

# Building Social and Emotional Skills at Home



Our classroom is a busy place where your preschooler is learning all sorts of things, including social and emotional skills such as how to express feelings and how to work together with classmates on a project. Most of the time the classroom is a happy place where the children enjoy playing and learning together. Occasionally, however, teachers need to step in to help children resolve conflicts. We often use puppets to talk with children about these conflicts or other problems and to help them think about solutions. In our experience, children are eager to tell their fears and feelings to one of the puppets.

You can use puppets at home, too. They are a great way to introduce your child to feeling words like *happy*, *sad*, *angry*, and *excited*. Puppets can also help in discussions about challenging topics, like getting to bed on time. Here are some other suggestions for helping your child develop social and emotional skills.

**Think out loud.** When your child hears your thinking process, it helps her understand how to cope with frustration and solve problems: “Whoops. My favorite shopping bag has a hole in it. I’d better take another one with me to the grocery store.”

**Read bedtime stories.** There is something magical about this end-of-the-day routine that makes it the ideal time for talking about feelings. Discuss the characters and events in the story. Invite your child to share his or her thoughts and feelings by asking questions: “What do you think he should do? How do you think she feels? What would you do if you were this character?”

**Do a job together.** Instead of asking your child to do a chore alone, do it with her. The two of you might fold laundry, set the table, rake leaves, or paint a wall. Help your child join in by shortening the handle of a broom to make it child-size or providing a small paintbrush or roller.

**Play games.** Card and board games and outdoor games such as tag or hopscotch offer built-in opportunities for helping children learn to take turns, cooperate, handle frustration, and more. While playing games together, focus on fun instead of winning or losing.

**Prevent potential problems.** Before a friend comes to play, help your child put away toys he does not want to share. Before taking a bus to the zoo, provide a step-by-step explanation of what you will do: “We will wait at the bus stop for 5 minutes, then get on the bus and sit together and watch the sights go by for about 30 minutes [explain this as the length of one episode of a favorite TV show]. Then we will walk three blocks to the zoo and tour the lion house before anything else!” During the trip remind your preschooler of what will happen next.

**A message from your child's teacher**