Supporting Social Skills Development
Parent Support Pack #1

Social Development & Language Impairment:
Social skills are a critical aspect of every child’s development. Children need to participate and feel accepted within our community. The ability to form and maintain positive peer relationships can have a huge impact on a child’s academic and language development, as well as affecting their experiences in the classroom, home and playground environments.

Social skills encompass the verbal and nonverbal skills we use to interact, communicate and build relationships with other people. These are essentially:

- The skills we need to get along with others
- The ability to communicate with others appropriately and effectively

Social skills involve both the verbal aspects of speech and the non-verbal aspects of body language and paralinguistic skills including intonation, stress on words, volume and pace.

Social skills help children feel good about themselves, make friends and form relationships, sustain these friendships and relationships, and succeed within the school setting. Emotional intelligence is a critical skill for children in this regard, perhaps of more importance than academic intelligence. This is because as a general rule, our level of intelligence and our level of success in life do not necessarily correlate. Success in the classroom, playground, home, work and social environment is more closely influenced by how well we relate to people and our relationships with others.

Thus, it is important for us as a school and parent community to support our children in developing their awareness of emotions, and building their self-esteem. This will help our children to participate across contexts and to understand the emotions that go along with trying something new!

The pages included in this parent support pack have been taken from the KidsMatter program, an evidence-based primary schools mental health initiative, developed by the Australian Government Department of Healthy and Ageing, Beyondblue, the Australian Psychological Society and Principals Australia. The program has been implemented with excellent outcomes in a number of Australian schools, and encompasses many of the principles that underpin our social skills program at the LDC. While our program has been adapted to better support children with language difficulties, the information pages included in this support pack are extremely relevant to all parents, and provide some helpful, general strategies to encourage emotional awareness and the development of self-
esteem. Attempting to implement some of the suggested strategies at home will greatly support your child’s social skills learning at school, and will be helpful in generalising your child’s social skills across communicative contexts.

Should you have any questions or concerns, or if you would like to discuss social development further, please do not hesitate to contact us at the LDC. Our contact details are outlined below.

Warm regards,

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Why feelings are important

“Let’s go, let’s go. Come on Dad!”

This is the family outing that everyone in the family has been waiting for. Seven-year-old Voula has been up since dawn jumping around excitedly.

When Voula gets wound up it can be difficult to keep things under control.

She doesn’t seem to understand that her baby brother doesn’t like her jumping around and poking at him, or that her Dad is a bit slower in the mornings and needs his space.

You don’t want to dampen her enthusiasm, but you’d like her to be able to express it in ways that are less annoying to others!

Learning to manage feelings

Children’s feelings are often intense. They can be quickly taken over by feelings of excitement, frustration, fear or joy.

When feelings take over children’s behaviour, they can find it difficult to manage without adult support. This is why learning how to recognise and manage feelings is a very important part of children’s social and emotional development.

Understanding that all sorts of feelings are normal, that they can be named, and that there are ways of handling them are the first things children need to learn about feelings. Understanding that feelings affect behaviour, and being able to recognise how this happens are important steps for learning to manage feelings.
How parents and carers can help children manage feelings

1. Notice feelings
   Before we can learn how to control feelings, we first have to notice them. You can help your children notice feelings by noticing them yourself and giving them labels: happy, sad, excited, frustrated, angry, embarrassed, surprised, etc. Giving feelings names helps to make them more manageable for children.

2. Talk about everyday feelings
   Taking with children about what it’s like when you’re angry, sad, nervous or excited helps them find ways to express feelings without having to act them out through negative behaviours. Children learn these skills best when they hear adults and peers using words to express feelings and when they are encouraged to use words like this too.

3. Create space for talking about difficult feelings
   Help children to separate a feeling from a difficult reaction by helping them name it. Being able to say or think, “I am feeling angry” means that children don’t have to act really angry before anyone takes notice. It allows them to choose how they will respond. The same idea works with other difficult feelings like nervousness or fear.

Learning to pay attention to how they are feeling helps children understand that they can have emotions without being controlled by them.

