

## Social and Emotional Development in childhood: Typical developmental stages

Key childhood developmental stages:

1. Infancy (0-18 months)
2. Toddlerhood (18 months to 3 years old)
3. Early Childhood (3 – 6 years)
4. Middle childhood (6-12)
5. Adolescence (12-18)

In terms of social and emotional development, here are some of the key developments in each stage:

**Infancy:** Infants start to develop emotional bonds with their caregivers and begin to show emotions such as happiness, sadness, and anger. They also start to show social preferences and can recognize familiar faces. **Attachment and bonding** is important.

**Toddlerhood:** Toddlers develop their sense of self and begin to understand the feelings of others. They may also start to experience and express a range of emotions through words and actions, including frustration and jealousy. This is an important period for the development of **self-awareness**.

**Early Childhood:** Children at this stage continue to develop their social and emotional skills. They learn to share, take turns, and play cooperatively with others. They also start to develop empathy and become more aware of social norms and expectations. **Empathy and perspective taking** is important at this stage.

**Middle Childhood:** Children at this stage continue to develop their social and emotional skills. They become more aware of their own emotions and the emotions of others. They also begin to form close friendships and may experience conflicts with peers. **Peer relationships and social norms** are developing.

**Adolescence:** Adolescents experience significant changes in their social and emotional development. They may experience intense emotions and mood swings, as well as challenges in forming and maintaining relationships. They also develop their sense of identity and may question societal norms and values. **Identity and independence** are important at this stage.

Each of these stages is important for a child's social and emotional development and lays the foundations for healthy relationships and emotional well-being in adulthood. It is important to note that these stages are not always linear or fixed and that individuals may experience different stages at different times in their lives.

Let's take a closer look at:

## **Toddlerhood**

Toddlerhood generally refers to the period between the ages of one and three and it is a critical time for social and emotional development. During this stage, toddlers go through significant changes in their ability to understand and interact with the world, to express their emotions and to form relationships.

Here are some key aspects of social and emotional development in toddlerhood:

### **1. Emotional Expression and Regulation:**

-Increased emotional range: Toddlers begin to express a broad range of emotions, including joy, anger, frustration and affection. Their facial expressions and body language become more varied.

- Temperament: Individual differences in temperament become more apparent, with some toddlers leaning towards being more “easy going” while others may seem to be more sensitive or intense.

-Emotional Regulation: Toddlers start to learn basic strategies for managing their emotions, usually with the help of their caregivers, e.g. they may seek comfort from a trusted adult when upset.

### **2. Social Interaction:**

-Imitation: Toddlers tend to enjoy imitating the actions and emotions of the people around them. This helps them to learn social norms and expectations.

- Parallel play: Toddlers engage in parallel play, where they play alongside other children. This is an early form of social play.

-Attachment: The attachment bond between toddlers and their caregivers continues to strengthen. Consistent and responsive caregiving builds a sense of security.

Empathy: Toddlers begin to show signs of empathy, such as comforting others when upset.

### **3. Language Development:**

- Expanding vocabularies: Toddlers' vocabulary expands rapidly. They start using words to express their feelings, which helps with emotional expression and understanding.

- Social cues: Language helps toddlers to understand social cues and to respond to simple social requests, e.g. They learn to say “Please” and “Thank you” with prompting.

#### **4. Independence and Autonomy (The NO! and I DO IT MYSELF! Stage)**

- Toddlers' Independence: Toddlers strive for independence. They want to do things by themselves, which can lead to moments of frustration at some times and pride when they achieve small tasks at other times.

- Negotiation skills: Toddlers begin to negotiate and assert their preferences, even though their language skills are still developing.

#### **5. Challenges and Tantrums:**

- Tantrums: Toddlers may experience temper tantrums as a way to cope with growing frustration. This is normal and often occurs as toddlers are struggling to communicate their needs and emotions effectively.

- Boundary testing: Toddlers test boundaries as they explore their world, which is a normal part of their development, as they seek to understand limits and consequences.

#### **6. Social Learning:**

Observational Learning: Toddlers learn by observing the behaviour of others, especially their caregivers. They imitate the actions and emotions they see.

Caregivers play a critical role in supporting toddlers' social and emotional development. Providing a secure and nurturing environment, offering consistent and loving care, and responding to their emotional needs helps toddlers to develop a strong foundation for future social and emotional development.

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Let's take a closer look at:

### **Early Childhood**

Early childhood is typically defined as the period from three to eight years and is a critical period during which children develop fundamental skills for building relationships, understanding emotions and navigating social situations.

Here are some key aspects of social and emotional development in early childhood:

#### **1. Emotional Development:**

- Emotional Vocabulary: Children expand on their emotional vocabulary, learning to label and express a wider range of emotions. This helps in understanding their own feelings and in empathising with others.

- Emotional Regulation: Children at this stage can develop strategies to manage emotions, such as deep breathing or seeking comfort from caregivers. This skill helps them to cope with frustration, anger or sadness.

- Empathy: Empathy at this stage becomes more sophisticated. Children can understand and share the feelings of others, leading to more compassionate interaction.

-Self-concept: Children develop a clearer sense of self, understanding their abilities, preferences, and roles within their social environment.

- Resilience: Children at this stage learn to cope with challenges and setbacks, fostering resilience when faced with difficult situations.

## **2. Social Skills:**

- Friendships: Forming and maintaining friendships becomes significant. Children learn cooperation, negotiation and problem solving through play and interaction with their peers.

- Conflict Resolution: Children develop basic conflict resolution skills, including sharing, turn taking and apologising. These skills are crucial for successful social interactions.

