



UNIT-9

Social and Emotional Development

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Discuss the general stages of social development in children.
- ✓ Identify the family factors and outside factors that affect social development in children

Unit 9

Social and Development

General Stages of Social Development

All children have different personalities. Some tend to fuss a bit, while others are naturally relaxed and smile easily. Many parents are often amazed at the personality differences in their children, they often expect all of their children to have similar personality traits.

Every child, however, grows differently as they start to socialise. Children take a while to adapt to a new environment. However, some show no signs of apprehension, and are instead eager to play with other kids. Parents can assist their child in feeling comfortable while socialising. However, they must be careful not to force hesitant children into situations that make them frightened. If parents are patient and allow their children to make social advancements at a relaxed pace, they will usually find that even the quietest of children will socialise with others over time.

Early Social Interaction

The first opportunity to socialise and form attachments for babies is within their families. Parents can help their child feel safe and secure by offering attention. Infants get a sense of assurance that the world is a welcoming place when caregivers are quick to provide food, change their nappies, and cuddle them. Talking to babies and interacting with them, using pleasant expressions and soothing voices, makes them receptive to social interaction. Babies' smiles should always be repaid with a big grin.

Social Interaction in Infants (Infants, Toddlers, Middle Childhood and Adolescence)

Social interaction is different in every stage of a child's development. At the earlier stages, infants learn social skills through their parents and their immediate family. As they grow up, nursery and kindergarten become equally important. For many young children, this is the first experience when they get to spend time with other kids and learn basic skills such as sharing, respecting turns and getting to know other people. The role of the teacher is important, as they set the rules and help children of the group socialise.

Social Interaction in Middle Childhood

Middle childhood refers to children in primary school. This is a period where children become more independent, less self-centered and begin to understand their feelings, needs and desires but also those of their comrades. Friendship plays an important role as children learn to love people outside their family.

Social Interaction in Adolescence

Adolescence is often considered a crucial period in the life and development of a child. Social interaction, especially with people of the same age, is very important to adolescents. They tend to form strong friendships and enjoy the company of friends not only in school but in many different occasions outside of it. Friendship for adolescents is also often linked with loyalty, as they support their friends, often clashing with figures of authority like parents and/or teachers. Although most parents might find this habit annoying or even dangerous, it is part of the process of building social skills that will be beneficial for the children's lives as adults and parts of the society.

What is Socialisation?

Socialisation refers to the process of learning the social skills, which will be essential in the placement of any individual in the society in which they live. Primary Socialisation begins in infancy. In this stage, the infant or toddler learns how to interact with others and what boundaries to observe inside his/her family. Secondary Socialisation starts when the child starts to interact with people outside the family, namely when they are in a different environment, like the nursery or kindergarten. Every society has a different process of Socialisation. However, in all processes bonding and attachment, personal identity, self-concept and confidence are equally important from the beginning of one's life.

Attachment and Bonding

The development of feelings, such as love, begins with the bonding and attachment, which children begin to form in their very early days. These are helped by a series of actions performed by parents and children like skin contact, feeding, bathing and play, and by the senses like the smell, vision (through eye contact) and listening, particularly to the voices of one's parents. As they grow up, children tend to bond with many people, such as their parents, siblings and grandparents, provided that regular contact takes place. This is very important for the child's development and this is why the presence of a stable environment is crucial in these early stages and beyond. Children, who learn to form bonds from an early age, tend to feel more secure and are able to adjust easier to circumstances, such as school, where they will be separated for a time from their main caregivers and will be expected to form bonds with more people.

However, good attachments mean that when their main carer is not around a baby or child will show 'separation anxiety' through crying, screaming and, if old enough, trying to follow the carer. Separation anxiety will start around six to seven months and continue until around three years when a child can understand that mummy is going to come back! Part of this is the development of a concept called 'object permanence' – that even if you cannot see something it is still there.

Self-Concept and Personal Identity

These refer to the way children see themselves and develop their personality. The parents set the example and upbringing they give to their child is very important for the development of the child. Negative events during childhood might make young people have a poor self concept that will affect their whole lives and actions as adults.

The social and emotional development of children is an important issue in psychology today. Several important figures have proposed their own theories, some of which will be presented below.

