

Playing Together

A child's social emotional development happens during interactions with adults. These behaviors include an infant smiling in response to a parent's voice or cooing in response to a grandmother rocking him in the chair. Toddlers use social behaviors such as saying "my turn" during a play activity; or laughing and saying "again" during an activity.

Learning Guide: Promoting Child Social Emotional Development

- It's important to give your child opportunities every day to participate in social play activities so she can learn positive social emotional behaviors. Social play activities include your-turn-my-turn interactions such as rolling a ball back and forth; joining in play with your child and following his lead; social games such as singing songs, finger plays, and pretend play; stacking blocks and knocking them down; and blowing bubbles.
- Joining in play with your child can be as simple as sitting beside your child and copying what he is doing. You can follow his lead by responding quickly and positively when he tells you what to do during social play. For example he may say, "Sit down" and give you a shovel when he wants you to sit with him and scoop sand from the sandbox. You can encourage your child to participate in social play activities anytime and anywhere. For example, singing songs while changing a diaper or during a ride in the car.
- Watch how your child plays and responds to you and other adults during everyday interactions. Notice what makes your child smile and laugh. What does she do to let you know she likes to interact with you? Does she ask for more, or lead you by the hand to a favorite toy or activity? Do you respond quickly and positively to her? Be sure to match your interactions to your child's preferences.
- Encourage your child to participate in different types of social play activities so he has many opportunities to practice using social behaviors.
- Encourage your child to use different social behavior to begin and continue interactions with you during adult-child play activities. For example, you may begin a game of bouncing your toddler on your lap by waiting for her to say "bounce" or for you to continue the game when she laughs and says "more".
- Respond in a positive manner when your child uses or tries to use a social behavior during a play activity. Be patient and know that it sometimes takes lots of practice for your child to learn social behaviors such as taking turns. You should model the behavior for your child many times throughout the everyday activities. Remember that a parent's timely and positive response is a powerful motivator for a child.

Watch a video of this Learning Guide

You'll know the practice is working if ...

- Your child enjoys participating in social games like pat-a-cake and peek-a-boo.
- Your child initiates social interactions with you and others.
- Your child participates in turn-taking activities.

A Quick Peek

Riley is a soft-spoken toddler who prefers to explore toys by himself. He spends most of the day with his mother looking at books, coloring, or dancing along to music. He points to objects he wants, but is not using words to communicate. His mother has been taking him to a Mommy and Me playgroup session twice a week. The teacher and Riley's mom have concerns about his participation during the sessions. He does not participate in activities with the other children or adults. His mom has tried to sit and play with him next to other children, but Riley cries for his mom to pick him up. After five minutes, Riley points to the door and gestures for his mother to take him home. His parents would like to see him participate in play time with other children. One weekend Riley's family went to visit with his grandma and cousin. Riley's mom thought about how much he loves music and had an idea. She asked Riley's cousin and grandma to play Ring Around the Rosie. Once they played the game two times and Riley saw how much fun they were having he was willing to join in. His father took



photos and videos with the phone and then let Riley watch it later when they returned home. Riley smiled and laughed while he watched the video of him playing Ring Around the Rosie with his mother, grandma, and cousin.

When Riley went to Mommy and Me playgroup the next week, he grabbed the teacher's hand and began moving. His mom explained that Riley wanted to play Ring Around the Rosie. So the teacher led the game with Riley and other children. He smiled and laughed and wanted to play it over and over. Since then Riley's mom and the teacher have introduced more social games and are discovering that he is having more positive interactions with other children.

Click here for more resources on social emotional competence:

- [Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention](#)
- [Zero to Three: Promoting Social Emotional Development](#)

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