



TRANSITION TO SCHOOL: PARENT INITIATIVE

Looking forward

Parent and carer booklet 4



www.kidsmatter.edu.au/transition

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Social and emotional learning

School is not only about reading, writing and arithmetic. It is also about making friends, learning how to work with others and to be more responsible. As your child moves through school, new demands are placed upon them and it is their social and emotional skills that will help them to manage and cope with these new demands and challenges.

What is social and emotional learning?

Social and emotional learning (SEL) includes learning about how to:

- Recognise and manage one's feelings
- Get along well with others
- Cope with frustrations or worries
- Make decisions and solve problems

Social and emotional learning covers a wide range of skills that children learn, develop and practise over time. Social and emotional skills are important for children's **mental health and wellbeing** as well as their academic learning.



Research shows that social and emotional skills help school children settle in the classroom and get on with learning. This is because learning at school is affected by how confident children feel about their abilities, how effectively they are able to manage their own behaviour, concentrate and organise themselves and how positively they are able to get on with teaching staff and with peers.

There is a range of skills that help children continue their social and emotional learning. Some of the skills that have been introduced in previous sessions and booklets and that are appropriate to your child include:

- Taking turns
- Sharing
- Cooperating
- Inviting others to play
- Making a choice
- Sticking to a task
- Noticing someone else is sad
- Helping with a household task
- Comforting a friend
- Naming a feeling
- Making a new friend
- Asking for help when needed

Good mental health is vital for learning and life. Like physical health, mental health is something we all have, and like physical health, it can range from good to poor and change over time. Children who are mentally healthy are better able to meet life's challenges, learn more successfully and have strong relationships with important people in their lives.



Some important social emotional skills

Social and emotional skills develop and progress over a lifetime. For children who have recently started primary school, these skills are in the early stages of development. Now is a great time to work with school staff to help children practise and develop these skills further. The kinds of social and emotional skills that are important for children to develop have been identified by researchers as:

<p>Self-awareness</p> <p>Understanding feelings and self-confidence</p>	<p>Self-management</p> <p>Managing emotions and being able to set goals and stick to them</p>	<p>Social awareness</p> <p>Respecting and understanding others, and appreciating differences between people</p>	<p>Relationship skills</p> <p>Cooperating, communicating, making friends and resolving conflict</p>	<p>Responsible decision-making</p> <p>Choosing wisely and thoughtfully when making decisions</p>
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The following describes these social and emotional skills in more detail. Whilst reading, you may also like to think about your own areas of strength. Remember, one way children learn is through watching and copying others, so your own social and emotional skills are important too!

<p>Self-awareness</p>	<p>Your child has been developing an awareness of themselves as an individual since birth through their relationships both with you as their parent or carer and from others who have been part of their life. By now they may be able to recognise and label simple feelings such as; happiness, sadness, or anger.</p> <p>Going hand in hand with learning to recognise emotions and feelings is the ability for your child to recognise and talk about the things that they are good at doing. Children’s self confidence can grow through the acknowledgment of these strengths.</p>	<p>Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noticing and understanding our own feelings • Recognising strengths and becoming self-confident
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Self-management

For children in the early years of school self-management is not always easy. Children at this age are working towards being able to wait a little longer for things they want, or seeing a task through until the end and learning how to express frustration and disappointment verbally rather than physically or by having a tantrum.

Over time children learn that they can't always get what they want straight away or learn a new skill overnight. Developing self-management includes being able to decide on a goal, plan and work through a series of steps, coping with setbacks and sticking at a task even when it gets challenging.

Examples include:

- Managing emotions
- Being able to set goals and stick to them

Social awareness

Being able to identify and understand their own feelings (self-awareness) also helps children to recognise and respond appropriately to the feelings of others. Once your child has developed a simple language to describe feelings and has begun to focus on recognising their own feelings, they can start to use this learning to identify and understand how others are feeling.

This will involve noticing a number of pieces of information such as; facial expressions, body language and tone of voice. This also involves respecting the rights of others and appreciating differences between people.

Examples include:

- Respecting and understanding others
- Appreciating diversity and differences

Relationship skills

Children by this age are starting to identify those who are their friends and to interact more fairly with each other. Children who experience positive social relationships will feel more settled and self-confident. They are more likely to engage in school and life successfully and to develop deeper, ongoing friendships. Developing relationship skills is important because they help children to manage life's ups and downs.