Freud

Freud identified three parts to the personality: the Id, the Ego, and the Super-Ego. The Id is, according to Freud, present from the very beginning of a person's life. It is unconscious, instinctive, driven by pleasure, and thus, ensures the survival of the individual. The Ego develops as a person starts to grow up and realizes themselves as an individual and not part of their mother as they did in the first months of their life. The Super-Ego develops even later and consists of the values and moral views that will allow or not allow an individual to fulfill all of their desires.

Skinner

For Skinner, development is a process based on experience. Rewarding, whether pleasant or not, will teach children what is acceptable behaviour and what is not. The methodology of positive rewarding is still used in behaviour management programs today.

Bandura

'Modeling' or 'social learning' is at the center of Bandura's Theory. These are based on the tendency of younger children to copy actions they see in adults. Aggression is therefore a direct result of social learning. Adults that develop aggressive behaviours have most likely been witnesses of violence during their childhoods. Bandura attempted to prove his theory by showing to a number of children films where adults hit dolls. The children copied this behavior after the screening considering it to be acceptable.

Biological Theory

Aggressive behaviour is caused according to the biological theory by a combination of biological, psychological, and/or environmental factors. So, the brain structure, genes, frustration for something not achieved, pain or heat can all potentially cause aggressive behavior.

Moral Development

Moral Development, which is a sense of what is right and what is wrong, develops from the examination of other people's behaviour whether they are adults or children. Reinforcement through the promotion of specific actions as right or wrong is very important for the moral development of children.

Pro-Social Behaviour

A more advanced stage to a child's moral development has to do with the so-called pro-social development. This involves an action that benefits society or another individual, although it might have negative results for himself/herself. An example of this is when a child gives the money they have been saving to buy a toy to give to a charity.

Stages of Emotional and Emotional Development

Age	Social and emotional development
Birth up to four weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responds positively to main caregiver Mimics facial expressions Stares at bright shiny objects
One month	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gazes intently at caregivers By six weeks smile at caregivers
Four months	Engages, smiles and vocalises with caregivers
Six months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Starts to show interest in other babies and smiles Becomes more interested in social interaction, depending on the child's personality and time spent with other kids Fears strangers and distress when separated from caregiver Interacts differently with the family members Uses a comfort object e.g. a blanket Seeks attention
Nine months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very interested in all around Recognises unfamiliar and familiar faces Shows stranger anxiety
One year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emotionally volatile, demanding and assertive Temper tantrums may start Unhappy at changes in routine Expresses rage at being told 'no' Distinguishes between self and others, but still self-centred – only concerned with his or her own view of the world. Becomes aware of the emotions of others and displays definite emotions Plays alone Starting to develop object permanence
18 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows stranger shyness Dislikes changes in routine Starts toilet training Starts to have tantrums when upset Has separate sense of self Little idea of sharing and strong sense of 'mine'
Two years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enjoys other children's company but is averse to sharing toys Is concerned when a fellow child is upset Engages in parallel play (alongside others) Remains egocentric Becoming emotionally stable, but still prone to mood swings Learning to separate from caregiver for short intervals, e.g. while at nursery school
	Knows own identity

Three years	<p>Greater social awareness</p> <p>Will play in twos or threes and share ideas</p> <p>May have close friends</p> <p>Will start playing a lot with children of the opposite sex</p> <p>Stable and emotionally secure</p> <p>Friendly to other children</p> <p>Increasing in independence, but still needs support from adults</p> <p>Fears loss of caregivers</p> <p>Strong sense of gender identity</p> <p>Less anxious about separation</p> <p>Plays alongside others</p>
Four years	<p>Enjoys co-operative and dramatic play</p> <p>Understands competition and co-operation</p> <p>Responds to reasoning</p> <p>Can take turns</p> <p>Enjoys being independent but still needs reassurance and comfort</p>
Five years	<p>Becomes engrossed in activities</p> <p>Develops fears of ghosts e.g. things under the bed</p> <p>Concerned about being disliked</p> <p>Good sense of self-awareness developed</p>
6–7 years	<p>Able to form firm friendships</p> <p>Very supportive of each other, playing complex games</p> <p>Plays in separate sex groups</p> <p>Fairly independent and confident</p> <p>Increasing sense of morality (right and wrong)</p>
8–12 years	<p>Friendships become very important, predominantly same sex</p> <p>Concerned about the thoughts of others about them</p> <p>Often uncertain about changes in settings</p>

Outside Factors Affecting Social Development

The family unit has the greatest impact on the lives of growing children. However, it does not take long for the outside world to become influential. The social development of children will at some point be affected by positive and/or negative factors that are out of the parents' control.

