

SEVEN SKILLS FOR SCHOOL SUCCESS

by Pam Schiller



Acknowledgments

Dedication

To Dr. Harry Chugani and Dr. Bruce Perry, who continue to produce scientific evidence supporting the crucial role that early interactions and experiences play in developing social and emotional intelligence.

To Daniel Goleman, who elegantly spreads the news!

To sweet baby Audrey, who is living proof that loving parents who are fully present make a significant difference.

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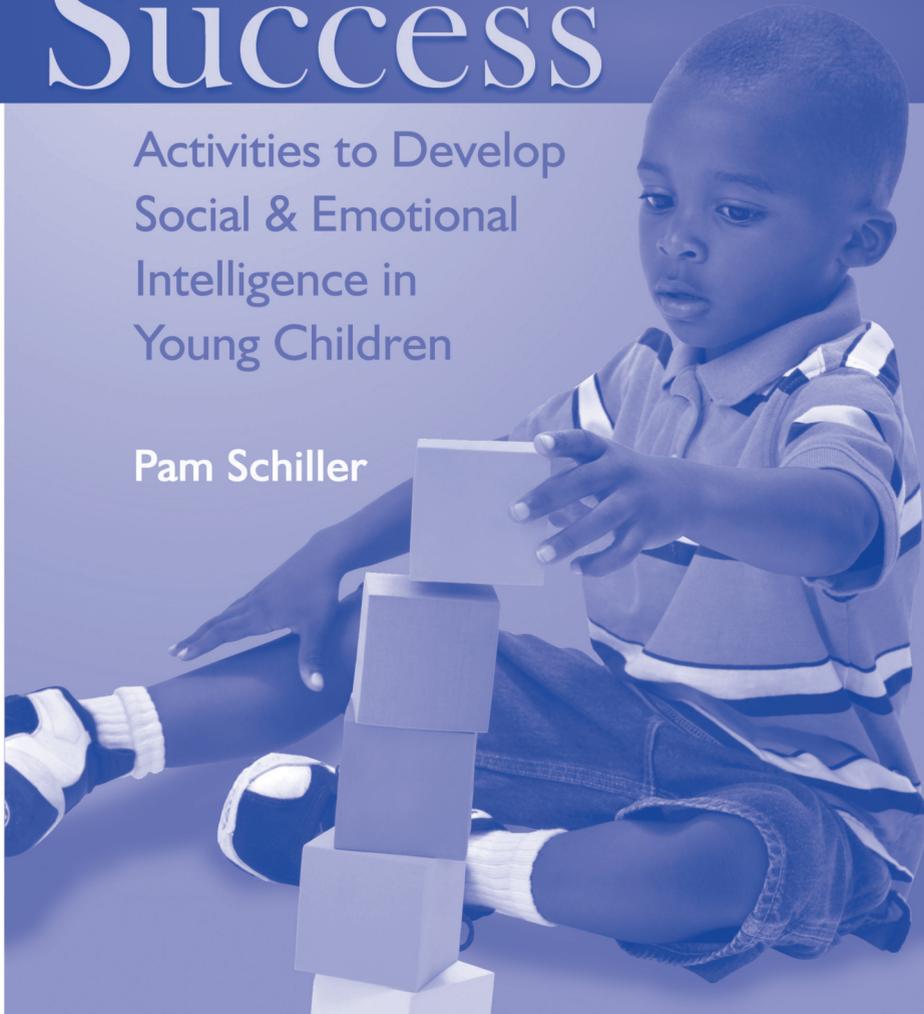
Do You Know the Muffin Man? with Thomas Moore

SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Seven Skills for School Success

Activities to Develop
Social & Emotional
Intelligence in
Young Children

Pam Schiller



gryphon house, inc.
Beltsville, MD, USA

Seven Skills for School Success

by Pam Schiller

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Introduction



All children need social and emotional skills so they can learn and be successful in school and in life. To be successful academically, children need to learn how to control their emotions and how to work in groups; these skills are necessary to thrive in school or any other learning situation. Children who can control their impulses and behaviors are much better prepared to listen and learn.

Society values an individual's cognitive capabilities; yet many people do not stop to consider how individuals actually develop these skills. We want children to be successful in school, and, generally, good grades are measures of that success. We may assume that good grades are the result of superior cognitive abilities. However, children need to learn to pay attention and listen so they can develop the thinking skills necessary to become successful students. Paying attention and listening require children to control impulses, delay gratification, and focus on a task. All of these are related to social and emotional development.

For example, when an individual is a gifted athlete, we may believe that, beyond her physical talents, it is her cognitive abilities that make her exceptional. This type of thinking is “putting the cart before the horse.” It is more likely that she has used her social and emotional skills—her ability to control her impulses and delay gratification—to focus on practicing the physical and mental skills necessary to become an exceptional player.

New findings from neurological science support the crucial role social and emotional development play in learning. Researchers (Sousa, 2005; Goleman, 2006) suggest that cognitive and physical potential is optimized only when an individual's brain is adequately wired in the areas of social and emotional intelligence.

This book reviews some of the more recent research findings related to social and emotional development and suggests strategies for applying this important

research as you work with children. In addition, it explores important characteristics of social and emotional intelligence and offers easy-to-implement activities to help children develop these characteristics to the fullest.

WHAT IS SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE?

Social intelligence covers the broad range of skills people use to relate to, play with, learn from, and teach others. Social skills are important for survival and for a good life.

Individuals who are socially intelligent are able to:

- Assess the feelings of others;
- Relate to the feelings, motives, and concerns of others;
- Read and respond to social cues; and
- Negotiate and resolve conflicts.



A group of children are playing Keep Away. Hunter is watching from the sidelines. Each time the ball comes close to him, he makes a feeble attempt to intercept it. Amanda notices that Hunter appears interested in the game. When the ball comes her way, she catches it and announces to the group, “Hey, Hunter wants to play with us. Come on, Hunter, you can be on my team.”

Amanda exhibits a high level of social intelligence. She is attuned to the feelings of others. She notices Hunter on the sidelines watching. She reads social cues. Hunter’s attempt to intercept the ball registers with Amanda as a sign that Hunter would like to play. Amanda responds by waiting for an appropriate time to stop the game. She helps Hunter join, and she helps her teammates become aware of the situation.