Examples include:

- Building positive relationships & making friends
- Communicating
- Negotiating
- Resolving conflict

Responsible decision-making

As children develop they are increasingly able to make decisions independently. Continuing to develop responsible decision-making skills involves learning to respect others, problem solve and take responsibility for their decisions.

Responsible decision-making involves learning to consider the possible outcomes of behaviours (e.g., "If I kick a ball inside it might break something").

Examples include:

- Respecting others
- Problem solving
- Personal responsibility



Some factors that influence the development of social and emotional skills

Characteristics unique to your child

School and families can work together to foster social and emotional skills, but it is important to remember that each child is unique. As with all areas of learning your child's learning style and personal characteristics will impact on how they develop; some children will 'pick up' these skills easily and some children will require extra support and time.

Children's developmental stage

As children's brains develop, their capacity to learn and use social and emotional skills also develops. Children at different developmental stages have different social and emotional skills that are relevant and appropriate for their age group.

Experiences

Children develop social and emotional skills through relationships and the opportunities they have to interact with key people in their lives.

Teaching

Just like learning to read, write and count, social and emotional skills can be taught and learnt.

Practise

Through your everyday interactions with your child you will be continually supporting them to practise and develop their social and emotional skills. For example, think about the number of times you have helped your child to learn how to share, take turns, listen to instructions, calm down, etc.

Time

All of us are continuously reflecting on and developing our social and emotional skills; the ability to think about our behaviour and learn new skills develops over time.

Encouragement

By giving your child encouragement and positive feedback for the skills you see them developing, you will help them to feel good about themselves and increase their ability to continue to grow in social and emotional competence.

Realistic expectations

Your child is young and is working hard at lots of new things all the time as they continue their journey of adjusting to primary school. Recognising that he or she will sometimes make mistakes and having realistic expectations, will give them the space and confidence to continue to develop their social and emotional skills.

Remember

Social and emotional skills develop over time. Each child will develop at their own pace, and you can assist them by teaching and providing them with the opportunities to learn and practise these skills.

Everyday situations present lots of opportunities for children to learn and practise important social and emotional skills.



How can parents and carers support children's social and emotional learning?

As parents and carers you can continue to support your child to build their social and emotional skills, just as you would other skills that they need at school, such as; reading and counting. Through your everyday interactions with your child you have already been supporting them to develop their social and emotional skills. The following contains some more ideas and practical strategies for how you can continue to help your child develop these skills.

Before trying these strategies, take a little time to think about what works best for your child when learning new skills and how you have supported them in the past. You can use this information and the suggestions on the following pages to help guide you.

Supporting your child to develop these skills works best when it continues consistently over time.

Recognising your child's strengths

Taking the time to reflect and notice how your child is going socially and emotionally will enable you to highlight to them all the great things they are doing and continue to assist them in further developing their skills.

Looking back over your child's transition into school will allow you to recognise successes and things that have gone well. For example, you might have noticed some new skills your child has been learning (e.g., making new friends, talking more about their feelings of excitement, giving you a school notice, etc).

Using clear communication

The way you talk with your child can play an important part in helping them develop their social and emotional skills. When teaching your child a new skill, it is helpful to:

Describe in detail what you want your child to do (rather than what not to do) as this can help your child to know how to go about doing what you ask.

Give your child information on why you are asking them to do something as this helps them learn about why what they are doing is important (e.g., "I would like you to finish what you are doing now so we don't have to rush your time playing at the park with your friends").

Use language that focuses on the skills you are hoping to encourage teaches your child to further develop that skill, (e.g., "when you put the plastic mat down you stopped the paint ruining the carpet" - responsible decision making) or "you noticed Keira was upset and helped her to feel better" - social awareness, relationships skills).

Give positive feedback as your child develops these skills as this encourages them to keep trying and lets them know what they have done well.



Giving positive feedback

Helpful feedback is:

Timely – given as soon as possible after they have displayed the skill

Specific – describes exactly what they have done (e.g., “you finished picking up your toys even though you wanted to go out to play”)

Reinforcing – highlights the things they are doing well (e.g., “you made Chincia really happy when you asked her to play too”)

Constructive – provides information that helps your child know what you would like them to do either now or next time (e.g., “make sure Max has a turn too”).

When giving feedback try to avoid:

General praise (e.g., “good work”) as this doesn’t provide your child with information about exactly what they did well

General feedback (e.g., “stop that”) as this doesn’t provide your child with enough information about what they should be doing

Criticism (e.g., “you’re no good at sharing”) as this can reduce your child’s confidence and make it harder to do well next time.

