



## Support Your Child's Social and Emotional Development

Your child's social and emotional development (mental health) — how he or she manages emotions and relates to others — is as important as physical health. Social and emotional development is not as obvious as physical health, but it's vital for future success — in school and in life.

### Why it matters

Your child's social and emotional development affects every part of his or her life. Children who develop good social and emotional skills:

- make and keep friends
- understand and express emotions
- are ready for school
- think clearly and learn new things

### You can make a difference

Your love and attention are as important as food and a place to live. When you cuddle and play with your child and praise good behavior, you're supporting your child's social and emotional development — and building a foundation for a lifetime of success.

### Inside you'll learn about:

- social and emotional milestones for your child
- how to support your child's social and emotional development
- when to be concerned
- where to go for help

## How to Get Help

If you have concerns, talk to your doctor or call 311 for a doctor near you. Your pediatrician or family doctor can provide health information, developmental screenings and referrals.

For mental health referrals, call **311** or LifeNet: **800-LIFENET (800-543-3638)**.

For this pamphlet online and more information, visit [nyc.gov](http://nyc.gov) and search for *child mental health*.

helping children soar



**NYC PROJECT  
LAUNCH**

## NYC Project LAUNCH

Strong families and communities  
Promoting social and emotional development  
Healthy, happy and successful children

This pamphlet was developed under grant number 1H79SM060274 from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The views, policies and opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of SAMHSA or HHS.

# Promoting Your Child's Social and Emotional Development

## A Guide for Parents of One- to Five-Year-Olds



## Building Healthy Foundations for a Lifetime of Success

If your child is... <b>12 to 18 months</b>	<b>18 months to three years</b>	<b>Three to five years</b>
<p><b>What to Expect</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comes to you when distressed and accepts comfort from a parent or caregiver</li> <li>• Explores with enthusiasm and is curious about other people</li> <li>• Likes to be around children but may be afraid or anxious around strangers</li> <li>• Enjoys books, songs and simple games</li> <li>• May have temper tantrums when she doesn't get her way</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shows affection by hugging you or holding your hand</li> <li>• Comforts self using objects, such as a blanket</li> <li>• Expresses feelings, by smiling or crying</li> <li>• Gets upset and cries when you leave up until age two, and in other stressful or unfamiliar situations after that age</li> <li>• Starts understanding and uses “no”</li> <li>• Feels proud of what she can do, such as running or kicking a ball, and shares accomplishments with you</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enjoys imaginary play</li> <li>• Wants to do things without your help</li> <li>• Plays and shares with other children</li> <li>• Learns to name and express feelings</li> <li>• Becomes aware of your feelings</li> <li>• Asks a lot of questions</li> <li>• Tests limits but accepts them most of the time</li> </ul>
<p><b>What You Can Do</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold and cuddle your child so he trusts you to protect him.</li> <li>• Praise good behavior; use positive words and encourage your child.</li> <li>• Notice when your child wants to be close or wants to explore.</li> <li>• Use everyday activities — bath time, meal time — to connect with your child.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read books together.</li> <li>• Sit on the floor to play; allow your child to lead.</li> <li>• Help your child find a blanket or stuffed animal she can turn to for comfort.</li> <li>• Stay near your child as she explores the world.</li> <li>• Discipline with kindness; try using timeouts and follow through consistently.</li> <li>• Label feelings, especially when setting limits, such as: “I can see you’re angry but it’s not okay to hit.”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Play “make-believe” games together.</li> <li>• Listen and talk to your child. Help him name his feelings and talk about yours.</li> <li>• Find a balance between talk and play.</li> <li>• Encourage your child to play with siblings and other children.</li> <li>• Supervise play times.</li> <li>• Stay involved in your child’s friendships.</li> </ul>
<p><b>When to Be Concerned</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is difficult to comfort or cries most of the time</li> <li>• Rarely makes eye contact</li> <li>• Reacts the same way to parents and strangers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is too comfortable with, or overly fearful of, strangers; doesn't show preference for any one adult</li> <li>• Seems sad or withdrawn; lacks interest in people or toys</li> <li>• Has temper tantrums, often hits, bites or punches, or destroys toys or other objects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can't focus on or finish activities</li> <li>• Clings or gets upset when you leave</li> <li>• Witnessed violence or had a traumatic experience</li> <li>• Doesn't play with you or others</li> <li>• Is too aggressive</li> </ul>

## Your Child Depends on You

It's important to take care of yourself, too. Talk to your doctor if you:

- Feel tired, depressed, worried or overwhelmed, and these feelings don't go away
- Don't enjoy spending time with your child
- Are having a hard time with your own emotions and relationships
- Witnessed violence or had a traumatic experience