WHAT IS EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE?

Healthy emotions allow people to express and constructively manage the full range of human feelings, to postpone gratification, to find constructive outlets for negative emotions, and to understand and appreciate how others feel. Healthy emotions lead to self-satisfaction and joy.

Individuals who are emotionally intelligent are able to:

- Identify and label feelings,
- Express feelings,
- Assess the intensity of feelings,
- Manage feelings,
- Delay gratification,
- Control impulses,
- Know the difference between feeling and actions, and
- Manage stress.

A group of children are playing Red Rover at a birthday party. John wants to play with them. He has been watching the other children play. Several times, he tells the children that he would like to play. Heather stops playing, but before she has a chance to tell John he can take her place, Michael takes her place. John sees his opportunity is gone. He tells Michael that he was waiting and was the next in line to play. Michael says, "Too bad!" John starts to cry. Daniel says, "John, you can play in my place. I am going inside to play with Heather."

What happened here? Who demonstrates competency in the area of emotional intelligence? What about John? He waits patiently, he communicates his desires, he tries to negotiate with Michael, and he refrains from kicking or hitting Michael. These are all important building blocks of emotional intelligence. His tears are his way of communicating his frustration and stress. He handles himself well for a four-year-old. He demonstrates intentionality, effective communication skills, an ability to control his impulses, and the ability to wait. Instead of tears, he could have taken his frustration out on Michael.

Daniel also shows a high level of emotional intelligence and social intelligence. He demonstrates empathy for John and is willing to move on to another activity to allow John to have a turn.

There is not much information about Michael in the scenario, but he likely has not mastered empathy yet.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE ARE INTERDEPENDENT

Emotional intelligence is the understanding and managing of one's feelings and emotions. Social intelligence is the understanding and managing of oneself in group situations. The two are interdependent. Most often a child will learn to understand and manage himself before he becomes skilled at understanding and managing himself in the company of others. However, children also learn about themselves by watching and interacting with others. The chart below shows how the skills for social and emotional intelligence support each other.

Emotional Intelligence	Social Intelligence
Self-awareness Understands feelings Knows the difference between feelings and actions	Social awareness Assesses the feeling of others Reads social cues Relates to the feelings, motives, and concerns of others Is attuned to the feelings, motives, and concerns of others
Self-management Exercises feelings Manages feelings Controls impulses Communicates feelings Manages stress	Relationship management Negotiates and resolves conflicts Responds to the feelings, motives, and concerns of others Works cooperatively with others Communicates effectively with others Demonstrates strategies for entering group play

WHAT BRAIN RESEARCH SAYS ABOUT SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Wiring the Foundation for Brain Power

The primary task of the brain during early childhood is to connect brain cells (neurons). Every neuron has an axon, which sends information out to other

neurons, and several dendrites, which receive information from the other cells. As axons hook up with dendrites, trillions of connections, called synapses, are formed. Everything we learn is stored in communities of neurons. We have neurological communities assigned to operate our motor, cognitive, and language capabilities, as well as our social and emotional capabilities.

Experience forges the connections, and repetition strengthens the forged connections for all areas of development. The first time an experience is encountered, neurons connect. When the experience is revisited or repeated, the information travels over the established circuitry and, in doing so, strengthens the connections. In neurological terms, the axons become more highly myelinated. When the axons within the community are fully myelinated, information is able to travel at an incredible rate of 200 mps (miles per second) over the brain's circuitry (Sousa, 2005). Think about the circuitry like paths through the wilderness—those paths that are used the most become highways and those that are not used tend to fade away.

Social and emotional wiring differ from cognitive and physical wiring in that they are uniquely dependent on human interactions (Goleman, 2007). We must interact socially with others in order to forge social networks in the brain. Our ability to relate to others comes from the application of what we have learned from those early interactions to the broader world. Emotional wiring is laid down during the first few years of life as children interact with their parents and caregivers and determine that they are able to get their needs met. The ability to control emotions and manage impulses depends on the wiring of this trust.

The quality and quantity of social and emotional experiences will affect the outcome of social intelligence and emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2007).

The Social and Emotional Brain

The social brain is the sum of the neural mechanisms that orchestrate our interactions as well as our thoughts and feelings about people and our relationships. Social wiring requires face-to-face, voice-to-voice, and skin-to-skin contact with others.

The emotional brain is the sum of the neural mechanisms that orchestrate and manage our emotions and our impulses. Positive emotional wiring requires confidence that we are safe.

Developmental Timetables

There are fertile times when the brain is able to wire specific skills at an optimum level. These fertile times are called “windows of opportunity.” The windows are scientific; they are open from birth to puberty. The open windows of opportunity are the same for all children, no matter where on the planet they are born, no matter the conditions under which they are born, no matter whether they are premature, developmentally delayed, or typically developing.

Social and emotional intelligence foundations are wired during the first 48 months of life. Positive experiences during open (fertile) windows result in positive outcomes. Negative experiences during open windows result in negative outcomes. For example, in terms of emotional intelligence, an infant wires trust during the first 14 months of life. If he cries and someone comes to help him, he will wire for trust; if no one comes to his aid, he will wire for lack of trust (Ramey & Ramey, 1999). If he is hungry and someone feeds him, he learns to trust, but if no one feeds him, he learns not to trust. It is as simple as that.

When positive experiences are offered according to the timetable provided in the following chart, Windows of Opportunity, wiring will occur at an optimum level. The brain is fertile all through the early years and up to puberty, so the skills listed within each window are technically able to wire during that time. However, optimum wiring occurs when positive experiences occur within the designated window.

Windows of Opportunity

Window	Wiring Opportunity	Greatest Enhancement
Social Intelligence Attachment Independence Cooperation	0–48 months 0–12 months 18–36 months 24–48 months	4 years to puberty
Emotional Intelligence Trust Impulse Control	0–48 months 0–14 months 16–48 months	4 years to puberty
Motor Development	0–24 months	2 years to puberty
Vision	0–24 months	2 years to puberty
Thinking Skills Cause and Effect Problem Solving	0–48 months 0–16 months 16–48 months	4 years to puberty

Windows of Opportunity *(continued)*

Window	Wiring Opportunity	Greatest Enhancement
Reading Foundation Skills*	0–24 months	2–7 years
Early Sounds	4–8 months	8 months to puberty
Vocabulary	0–24 months	2–5 years
* Two reliable predictors of reading success are sound discrimination and the size of the individual's vocabulary.		

