

Signs of Social and Emotional Well-Being for Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers

Infant/Toddler

From birth to age 3 months

Looks at faces
Listens to voices
Quiets when picked up (the majority of the time)
Cries, smiles and coos

From 3 to 6 months Parent or Caregiver

Gives warm smiles and laughs
Cries when upset, and seeks comfort
Can be comforted (the majority of the time)
Likes to look at and be near special person(s)
Shows excitement by waving arms and legs

From 6 to 9 months Parent or Caregiver

Plays games like “patty cake”
Responds to own name
Enjoys a daily routine and transitions from situation to situation with relative ease and needs
May get upset when separated from familiar person(s)
Unsure of strangers
May comfort self by sucking thumb or holding special toy or blanket

From 9 to 12 months

Able to be happy, mad and sad
Shows feelings by smiling, crying, pointing
Has a special relationship with parents and caregivers
Is curious about playthings
Imitates others
Enjoys books
Trusts that needs will be met

From 12 to 18 months

Safe and secure in loving relationships
Curious about people
Explores with enthusiasm
Bold and confident
Says “mama,” “dada,” and up to eight additional words (and some two-word sentences) by 18 months
Uses words for feelings: happy, sad, mad
Responds to changes in daily routine

From 18 to 24 months

Laughs out loud
Loving toward others
Plays beside other children
Enthusiastic
Protests and says “No!”
Curious and likes to explore people, places and things
Enjoys books, stories and songs

Recommended Actions

Parent or Caregiver

Looks lovingly at baby
Talks and sings to baby
Touches baby gently
Picks up and soothes crying baby
Reads with baby

Holds baby when feeding
Shares baby’s smiles and laughter
Notifies and pays attention to baby
Responds to baby’s cries and coos
Holds and reads to baby
Plays lovingly with baby

Takes pleasure in games with baby
Talks to baby in gentle voice
Is predictable and consistent
Watches and knows what baby wants
Reads with baby
Sings songs and says nursery rhymes to baby

Parent or Caregiver

Names feelings like happy, mad, sad
Is available, responsive, gentle and protective of baby
Talks, sings songs and says rhymes to baby
Encourages baby to explore
Reads books with baby

Parent or Caregiver

Offers safe and trusting relationship
Shows interest in toddler
Is loving toward toddler
Talks, listens and responds to toddler
Reads, sings songs and plays with toddler
Uses words to tell toddler “what comes next”

Parent or Caregiver

Shares in toddler’s laughter
Loving toward toddler
Encourages curiosity
Celebrates what toddler does
Sets limits that are firm, fair and consistent
Responds evenly and respectfully with toddler
Reads, talks, listens, plays and sings to toddler

From 24 to 30 months

Uses words to communicate
Playful with others
May be shy in unfamiliar places
Likes people
Uses pretend play
Smiles and laughs
Enjoys lots of different books and simple games

Parent or Caregiver

Talks to toddler and uses words for feelings
Supports toddler's play
Helps toddler feel comfortable
Enjoys toddler and plays simple games
Encourages imaginary play
Reads to toddler every day
Praises and encourages toddler

From 30 to 36 months

Able to play independently
Easily separates from primary caregivers in familiar places
Begins to share with others without difficulty
Shows feelings for others
Expresses many feelings: sad, happy, frightened, angry
Enjoys books and games

Parent or Caregiver

Encourages toddler to play independently
Helps toddler to separate
Helps toddler to share with others
Helps toddler to use words for feelings
Listens and responds to toddler's feelings
Disciplines positively and consistently
Tells stories, reads and encourages pretend play

From Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning <http://csefel.uiuc.edu>

Warning signs for potential social-emotional concern

Parents and other caregivers will need information, consultation and referral if the infant ...

- Resists holding
- Is difficult to comfort or console; has prolonged inconsolable crying
- Has sleeping or eating difficulties (sleeps or eats too much or too little)
- Is failing to thrive
- Rarely seeks or makes eye contact, or typically avoids eye contact with parents
- Appears unresponsive to efforts to interact or engage
- Rarely coos, babbles or vocalizes
- Has limited ability to regulate emotions

Parents and other caregivers will need information, consultation and referral if the toddler or preschooler ...

- Shows little preference for or excessive dependence on the parent(s) or other primary caregiver
- Does not show any apprehension about strangers
- Appears excessively irritable or fearful
- Has an inappropriate or limited ability to express feelings
- Lacks interest or curiosity about people or playthings
- Fails to explore his or her environment
- Often appears sad and withdrawn
- Has inappropriate sexual behavior
- Has inappropriate impulsive or aggressive behavior
- Has excessive fears that do not respond to reassurance
- Experiences frequent night terrors
- Has extreme and frequent tantrums
- Experiences significant language delays
- Exhibits unusual need for order or cleanliness

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