

# Social and Emotional Activities



## Development and Behavior Toolkit for Children Birth to 5

Activities to Support Healthy Early Child Development

For more information, please contact the Cincinnati LEND program at [LENDTraining@cchmc.org](mailto:LENDTraining@cchmc.org)



# Social and Emotional Activities



# Social & Emotional Activities:

## 0 - 6 months

- Cuddle, talk, and play with baby while feeding, dressing, or bathing.
- Respond to baby's cries. If not hungry or in need of a diaper change, try swaddling, rocking, singing, or taking baby for a walk.
- If baby cries, respond and comfort him/her and try to find out what he/she needs. Whisper in the ear to quiet him/her. Hold baby close and make soft sounds. The baby is letting you know something with his/her cry. When you respond, the baby learns to trust you are there. You cannot spoil your baby at this age.
- Help baby calm themselves by guiding his/her fingers to his/her mouth, giving a pacifier, or offering a favorite blanket or soft object.
- Learn baby's special rhythms and try to settle into routines, such as sleeping at night more than during the day. Be predictable and consistent when you interact with baby.
- Hold baby, sing songs, gently dance, and/or put your face close to his/hers. Make silly faces. Smile at your baby. Stick out your tongue. Yawn. Wait a few seconds and see if baby tries to repeat your actions back to you.
- Bath time is a wonderful time to have fun and be close to your baby.



# Social & Emotional Activities:

## 0 - 6 months

- Use “reciprocal” play - smile when baby smiles and copy their sounds.
- Step back from baby so he/she cannot see you. Gently call his/her name. Watch what he/she does. Does he/she stop moving for a moment? Does he/she try to move his/her head toward your voice? Pick the baby up. Say, “Here I am,” or “You are safe.”
- Talk to baby about what he/she is doing, seeing, hearing, and feeling. Say, “I am changing your diaper. You will like being nice and dry. I love you!”
- Pay attention to what baby likes and doesn't like so that you can figure out what baby needs and how to make him/her happy.
- Get down on the floor with baby and play at their level. Look at toys, books, or objects together. Have fun, laugh, and enjoy your time together.
- Bring baby to new places to see new things. Go on a walk to a park or the mall. He/she will love to see new things while you keep him safe.
- Use baby's name when you dress, feed, and diaper him/her. Visit a friend who has a baby or young child. Stay close and let him/her know that these new people are okay. It takes a little time to warm up.



# Social & Emotional Activities:

## 7 - 12 months

- Be available, responsive, and gentle with baby. Give lots of hugs and kisses.
- Continue with routines - which are especially important now - so that baby feels safe and secure.
- Pay attention to how baby reacts to new situations and people and try to do things that help him/her feel comfortable and happy.
- Stay close while baby explores and moves around so he/she knows that you are near.
- Play games like "my turn, your turn."
- Say what you think baby is feeling, for example, "You are sad, so we are going to try and help you feel better."
- Ask for behaviors that you want ("time to sit") rather than telling baby what not to do ("don't hit").
- Encourage baby's wanted behaviors rather than punishing unwanted behaviors. Give four times more encouragement than correction.
- Help baby learn limits by saying "no" in a firm quiet voice.
- Provide baby with choices.



# Social & Emotional Activities:

## 7 - 12 months

- Give baby time to get to know a new caregiver - bring a favorite toy, blanket, or stuffed animal to help comfort them in a new situation.
- Include baby at mealtimes.
- Play on the floor with baby every day. Crawl around with him/her, or just get down and play on their level. Roll a ball back and forth and clap if they push back.
- Play gentle tickle games with baby, but make sure to stop when he/she lets you know they have had enough. Watch carefully and respond to their clues.
- Dance to music with baby. Hold his hands while he bends up and down.
- When you are dressing or diapering baby, talk about his/her body parts and point out your body parts. Say, "Here is Daddy's nose. Here is Destiny's nose."
- Go on a walk to a park or a place where children play. Let baby watch them and visit a little if he/she is ready.



# Social & Emotional Activities:

## 13 - 18 months

- Provide a safe, loving environment; be consistent and predictable. Give the toddler lots of hugs and kisses and give praise for good behavior.
- Set limits that are firm, fair, and consistent. Encourage the toddler's wanted behaviors rather than punishing or correcting unwanted behaviors. Give four times more encouragement than correction.
- Describe the toddler's emotions - "You are mad when we have to leave the park." Make different faces in the mirror (happy, sad, etc.).
- Encourage the toddler to have empathy - for example, to hug or pat another child who is sad.
- Toddlers like to have a regular daily routine. Talk to him/her about what you are doing now and what will be happening next. Give him/her time to be active and time to be quiet.
- Have a pretend party with stuffed animals or dolls. You can cut out little "presents" from a magazine, make a pretend cake, and sing the birthday song.



# Social & Emotional Activities:

## 13 - 18 months

- Toddlers need a lot of time to move around and exercise. Go for a walk, visit a playground.
- Dance with the toddler. Make a simple instrument out of a large plastic food tub (for a drum) or a small plastic container filled with beans or rice (for a shaker).
- Let the toddler help with daily tasks. Give him/her simple "jobs" to do and provide praise. He/she can wipe off a table, put toys away, or help sweep up.
- Set up playdates with other children. Children don't understand how to share yet, so make sure there are plenty of toys. Stay close by and help him/her learn how to play with other children.
- Storytimes, especially before naptime and bedtime, are a great way to settle down before sleep. Let the child choose books to read and help turn pages. Encourage the child to name what he/she sees.