Use the Windows of Opportunity chart as a guide when planning social and emotional experiences for children. The windows of opportunity provide a framework for what is best for children. For the greatest enhancement, offer positive experiences during fertile (open) windows and provide numerous opportunities for repetition, which should follow as closely as possible to new experiences.

Spindle Cells

At birth, there are 100 trillion neurons waiting to be wired. The brain is an amazingly unfinished organ at birth. Connections are forged as children encounter experiences in the world, and they are reinforced with subsequent repetitions of the experience. This becomes the neural circuitry that will lay the foundation for children's lifelong learning. Some of the 100 trillion neurons waiting to be connected are specifically assigned to wire for social and emotional intelligence.

Social wiring is forged by social experiences. Spindle cells, named after their long, spindle-shaped bodies, are the cells that are credited with allowing us to feel love and to suffer emotionally (Goleman, 2007). These cells occur in parts of the human brain that are thought to be responsible for social orchestration (interactions). They are responsible for empathy, speech, intuition about the feelings of others, and snap judgments.

Spindle cells make us socially aware and sensitive. Scientists believe that spindle cells create our interpersonal intelligence. Humans, some species of apes, and humpback whales are the only animals with spindle cells. Spindle cells position themselves in the brain during the first four months of life. How prolific they are depends on factors such as stress (for worse) and loving atmosphere (for the better).

Mirror Neurons

Mirror neurons are also related to our social and emotional skills. They form during the first few years of life as we watch others. Mirror neurons make emotions contagious. They are the neurons that allow babies to smile after only a few short weeks of experiencing human interactions.

Mirror neurons help us sense the intentions of others and are invaluable when it comes to gathering social information. Mirror neurons fire as we watch others. They are firing when we smile back at someone who smiles at us. They are firing when one crying baby makes other babies begin to cry. Scientists claim that the more active a person's mirror neuron system is, the stronger the capability for empathy.

Effects of Stress

Emotional trauma can have a negative impact on early development. Children who are stressed carry a high level of cortisol (the stress hormone) in their bloodstreams. High levels of cortisol cause adults to have “fuzzy” thinking, but for young children it is far more damaging. When cortisol washes over the newly formed neurological connections of young children, it can literally wash away some of those fragile new connections—leaving children struggling to build the necessary foundation for lifetime learning (Families and Work Institute, 1996).

Emotional trauma also interferes with the brain's ability to use rational thought to decode our emotions. It over-sensitizes us to stress and causes us to over-react to situations.

Do young children have stress? Yes! Although the causes of their stress may be invisible to most adults, they often carry a high level of stress. What causes stress in children? They are struggling to meet developmental milestones: learning to communicate, to walk, to interact, to trust, to sustain emotional balance, and to understand their world. One of the greatest stressors for young children is building rapport with those involved in their daily lives. For example, when a child's teacher leaves and a new one takes her place, it may take this child a long time to make the adjustment to someone new. During this period of time, the child will encounter stress with each interaction.



In the middle of the last century, Romania was an impoverished country where families could not afford to have children because they were too poor to keep food on the table.

The Czar of Romania at that time was concerned that without a population, one day there would be no more Romania. So he made a law that each woman within child-bearing age had to have at least 4 children, and those who did not comply had to pay a heavy tax.

Reluctantly, the families in Romania began to have more children. However, they could not provide for these children because of their poverty.

The government stepped in and took over the care of these children and placed them in large orphanages. The orphanages were all the same—a central tower with four wings, three stories high—40 children on each wing with 1 caretaker for each wing.

In these orphanages, conditions were inadequate. The color was drab and there were no toys or books. The caretakers could not possibly take care of all the children, so bottles were propped up and diapers were changed only when absolutely necessary. Many of the children remained in their cribs day and night, like animals in cages. Nutrition was also poor and many became malnourished.

Importantly, little or no emotional or social interaction occurred between the children and caregivers or other adults. No one read to them, no one played with them or held them, and no one showed affection to these unfortunate children. Yet, healthy social interaction early in life is crucial to normal emotional development.

This was convincingly demonstrated in experiments on newborn monkeys performed by Dr. Harry Harlow in the 1960s. Dr. Harlow reared newborn monkeys in complete isolation and found that if the period of isolation exceeded 8 months, the young monkeys were not accepted into colonies because of their abnormal and delinquent behavior. Monkeys reach puberty between 3 and 4 years, so 8 months was long before puberty.

Dr. Harry T. Chugani, a pediatric neurologist, and Dr. Michael E. Behen, a pediatric neuropsychologist, from Wayne State University, have studied the effects of early socio-emotional deprivation on young children for a number of years. They were familiar with the Harlow experiments and wanted to study effects of deprivation on the brain. The Romanian orphans became part of their research. Drs. Chugani and Behen have followed these children from the time they arrived as adopted orphans and have performed a variety of neuroimaging studies to determine the effects of early socio-emotional deprivation on brain function and connectivity. They also performed behavioral assessments on the children.

Drs. Chugani and Behen found that most of these children had a difficult time overcoming the effects of their early deprivation. They had impulsive behaviors, attention deficits, and attachment disorders. Like in the Harlow monkeys, there seemed to be a critical period, in that children who were adopted prior to 18 months of age fared better than those who were adopted later. Indeed, several siblings adopted by the same foster parents were noted to have different outcomes, with the younger ones doing better because they had spent less time in the orphanage and had been placed in caring environments sooner.

Dr. Chugani and his team used advanced brain imaging techniques, including PET (positron emission tomography) and DTI (diffusion tensor imaging, an advanced MRI technique that can look at tracts or connections in the brain), to study these children. They found that certain areas of the brain, called limbic regions, were functioning poorly and were abnormally connected to each other. In normal people, these same regions are known to be involved in emotional and social skills. Dr. Chugani concluded that if the infant does not use certain brain areas and connections that are waiting for attachment and bonding, then these areas fail to stabilize or “hard wire,” leading to disturbances in the behavior of these children as they grow up. The first 18–24 months are crucial for this hard wiring to occur properly.