Remember

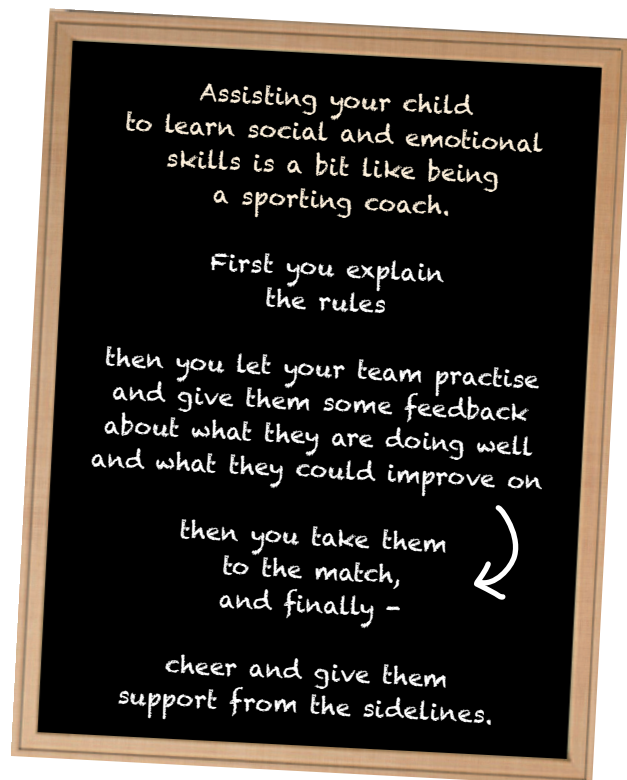
Take small steps when teaching your child a new skill. For example, if your child finds it harder to join in large groups, give them the opportunity to start with a couple of children first in a small group and gradually build up. If you know your child struggles with making choices, consider narrowing the options to two or three to support them in this.

Modelling behaviour for your child

Parents and carers are important role models. Children often learn how to behave and interact with others by copying or imitating what they see others doing.

The way you react when overwhelmed and the way in which you talk about it afterwards will help your child to learn how to manage their feelings and behaviour. When they see you being kind and helpful to others, they will learn from your behaviour that this is what is expected from people. If you shout and become angry when resolving conflict, they may use this same response for their own conflicts.

Children can also learn by having their parents and carers teach or coach them in particular skills.



Ideas to help your child develop their social and emotional skills

Below are some suggestions for how parents and carers can support each particular skill. The ideas can be adapted to suit your child and family situation. For example, you may already have strategies that you know work well and want to incorporate these into the ideas below. Remember, focusing on one or two ideas at a time is important to avoid overwhelming your child.



Self-awareness

Observing your child

Notice what they are able to do well and any skills where they may need some more guidance and practise will assist you in helping them become more self-aware.

Helping your child to describe how they are feeling

Notice how your child is feeling and then help to give words to these feelings, such as; happy, sad, excited, angry, disappointed and frustrated. For example, "You seem really happy this morning", "It looks like you are feeling frustrated because you are having trouble putting on your shoes". You might like to make a chart with faces matching different feelings to help teach your child to identify their emotions.

Helping your child to understand their feelings

For example, "It sounds like you feel disappointed because you wanted that picture to look just like the one in the book and it didn't quite work out how you hoped?"

Recognising body reactions

Identify what happens to your child's bodies when they experience certain feelings. For example, when feeling worried or scared they might feel butterflies in their tummy, when excited their heart might race.

Identifying and developing strengths

Help your child to identify and develop their own strengths. Encourage your child to try different activities. Praise their efforts and persistence. This can be achieved by getting them to do different tasks that they can do easily. For example, helping with home tasks such as setting the table for dinner.

Helping your child to name their feelings and recognise them as normal can assist them to feel safe and supported and to develop a sense of trust in you as someone who will be there for them.



Self-management

Assisting your child to manage their emotions

Help your child identify situations that often trigger strong emotional responses and be ready to offer support. Talk to your child about how experiencing emotions are normal. You can help prepare your child for situations that you know from experience can cause them to feel anxious or nervous, e.g., walking into a birthday party filled with unfamiliar faces. Talk to them about what they expect, for example, “last time we went to a party with lots of children and adults you felt a bit nervous; let’s talk about what you and I can do to help it become easier this time”. Allow children to have a go at things that make them feel nervous can help them learn they can cope with new situations.