# Social & Emotional Activities:

## 19 - 24 months

- Be calm and comforting during and after temper tantrums.
- Give the toddler lots of hugs and kisses and give specific praise for good behavior, like "Great job holding my hand!"
- Be consistent with what the toddler can and cannot do.
- Use words to describe the toddler's emotions - "You are happy when we visit the library." Help the toddler label their feelings. "You seem mad".
- Encourage the toddler to have empathy - to hug/pat a child who is sad.
- Arrange playdates for the toddler to play with other children; have lots of toys to play with because toddlers are still learning to share.
- Give the toddler simple tasks to do to help around the house, such as sweeping and helping with dinner. Give praise for being a good helper.
- Play Parade or Follow the Leader with the child.
- Try to keep to set routines during the day, and let your child know what will be happening next. Say, "Remember, after we brush your hair, we get dressed."



# Social & Emotional Activities:

## 19 - 24 months

- Have a special reading time every day with the toddler. Before bedtime or naptime is a great time to read together.
- Give the child choices but keep them simple. Let the toddler choose a red or a blue shirt while dressing and choose between milk or juice at lunchtime.
- Encourage the child to pretend play. Put a few small chairs in a row to make a “bus.” Ask, “Where will we go today?”
- Teach the child simple songs and finger plays, such as “The Itsy-Bitsy Spider.”
- Get down on the floor and play with the child. Try to follow your child's lead by playing with toys they choose and trying their ideas.



# Social & Emotional Activities:

## 2 - 3 years

- Give the child directions that have two steps. Say, "Put LEGOs in the box, and then put the box in the closet."
- Make a "Me Book" with the child. Take some pieces of paper and glue in pictures of the child, family members, pets, or other special things. Tape/staple the pages together.
- Let the child help when you are cooking and cleaning. Children can do things such as putting flour in a cup or putting away spoons and forks in the drawer.
- Let the child do more things for him/herself, like putting on own shoes and coat. Make sure you give children plenty of time!
- Most children love to imitate. Try new words, animal sounds, and noises, and see if the child can repeat what you say or how you sound.
- Encourage creative play, such as drawing with crayons, painting, and playing with Play-doh. Playing with chalk on the sidewalk is fun.
- Schedule a playdate with another child. Keep it short, such as 1 or 2 hours. Have some playtime with enough toys for two, snack time, and some outdoor play.
- Play with the child and help them learn how to share. Show the child how to share and offer praise when they share with you.



# Social & Emotional Activities:

## 2 - 3 years

- Set limits and be consistent with what the child can and cannot do; give praise for following the rules.
- Talk about the child's emotions; encourage them to identify the feelings of others or characters in books. Support the child to express feelings safely.
- Help the child solve a problem when upset.
- At mealtimes, encourage others, like peers or family members, to talk about their day and include the toddler. Say, "Latoya and I went to the park today. Latoya, tell your sister what we did."
- Give the child directions that have at least two steps when doing things like cooking, dressing, or cleaning. Say, "Put that pan in the sink, and then get the red spoon."
- Tell silly jokes with the child. Simple "What am I?" riddles are also fun. Have a good time and laugh with your child.
- Play games that involve following simple rules, such as Mother May I and Red Light, Green Light.
- Create a pretend argument between stuffed animals or dolls. Talk with the child about what happened, feelings, and how best to work out problems when they come up.



# Social & Emotional Activities:

## 4 years

- Play make-believe with the child - let them be the leader and choose what you will play.
- Say positive things; praise the child and what they are doing.
- Set limits and be consistent with what the child can and cannot do.
- Encourage the child to use words, share toys and take turns playing games of one another's choice.
- Help the child prepare for something new using pretend play about what they might be nervous about.
- Let the child solve problems when playing with friends but be nearby to help out if needed.
- Provide opportunities for the child to be creative.
- When doing house/yard work or clean up time, allow the child to do a small part on their own. Let them empty the wastebasket or clean the crumbs off the table.



# Social & Emotional Activities:

## 4 years

- Introduce a new feeling each day, such as boredom. Use pictures, gestures, and words. Encourage the child to use a variety of words to describe how they feel.
- Encourage activities that involve sharing, such as building with blocks, coloring with crayons, and playing dress up. Teach the child how to ask a friend for a turn. Give him/her a lot of time to play with other children.
- Take the child to the library for story hour. Children can learn about sitting in a group and listening to stories.
- Use stuffed animals to act out an argument. Talk first about how the different animals are feeling. Then, talk about different ways to come to an agreement.



# Social & Emotional Activities:

## 5+ years

- Gently and consistently help your child manage feelings to prevent unsafe behavior.
- Give the child opportunities to play with other children and work out disagreements during play.
- Praise the child for desired behavior, such as asking for things nicely and calmly taking “no” for an answer.
- Encourage imagination through play and encourage working together. Build a store, house, puppet stage, or fire truck out of old boxes.
- Ask the child their birthday, telephone number, and first and last name. Practice what they would do if they were separated from their grown up.
- Talk about real dangers (fire, cars) and make-believe dangers (monsters under the bed) using hand-drawn pictures or pictures cut out from a magazine.
- Tell the child a favorite nursery rhyme that involves the idea of “right” and “wrong.” Discuss what kinds of choices the characters made in the story.
- Play games with the child such as Go Fish, Checkers, or CandyLand. Board games or card games that have three or more rules are great.
- Show the child examples of people from different cultures. Talk about things that are the same or different between them and others.