-Social Norms: Children grasp societal norms and manners, understanding what is acceptable behaviour. They learn politeness, waiting their turn and respecting personal space.

- Gender Roles: Understanding of gender roles and differences in social expectations starts to emerge, influenced by cultural and familial factors.

-Play skills: Play becomes more imaginative and cooperative. Group play helps in understanding social roles and enhances communication abilities.

## **3. Cognitive and Emotional Understanding:**

- Theory of Mind: Children begin to grasp the understanding that others can have different beliefs, desires and intentions, a crucial skills for successful social interactions.

-Understanding Complex Emotions: Children recognise more complex emotions like jealousy, pride and guilt. They learn how actions affect others' emotions.

-Moral Development: Children develop a basic understanding of moral concepts such as fairness and justice. Children develop an understanding of right from wrong and develop a basic moral compass.

## **4. Family and Peer Relationships:**

-Parental relationships: Children continue to strengthen their attachment to their caregivers, giving them a secure base for exploring the world.

-Peer Interactions: Interactions with peers become more sophisticated. Children at this stage engage in imaginative play, share experiences and form bonds with specific friends.

## **5. Self-identity and self-esteem:**

Self-Concept: Children develop a sense of self, understanding their own abilities, attributes and characteristics. Positive reinforcement and encouragement significantly influence the development of a healthy self-concept.

Self-Esteem: Positive experiences, encouragement and support from caregivers and peers contribute to the development of self-esteem. Children who feel loved and valued have higher self-esteem.

In early childhood, social and emotional development is interconnected with cognitive and physical growth. Positive and nurturing environments, both at home and in educational settings, play a crucial role in fostering health social and emotional development. Encouragement, positive reinforcement and opportunities for social interaction contribute significantly to a child's emotional intelligence and social competence.

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Let's take a closer look at:

### **Middle Childhood**

Middle childhood, typically defined as the period between the ages of 6 and 12 years old, is a time of significant social and emotional development. During this period, children become increasingly independent and self-sufficient, and their social worlds expand to include more peers and adult figures beyond their family.

Here are some key aspects of social and emotional development in middle childhood:

1. **Self- concept:** Children's self-concept becomes more complex and nuanced during middle childhood. They start to define themselves based on a variety of factors, including their abilities, interests, and social groups.
2. **Peer relationships:** Middle childhood is marked by the increasing importance of peer relationships. Children form close friendships with peers who share their interests and values, and they may start to experience social hierarchies and cliques.
3. **Empathy and perspective-taking:** Children's ability to understand others' perspectives and empathize with them becomes more sophisticated during middle childhood. They may begin to understand more complex social situations and be better able to navigate social conflicts.
4. **Emotional regulation:** As children encounter more complex social situations and emotions, they continue to develop their emotional regulation skills. They may learn new coping strategies, such as taking a break to calm down, and become more aware of their own emotional states.
5. **Moral development:** Middle childhood is an important time for the development of moral reasoning and understanding of social norms. Children start to understand the importance of fairness, honesty, and kindness, and may be more likely to follow rules and respect authority figures.
6. **Gender identity:** Children's understanding of gender roles and expectations continues to develop during middle childhood. They may start to understand gender stereotypes and may become more aware of gender differences in behaviour and appearance.
7. **Bullying:** Unfortunately, middle childhood is also a time when bullying can become more prevalent. Children may experience teasing, exclusion, or physical aggression from peers, which can have significant negative impacts on their social and emotional development.

Overall, middle childhood is a significant period of growth and change in social and emotional development. Children become more independent, form close friendships with peers, and

continue to develop important social and emotional skills. Parents, caregivers, and educators can support this development by fostering positive relationships, modelling prosocial behaviours, and providing opportunities for children to develop and practice their social and emotional skills.

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Let's take a closer look at:

### **Adolescence**

Adolescence is a period of significant social and emotional development, as young people navigate the challenges of transitioning from childhood to adulthood. During this time, adolescents experience changes in their relationships, sense of self, and emotional regulation. Here are some ways in which social and emotional development unfolds during adolescence:

1. **Peer relationships:** Peer relationships become increasingly important during adolescence, as young people seek to establish their identity and form close bonds with others outside of the family. Adolescents may experience a range of emotions related to peer relationships, including excitement, anxiety, and social stress.
2. **Sense of self:** Adolescents are also developing their sense of self, including their values, beliefs, and goals. This process can be challenging, as young people struggle to balance their desire for autonomy with their need for social connection and acceptance.
3. **Emotional regulation:** Adolescents also experience changes in their emotional regulation, as they learn to manage the intensity of their emotions and cope with stress and adversity. Adolescents may be more susceptible to experiencing negative emotions such as anxiety and depression, and may need support and guidance in developing healthy coping strategies.
4. **Identity formation:** Adolescence is also a time of identity formation, as young people begin to explore different aspects of their identity, including their gender, sexuality, and cultural identity. This process can be challenging, as adolescents grapple with societal expectations and navigate conflicting values and beliefs.
5. **Parent-child relationships:** Adolescence can also be a time of strain on parent-child relationships, as young people assert their independence and parents struggle to find a balance between supporting their child's autonomy and maintaining boundaries and guidance.

It is important to recognize that social and emotional development is a complex and multifaceted process, and that multiple factors are likely to interact to influence outcomes. Supporting positive social and emotional development during adolescence requires a holistic approach that takes into account a wide range of factors, including those related to individual differences, family dynamics, and broader social and cultural contexts. Encouraging healthy communication, promoting positive coping strategies, and supporting young people in developing a strong sense of self and purpose can all contribute to positive social and emotional outcomes during adolescence.

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