Setting clear guidelines

Help your child manage their behaviour by letting them know what is expected of them and the outcomes. For example, “Packing up your toys quickly will give us extra time to read a story on the couch before bed”.

Teaching strategies to help them calm down

Teach your child breathing exercises (e.g. the Balloon Technique), using time out to calm down in a quiet place, or find a distraction by doing something else for a while like going for a walk.

Teaching simple self-talk

Your child can learn to cope with new situations by using simple phrases like, “It’s okay, I can do this”.

Explaining how you manage your own emotions

Describing what you do to feel calmer can help your children to manage their own emotions. For example, “Sometimes when I am nervous I sit on my bed and think of palm trees” or “When I get angry I go somewhere quiet and take some deep breaths”.

Highlighting past behaviour

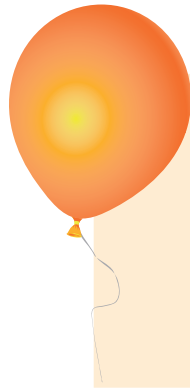
Point out things you have noticed that have helped your child in the past to calm down. For example, “I noticed you calm down when you play with your favourite toy” or “you seem to be able to make the angry feelings go away when you jump on the trampoline, ride your bike in the yard, run up and down outside, or pat and cuddle the dog etc”.

Encouraging goal setting

Help your child to self-manage by setting goals for things they would like to achieve. Start with small achievable goals to work towards and build up to larger ones. For example, wanting to get dressed independently might involve starting with an adult’s assistance and gradually learning how to do it themselves.

Through consistent, loving guidance children can learn to manage the intense emotions that they will feel from time to time.





The Balloon Technique

“Imagine your tummy is a balloon. Close your eyes and put your hand on your tummy. Take a big breath in through your nose and let your stomach fill up like a balloon. You will notice your tummy filling with air and getting bigger. Then breathe out slowly through your mouth. As your tummy is letting the air out the balloon is becoming smaller”.

Social awareness

Recognising others feelings

Help your child to recognise that others have feelings like their own. For example, “When Tamara took your toy you felt sad and annoyed. Tamara feels sad because her toy was taken”.

Understanding reasons for feelings

Help your child to think about why others may be feeling a particular way. For example, “Tamara is crying and feels sad because Minh took her toy”.

Respecting others feelings

Help your child to respect that different people will respond differently and that this difference does not make the feelings of others any less valid. For example, “Tamara took my toy and I didn’t cry; why is she crying?” your response could be, “we are all different and we can feel things and show these feelings differently”.

Encouraging your child’s efforts

Watch out for and encourage your child’s efforts to be respectful, accepting and helpful towards others. For example, “You really helped Tamara by asking Minh to give Tamara’s toy back to her”.

Relationship skills

Encourage mixing with others

Having your child’s friends over to visit so they can build friendships and practise their social skills.

Practise communication skills

Encouraging your child to practise important communication skills. For example, speaking clearly, listening to others, facing friends when they talk to them or are being talked to, making eye contact.

Taking turns and sharing

Parents and carers can support children to take turns and share by providing play opportunities to practise these skills. With guidance, monitoring and positive feedback give your child specific words to say or strategies. For example: how to share a toy, “Can we take turns to play with that toy?” Teaching them how to play board games that require turn taking skills will also provide opportunities to practise these skills.

Visiting parks

This activity is fun and allows children to practise mixing with other children in places other than home.



Responsible decision-making

Practising making choices

Allowing your child to practise making simple choices that are appropriate for their age can help them to become responsible decision-makers. Be sure to provide options that you will be happy with no matter which they choose. For example, "Would you like an apple or banana to eat?" or "Do you want to wear the green top or the blue top?"

Explaining reasons for choices

Asking your child to explain the reasons for their choice as this helps them to develop skills of evaluation and reasoning. For example, "I really like the green you used in the picture; why did you choose green to colour in that part of the picture?"

Family decision-making

Involving your child in family decision-making gives them opportunities to have input into family events or traditions. For example, "What would you like to have for your birthday dinner?"

Affirming choices

Commenting on your child's choices that have led to positive behaviours encourages them to make similar choices in future. For example, "I could see you were really angry and wanted to throw the toy but you didn't".

Noticing responsible decisions

Commenting when your child makes a responsible decision (e.g., "It was really helpful when you tidied up and put your schoolbag away").