Important of School

For children, school is more than just a place to learn academics. It is an environment where they develop important friendships and learn more about the world. Over time, they appreciate the feelings and input of others. Sensitive, caring teachers are a blessing, especially in the early stages.

Many children stumble as they learn how to make friends and how to be good friends. Young children are very self-centred. Therefore, the notion that there is a whole world of people out there that they must learn to work with and compromise with can be unsettling. Teachers who patiently offer guidance and understanding as the children learn to socialise can help them to learn important lessons about sharing, forgiveness, thoughtfulness and acceptance.

Economic Factors

It seems that economic issues play a role in the Socialisation of children, with those coming from poorer families and communities having greater trouble to socialize than those coming from richer ones. This is probably caused because poorer children tend to have fewer opportunities to socialise outside their house because of the economic situation of their families and/or communities.

Fitting In

Parents are always inclined to see the unique traits in their children. However, some children may not be quite as accepting. While it is discriminatory, there will always be children who will be singled out by their peers because they are 'different'. Bullying and playground taunting seem to be universal experiences amongst school-aged kids. There is little the parents can do to stop it once it has begun.

What parents can do is to offer their children tools that the kids would need to cope and flourish, despite the negative prods that they undergo from other kids. They would also need to enlist the help of school officials in controlling the behaviour of school bullies. Encouraging kids to seek few trustworthy friends, developing a child's personal strengths in order to strengthen their self-esteem, and providing opportunities for extracurricular related activities where children can grow socially can all be helpful steps to let a bullied child understand that they are special and worthy.

Stress

A while back, 'stress' was reserved for adults. These days, kids are often exposed to their own stressors. Family problems, limited outlets for active play, school and social commitments and exposure to distressing media stimuli can be sources of stress for children.

Children are extremely vulnerable to the constant barrage of advertising, news, and celebrity influences that are common in modern day. Parents are advised to closely oversee their children's media exposure since kids don't have a clear understanding of the stories and images that they view.

Frightening movies, violent video games, and even news broadcasts can leave kids feeling uncertain and vulnerable. Providing kids with a solid, secure foundation is vital for healthy emotional development. Without this foundation, social development is affected negatively. Children that are nervous about their safety cannot be free to focus on the joys of being kids playing, making friends, and developing a good sense of self. Assuring the kids and making them feel safe and secure is one of the most important jobs of parents and others who are interested in the welfare of children.

Family Factors that Affect Social Development

The importance of family in every stage of an individual's development cannot be stressed enough. Social development is no exception.

Nurture versus Nature

It is now believed that both genetics and family influence play an important role in a child's development and Socialisation process.

Some babies tend to be born with socialising abilities. This is clearly shown in their outgoing nature and the habit of smiling towards any familiar faces. On the other hand some babies tend to remain subdued and reserved by birth. Could this really be a result of genetics?

It is said that the development of a child starts even before a child is born. Therefore each and every newborn is unique and quite different from the time they are born. The genetic makeup of a child thus accounts for some innate differences in the temperament and sociability of young babies. As they grow and develop, parental and other family influences are key in shaping children and impact their social growth and development.

Shy Babies?

So the question, 'are there babies who are born shy?' has two possible answers. Genetics might indeed play a role, but also if the baby's parents are uncomfortable in social situations will most probably have a more limited circle that will expose their children to fewer circumstances as they grow up. As a result these children might have more trouble socializing than the offspring of extrovert parents. In any case, parenting styles, access to others and family dynamics play an important role.

Parenting Styles

Four parenting styles can be identified. The first three have been discussed by Psychologist Diana Baumrind in the early 1960s. Recent researches have added a fourth.

