

Relationships that Nurture

Monthly tips provided by St. David's Center in partnership with Mom Enough

Parent's Role in Emotional Development across Developmental Stages and Ages

Audio can be heard here: [Emotional Development](#)

I. Emotions influence how young children share, play and learn with one another. Caregivers help preschoolers with emotional development through:

- Reassuring anxiety
 - Preschoolers have increased independence that brings on confidence and anxiety. They begin making friendships and can engage in pretend play. New fears may develop (i.e. – the dark, baths, animals). Let them know you understand their fear and can help them with it. Encourage talks about feelings and identify when they are showing brave behaviors against fears.
- Validating emotions
 - Validation is acknowledging the child's emotion, even when it seems silly or frustrating. "I see you're sad by your tears." You can still ask something different of the child, but let them know you understand where they are coming from.
- Connecting emotion to behavior shown
 - From "terrible two's" to "trying three's" and beyond, preschoolers begin to test limits in different ways and can have a rebellious nature. Label what you see with an emotion. By giving words to your preschooler's behaviors, you can "Name It & Tame It".

II. As children move into school age, parents help them navigate the emotions that come with new social demands and experiences through:

- Modeling emotional behaviors: showing empathy, sharing feelings, giving respect, being helpful
- Asking questions without judgment: being curious to what they are thinking and how they perceive others
- Differentiating with them "In my brain..., in your brain" to gently challenge unhelpful thoughts about situations

III. Infants are known to need predictability in sleep, feedings and caregiver responses to lay the foundation of healthy emotional development. Older children also need predictability to continue healthy emotional development. Caregivers can support through:

- Being clear and consistent with messages about family values and expectations
 - "You can be mad without being mean"
 - "In our family we...."
 - "Grown-ups make decisions. Your kid choice is to A or B"
- Establishing a routine in the home that has both established patterns and opportunities to practice flexibility by notifying the child ahead of time about changes or different transitions
- Remembering the importance of basic needs: hunger, sleep, feeling connected to one another