Learning to name feelings helps children find ways to express them without having to act them out.

Learning to cope with feelings helps children manage their behaviour at school and at home. It helps them learn better, relate to others better and feel better about themselves.

Things to remember:
- Learning skills for managing feelings takes practice
- Noticing and naming feelings comes first
- Talking about everyday feelings in normal conversations makes it easier when the difficult feelings come up
- Talking about difficult feelings is usually best tried after the feelings have calmed down a bit, and when children, parents and carers are feeling relaxed.

Things to try at home:
- Use feeling words when you talk with children about everyday situations:
  - “You scored a goal! How exciting was that!”
  - “It’s pretty disappointing that Kati can’t play with you today.”
- Invite children to describe their own feelings:
  - “I’m feeling pretty nervous about going to the dentist. How about you?”
  - “How did you feel when…?”

Further information on children’s feelings is available in the KidsMatter Primary resource sheet Children’s development: Understanding children’s emotions and on our website:
www.kidsmatter.edu.au/resources/information-resources/

This resource is part of the KidsMatter Primary initiative. We welcome your feedback at www.kidsmatter.edu.au

Australian Government
Department of Health and Ageing
Everyone’s good at something! Supporting kids’ confidence

Mateo really likes football but he’s not sure about playing with the local team. He thinks: “I’m not as good as the other kids are. What if they don’t pass the ball to me? What if I drop it?” Mateo often stops himself from having a go at new things. He doesn’t want to look silly.

He would rather let others go first so he can watch what they do. At school when the teacher asks him a question he often says “I don’t know” even if he does know the answer. Mateo doesn’t want to get things wrong. When he makes a mistake on his homework he gives up and says, “I can’t do it.”

His parents want him to try. “You’ve got to have a go,” his dad says, “otherwise, how will you learn?”

Children who lack confidence in their abilities sometimes try to avoid even having a go at some things. This can get frustrating for parents and carers. It can also stop children from developing the skills they need to tackle tasks confidently.

How confidence develops

For most children starting school means spending more time on learning and less on play. It also means more expectations of them – from parents, carers, teaching staff and also from themselves.

Primary school children typically start out with high expectations. When they see how well they do things compared to others, their view of their own abilities often changes. They learn that they are good at some things and not so good at others. They also see how other children and teaching staff respond to what they do.

These things influence children’s confidence in their abilities. They also influence how willing they are to have a go in situations where they feel unsure.

How parents and carers can help

Confidence improves through building on small successes. Parents, carers (and teaching staff) can help by:

- explaining to children that skills develop with practice
- encouraging children to persist when they don’t succeed straight away
- praising effort, persistence and improvement
- making sure that goals are achievable by breaking down large tasks or responsibilities into small steps
- being ready to help when necessary, without taking over.

Encouraging children to have a go and valuing individual improvement supports children’s confidence.
Confident thinking

Self-esteem is an important part of confidence. Having good self-esteem means accepting and feeling positive about yourself. Confidence is not just feeling good but also knowing you are good at something.

Particular ways of thinking are very important for building confidence. Helpful ways of thinking include:
• believing that, if you try, you can succeed
• finding positive ways to cope with failure that encourage having another go
• enjoying learning for its own sake by competing with your own performance rather than that of others.

Dealing with disappointment

Everybody fails to achieve their goals sometimes. Parents and carers (and teaching staff) can help by:
• Responding sympathetically and with encouragement, e.g. “That was disappointing, but at least you had a go.”
• Helping kids focus on what they can change to make things better, rather than thinking that the situation is unchangeable or that there is something wrong with them, e.g., “What can you try that might make that work better next time?”
• Challenging ‘I can’t’ thinking by showing, and saying, you believe in them and reminding them of what they have achieved.

Optimistic thinking recognises what has been achieved more than what is lacking. It looks at the glass as half full rather than half empty.

Parents and carers can help children focus on their own effort and on achieving personal goals as the best way to measure success.

Further information on supporting children’s confidence is available on our website: www.kidsmatter.edu.au/resources/information-resources/

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Department of Health and Ageing

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