These are:

Authoritative Parenting: Authoritative parents expect good behaviour from their kids, but they will gently and affectionately guide them rather than being forceful or cruel. They favour supportive discipline. Kids with authoritative parents are usually self-confident and socially capable.

Authoritarian Parenting: Authoritarian parents place high demands on their kids without allowing room for discussion or regard for the child's feelings. They are often rigid and controlling. This can result in children who are fearful, anxious, withdrawn, frustrated and/or fearful.

Permissive Parenting: Permissive parents allow children to decide what they feel is appropriate behaviour. They are extremely lenient. These children often have poor control over their emotions and may encounter difficulties relating with peer relationships.

Neglectful Parenting: Neglectful parents place the welfare of their children as a low priority unlike permissive parents who are involved in their children's lives. Children of neglectful parents are usually emotionally immature and may engage in antisocial behaviour.

Access to Others

Access to others is determined by both economic and geographical factors. Parents who have economic problems will not be able to introduce their children to many different social activities, such as music classes or sports. This also applies to families who live in remote and rural areas. As a result, the children who have been exposed to different social circumstances and people during their early life will be able to socialise better with diverse groups of people as adults.

Family Dynamics

Bigger families tend to provide children with more chances to socialize. Also, families where the members are supportive of each other give the child a sense of confidence that will allow them a healthy social development.

Particularly, the relations with one's siblings affect one's social development. Children learn specific and important social skills like sharing, respecting, winning and losing. At the same time, the order of birth often defines an individual's personality. First children might be bossy, as more responsibilities are entrusted to them. Middle children are better listeners and more pleasant in social situations, building calm relationships. On the contrary, the younger ones tend to seek attention more often. These traits might well follow children into adulthood, although then they can choose which to keep and which to discard.

Children's' Fears

To a certain degree, fear is natural for both children and adults. Children are usually more fearful of certain circumstances and this is to be expected as they do not have the experience of life that comes as the years pass by. Parents therefore, should not worry too much about their children's fear, unless of course these become a constant source of anxiety for their offspring.

Typical Children's Fears

Situations that make children anxious vary from age to age. As they mature and gain confidence and know their place in the world, most children forget many of their previous anxieties. This growth process continues throughout childhood, with kids moving through their fears just the same way that they outgrow toys. Kids often experience some level of separation anxiety and may fear animals, noises, baths, strangers, and the potty. Some of these anxieties may continue into preschool years especially the fear of animals.

However, many of these fears are replaced by fears of imaginary things, like ghosts and monsters. This is the age when parents find themselves rushing to their children's bedsides to comfort their child after an episode of a frightening dream or to show children that nothing lurks beneath their beds or in the closets. Kids at this age may develop fears about bedtime or darkness, and may want to have a small nightlight next to their bed.

As their world expands and kids are exposed to new experiences, other fears may develop. Starting or changing schools can be quite stressful for some children. They may fear that teachers will not like them or that they will not fit in well with peers. In addition, school-going kids may begin to process information about the world, and may feel anxious about crime, and personal safety.

In their teens, some children still experience the fears of their early childhood. However, their growing knowledge of the world may increase anxieties about crime and safety. They may have experienced the death of someone close by this age thus increasing the chances that they will worry about the possibility of their own death or that of a parent. Social issues can take on great importance to teens so fear of social rejection can be prevalent. Teens realizing that they will be expected to take on full responsibility for their lives when they become adults can be overwhelming and some teens who may fear that they won't succeed at university and in life.

Providing Support

Although parents often find it easier to support and comfort their children during their infancy or toddler and middle childhood years, they might find it more challenging with adolescents. In all cases, parents must be ready to listen to their children's fears and anxieties and reassure them that fear is a natural feeling.

Dealing with Stressful Times

Stressful situations can increase anxiety in kids and can even bring new fears. When parents separate or divorce, kids are likely to suffer a feeling of insecurity. Parents can help by assuring their kids that they will continue to be loved and cared for. Illness and death, especially when close to home, can make kids of all ages feel anxious that someone else they love may die. Parents can listen to their children's worries and give honest information regarding the current situation and dispel the thoughts of further misfortune.

