

DEVELOPING SOCIAL SKILLS IN UNDER 5'S...



Practical tips for helping tamariki develop the skills to interact with others and build friendships.

IN THIS RESOURCE:

- What is social development?
- What to expect from each age and stage
- Why is social development so important?
- How you can help build social skills
- Conflict resolution

WHAT IS SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT?

Social development refers to the process by which children learn to interact with others and the social world around them. It is about how children develop and maintain relationships and friendships, as well as how well they navigate conflicts within those relationships.

From birth to 5 years, children undergo significant cognitive growth and the development of social skills is a large part of this. Whereby a one-year-old may play independently or cling to a parent/caregiver, a 3 year old may begin to initiate interactive games with other children and be more aware of others emotions.

The following pages will look at what can be expected in terms of social development throughout the different ages and stages and what you can do to aid these stages of your child's development.

Remember, this is just a guide and each child will differ depending on their own unique personality and temperament.



WHAT CAN I EXPECT FROM MY CHILD AT EACH AGE?

BIRTH - 6 MONTHS:

- Will cry to get express needs
- Beginning to smile, may smile in response to caregiver

6-9 MONTHS:

- More aware of familiar and unfamiliar people
- May begin to express separation or stranger anxiety
- Can respond to other people's emotions by crying smiling or laughing
- Enjoy looking at themselves in the mirror
- Beginning to explore different toys

12-18 MONTHS:

- Will have 'favourite' people
- May cry when familiar people aren't around
- More interactive with toys, i.e. may hand you a toy or book
- Starting to enjoy simple interactive games like peek-a-boo

18 MONTHS - 2 YEARS

- Will have more temper tantrums and begin to push boundaries
- May be starting to enjoy simple pretend play games such as imitating adults
- Likely to play alongside others (parallel play) but not yet interactively (co-operative play)

3 - 4 YEARS

- Starting to show and verbalise a wider range of emotions
- More interested in pretend play but may still be confused about what is and isn't real
- Play with other children and separate from caregivers more easily
- Are spontaneously kind and caring

5 YEARS +

- Enjoys playing with other children
- More independent from caregivers
- Tests boundaries
- Understands what it feels to be embarrassed



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WHY IS SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT SO IMPORTANT?

Studies have shown that effective social development can have a significant impact on many other areas of a child's development. Some of these areas include:

Language: Interacting with other children provides increased opportunities for kids to practice their speech and language skills.

Self-esteem: Developing the skills to communicate effectively with others and build a strong friendship group reaffirms the child's sense of comfort with their individuality and their sense of belonging in their social world.

Learning ability: As well as increasing language skills, research has shown that the ability to build and maintain social connections can help children settle better into the school environment and increase their chances of academic success.

Conflict resolution: The language skills and self-esteem that are built through developing social skills, are both important factors in effective conflict resolution.

Attitude: Healthy social development and social relationships can help your child develop a positive world view.



HOW CAN I HELP BUILD MY CHILDS SOCIAL SKILLS?

BIRTH - 2 YEARS:

- Respond to your infants needs promptly
- Make a lot of eye contact with your baby, get down to their level when you interact with them
- Talk to your baby, pause and give them time to respond like you would in any other conversation
- Play games such as copycat and peek a boo, with both words and actions. Peek a boo can actually reduce the amount of anxiety a baby will experience as they get older, as it teaches them that you will come back even after you disappear
- Involve your baby in your daily activities such as running errands and social outings. This is a great way of modelling positive social behaviour to your baby
- Arrange playdates so your child has opportunities to be around other children.

2-5 YEARS:

- Allow your child opportunities to explore independently
- Demonstrate your love for your child through language and by showing physical affection; this also helps to teach the child effective ways of expressing their own emotions
- Play with your child as a peer; this will help develop skills for co-operative play
- Continue to provide social opportunities for your child such as play dates and group outings
- Model social skills through your own relationships and friendships.



CONFLICT RESOLUTION

As parents/caregivers, we often expect our tamariki to adhere to the same social practices that we as adults do. Sometimes these expectations exceed our children's developmental abilities. One of the more common situations that parents/caregivers do this in is during conflict.

Telling a child to say "I'm sorry" to resolve a conflict is common practice with pre-schoolers. It's how we as adults would do it, so we expect the same of our tamariki. However, children don't actually understand the concept of 'sorry' until about age 4 or 5. A more effective approach is to explain to your child how their actions may have affected others, e.g., "can you see that Amy is feeling sad that you hit her?" This aids in the development of empathy and teaches the child to feel genuine remorse. As they get older, they will be more likely to apologise of their own accord and genuinely mean it. Ultimately, children learn most of their social skills based on what they see around them. So modelling effective conflict resolution is the most effective way to help your children develop their own conflict resolution skills.

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