This story is reprinted with the permission of Dr. Harry T. Chugani.

Sleep Deprivation

Many children are sleeping one to two hours less per night than their brains need for healthy growth (Gurian, 2007). Sleep deprivation denies the brain the necessary time for processing, and it denies body cells the necessary time for regenerating. Sleep deprivation in children has another negative effect—it causes antisocial behavior. Children who are tired whine and fuss. They are uninterested in participating in social activities. Researchers say that children who are sleep-deprived are more likely to do poorly in school and are prone to become substance abusers (Gurian, 2007).

Young children are wiring their brains for future use based on the experiences they encounter each day. If those experiences are antisocial in nature, then the wiring that is forged will be reinforced for antisocial behavior. Children need 8–10 hours of sleep each day. Infants and toddlers require an even greater number of hours of sleep.

Impact of Television and Computers on Social Intelligence

Both the computer and the television are antisocial mechanisms. Neither requires interpersonal interactions. Instead, both seduce children into solitary play.

During the first year of life, an infant's brain grows its particular set of necessary connections through reciprocal relationships. (See mirror neurons and spindle cells, pages 15 and 16). Synapses form through interactions with people. Babies need to be touched, spoken to, and listened to. Television and other screen stimulants can derail this brain development (Gurian, 2007; Jensen, 2005). The American Medical Association and every other medical association that has studied the impact of television on early brain development recommend avoiding screen time for children younger than two.

In *Endangered Minds*, Dr. Jane Healy speaks to the need for children to be active participants in the wiring of their brains. She says, “A ‘good’ brain for learning develops strong and widespread neural highways that can quickly and efficiently assign different aspects of a task to the most efficient system.... Such efficiency is developed only by active practice in thinking and learning, which, in turn, builds increasingly stronger connections.”

Dr. Healy goes on to say that excessive television viewing may affect the development of strong and widespread neural networks because it is primarily a passive activity that not only fails to offer opportunity for wiring but at the same time prohibits wiring because it takes the place of active exploration.

A growing suspicion among brain researchers is that computers have the same effect. They deprive children of activities specifically needed to build strong brain connections.

SEVEN KEY ELEMENTS FOR SCHOOL SUCCESS

Over the past two decades, brain research has highlighted the preschool years as a critical transition point in childhood development; it has also highlighted the importance of early experiences to promote optimum wiring in all areas of development: social, emotional, motor, cognitive, and language.

What teachers have known for decades, the research community has confirmed: an inextricable link exists between social-emotional competence and school readiness. In their review of the literature on social and emotional intelligence, Mitchell and Glossop (2005) concluded that:

Social and emotional intelligence is a crucial determinant of a child's "readiness to learn." That readiness depends on seven key elements, which the research has defined as:

- Confidence
- Curiosity
- Intentionality
- Self-control
- Relatedness
- Capacity to communicate
- Cooperativeness

Although research clearly identifies these seven characteristics as critical for school success, the focus continues to be on early academic training. Yet, a child's readiness for school is not measured by how many letters of the alphabet he knows or how high she can count. It is not contingent on early reading or math ability. It depends on the less-tangible criteria related to social and emotional intelligence. Daniel Goleman, in *Social Intelligence*, says,

Those who say that social intelligence amounts to little more than general intelligence applied to social situations might do better to reason the other way around: to consider that general intelligence is merely a derivative of social intelligence, albeit one our culture has come to value.

Focusing on helping children develop each of the seven key elements will enhance their social and emotional intelligence and will help those children achieve their full potential as individuals and as members of society.

TEACHING FOR LEARNING

1. Model

Do you remember the old saying, “a picture is worth a thousand words”? Well, when it comes to teaching children, this is profoundly true. Children are always watching us; everything we do teaches a lesson. For example, if we want our children to be cooperative, confident, and intentional, then we must demonstrate those behaviors to them in all that we do—not just when it suits us.

Demonstrating the characteristics we want children to acquire is not a part-time job. Children are pragmatic, fairly black-and-white in their thinking. The concept of “extenuating circumstances” is beyond their comprehension. Young children have not yet formed an understanding of discretion or the ability to look at a situation from several points of view.

To children, you are the most important people in the world. Because they want to grow up just like you, they imitate and take to heart all that you do. This is a powerful position; enjoy it and use it wisely because all too soon that power will shift from you to their peers. If you have provided a strong foundation, the key components that make up children’s social and emotional intelligence will stay with them even through the spirit-shaking teenage years.

2. Discuss

In our busy, day-to-day world, it is easy to forget why discussing things is important. It is often easier to say something and move on or to take care of a crisis by yourself. A good example of how to use discussion is when it is time to clean up. A discussion might go like this:

Why do you think it is important to clean up the toys?

Because the room needs to be neat!

Yes, it is nice for the room to be neat and tidy. What might happen if the toys are left on the floor?

Someone might step on them and break them.

Yes, they might break or someone might trip on a toy and get hurt. Have you ever tripped on something that was left out on the floor?

I did. I fell down when I stepped on a shoe.

The toys might also get lost.

That's right. If we leave the toys scattered on the table or on the floor, some of them might get lost. I have put eight blocks on the floor. Will you pick them up and put them away?

By myself?

Do you want some help?

Yes.

Why?

Because it is too many blocks for just me.

Oh, you mean if more people help, the work will be easier?

Yes, and faster.

When everyone helps clean up, the work is finished more quickly. When everyone helps clean up, the work is divided so each person has less to do.

What comes after clean-up time?

When you see children sharing, being responsible, showing empathy, practicing persistence, or other positive traits, acknowledge them with specific feedback.

Notice that the discussion is short and that a concrete example is used. You don't want to overdo discussion because children will lose interest. The concrete example of the blocks helps children see the benefits of cooperative effort in cleaning up.

Children's books provide an intriguing source of discussion material. The plots can often serve as a springboard for a discussion that will increase children's understanding and expand their thinking.

