

Building Your Child's Social & Emotional Skills

You know that reading with your child can help boost their literacy skills, but you might be stumped on ways to help them build life skills.

There are many ways you can facilitate your child's development beyond academics. You can help them develop social and emotional skills, like the ability to solve problems or how to use coping strategies when they face challenges.

Experts have shared several ways you can create opportunities for children to practice these skills every day.



Ask open ended questions. Rather than asking questions that could be answered in one word, like “How was your day?” try asking more thought-provoking questions that prompt your child to share something meaningful.

Examples:

- ★ What is something interesting that happened to you today?
- ★ What is something you learned that you were fascinated by?
- ★ What is something that you found challenging?

Offer choices within limits. Making decisions is a skill that gets better with practice. Offering choices about small aspects of your child's life may seem unimportant, but making these small decisions at an early age enhances executive function and uses the same parts of the brain they'll be using when they make bigger decisions down the road.

For younger children, these decisions may look like...

- ★ Choosing which vegetable (of the options in the kitchen) they would like with dinner
- ★ Picking which shirt they want to wear
- ★ Selecting what book they want to read at bedtime

For older ones, letting them make decisions that might have consequences may be scary, but it's equally, if not more important. These decisions may look like...

- ★ Picking what electives they want to take at school
- ★ Selecting extracurriculars they want to participate in
- ★ Choosing how they want to spend their free time outside of school

Building Your Child's Social & Emotional Skills

Practice using “feelings” words at home. Just as children have to practice learning and understanding new words, they also need to practice identifying and articulating their feelings. When you sense your child is experiencing an intense emotion, help them name what they are feeling.

Examples:

- ★ I see you have clenched your fists and your ears are red. I'm thinking you may be feeling angry. Does that sound correct to you?
- ★ It seems like you may be sad about what just happened. Does that feel right to you?
- ★ I'm curious if you're feeling worried about what you just saw on television. Is that how you are feeling right now?

Use everyday opportunities to help your child develop empathy and better understand others. Talk with your children about cultures, languages and religions that are different from your own and encourage your child to think about how others experience the world.

Ask your child “How do you think that person felt?” as you...

- ★ Read stories or watch movies together
- ★ Discuss their interactions with friends and family
- ★ Learn about history
- ★ Discuss current events

Develop healthy habits as a family. Health and nutrition are essential for your child's physical development and are closely connected to your child's social and emotional well-being.

Get started by...

- ★ Encouraging your child to participate in sports and other active hobbies
- ★ Discussing the importance of exercising safely, using sports equipment properly and wearing helmets and other protective gear
- ★ Serving nutritious, well-balanced meals and teaching your children about the types of foods they need to eat to fuel their bodies and their minds

Use mistakes as learning opportunities. When you receive a call home from your child's teacher or principal about how they acted up in class, fought with a peer or cheated on a test—no matter how you feel about your child's behavior—remember that everyone makes mistakes and teach your child take ownership for their actions.

When your child makes a mistake, consider asking them...

- ★ What motivated them to do what they did?
- ★ How did their actions affect others around them?
- ★ What can they do to make amends with the people or the community that they hurt?

Download the *Family Guide to Fostering Whole Child Development* to explore more resources for building your children's social & emotional skills at PTA.org/WholeChild.