When to Seek Help

Having fear is normal but excessive feelings of worry can limit a child's ability to function well at school, at home, and with their friends. If fears hamper a child's daily lives, parents may want to consider seeking the advice of their general practitioner or a mental health professional. Many childhood fears disappear with time, eventually ending, but some children may require time and support to work through their complex emotions. Individual temperament can influence kids' ability to handle change and stress, but when provided with parental reassurance and the tools necessary for coping with the issues in their lives, most children can resume to their happy and worry-free childhood.

Overcoming Social Fears in Children

Many children go through stages when they seem a bit shy or reserved. However, some children's fear of social situations may become persistent and severe enough to interfere with their lives. Children whose lives are affected by their social phobias may even experience developmental delays due to their inability to participate in normal childhood activities. Parents can take steps to help their children overcome social fears thus making it easier for them to interact with their peers in a healthy manner.

What is Social Phobia?

Social phobia is an intense fear of participating in social events. Although this usually appears in early adolescence, it is sometimes seen in younger children as well. Children that suffer from social fears may avoid social gatherings, interacting with adults other than their parents, or situations where they have to speak to an audience. Thoughts of presenting a paper in front of their classmates or attending a school dance for these kids can bring great discomfort, far beyond simple shyness. Children who have social fears worry that they will appear foolish or that they will do something that brings ridicule upon them. So they begin to avoid these situations. This avoidance strategy can have a negative impact on a child's socialisation, getting in the way of them developing friends.

Dealing with Social Phobia

In extreme cases, children suffering from social phobia might need help from a psychologist. In many cases however, parents can effectively help their children with their behaviour. Here are some ways children with social phobias can be helped:

- Provide children with contact with at least two close friends even during school breaks. Like this children will find it easier to socialize when the school reopens.
- Explain to their children that fear and anxiety are feelings experienced by all people in their lives, and that it is only natural to feel stressed in specific circumstances.
- Hobbies can be beneficial even to the most shy children. They allow them to do something they really like and at the same time meet children with similar interests. This will make socialization easier.
- Parties can also help boost a child's self-confidence and social skills. A party in the child's house might help them feel more comfortable and reduce stress. If the child does not want an all-kids party, a gathering of members of the extended family and/or neighbours – people with whom the child is more familiarized might also help.
- Relaxation techniques might also help children with social phobias. Positive imagery, deep breathing and/or meditation may help children manage the physical symptoms of their anxiety and therefore help them approach social situations more easily.
- Practice in the comfort of one's home can boost one's self-confidence. Parents can help their children practice how to react in social situations when the cause of anxiety is not present. This will teach children the social skills they need and will help them overcome their fear.
- Remember that overcoming one's fears takes time. Parents should not expect their children to make giant steps in no time. Instead they should be patient and praise them every time they take even the smallest step. Parents should permit kids to make small steps. Rather than expecting them to suddenly be the most outgoing members of their classes, they should expand their comfort zones a little at a time. Fearful kids can reach a stage where they can function well among their peers.

Seeking Professional Help

Kids with social fears need the help of a therapist. Counsellors will engage kids about their troublesome thoughts and help them to redirect their thinking into positive thinking. Once they have identified the triggers that set off their anxiety, they should work with the therapist to gradually face their fears.

Positive reinforcement for making improvements should be offered. Kids then learn to associate each successful step as evidence that with effort and time, they can overcome their anxieties. Parents should offer assistance and encouragement between sessions so that their kids continue to make steady progress.

Socialisation for Babies

Every baby, like every adult, will react differently in social situations, will have different social skills, and different capacities to deal with new people. For parents, this is often a concern and might wonder what they can do to help their children in their social development.

Establishing Trust

A sense of safety and security is *very* important for babies. Therefore, parents who establish close trusting relations with their children, from a very early age and give them the security they need can help them, experience the world in a positive light and be able to form better social skills as they grow up. Attentive care is important at this stage, so leaving the baby crying for hours is not a desirable option.

Encouraging Safe Interaction

While parents are all that a baby needs in the beginning, curious babies show interest in other people as they grow up. Margaret Mahler, a child psychologist who wrote extensively on child development notably her Separation-Individuation Theory, stressed not only the need for the primary caregiver to be warm and nurturing, but also for the caregiver to make themselves available to provide reassurance as the baby makes those first attempts at external Socialisation.