3. Practice

Children need opportunities to practice skills. Practice is important when learning something new. It helps children make sense of what they are learning. The more relevant the practice is to children's lives, the more meaningful it is and, therefore, the easier it is to master the task at hand. Practice strengthens brain connections associated with new skills, which will lead to faster retrieval of information and knowledge. For practice to be effective, children need to receive feedback from you and to do their own self-evaluation. Feedback helps children learn things correctly. If they are practicing something the wrong way they are not achieving their goals.

4. Acknowledge

When you see children sharing, being responsible, showing empathy, practicing persistence, or other positive traits, acknowledge them with specific feedback. For

example, you might say, “Alicia, I noticed you helping Abby finish the puzzle. It sure is easier when two people work together, isn’t it?”

While it is important to encourage children, avoid offering external rewards like stickers, allowances, candy, and so on. Ultimately, you want children to be rewarded by the internal joy they experience when they solve a problem or finish a project they have worked on diligently.

5. Reflect

One of the most disheartening by-products of our fast-paced lifestyles is the lack of time for reflection. Yet, we are often reminded of how important taking time to examine progress is to the achievement of goals. As children practice new skills, remember how important it is to provide feedback and support and to encourage them to think about how they feel about their progress.



Confidence

1

WHAT IS CONFIDENCE?

A feeling of emotional security that results from faith in oneself. It is a firm belief in one's powers, abilities, or capacities. (Adapted from Webster's II New College Dictionary)

Confident children meet challenges with optimism and persistence. They are able to make decisions and choices without the influence of adults or peers.

A Child Shows Confidence When...

- He presents himself effectively.
- She recognizes her ability to affect outcomes.
- He identifies problems and seeks solutions.
- She shows persistence and determination.
- He demonstrates a positive attitude.
- She listens attentively.
- He seeks adult help when needed.

A Confident Child Understands These Words...

able	independent
attitude	obstacles
can	optimistic
capable	persistent
challenges	problem-solving
confidence	proud
confident	self
courage	solve
determined	success
failure	

WHY CONFIDENCE MATTERS

Confidence develops over time. It is an attitude that reflects a positive and realistic perception of ourselves and our abilities. Confidence is learned, not inherited, and it develops from the inside out. Each of us builds our own level of confidence, layer by layer, from the experiences we encounter and how we manage these experiences. Our confidence is also influenced by the reactions of those around us. Gender, social class, religion, and culture each contribute to feelings of self-worth and confidence.

You play a major role in developing children’s confidence. Your reactions tell children if you approve or disapprove of their efforts, which in turn influence their self-evaluation. If you encourage children’s problem-solving and applaud their efforts, not just their successes, you promote confidence. When children solve child-size problems, they gradually learn that they do not need to fear failure and that they gain a great deal by trying.

“If I have the belief that I can do it, I shall surely acquire the capacity to do it even if I may not have it at the beginning.”

—Mahatma Gandhi

Criticism and blame diminish confidence. Verbal and physical abuse damage children’s feelings of emotional security and faith in themselves. In addition, children are self-centered, which may cause them to blame themselves for things they actually play no role in, such as a divorce or death of a loved one.

Children learn about the world and their place in it by watching the people around them. If you desire a child to be confident, you must model that behavior. Self-confident people are optimistic, independent, proud of their efforts, able to handle criticism, and emotionally mature. Self-confident people inspire self-confidence in others.

Self-confident children understand that life is full of ups and downs. They understand that when they encounter obstacles sometimes they will succeed and sometimes they will fail in overcoming them. They are realists, not perfectionists. If children always fail, they will lose the validation they need to develop confidence. If they always succeed, they will not know how to react to failure. Real confidence requires an understanding of the possibility of failure while still pursuing a solution. Confident people have a deep, realistic faith in their abilities.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

- External reward inhibits internal motivation.
- Self-efficacy (well-defined confidence) is a byproduct of problem solving. (Bandura, 2000; Jensen, 2005)

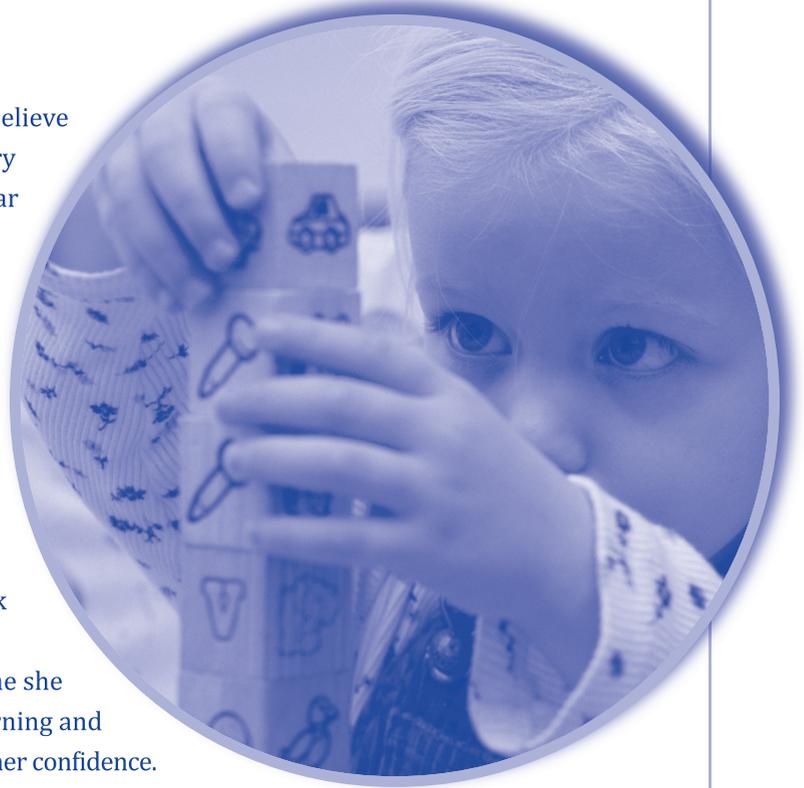
WHAT YOU CAN DO TO BOOST A CHILD'S CONFIDENCE SKILLS

Model Confidence

- **Describe one of your challenges.** When something occurs during the course of your day that seems difficult, say, “Hmm, it is going to be difficult to organize this toy shelf, but I bet I can do it. I’m sure going to try.” Celebrate by saying, “I did it!” when you accomplish your goal.
- **Talk about the pros and cons of a solution.** When you are faced with a problem, talk about it. Point out your options and discuss why you are selecting a certain option. For example, if you are trying to figure out the best place to put a new sandbox, you might describe each possible spot you are considering. Discuss the pros and cons of each location. For example, one spot is shady most of the day, but another spot is far enough away from the door to allow sand to drop off. Ask the child to think of additional pros and cons and even perhaps another location. When you make a decision, explain the rationale for your choice.

