

# Emotional Maturity



**What is it?** Emotional maturity is the ability to recognize and express both positive and negative emotions in ways that are healthy, respectful, and appropriate to the situation. It is also empathy and the willingness to help and comfort others.\*

**Why is it important?** Children who are emotionally healthy, and able to understand and get along well with others, are children who are prepared to learn and succeed—at school and throughout life.

**What can I do to build my child's emotional maturity?** Your child is constantly watching and learning from you. This makes you your child's first and best teacher of emotional maturity. But you don't need to teach "a lesson"—just look for teachable moments. Start by watching your child. See what he or she is doing, then join in. Children learn by playing, so have fun and be confident that how *you* are *being*—helpful, kind, caring, and so on—is what they are learning from you, day after day, and this is the best way to ensure your child enjoys school and is successful throughout life. For fresh, fun ideas on building your child's emotional maturity, talk to an early years specialist or try some of the activities listed below.



The activities below are grouped by age:

INFANT

TODDLER

PRESCHOOLER

Respond sensitively to your infant's needs, especially every time your baby cries during the first six months. Use your words to label the emotions you see. For example, "so sad... baby's crying."

Stroke your baby's face with your fingertip. Name all the parts of the face as you touch them.


Play "Pet the Dog": First, you pet your cat or dog. Then, with your hand over your baby's hand, gently pet your cat or dog together.

Hold your baby close while singing or talking. Make lots of eye contact and smile, so that your baby knows just how special it is to you. Giggle and laugh together.

Play different types of music with a variety of "moods." Take your baby in your arms and dance.


Give your baby a stroller ride to the library and read *I Love You Through and Through* by Bernadette Rossetti-Shustak. Borrow *Feeling Great!* by Jess Stockham. If there is a baby-parent program that day, then stay, play and have fun.

\*This definition is from the Early Development Instrument, which is used to measure the readiness to learn of kindergarten students.





Sing and act out the well known song, *If You're Happy & You Know It*. Use exaggerated expressions. Help your toddler label emotions by explaining that when you feel angry, you say "I feel angry," and so on.

Give your child some cuddly toys to care for (e.g., wash, feed, hug). Talk about what your child is doing, and how helpful and caring she or he is being.



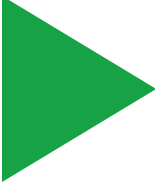

Give your child the chance to play independently, as well as with you, each and every day.

Make a home-made "Teddy Bear Hospital" for all your child's cuddly toys, complete with blankets, beds, bandages and medical tools.



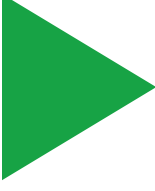

Play "Guess the Feeling": You act out an emotion and your child will guess what you are feeling. Include your child's teddies and other stuffed animals. This adds other personalities and situations to the game.

Take a trip to the library and borrow *We love bunk Beds* by Paula Metcalf or *Franklin in the Dark* by Paulette Bourgeois. Talk about the pictures and story with your toddler (e.g., "What do you think she feels?").



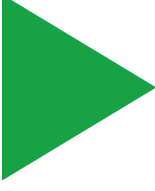

Use puppets or toys to act out various dramatic situations. Using characters with unique personalities, such as a lion and a lamb, will help you and your child make-believe many different points of view.

Help your child organize a play date with one or two friends. This is a chance for your child to design the invitation, or practice manners on the phone if he or she prefers to call.



Every week give your child a few jobs around the house (e.g., dusting, making bed, tidying up toys). Tell your child how much this helps the family.

Sprinkle cookie crumbs outside and let your child observe ants or other insects. Provide a magnifying glass. Talk about what the insects are doing (e.g., are they working together?).



Ride or stroll to the library and borrow *Pumpkin Soup* by Helen Cooper or *Stella, Queen of the Snow* by Marie Louise Gay. Have a conversation where you ask each other questions about the story (e.g., "Why do you think he did that?" "What do you think is going to happen next?").