During the second half of the first year, many babies experience their first spell of separation anxiety and display discomfort at being away from their mothers. Mothers who are careful to reassure their babies that they are nearby can offer them the encouragement and confidence to interact with others. Babies will often look to find their mothers in a room, even when they are comfortable.

Happy Faces

Babies show more enjoyment in socialising when the people around them are happy and in good spirits. Parents should help their little ones interact with other babies their own age, through seeking out mother/baby groups. Enjoyable and positive interaction with other babies and their cheerful mums will help babies perceive the world to be a fun-filled place.

Nature versus Nurture?

There are diverse views as to whether our capacity to socialise is inborn, or if socialisation is a learned skill. Indications ascertain that it may be a little of both. Some infants are outgoing right from the start. Other babies are reserved and seem uncomfortable being held by anyone else but a select few people. These intrinsic differences cannot be attributed to upbringing, since the babies were different right from birth.

There is no denying that factors such as to whether babies are born to introverted or extroverted parents will have an effect on a child's social inclinations. It may not be so much that introverted people would produce babies with similar tendencies as much as the fact that the social comfort level of parents will help to determine just how much exposure that their children get in different social settings. Practising a skill increases the chances that a person will master it, so it makes sense that babies and young children, who are presented with opportunities to hone their social skills, will be more confident and socially comfortable than their less socially active peers.

What Parents Can Do.

Parents should pay attention not only to their children's basic needs, but also, spend time discussing situations with them and encouraging them. Babies will need tenderness from their parents and as they grow up they will also need their encouragement in socializing with other people, whether these be grandparents and other family members or close family friends.

Encouragement in all aspects of life will allow children to develop confidence and boost their self-esteem, which will allow their social interaction in the future.

Emotional Development in Children

Every age has a different development of emotions and the way children control or react to them. In their early years, children will resort to crying to get what they want. As they grow up, they form more complex emotions and develop different skills of coping with them. Emotional development is therefore a mixture of feelings a person has for oneself and for others and the way one functions socially through them.

Babies and their Emotions

Although babies have certain emotions from the time of birth, the type of care they receive during the first year of their lives will have an impact on their emotional development. If for example, a baby is being loved and well taken care of during his first months, it will develop a positive feeling towards the world in general.

The bond the baby develops with its primary caregiver and the sense of security this person offers to it are very important for a healthy emotional development. In most cases, a baby's primary caregiver is the biological mother. Even when this is not happening however, the role of the primary caregiver is equally important and this person should allow the baby to form a close bond with them, as the first step towards establishing bonds with other people in the future.

Majority of babies have their biological mothers as their primary caregivers, but that is not always the case. Studies have shown that a primary caregiver can either be a mother, a father, or any person close to the child to whom they form a strong bond. What is important is not the official role of the caregiver, but that fact that he or she is there from the beginning, allowing the child to form a close bond and, eventually, bond closely with others.

Toddlers: the Beginning of Independence

The new experiences the toddlers face as they grow up can result in frustration that often leads in tantrums. An important part of this stage is for children to learn to control the way they respond to situations. Parents should be patient as this process takes time.

At this stage, children will also start feeling compassion towards family members or friends that are sad or upset. These are positive emotions that should be encouraged and praised as they form a positive step in the child's emotional development.

Learning to control negative emotional responses takes time. Parents should be patient with their temperamental toddlers. Children need to learn that there are better and more effective ways to get what they want than to throw tantrums.

Toddlers are also likely to show the first signs of compassion, expressing worry when a playmate or family member is upset or sad. Parents and caregivers should complement these expressions of positive emotion to encourage healthy emotional development.

Kindness and Self-Control

The emotional range of school children is wider. As they tend to like praise for the self-control they show in certain circumstances, parents and teachers alike can take advantage of this when trying to help children develop desirable emotional responses in different situations.

