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,

Tina Kilpatrick  
Speech Pathologist  
Working Days: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday  
North East Metropolitan Language Development Centre  
18 View Street Dianella, WA, 6059  
P (08) 9275 5511  F (08) 9275 5319  
E Tina.Kilpatrick@education.wa.edu.au

Robert Wells  
Therapy Assistant – BSc (Hons)  
Working Days: Monday, Tuesday  
North East Metropolitan Language Development Centre  
18 View Street Dianella, WA, 6059  
P (08) 9275 5511  F (08) 9275 5319  
E Robert.wells@live.com.au
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.

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

© Commonwealth of Australia 2011. Australian schools are permitted to copy material freely for communication with teachers, students, parents/carers and community members.

While every care has been taken in preparing this material, the Commonwealth does not accept liability for any injury or loss of damage arising from the use of, or reliance upon, the content of this publication.
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/

This resource is part of the KidsMatter Primary initiative. We welcome your feedback at www.kidsmatter.edu.au
We have now commenced our Social Skills program in Year 1 at the LDC, and are continuing to focus on consolidating self-awareness and self-esteem in our classes. The Outdoor Play part of the program is being implemented at lunchtimes in the playground, aiming to support our Year 1 students in learning our chosen Game of the Week. This initiative aims to:

- Provide students with knowledge of a range of cooperative games to encourage interactive play
- Provide opportunity to invite others to play
- Learn how to follow the rules of a game
- Provide opportunities to implement conflict resolution steps
- Provide opportunities for the students to manage winning and losing

We feel that the knowledge of these games will also be helpful for children entering mainstream education, arming them with the knowledge to suggest lunchtime activities and facilitate opportunities to develop peer relationships.

Over the last fortnight, your Year 1 child has been exposed to some/all of the games outlined below. The children are welcome to join and leave play as they wish. It would be wonderful for your child to have the opportunity to play this game with you, with siblings or with other children, to consolidate the concepts underlying the play and to encourage generalisation across contexts. Feel free to encourage your child to practice explaining the rules to you if they have played the game before, or to suggest playing the game in natural play contexts (e.g. the park, play dates, etc.).

**Game #1: Red Light, Green Light**

**Explanation:**

1. This is a game a bit like “What’s the time, Mr. Wolf?”
2. One person stands away from the group, and they are called the Red Light.
3. The rest of the group are Green Lights.
4. The Red Light yells, “Green light!” and everyone in the group tries to sneak up on the Red Light.
5. If the Red Light yells “Red light!” everyone has to freeze, and the Red Light turns around. Anyone caught moving is ‘out’ until the next round of the game.
6. The Red Light wins if he catches everyone ‘out’ before anyone touches him. Otherwise, whoever is first to touch the Red Light wins, and becomes the Red Light for the next round.

**Potential Conflicts & How to Support:**

- Child may become upset if they do not get a turn at being ‘Red Light’ → **Explain that the smart choice is learning to take turns. Explain that it is ok for us to take a turn out, because we know that we get to have another turn in, soon. Explain that sometimes, we need to learn how to “let go” when we don’t get our way and we can’t get our way all the time. But we do get our way some of the time 😊**
Child may become upset if they need to go back to the start → *Explain that not everyone can win all of the time, and that sometimes, but that nobody really gets “out” in Red Light Green Light. The game is played in a cycle, and there will be plenty of opportunity for the child to try again to become Red Light!*

**Game #2: Farmer, Farmer, May We Cross the River?**

**Explanation:**

1. Designate the playing area. You need an area ~ 10 x 10 metres
2. One person is selected to be “farmer”. Everyone else stands next to each other in a line in front of the farmer
3. The group chants, “Farmer, Farmer, may we cross the river? If not, why not? What’s your favourite colour?”
4. The farmer then replies with a colour, e.g. “green”. Any person in the line who is wearing green may walk across to the “safe zone” (past which no one can be tagged).
5. Once the children wearing green have reached the safe zone, everyone else must run past the farmer and try to reach the safe zone without being tagged.
6. Anyone who is tagged is “out” and must wait for the next round of the game to rejoin the group.
7. The last person to be tagged is the farmer in the next turn.

**Potential Conflicts & How to Support:**

- Child may become upset if they do not get a turn at being “farmer” → *Explain that the smart choice is learning to take turns. Explain that it is ok for us to take a turn out, because we know that we get to have another turn in, soon. Explain that sometimes, we need to learn how to “let go” when we don’t get our way and we can’t get our way all the time. But we do get our way some of the time 😊*
- Child may become upset if they get ‘out’ → *Explain that not everyone can win all of the time, and that sometimes, we need to take a turn at getting “out”. The game is played in a cycle, and there will be plenty of opportunity for the child to play again in the next round.*
- Child may require support learning the “chant”: *Support your child in play by modelling and saying the chant with them. Encourage your child to look for colours that not many people playing are wearing.*

**Game #3: Avoid the Octopus**

**Explanation:**

1. Designate the playing area. You need an area ~ 10 x 10 metres
2. One person is selected to be “hungry octopus”. The other players are the “fish” and form a line across one end of the playing area
3. When the octopus shouts “hungry”, everyone tried to cross to the other side of the playing area, or the “safe zone” without being tagged by the octopus
4. When a fish is tagged, he becomes a tentacle and has to hold hands with the octopus, working with him to tag the other fish
5. The last fish becomes the octopus for the next round of play.
Potential Conflicts & How to Support:

- Child may become upset if they do not get a turn at being “octopus” → Explain that the smart choice is learning to take turns. Explain that it is ok for us to take a turn out, because we know that we get to have another turn in, soon. Explain that sometimes, we need to learn how to “let go” when we don’t get our way and we can’t get our way all the time. But we do get our way some of the time 😊