Talk About Confidence

- **Define it.** Encourage the child to believe she can succeed even if she has to try several times. Describe some familiar people or characters who are confident; for example, the Itsy Bitsy Spider, the little blue engine in *The Little Engine That Could*, and the Little Red Hen.
- **Encourage children to try something new.** Ask the child how she feels when she learns something new, such as how to walk on the balance beam, skip, or turn a somersault. Point out that every time she conquers something new she is learning and problem solving. This will help build her confidence.
- **Create an “I Did It” spot.** When a child accomplishes a difficult task, ask her to draw a picture about the experience and help her write a sentence or two



about how the accomplishment made her feel. Create an “I Did It” spot on the wall for the pictures. Visit this spot often and talk about the pictures.

- **Read books.** The following books are wonderful stories about being confident or finding the confidence to do difficult things. Talk about the role of confidence in the stories you choose to read. For example, read *Amazing Grace* by Mary Hoffman. Ask questions. *How did Grace become confident? How do you know she wasn't confident at the beginning of the story?*

A Chair for My Mother by Vera Williams

Amazing Grace by Mary Hoffman

Ant Attack! by Anne James

Benjamin Dille's Thirsty Camel by Jolly Roger Bradfield

Caps for Sale by Esphyr Slobodkina

Domino by Claire Masurel

The Doorbell Rang by Pat Hutchins

Harold and the Purple Crayon by Crockett Johnson

When I Feel Good About Myself by Cornelia Maude Spelman

Imogene's Antlers by David Small

Itsy Bitsy Spider by Iza Trapani

Jennie's Hat by Ezra Jack Keats

King of the Playground by Phyllis Naylor

The Little Engine that Could by Watty Piper

Mouse Paint by Ellen Stoll Walsh

Mr. Pine's Purple House by Leonard Kessler

Pickle-Chiffon Pie by Jolly Roger Bradfield

Swimmy by Leo Lionni

Where the Wild Things Are by Maurice Sendak

Practice Confidence

- **Challenge children to the edge of their competencies.** Children learn and grow when they have opportunities to practice newly acquired skills as well as when they experience a challenge just beyond the level of their present mastery. Children are motivated and feel more successful when they face and then accomplish slightly difficult tasks or activities.
 - Match activities to the child's emerging needs and interests.
 - Challenge the child, but not to the point of frustration. Target experiences to the edge of the child's changing capacities.
 - Never underestimate a child's abilities.
 - Work with the child on challenging projects. Offer suggestions for trying new ways to accomplish tasks. Refrain from helping too much.

- **Keep physical space cozy.** Children feel large in relation to their environment. Maria Montessori demonstrated her knowledge of this fact when she designed child-size furniture.
 - Create small play areas.
 - Create private spaces where the child can be alone. For example, you might create a reading “tent” or an oversized cardboard “get away” box.
- **Avoid perfectionism.** Insisting that blocks line up perfectly or only accepting art that is aesthetically pleasing leads children to believe that anything less than perfect is unacceptable. Perfectionism can lead children to be afraid to try new things, become over-sensitive to criticism, and procrastinate.
 - Teach the child to set high, yet attainable, standards. This is the hallmark of a healthy striver.
 - Accept the child’s efforts and celebrate her determination and persistence instead of focusing on a perfect outcome.
 - Celebrate mistakes as opportunities for learning. Thomas Edison said, “If I find 10,000 ways something won’t work, I haven’t failed. I am not discouraged, because every wrong attempt discarded is another step forward.” Everyone makes mistakes. Learning from our mistakes is what matters.
 - Model the acceptance of criticism. Help the child view it as a means for learning and growing instead of something to avoid.
 - Teach the child to enjoy the process of creating. This is especially easy when she is drawing or painting, where the opportunity for creativity is high.
 - Teach the child to self-assess with fairness. Help her understand that what she thinks of her efforts provides motivation to move forward. Outside evaluations can be helpful, but they are certainly less accurate than one’s self-evaluation. Help the child understand that outside evaluations do not define who she is.
 - Ask questions that help the child self-assess. For example, say, “Building that fort took determination. How does that make you feel?” or “Why do you think you’re having trouble getting your tower to stay up?”
 - Perfectionism is often fueled by rigid thinking. Often, perfectionists won’t let go of an idea, even when they know they should. Animals exhibit the same rigid thinking that often appears with human perfectionist behaviors. “The South Indian Monkey Trap Fable” on page 30 shows what can happen to victims of rigid thinking—whether they happen to be humans or monkeys!

“Whether
you think that you can
or you can’t,
you’re usually right.”

—Henry Ford

The South Indian Monkey Trap Fable

Some villagers in India developed a trap to catch small monkeys. They hollowed out a coconut, made a hole in it that was just big enough for a monkey's hand to fit through, and chained it to a stake. Then, the villagers placed some rice inside the coconut.

Tempted by the rice, monkeys reached in and became trapped because the hole in the coconut was too small for them to remove their rice-filled fists. The monkeys did not understand that if they let go of what they wanted—the rice—they could be free. If they rigidly held on to the rice, they would be captured. Most of the time, the trap worked and the villagers captured the monkeys.

- **Encourage persistence.**

- A child needs time to focus on the activity she is engaged in without interruption. Instead of trying to help her finish what she is doing so you can move on, allow ample time for the child to focus on the task at hand and plenty of notice before moving on to something else.
- Think of an activity that you can teach the child in which she will visibly improve over time. For example, you might start doing jumping jacks every day. At the beginning of the month, write down how many jumping jacks she can do before tiring. Each week, encourage her to beat her “personal best.” Use this activity as an example of how you can improve with practice and persistence.

