



A guide to social & emotional development for birth – 5 Years

A child's social and emotional development plays an important part in their overall development and mental wellbeing. Supporting this during the first 1001 days of a baby's life is a crucial time for their brain development, they will then build on this throughout childhood.

This guide will give you a quick overview of what a child can do at different ages and how you can help them to achieve this. Please note that this is a guide and children's development can vary but if you feel you are worried about a child's development please seek advice from your health visitor.



0 - 6 months

I can...

- Recognise familiar people and their voices
- Enjoy playing with my hands, feet, fingers and toes
- Look at your face and look into your eyes, even if just for a few seconds at first
- Let you know I am content by cooing
- Let you know that I am happy by smiling, laughing and gurgling by a few months old
- Hold on to you while I enjoy your hugs
- Sometimes I may suck my fingers or hand to calm myself down

You can help me by...

- Singing songs, holding me close in your arms and gently dancing with me.
- Talking to me about what we are doing, seeing, hearing, and feeling. Say "I am changing your nappy, you will like being nice and dry".
- Holding me and putting your face close to mine. Making silly faces, smiling at me and sticking out your tongue. Waiting a few seconds and see if I try to repeat your actions back to you and telling me you love me.
- Stepping back from me so I cannot see you. Gently calling my name. Watching what I do. Do I stop moving for a moment? Do I try to move my head towards your voice? Picking me up. Say, "Here I am."
- Comforting me when I cry and finding out what I need. When you respond, I learn to trust you are there for me.
- Beginning to play simple games with me such as peekaboo.

6 - 12 months

I can...

- Respond to your smile and begin to laugh when looking at you
- Respond to your soothing and comforting and I love to be touched or held close
- Enjoy watching other babies and children
- Sometimes get frightened by loud or unfamiliar noises
- Enjoy simple games like peekaboo or this little piggy
- Try to talk with noises and gurgles
- Babble by putting sounds together such as "ma-ma-ma", "ba-ba-ba"

You can help me by...

- Taking me to new places to see new things. Going on a walk around the outside area. I love to see new things while you keep me safe
- Using my name when you dress, feed, and change my nappy. Saying, "Here is Dusty's finger. Here is Dusty's foot."
- Responding to me when I cry, whisper in my ear, hold me close and make soft sounds. This will help me know that you are there
- Getting down on the floor with me and play with me on my level. Look at toys, books, or objects with me. Have fun, laugh, and enjoy our time together
- Learning and settling me into a regular routine for eating, sleeping, and changing. Talk to me about my routines. This will help me feel secure and content



1 year

I can...

- Show how many emotions, such as happiness, sadness, discomfort and anger and show my likes and dislikes
- Get upset when you leave me with someone else because I want you in my sight all of the time
- Show affection by hugging and kissing people, pets or stuffed animals or dolls
- Be shy around new people and seem jealous if you pay attention to someone else. I may need time to watch and warm up to new people and places
- Respond to my name when you call me
- Have fears such as falling, darkness, large animals, loud sounds or changes in routine

You can help me by...

- Playing on the floor with me. Crawl around with me, or just get down and play on my level. I will really enjoy having you to myself.
- Playing gentle tickle games with me, but make sure to stop when I let you know I have had enough.
- Talking about my body parts. Say, "Here is my nose. Here is Destiny's nose."
- Dancing to music with me. Holding my hands while I bend up and down. Clapping and praising me when I "dance" by myself.
- Making silly expressions and talk about what you can see and what you are doing.
- Sitting on the floor with me and rolling a ball back and forth. Clapping your hands when I push the ball.

18 months

I can...

- Show you that I am happy by smiling at people including other children and I like to show affection by giving hugs and kisses however at times I may also show different emotions such as fear, sympathy, modesty, guilt or embracement
- Enjoy playing near other children but not with them yet. I may hand them an object, but I will want it straight back as I do not understand how to share
- Turn to you for help when I am in trouble
- Prefer to do things by myself. I may seem stubborn, but this is normal
- Enjoy being centre of attention and love to imitate others
- Recognise myself in a mirror or on a picture

You can help me by...

- Teaching me about emotions. Making happy faces, sad faces and silly faces in front of a mirror. This is fun!
- Giving me opportunities to play with the other children. I don't understand how to share yet.
- Giving me simple "jobs" to do. For example, cleaning a table, putting toys away, or helping to sweep up.
- Talking to me about what you are doing now and what will be happening next.
- Sitting with me for story times, especially before naptimes, they are a great way to settle down before sleep. Let me choose books to read and help turn pages. Help me name what I see.

2 years

I can...

- Imitate you, other adults and my friends. I like to imitate household tasks and enjoy simple pretend play like pretending to cook or talk on the telephone
- Show lots of emotions, and my emotions can be very "big". I can get angry and have a temper tantrums. I may use words like "mine," "no," "me do it". I can find it hard to wait and want things right now. However I am learning how to show affection by returning a hug or a kiss. I will try to comfort familiar people who are in distress
- Try new things and explore new places but I want to know you are nearby to keep me safe
- Recognise my name and know my likes and dislikes. I may become attached to certain things such as a book, toy, or blanket
- Learn about routines in the setting, but generally I am unable to remember the rules
- Play nearby other children but not really with them. I am very interested in other children and am still learning how to play with them. I don't understand how to share things yet

You can help me by...

- Teaching me all about emotions. Help me label my feelings when I am angry, sad, happy, or silly. Say, "You are really happy" or "you seem really mad."
- Sharing a book. Let me Snuggle up and get close. Before nap time is a great time to read.
- Letting me know how special I am! I will love to be praised for new things I have learned how to do: "you are so helpful", "wow you did it yourself".
- Trying to have set routines during the day, and let me know what will be happening next.
- Letting me enjoy exploring new things and taking some time to see the little things with me.
- Allow me time to find beauty in things like some weeds growing on a path or a pigeon pecking for seeds
- Providing me lots of time to play with other children. Stay nearby to help me learn about taking turns

2 1/2 years

I can...

