

“I am the most important.”

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“I am.”

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“I am the most important person in my child’s life.”

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Yes, you are, and Early Start knows it. That’s why all our services are delivered in a way that supports that important first relationship between parent and child.

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*You care about your child’s health, development, and wellbeing. We care about providing you with the information, practical help, and emotional support you need to respond to their unique needs, abilities, and preferences.*

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Your relationship with your baby is the foundation of their *social and emotional development*. That’s the phrase used to describe a child’s ability to experience and express feelings, form relationships, and explore the world—the cornerstones of learning and development throughout life. This is true for **all** children, including those with delays and disabilities.

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- Making friends,
- Showing frustration and anger in healthy ways,
- Figuring out conflicts peacefully,
- Taking care of someone who has been hurt,
- Waiting patiently,
- Following rules, and
- Enjoying the company of others ...

These are **all** social and emotional skills your child will need as they grow into an adult. Young children learn and develop those skills through their connections with the important people in their lives. Your child’s connection to you will help them feel secure and confident to explore the world.

Let’s take a minute to learn a little bit about social and emotional development...

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Social and emotional development is comprised of five main factors:

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“Attachment” is the lasting emotional bond between a child and a few, specific caregivers, usually their parents. That bond is especially important for the child in times of stress.

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“Temperament” is the unique emotional personality of a child. They may be calm, quiet, and easy-going or they may be excitable, chatty, and easily upset. Know and respect your child’s temperament. It may be different from your own!

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Emotional expression refers to the different ways people show how they’re feeling. Smiling and laughing show someone is happy. Crying shows that someone is sad or hurt.

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Regulation is the ability to control how we behave and recover from strong emotions. It’s what helps us maintain focus and attention for learning and developing relationships with others.

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Social understanding involves recognizing the differences in and making sense of the behaviors and actions of other people. Children learn social understanding through their relationships and through engaging with you and other people in their lives.

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Young children are learning all the time, through everyday activities with the people they know, in the places they know. It only takes a few minutes throughout your child’s day to help them learn new social and emotional skills. Your Early Start team can help you see what’s already working and build new skills to support your child’s learning and development. Let’s look at some of the social and emotional skills seen in the very early years and think about how you can support your child to develop them.

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Young children learn to be comforted, sometimes by themselves and sometimes with help from others. For instance, some babies suck on their fingers or a pacifier to comfort themselves.

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When your child is upset, how do you respond to and soothe them? How do you help your child learn to calm?

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Help your young child understand their feelings by noticing and naming them: “I can tell you’re sad because you dropped your ice cream cone.”

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Young children use their senses to learn about people and things in their world.

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How do you “tune in” to your child’s world and try to imagine what they are experiencing?

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Talk and sing to your child. They will notice you!

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Young children show that they recognize the important people in their lives by smiling, getting excited, opening their eyes wide, or turning to that important person.

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How do you know when your child is happy to see you? How do you show your child you know how happy they are?

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Smile back.  
Hug them.  
Talk to them!

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Young children begin to see themselves as separate from other people. They begin to imitate others and to explore and try out new behaviors. They may also become upset around strangers or when their important adults aren't around.

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How do you talk about feelings with your child?

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Talk about your own and your child's feelings clearly and simply, in words your child will understand and begin to use. Give your child time to get to know new people and new situations.

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Young children begin to remember what specific feelings are, even when they are not feeling them at the moment. They are gaining a stronger sense of who they are and may begin expressing emotions strongly. You may hear "no" and "mine." Temper tantrums, hitting, and biting are typical expressions of strong emotions in toddlers.

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How do you encourage the behavior that you want to see from your child?

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Think of different, healthy ways to manage feelings.  
Deep breaths, counting to four, blowing bubbles, singing a song, silly dancing, or asking if your child wants a hug—are all good ways to handle strong emotions.

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Young children work out emotional questions and learn more advanced concepts through play.

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How do you play with your child?

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Playing builds relationships, supports the development of social skills (like sharing and taking turns), and builds thinking skills (like problem-solving). Play with your child... it's fun!

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Finally, it is always important to pay close attention to what your child likes and doesn't like, including people and situations. Learn to read your child's cues and moods. If your child is happy, keep doing what you are doing. If your child is upset, take a minute and comfort him. Be patient.

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Children learn the most from what other people do—especially you!

Parenting a very young child can be challenging and stressful, sometimes. Give yourself a break when you are having a hard time staying calm with your child. Be sure your child is safe and give yourself a minute or two to calm down when feelings are running high. You might say: "I need some time to think about how I can best help you."

Take care of your own emotional wellness. If you have stress, depression, or anxiety, it impacts your child. Get the help and support you need.

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Remember... your Early Start team is here to support you and your child. Contact them when you have questions or ideas.

We want to make sure that you and your child have the strong relationship that all children need to grow and learn!

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