New experiences, challenges, and emotions appear at this stage of life and parents should help their children understand them and cope with them. Sibling rivalry is one of them and can prove particularly challenging for parents. Parents should interfere only when the situation gets out of control as children should learn to deal with such issues themselves in the process of their emotional development. Although tensions among siblings are common, the relation with one's brothers and/ or sisters can form the basis of the relations one develop with others in the future.

Pre-Teens

Children at the pre-teen age are just starting to spread their own wings, and while they want some independence, albeit limited, they also want the security of strong parenting. This is the time parents should gradually loosen their reins, in order to set the groundwork for adolescence. The task may seem challenging; holding too tightly to the apron strings can however have a negative effect.

Communicating well with pre-teens is important. Not only does it set the foundation for a strong parent-child relationship, it also will help you both cope better when they cross over into adolescence. Some pre-teens feel a real need for privacy, and may not want to share everything with their parents.

Understanding Babies' Emotions

Parents want to do the things that make their babies happy. Despite their best efforts, babies fuss. It is important to understand that babies like other people, experience and display a range of emotions that are not always pleasant. By learning about the needs of babies in general, parents can understand their baby's emotions enabling them better to keep their little ones happy.

Baby Language

The sound a baby makes often shows what it wants. Decoding these sounds is a long and often challenging process but it is essential in understanding what the baby is trying to say in its own way. Priscilla Dunstan created a Baby's Language DVD to help new parents understand their babies, after she noticed that her son made different sounds in different situations and realized that other babies used exactly the same sounds.

Facial Expressions and Body Language

Babies show their emotions using both facial expressions and body language. Silvan Tomkins theorised that there are nine effects that make emotions clear through exhibiting specific facial expressions and/or body language, applying to babies, as well as to those older. They are:

Positive:

- Enjoyment and Joy – Smiling, lips wide and out
- Interest and Excitement – eyebrows down, eyes tracking, eyes looking, and closer listening

Neutral:

- Surprise and Startle – eyebrows up, eyes blinking

Negative:

- Anger and Rage – a clenched jaw, frowning, and a red face
- Disgust – head forward and down, the lower lip raised and protruded
- Dismal (reaction to bad smell) – upper lip raised, head pulled back
- Distress/Anguish – crying, sobbing, mouth lowered, and arched eyebrows
- Fear/Terror – frozen stare, pale face, sweat, coldness, and erect hair
- Shame/Humiliation – the head down and averted, blushing, and eyes lowered

General Age Guidelines

Even though each individual is different, there are some age specific similarities in the emotional development of all persons.

Birth to 6 Months

In their early lives, infants use crying as a way to announce that they are having a problem – for instance, they will cry when they are hungry, wet, hot, cold, or lonely. When they reach their first or second month, they begin to smile when they see a familiar face, usually their parents. In the next few months they will develop giggling and happy movements as a way to express their emotions. These will be complemented with other sounds as they grow: cooing, gurgling or the imitation of simple sounds their parents might make. Negative emotions are also present at this stage and babies tend to show them too.

6 to 12 Months

At this stage, babies begin to develop separation anxiety and stranger anxiety. The first appears when they are separated by their parents, the second when they meet unfamiliar faces. The result will be fear and the reaction crying. At the same time, the baby will feel closer to their parents, express enjoyment more vividly and will probably start saying their first words.

12 to 18 Months

This is the stage when babies start becoming toddlers. They begin to show their frustration and anger as part of the process of getting what they want. Although this might be annoying, it is a natural reaction that *will* gradually stop as the children learn to express themselves better with words.

From approximately 18 months onwards, children might start developing a better understanding of other people's emotions and react to them. For example, if a sibling is crying, the child might show signs of empathy.

Understanding the Child's Emotional Development

A child's emotional development is related to the following abilities, which grow as the time passes by:

- Identifying and understanding their feelings
- Reading and understanding other people's feelings
- Managing their feelings
- Shaping the way they behave
- Developing empathy for others
- Building strong and/or good relationships with family member, friends, and other people

Emotional development is a long and complex process, which starts in infancy and continues well into adulthood. The first emotions babies develop are anger, joy, fear, and sadness. As they grow up, children will develop rapidly their ability to experience and express a wide range of feeling and they also learn how to cope with them and manage them effectively. These include shyness, surprise, embarrassment, shame, guilt, pride and empathy among others. Identifying emotions is a process that continues in primary school children as is the way they manage them and react to them.

