*. New York: Fireside.

Responsive Classroom:

www.responsiveclassroom.org



Practicing Social Skills at Home

- Importance of reinforcing learned skills in school
- Opportunity to model appropriate language, improve communication skills, foster self-awareness, and practice problem-solving skills

Exploring Your Child's Uniqueness

- Strengths and Weaknesses
- Hopes and Dreams
- Build self-efficacy skills and self-confidence
 - Importance of “process” not “product”
 - e.g., “I noticed that you ran so fast and worked cooperatively with your teammates during the lacrosse game today!”
 - Instead of focusing on winning or losing game

Communication Skills

- Importance of self-advocacy and assertiveness skills
- Expressing oneself in a clear and respectful tone
- Practice use of “I messages”
 - e.g., “I feel upset when you don't share with me because it hurts my feelings.”

Empathy

- Practice identifying and labeling feelings in self and others
- Perspective-taking skills
 - e.g., When reading at home, ask about how a story's character may feel and why.
- Consequences for both positive and negative behaviors toward others
 - e.g., Others will want to play with you if you treat them kindly

Friendship

- Importance of being able to calm down and communicate in a clear and respectful way
- Cooperation and Negotiation Skills
 - Sharing
 - Active Listening
 - Compromising

Problem-Solving Skills

1. Identify the problem without blame
2. Brainstorm solutions
3. Explore the consequences of each solution

e.g., If I did this, what would happen?

4. Pick the best solution and make a plan to execute it