



**COLORADO**  
Office of Early Childhood  
Department of Human Services

## PROMOTING SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Social, emotional and behavioral health begins at birth and lays a foundation for children to:

**MANAGE EMOTIONS • HAVE POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS**  
**RESOLVE CONFLICTS PEACEFULLY • TAKE CARE OF OTHERS**

Children begin learning these skills from birth as they build attachments and trust with caregivers, learn how to calm themselves down, and later, to recognize emotions.

Just like other skills, children develop social and emotional abilities gradually - and they need plenty of support from adults as they learn.

Nurturing our children's social and emotional needs from birth helps ensure they will have good mental health throughout their lives.

We all have mental health - even babies! And just as physical health enables us to have the energy we need to work and live our lives, mental health allows us to have positive relationships with others, cope with life's challenges, and manage our emotions.

Just as we take care of our children's physical health - with healthy food, plenty of sleep and regular check-ups - we must also take care of their mental health by supporting their social-emotional development.

### BUT HOW?

Loving relationships with you and other adults are the foundation of children's healthy social-emotional development.

Positive relationships help children feel secure and encouraged. Through relationships we can teach children to understand and express their feelings, develop compassion for other people, and learn the difference between right and wrong. These social and emotional skills prepare children for success in school and throughout their lives.



## 3-5 YEARS

Children age 3-5 years are making friends and learning how to help, share, take turns and resolve problems - but they still need lots of reminders and support. At this age children are better able to control their feelings and impulses but they still need practice. They are able to follow simple rules and predict routines. They are also able to follow directions with two steps (“Go to the closet and get your coat so we can go outside”).

### TRY THESE TIPS:

- Talk about his feelings, your feelings, and others’ feelings
- Help her see how her actions affect other people and help her resolve conflicts (“How did Daniel feel when you took his toy? What can you do to make him feel better?”)
- Be a role model for how to interact with others (try taking turns playing with a toy)
- Play games to practice controlling impulses (try “freeze dancing” - dance until the music stops and then “freeze” until it starts again)
- Stay calm, even if she is not; keep her close to make sure she doesn’t hurt herself or others when she is upset; when she is calm, talk about why she felt that way
- Give children lots of support, encouragement and love every day
- Read books and talk about how the characters feel and why
- Show and talk about ways that are OK to express emotions (like dancing, hitting a pillow, squeezing play dough, talking to an adult)
- Stick with daily routines - keep bedtime the same every night, do the same order of things before bedtime (pajamas, brush teeth, read a book)
- Tell her rules in words she can understand and tell her why the rule is important
- If he needs help, show him and then let him try it himself
- Play “follow the leader” to help children learn to follow directions

**Challenging behavior - or acting out - is how children communicate that their social and emotional needs are not being met. Parenting is hard, and all families need help to prepare their children for success in school and beyond. It’s normal to have questions and concerns about your child’s development and behavior.**

### THERE ARE SUPPORTIVE RESOURCES IN YOUR COMMUNITY:

Talk to your child’s health provider, child care provider, or other early childhood professional. Visit [earlylearningco.org](http://earlylearningco.org) to get practical tips and fun ideas to support children’s learning. Visit [coloradoofficeofearlychildhood.com](http://coloradoofficeofearlychildhood.com) to learn about social-emotional development and community resources.



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