- **Be fully present.**

- Listen carefully. This is easier said than done. In today's busy world, it is easy to give superficial attention to a child's questions and comments. Instead, really take time to listen and respond constructively and with interest. This helps the child feel that her work and her comments and questions are valid and respected. When you are fully present with the child, she feels that she is the most important person in the world.



- When you get frustrated, take a moment to calm down before responding or acting. Being fully present for the child requires your full attention, and frustration is a distraction.
- Teach the child how to be “fully present.” Help her practice how to listen attentively and respond appropriately.
- **Practice problem solving.** When children solve problems, they feel confident. This confidence motivates children to tackle new and challenging situations, which in turn leads to greater learning.
 - Encourage hands-on investigations. Hands-on experimentation allows the child to use trial and error as she learns about the things in her world.
 - Provide interesting items to explore, such as rocks, leaves, kitchen gadgets, old clocks, boat parts, pulleys, and so on.
 - Rotate toys and other items to keep them fresh and thought-provoking. Put some toys and materials away and take them out when children need a fresh look or a new challenge. Begin with activities that encourage the child to count to three and gradually add activities that encourage counting to four, five, six, and so on. Build an understanding from simple to more complex. For example, before you expect the child to classify materials (sort by likenesses), provide activities that teach the math vocabulary required for classifying, such as descriptive words like “round,” “square,” “tall,” “short,” “thick,” “thin,” “red,” “blue,” and directional words like “up,” “down,” “in,” “out,” and “inside.” With this preparation, the child has the tools she needs to be successful when asked to place the red items inside the square box.
 - Provide unique items for water play. Offer funnels and containers some of the time, and basters and sponges at other times. Invite the child to use all kinds of interesting items for water play, including hand beaters, whisks, measuring spoons, tubing, corks, and pumps.
- **Foster creative and critical thinking skills** by encouraging children to use items in new ways.
 - Make megaphones from empty paper towel tubes. Use cylindrical building blocks, hair rollers, or curlers as microphones.

- Use a variety of items as paintbrushes, such as feathers, squeegees, twigs, corn husks, feather dusters, or spatulas. How do these different paintbrushes change the outcome of the painting?
 - Make funnels. Demonstrate how you can make a funnel by rolling a sheet of paper diagonally.
 - Explore ways to move pieces of Styrofoam. Invite the child to think of ways to move a Styrofoam chip from one end of a table to the other without using her hands.
 - What can you do with a paper bag? Give the child a small paper bag. Ask her what she can do with the bag, other than use it to carry something.
- **Encourage children’s suggestions and solutions.** Listen carefully to the children’s ideas. Offer help when they become frustrated, but don’t solve their problems. Learning to control frustration develops emotional security, which is the ability to control emotions and to maintain an emotional balance. When children know they can find a solution to a problem, they are less likely to become overly worried about it. Each time they solve a problem, they become more certain that they will be able to solve future problems. This cycle leads them to become more patient and less frustrated.
- Discuss the steps in problem solving. Use the following questions to help the child focus on the problem and the solution.
 - Step 1: What’s my problem?
 - Step 2: What are my choices to solve it?
 - Step 3: What looks like the best way?
 - Step 4: What can I do myself to solve it?
 - What help do I need from someone else?
 - Step 5: Try my solution.
 - Step 6: Decide if it worked or if I should do something differently.
 - Challenge the child to solve problems:
 - Problem: The wagon is stuck in the mud.
Question: How can we get it out?

 - Problem: Our ball is in a big puddle of water.
Question: How can we get it out?

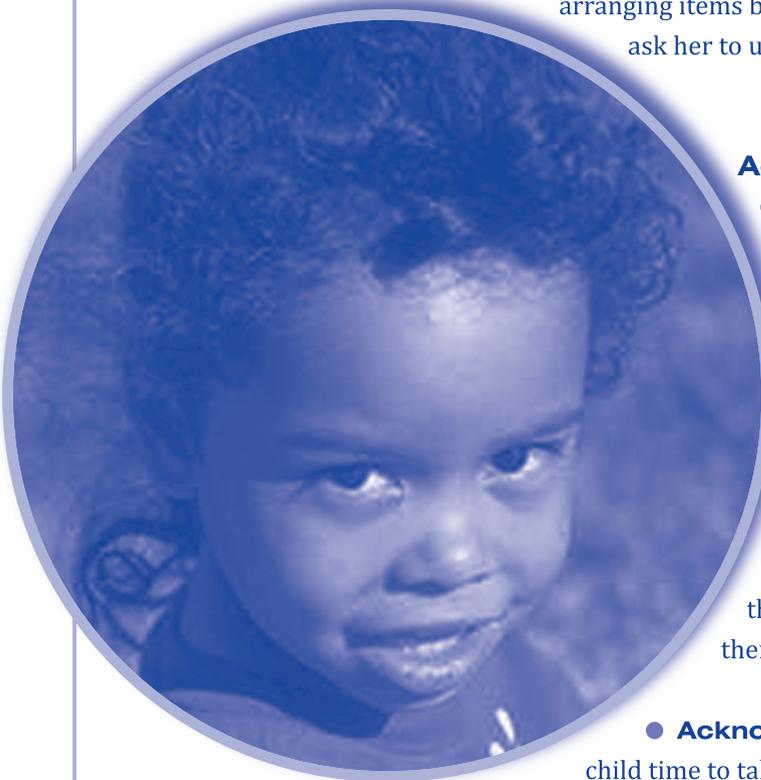
 - Problem: I need to move across the floor but I cannot use my feet.
Question: How can I get across the floor?

 - Problem: The papers keep blowing off the table.
Question: How can we keep them on the table?