Working together with your child and their school

It is not only you, as the parent or carer, who will be supporting your child to develop their social and emotional skills; your child's school plays a major role in this too. You can work in partnership with your child's school by communicating with teachers about your child and letting them know how you support their skills at home. You can also find out how school staff support your child's social and emotional learning. When families and schools work together, social and emotional learning is likely to be more effective.

Working in partnership with your child's school is important because:

- You are able to provide and share with the school your valuable knowledge about your child,
- Finding out about what is happening in the school and how the school works can help boost your child's confidence,
- Building connections between your family and the school helps your child adjust to and be successful at school now and in the future,
- It helps to support your child's learning.



Don't forget - other parents and carers are also a useful resource and source of support.

Having the opportunity to meet with other parents with similar concerns or questions may help you to feel confident and get ideas about what else you could try.

Some ways you can get involved include:

Taking an interest in your child's learning

Ask your child about their day, assist them with homework and help them understand why learning is important. Acknowledge their efforts and celebrate successes to help build a positive attitude towards learning. You could also talk with your child's teacher about the things they are learning and how you can support this. It might include additional ideas that you can use at home to support your child's social and emotional learning.

Staying informed

When possible look for information about activities at the school; attend information evenings and social activities at the school; share information with other parents and carers about what has been happening or is coming up.

Contributing and supporting

Provide opportunities for your child to get involved with activities and with other children.

Remember the importance of schools and families working together

Everything you do makes a difference in supporting your child's learning and building a positive relationship with your school community.

If you are not sure how to be involved, ask your child's teacher or other parents and carers for some ideas.

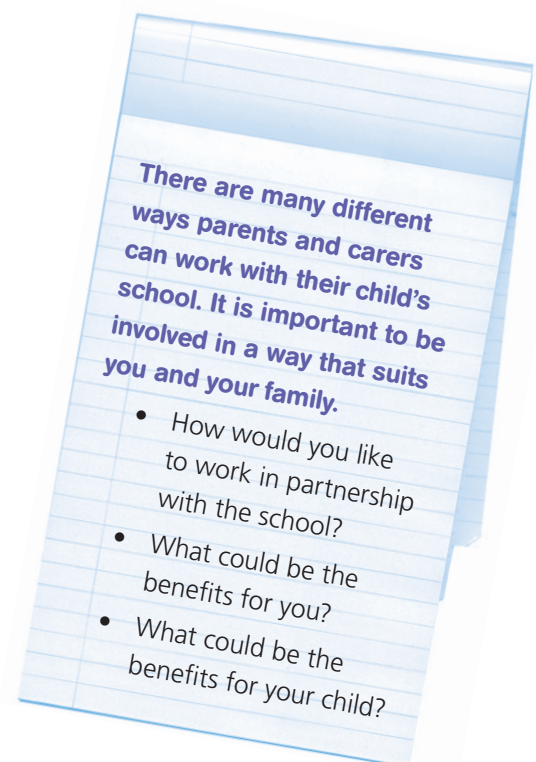
Find out how your individual skills and resources can assist the school (e.g., volunteering or donating unused or unwanted materials). Look out for opportunities to share your knowledge, ideas, experiences (e.g., cultural traditions, and customs), and personal stories with the wider school community.

Communicating

Maintain relationships with your child's teacher, school staff, other parents and carers and other children (e.g., saying, "hello"); inform the school of your needs and wants; discuss with other parents and carers the ways that the school can support you.

Why continued involvement in the school community is important

Continued involvement in the school community is important as this can support your child's learning, show your child that you think their learning is important, and help the school to understand your child's strengths, interests and needs. By continuing to be involved parents and carers can provide continuity and support throughout the school years.





TRANSITION TO SCHOOL: PARENT INITIATIVE

KidsMatter Primary information resources

The KidsMatter Primary information resources, designed for parents, carers and teachers, contain information on specific topics that you may also find useful for supporting your child during the transition to primary school. These can be found at: www.kidsmatter.edu.au/resources/information-resources/

The KidsMatter Primary information sheets that relate to this Booklet, and provide further useful information, include:

- Social and emotional learning: how it works
- What makes a positive school community
- Belonging at schools makes a difference
- Why connect at school?

Further information about other resources for supporting children during the transition to school can be found in the KidsMatter Transition to School: Parent Initiative information sheet: 'Other resources on transition to school for families'.

This resource is part of the KidsMatter Transition to School: Parent Initiative.

The team at KidsMatter welcomes your feedback at: www.kidsmatter.edu.au/transition



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