

# My Social and Emotional Health

*Relationships are the key to a child's success in life.*

I will grow and change dramatically in my first few years. As a newborn, I will spend most of my time sleeping and eating. Then, as a toddler, I will want to explore every part of my world. I will also learn new words almost every day! This rapid growth can be exciting for caregivers, but exhausting at times. Many parents agree that a small child can make you feel frustrated one minute and fill you with delight only a minute later.

## Development of Emotions

Newborn babies have many skills that help them respond to caregivers; this is a time of developing trust. However, much of their behavior at this age is reflexive, like sucking, swallowing, blinking, or startling. Around 3 months of age, infants start to show signs of basic emotions like happiness, anger, sadness, and fear. Around 18 to 24 months, they can show more complex emotions like shame, embarrassment, guilt, and pride.

## Attachment

Attachment is a strong loving connection that children feel toward special people in their lives. Developing attachments to parents and caregivers creates security and allows a child to form trusting relationships. Attachment begins at birth for the child, and during the end of the pregnancy for parents (especially mom). By 2 to 4 months of age, children show strong attachments to their parents and other adults who care for them.



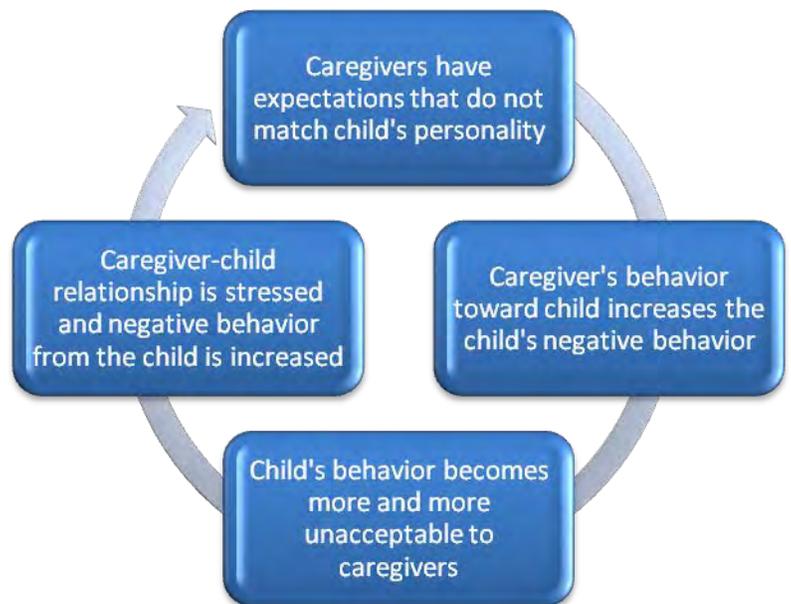
## Temperament

Temperament is the way a child approaches and reacts to life and the world. It is a basic part of their personality. According to research, most children fall somewhere along the line on each of the five categories shown in the diagram below. These temperament traits tend to stay the same over our lifetimes. However, development and relationships play a role in how we express and manage these traits.



## Goodness of Fit

The emotional balance or “fit” between a child, their environment, and their caregivers can have a big effect on social and emotional development. This is especially true of the values, expectations, and temperaments of parents and caregivers. If a caregiver’s expectations and ideas about how a baby should behave do not match the child’s temperament, their responses can increase a child’s negative behavior. As the negative behavior increases, the caregiver can become more frustrated. The graphic at right shows how a caregiver who doesn’t understand a child’s temperament can create a negative cycle that is difficult for everyone.



If parents tune in to their child and understand their temperament traits, they can avoid some struggles and enjoy an easier, happier relationship. The same cycle shown above can be positive if parents and caregivers understand the child’s temperament. This will develop a good fit between baby and adult—a win-win situation!

## Stages of Social and Emotional Development

### Stage 1 (Birth to around 3 months)

#### I will:

- calm or quiet to a soft loving voice or when picked up.
- suck my thumb, fingers, or pacifier to calm down.
- smile and reach for caregivers.
- begin to play with my toes, fingers, and hands.

### Stage 2 (3 to around 6 months)

#### I will:

- show basic emotions like happiness, anger, sadness, fear, and surprise.
- laugh and giggle.

#### What Am I Telling You?

*Do I become fussy, tighten my fists, or close my eyes when entering a loud or bright room? Try dimming the lights and holding me close until my body relaxes and I show I’m ready for more.*

- look for my favorite caregiver. I may become sad when they leave.
- become sad or cry when another child cries.
- begin to show an attachment to my favorite adults.

***My caregivers meet my social and emotional needs by:***

- recognizing my personality and temperament and accepting it.
- recognizing your own temperament. Understand how it may affect your relationship with me.
- using my natural routine to develop a relationship with me and to respond to my unique communication style.
- supporting me with a soft, calm, consistent voice when I am angry, frightened, or sad.
- giving me the words for my emotions. Say things like “You were surprised when that dog came close, weren’t you?”
- spending time with me to play, explore, and to simply be together.
- keeping my caregivers consistent. This will help me build strong, trusting relationships.

***Stage 3 (6 to around 12 months)***

***I will:***

- show fear when I see a strange object, animal, or person.
- start to understand that objects and people still exist even when I can’t see them.
- show a range of emotions.
- watch my caregiver and look to see what they are looking at.
- imitate others.
- take turns when talking and playing.
- show interest in other children.

***Stage 4 (12 to around 24 months)***

***I will:***

- recognize myself in a mirror.
- begin to see myself as separate from my parents or caregiver.
- play games with another person, like hide and seek or rolling a ball back and forth.
- have difficulty sharing toys.
- try to help another child who is sad.
- become upset or throw tantrums more often.



## Stage 5 (24 to around 36 months)

### I will:

- begin to play with others more often.
- begin to understand rules about what to do and what not to do.
- talk to my peers. I will also want to play with them.
- try to help or comfort others who are sad or need help.
- show more independence. I may argue with my parents and caregivers or challenge them.
- begin to use words to talk about how I feel.

### My caregivers meet my social and emotional needs by:

- talking with me and using words about my feelings. For example, say “You are sad that mommy went to work. Let’s find your blanket and read a book together.”
- providing a daily routine so I know what to expect.
- giving me time and a warning when we are going to do something different.
- helping me learn about sharing. Suggest ways to share, like “Sara really wants to play with that toy, can you give it to her when you are done?”
- providing many chances for me to play with my peers.
- playing lots of games with me that help me practice taking turns, like rolling a ball or hide and seek.



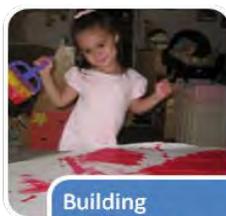
### Caring for Isabella

After 4 months in child care, Isabella’s caregiver learned that she needed time and support to join group activities. During classroom activities, she chose to sit near her caregiver with a blanket and family picture instead of joining. Then, after Isabella turned three, she stopped taking naps. Her caregiver noticed that, while her peers napped, Isabella showed interest in activities that she had not participated in with her peers. Her caregiver began preparing quiet activities for Isabella to explore during nap time. After a few weeks of exploring these activities on her own while her peers slept, Isabella began to participate in small groups and activities with the other children.



#### Beginning

- Individual activities
- Becoming familiar with routine



#### Building Confidence

- Beginning to feel a part of the group



#### Success!

- Playing with others
- Participating in routine activities

To learn more about social and emotional development, view the Resources and References found at the end of these materials.