- Use my imagination while I play through puppets, dressing up, dolls and play figures
- Enjoy being independent at times and will easily leave your side if I am familiar surroundings
- Identify if I am a boy or a girl
- Sometimes understand others feelings and may be able to identify when another child is angry or happy
- Get louder and bossier at times and I may start to use a loud urgent voice. I may also Scream and throw temper tantrums at times
- Like to be hugged and cuddled – but not during play time. I can enjoy it during story time as I enjoy stories and songs, sometimes over and over again

You can help me by...

- Helping me make a "Me Book". Take some pieces of paper and glue in pictures of the children, family members, pets, or other special things.
- Letting the child help when you are cleaning up. Wiping down the table after snack/lunch or helping to put things away.
- Letting me do more things for myself. I can put on my shoes and coat when we go out. Make sure you give me plenty of time to work on these new skills.
- Playing with me and helping me learn how to share. Showing me how to share and praising me when I share with you. This is a new thing for me, so do not expect too much at this age.
- Playing follow the Leader with me. I will love to copy you—and be the leader!
- Giving me choices, but keep them simple. Let me choose a red or a blue car to play with or milk or water at snack/lunch time.



3 years

I can...

- Do many things for myself and I will tell you "I can do it myself". Although more independent I am still learning to follow simple rules and may need gentle reminders.
- Play briefly with other children and learning more about sharing and taking turns. I may have a special friend that I prefer to play with
- Find that my emotions may shift suddenly, from happy to sad, from angry to silly. I am a trying to learn how to handle these emotions. Sometimes I may be able to express with words the feelings that I am having
- I may boss people around and make demands. This shows not only that I am independent but also that I value myself. I may do something asked of me but may be more willing if I think it's my idea
- Be fearful & have nightmares. TV shows (even scary cartoons) can give me nightmares.
- Use my imagination to create stories through pretend play with dolls, toy telephones, and action figures

You can help me by...

- Drawing simple pictures of faces that show happy, sad, excited, or silly expressions. Encouraging me to talk about the expressions and how I might be feeling.
- Telling me a simple story about something I did that was funny or interesting. Giving me an opportunity to tell a different story about myself.
- Giving opportunities and encouragement at snack/lunch time to let me talk about my day.
- Creating pretend play with my toys. Talking with me about what is happening in my play, and how best to work out problems when they come up.
- Telling me silly jokes. Simple "What am I?" riddles are also fun.
- Telling me how great I am. Give me a high five, a big smile, a pat on the back or a hug.

4 years

I can...

- Enjoy playing with other children and have favourite games and playmates. I am beginning to share and take turns but may be possessive of favourite toys and play things
- Express extreme emotions at times, - laughs, cries, is silly, angry. I am able to label my own feelings and control my feelings of frustration
- Use real-life situations during my play such as going to the shop, school and petrol station. I use my imagination a lot, and I can be very creative
- Continue to have an imaginary friend when playing games, sleeping and going to nursery.
- Show concern and sympathy for younger siblings and playmates when they are hurt or upset. My ability to empathize (to put myself in other peoples shoes) is increasing
- Start to develop an understanding of danger, know when to stay away from dangerous things

You can help me by...

- Trying to have a clear routine during the day. Letting me know what will happen next. Building in a quiet time and reading time each day giving opportunities for hugs and cuddles.
- Talking to me about possible dangers in the setting or at home, such as electrical sockets and cooker/hobs. Outside dangers, too, such as crossing the street or talking with strangers.
- Introducing a new feeling each day, such as bored. Using pictures, gestures, and words Encouraging your child to use a variety of words to describe how they are feeling.
- Encouraging activities that involve sharing, such as building with blocks, colouring with crayons, and playing dress up. Teaching me how to ask a friend for a turn. Give me a lot of time to play with other children.
- Talking with me about how people are alike and how they are different.
- Providing opportunities for me to be creative. Empty containers, glue, newspapers, rubber bands, and magazines can be used to make new inventions. Listening to me when I try to tell you about my invention.



5 years

I can...

- Choose my own friends and may have a best friend. I like to play best with one or two other children at a time however will play in small groups at the park or school and play with most people in the class
- Understand and follow simple rules at school and at home and I am beginning to understand the meaning of right and wrong
- Show a variety of emotions. I may be jealous of other children at times, especially of a younger sibling that may be getting attention. But also be sensitive to other children's feeling and can identify feelings in others: "he is sad."
- Show some self-control in group situations and wait for my turn or stand in a line. I also understand turn taking and will share most of the time
- Respond to requests such as "use your quite voice" or "inside is for walking."
- Focus my attention for a necessary length of time such as when directions are being given or a story is being read due to my increased attention span

You can help me by...

- Encouraging me to play games that require working together. Try building a tent out of old blankets, playing catch, or acting out stories.
- Talking to me about real dangers and make-believe dangers (monsters under the bed) using hand-drawn pictures or pictures cut out from a magazine.
- Supporting me to do small jobs around the setting/home as this makes me feel good. Giving me lots of praise when I am doing a good job, and telling me what a big help I am.
- Ensuring I have plenty of rest, quiet and alone time when I need it. Ensuring that I have time for reading every day, so I can snuggle up and get close with you having hugs and cuddles.
- Teaching me about myself, when my birthday is, how old I am, where I live and my name.
- Telling me simple jokes and riddles and listening to me when I tell you jokes. I love it when we laugh together.

