

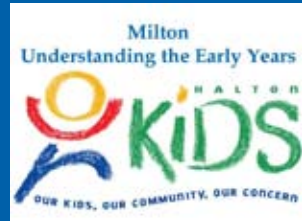
Social Competence



What is it? Social competence is cooperation and the ability to get along with others and make friendships. It is also taking responsibility and showing respect, as well as the ability to solve problems and adjust to routines. Socially competent children have positive work habits and are eager to explore new things like books, toys and games.*

Why is it important? Children who get along well with a wide variety of others, and who can adjust to new situations, are children who are prepared to learn and succeed—at school and throughout life.

What can I do to build my child's social competence? Your child is constantly watching and learning from you. This makes you your child's first and best teacher of social competence. 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*—respectful, cooperative, 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 strengthening your child's social competence, talk to an early years specialist or try some of the activities listed below.



The activities below are grouped by age:

INFANT

TODDLER

PRESCHOOLER

Play "Hide, Find and Hug": It's just like hide-and-seek within a very small area, but with a hug as the reward for finding the "hider."

Lay down on the floor next to your baby and talk, read a book, or sing.


Give your baby a chance to be with other babies. For example, participate in a baby play group like "Mother Goose" at your local Early Years Centre.

Place different objects, such as large balls or toys, inside a box or other container. Watch while your infant removes them one by one—or dumps them all on the floor. Cheer for your baby and talk about what he or she is doing.

Play peek-a-boo, with lots of exaggerated gestures and facial expressions, as well as kisses and hugs for rewards.



Give your baby a stroller ride to the library and borrow *Oh no, Anna* by Vivian French. 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.





Put together a “Me, I’m Special” photo book. With your toddler, look at the photos of family and friends, describing who and what is in the picture.

Play with a large ball. Take turns rolling it to each other. After awhile, include a stuffed toy in the game, just as you would include another child.



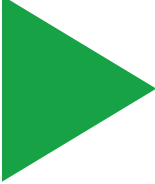

Play a game of make-believe with your child. For example, start by saying: “You be the parent and I’ll be the kid.”

Have fun laughing while you make silly and obvious mistakes, such as calling your child by the wrong name so that she or he can correct you. Continue the game by calling a dog a pickle, a car a spaceship, and so on.



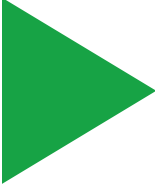

At bathtime, tell your child his or her evening schedule. Be sure and add scoops and pitchers to the tub—maybe even a drop of food colouring. Discuss concepts such as “sink vs. float” and “my turn, your turn.”

Take a trip to the library and borrow *Pip and Squeak* by Ian Shoenherr or *Mr. Grumpy’s Outing* by John Burningham. Talk about the pictures and story with your toddler (e.g., “What do you think he feels?”).



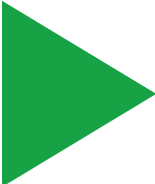

Provide a large cardboard box and craft materials (e.g., crayons, paint, glue, safety scissors) for a small group of friends to decorate and use.

Play the “What would you do?” game: Concoct different social situations and ask child what she or he would do. For example, “What would you do if a friend came to your birthday party with socks on her ears?”



When your child invites a friend over, give them a sheet or blanket and some pillows or cushions and let them make a “house” under a table.

Play the “What if...?” game: Start by asking your child, “What if you went outside in the rain... what would you need?” Continue with other scenarios, either realistic (e.g., going to the zoo) or imaginary (e.g., going into space).



Ride or stroll to the library and borrow *Ella, of course* by Sarah Weeks or *Where’s our mama* by Diane Goode. Have a conversation where you ask each other questions about the story (e.g., “Why do you think she did that?” “What do you think is going to happen next?”).