- Encourage the child to think of new ways to use materials. For example, ask the child to think of ways she might use scarves to create a costume.
- Encourage the child to help others. For example, if the child is a more advanced “puzzler worker,” suggest that she help her friend who is less advanced at working with puzzles.
- **Ask open-ended questions.**
 - “What can you do with a clothespin (bottle cap, jar lid, feather, paper clip)?”
 - “How many ways can you use a ball (crayon, block, wagon)?”
 - “If we need to move the water in this bucket to a new location without moving the bucket, how can we move the water?”
- **Encourage children to talk out loud when problem solving.** Often, a young child will talk herself through a series of actions to find the solution to a problem. As the child matures, this “talking out loud” will become an internal monologue.
- **Use encouragement, not praise.** Praise is external. External rewards inhibit internal motivation. Encouragement offers children an opportunity to build internal satisfaction and joy.
 - Eliminate the use of stickers and privilege rewards. Link actions to enjoyment and satisfaction instead of a tangible reward. Examples:
 - Look at you! You finished the puzzle. That took determination.”
 - “You did it! You came down the slide feet first and landed right in my arms.”
 - Use encouragement especially when the child makes a poor choice. Examples:
 - “I’m sure you can find a better way next time.”
 - “What could you say to Madison next time to get her to share her toy?”
 - Be honest and sincere with compliments. Examples:
 - “You used blue. That’s my favorite color.”
 - “That tower is as tall as you are, Audrey! Is it the tallest tower you have built?”
 - Encourage the child to critique themselves. Give her opportunities to evaluate her own accomplishments. Rather than stating that you think she has done a good job, ask her what she thinks of her work. Examples:

“You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face.”
—Eleanor Roosevelt

- “How did you get the leaves to stay on your paper?”
- “What gave you the idea to use the bowl as a hat?”
- Avoid comparisons. Comparing one child to another creates resentment. The child who serves as your model is left to feel frozen in the role of “good” child. The other child may resent the “good” child for getting your attention.
- Focus on process instead of product. Discuss the colors the child uses in her artwork, the determination she applies to learning a new task, or the courage she exhibits when trying to climb up another rung on the slide ladder. Encouragement during the process creates a joyful experience and reminds the child that creating and doing can be as much fun as finishing.
- Notice and describe behavior. Examples:
 - “You worked hard to finish your building.”
 - “You found several ways to arrange the buttons.”
- **Encourage independence.** Respond to the child’s needs in a consistent, predictable manner as you nudge her to find her own answers. When she asks you a question, ask her, “What do you think?”
- **Break tasks into small parts.** Nudge a reluctant child to complete a task by breaking tasks into smaller parts. For example, maybe help the child practice arranging items by likenesses and differences before you ask her to use the items to create a pattern.



Acknowledge Confidence

- **Help children acknowledge their acts that demonstrate confidence.** When the child directs the problem solving that helps get a block to stay on top of the tower that she built, acknowledge her persistence.
- **Celebrate small steps along the way to success.** Sometimes the child needs to know she is almost there or at least is on the right path.
- **Acknowledge successes** by allowing the child time to talk about her achievements.

- **Participate in brainstorming and problem-solving activities.** Select random items and brainstorm new uses. For example, how might we use a bottle cap for something other than capping a bottle? What can we use a straw for other than drinking? Challenge the child to think of things she can use as accessories as she builds with blocks. What can we use for a bed? Challenge her to think of things to use as pretend food in her play. Can yarn be used for pretend spaghetti?

“The greatest barrier
to success is the
fear of failure.”

—Sven Goran Eriksson

Reflect on Confidence

- **Ask children questions that will help them think about confidence.**
 - How do you feel when you are able to solve a problem?
 - What do you do when something seems too difficult?
 - What is confidence? How do you feel when you are confident?
 - How do you gain confidence?
 - What are some examples of confidence?

Curiosity

2

WHAT IS CURIOSITY?

An intense desire to know and to understand; disposition to inquire, investigate, or seek after knowledge; desire to gratify the mind with new information or objects of interest; inquisitiveness. (Adapted from Webster's II New College Dictionary)

Curious children are alert to their senses and keenly aware of their environment. They notice little things like an ant carrying a morsel of food or a new poster on the wall. Curious children ask "why" often and when they get the answer they will often have another question. They are able to sustain interest with or without an adult close by.

A Child Shows Curiosity When...

- She demonstrates interest in the environment and in people.
- He explores new materials.
- She asks questions.
- He identifies problems and seeks solutions.
- She exhibits persistence and determination.

A Curious Child Understands These Words...

cause and effect	new
desire	novel
discovery	novelty
experiment	pleasure
explore	predict
fear	question
imagination	safety
inquire	seek
interest	senses
investigate	wonder
learn	world
mastery	

WHY CURIOSITY MATTERS

Curiosity drives intellect. We are born curious, and we immediately begin to use our senses to explore the world around us. Without curiosity, a baby would never reach for a rattle.

Young children are naturally curious. To a child, the world is full of infinite possibilities. Children believe pigs talk, monsters can fit under their beds, and wolves are able to knock down a house with a simple huff and puff. Children's ideas are without limits, judgments, and bias. They enjoy coloring trees purple and the sun green. They are constantly asking who, what, when, where, and why.

Some people remain insatiably curious throughout their lives. Others lose their drive to know, possibly because of societal pressure to perform well on tests and conform to social norms. Without curiosity, learners become passive and compliant. They are more eager to be "right" and to please authority than they are to explore, question, and experiment. They lose their sense of wonder when they cease to exercise it.

Curiosity encourages exploration, questions, experimentation, and a sense of wonder. It solves problems, clarifies values, and strengthens relationships. The more we know, the more tools we have to understand our world and communicate with others.

Bruce Perry (2001) says curiosity drives exploration and results in discovery, which leads to pleasure and repetition. Repetition leads to mastery and confidence, which in turn leads to continued exploration. This cycle is the foundation of learning. Curiosity is the catalyst.

Curiosity	results in	Exploration
Exploration	results in	Discovery
Discovery	results in	Pleasure
Pleasure	results in	Repetition
Repetition	results in	Mastery
Mastery	results in	New Skills
New Skills	results in	Confidence
Confidence	results in	Self-Esteem
Self-Esteem	results in	Sense of Security
Security	results in	More Exploration

Perry, Bruce (2001) "Curiosity: The Fuel of Development." Early Childhood Today, NY, Scholastic.