



Social And Emotional Development

Shaleha Jaffar *

Corresponding Author: Shaleha Jaffar, Psychologist - focusing in child development, M.Sc psychology.

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Healthy mental, emotional, and behavioral development is important for young people to lead meaningful, productive, and engaged lives. Studies suggest that healthy mental, emotional, and behavioral development is shaped by genetic, biological, social, and environmental factors that influence all stages of development (even before conception).“Children’s social and physical environments literally shape their brains and consequently the behaviors and emotions they learn.”

Social and emotional skills include understanding and managing oneself, relating to others, and making responsible choices based on self and others.

Social and emotional development can be defined as how people learn skills to understand and manage how they act, how they relate to others, and how they make responsible choices. These skills include being able to understand and control emotions, understand and care about others, and make good decisions. (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child 2004, 2). These skills also include behaving responsibly and with good intentions, establishing and maintaining positive relationships, and avoiding negative behaviors.

Growing social and emotional skills is developmental. As children develop, so do their social and emotional skills. Children from a young age start learning through various environmental aspects (This includes Parents, teachers, friends, and so on).

Social and emotional development is a lifelong process. It starts at birth and continues throughout adulthood. The foundation of social emotional development begins in infancy. A two-month-old infant is soothed and smiles at the voice of an adult. When the caregiver talks to the child, he/she will fixate on the face of the loved one. Being able to read your child's cues and attending to them from the day they are born starts the creation of social emotional development in your child. You are creating a secure, trusting and loving relationship with your child.

The benefits of strong social and emotional skills are evident for both children and adults. Social and emotional skills are associated with improved behavior, lower levels of emotional stress and positive wellbeing. These positive outcomes from social and emotional development continue into adulthood. Developing social and emotional skills in adults can increase their success at work, help them achieve career and personal goals. These skills can also help adults be more creative, have healthier relationships, better manage stress, and achieve greater self-awareness.

Children who have been given specific training in social-emotional skills are taught how to solve their own problems independently, to see other perspectives, to negotiate, and to make compromises. These skills must be taught in a proactive, focused way, not in the heat of the moment after a problem

occurred. Children need to practice using these skills when they are calm. Then when a problem does occur, the adult can support children in putting their skills into action. (Schwartz 2007).

Brain research indicates that emotion and cognition are profoundly interrelated processes. Specifically, “recent cognitive neuroscience findings suggest that the neural mechanisms underlying emotion regulation may be the same as those underlying cognitive processes”. Emotion and cognition work together, jointly informing the child’s impressions of situations and influencing behavior. Most learning in the early years occurs in the context of emotional support (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine 2000).

Impact in Adults

Young adulthood is a time often perceived as the prime stage of life when one is free from both the chains of adolescence and the stigmas that come with more advanced age. As individuals emerge from adolescence, their dependence on family lessens as they begin to establish autonomy, careers, and intimate relationships throughout the ensuing two decades of life. During young adulthood, social-emotional development intertwines with that of identity, moral, and career in dynamic ways that portend one's future attitudes and lifestyle. Fresh from perceived travails of late adolescence, those navigating young adulthood often strive to establish homeostasis while navigating new environments and ongoing personal growth. It is the point one have a (a) feelings of freedom from newfound autonomy (e.g., in determining personal identity, moral choices, and career directions) and (b) experiences of restriction as environmental challenges such as oppression, making moral decisions in a globalized world, and the economic realities of the world of work collide to create the hardships and rewards found in social-emotional development during this stage.

One aspect of social development that promotes having a broad social network is the tendency of adolescents to become more aware of how other people feel. The ability to empathize and to appreciate the unique differences among people increases in adolescence. Adolescents often learn to take other people’s feelings into account, be compassionate about the suffering of others, listen actively, and interpret nonverbal cues. Although youth typically begin to express some complex emotions early in life,² adolescents start to examine their inner experiences and express their emotions verbally. However, because the prefrontal cortex is not fully developed until early adulthood, adolescents often find it challenging to interpret body language and facial expressions. As the prefrontal cortex develops and the capacity for abstract thinking grows, adolescents will be able to empathize more deeply with others.

Conclusion

Building a strong social-emotional foundation as a child will help the child thrive and obtain happiness in life. They will be better equipped to handle stress and persevere through difficult times in their lives as an adult.

In the past, educators have stressed academic skills to determine success in a child. Those archaic days are long gone and now we know the importance of social-emotional development.

We as parents and educators must learn to read our child's emotional cues so that we can help them identify their emotions; model the behavior for our children; consistently interact with our child affectionately; show consideration for their feelings, desires and needs; express interest in their daily activities; respect their viewpoints; express genuine pride in their accomplishments with meaningful comments; and provide encouragement and support during times of stress. SOURCE: Moore, 1992.