While younger children will have physical reactions and behaviours, as they grow up they will be expected to have fuller control of their reactions, a process that is influenced by thinking.

Thus, an emotion and the way a child experiences it has several different parts:

- Physical response: heart rate, breathing, etc.
- Feelings the child has to recognize and name
- Thoughts and judgments a child attributes to or associates with the different feeling
- Signals of possible action, such as, a desire to go closer, leave, or fight

The way children express their emotions, through words or actions, is influenced by:

- The appropriate and inappropriate ways to express emotions parents and teachers teach children
- Whether the emotional needs of child are met effectively
- The temperament of a child
- The emotional reactions and behaviours they have seen and experienced from those around them
- The possible problems or stresses the child and/or their family are experiencing at a particular time

Managing Feelings

Managing feelings is one of the most challenging and important parts of a child's emotional development. People are not born with the ability to effectively manage and control the way they feel. Infants and younger children constantly need their parents in order to be able to do this.

One of the main factors contributing to the frustration of younger children is that very often they are not able to do what they want to do. The reaction is a temper tantrum that is all too common among toddlers.

As we see, therefore, the way a child feels is closely linked with their behaviour. As young children cannot manage their feelings well, they often react without thinking.

This begins to change when children start school. The thinking process begins to influence the way they react to the feeling experienced by themselves and others. Therefore, school children are more able to describe their feelings with words, something that allows them to change the way they feel. This results in better management of their emotions and the ability to calm down without needing the help of their parents.

Relationships are Important for Children's Feelings

The quality of the relationship a child has with their parents is very important for their emotional development. A close, loving relationship is therefore desirable. The way parents react to and manage their own emotions influences a child. At the same time, parents will need to practically help their children manage their emotion.

Supporting your Child's Emotional Development

In order to do that, parents should:

- Maintain a calm, warm, and predictable emotional climate
- Accept and recognise the emotions of their child
- Discuss different feelings through the reading of stories. By talking about the feelings of their favourite book characters, children will be able to begin recognising and understanding their own feelings.
- Put feelings into words, for instance what is that feeling the child experiences at the moment called?
- Encourage children to talk about situations, in their lives, that provoked intense feelings
- Praise positive behaviour, for example when the child reacts calmly to a negative emotion
- Teach the child to separate the way they feel from the way they behave. For instance, it is ok to be angry, but it is never ok to hit someone.
- Help people understand and make the distinction between their feelings and other people's feelings. How they behave, as a result of how they feel, might have an effect on how someone else might feel.

General Principles for Supporting Children's Emotional Development

The first thing parents and teachers can do in supporting their children's emotional development is to pay close attention to their children's feelings, how they react to them, and how they manage them.

Understanding and identifying different emotions can be difficult, as some emotions are not as obvious as others. This means that parents do not only need to *listen* to their children, but they also have to pay attention to their body language, their behaviours, and reactions to their surroundings/situations. Understanding different emotions helps a parent guide and support their child more effectively in the course of their emotional development.

It is also important to help children identify their own emotions by themselves and understand them. Discussions on the topic might help them in this process and also teach them that other people have feelings too. In any case, children should feel comfortable with their emotions; they need to realise that the emotions are natural and they need to be able to discuss them, as a way to develop ways of effectively managing them.

Although emotions and feelings are totally natural, children should learn that there are appropriate ways of expressing them. Parents should set limits to these ways in order to avoid aggressive or other annoying reactions and behaviours. For further information on effective limit setting, see *the Kids' Matter Resource Pack on Learning to Manage Anger*.

First and most important of all, parents and teachers alike should set a good example for their children. The way they cope with and manage their emotions influences the children around them and provides good (or bad) examples for them to follow. Even when a parent or a teacher loses control, at a particular moment, it is always good to acknowledge what has happened, showing the child how they should react in a similar situation.

Further Reading:

- ✓ *Young Children's Personal, Social and Emotional Development, (2010), By Marion Dowling*
- ✓ *Social and Emotional Development in Infancy and Early Childhood, (2009), edited by Janette B. Benson, Marshall M. Haith*