PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR DEVELOPMENT GUIDE

1. PARENT-CHILD INTERACTIONS

Children begin to learn how to work, play, and act around others while getting to know who they are. You, as a parent, will be arranging many social activities for your child, so it’s important to have a guide. Here are some rules of thumb.

BE A GOOD MODEL

Your children will spend more time with you, the parent, than with anyone else as they grow up. They will copy what they see, so be sure to set a good example. Practice self-control whenever possible. If parents are pressured trying to juggle child care, housework, cooking, and training a new puppy, they know it’s time to take a break. If you feel your control slipping, give yourself a time out: a shopping trip, a hot bath, a movie, or a TV show. Similarly, parents must realize that children feel frustrations too. It’s not easy learning to tie shoes, make friends, ride tricycles, cut with a scissors and share with friends. Help your child take breaks from frustrating situations also. Offer a treat, go for a walk together, or play a game.

BE TOLERANT

Try not to show bias about color, race, religion, dress, type of housing, etc. Be open-minded, and the chances are good that your child will be too. Invite your child’s friends of different races and religions to come play, to share a meal, or to celebrate a special occasion.

LET YOUR CHILD BE A CHILD

Expect childish, not adult behavior, from your child. Social growth is made in small steps, with each new one built on an earlier step. Children need to be challenged but not frustrated. It is not realistic to expect a three year old to read or a two year old to play the piano. Every child needs time to play and to explore the environment, before trying more difficult tasks. It is realistic to expect a child two to three years old to fold paper in half with a distinct crease and to try to cut with scissors, but it is not realistic to expect that child to fold the paper so the corners match perfectly, or to cut accurately with scissors.

SHOW YOUR CHILD AFFECTION

Children need to be told and shown that they are loved and wanted. Parents will not always love what their children do, but they must let children know that they love them. You can say, “I love you, Jane, but I don’t love the way you popped your brother’s new red balloon.” Parents must be generous with hugs, good-morning and good-night kisses, and frequent terms of affection.
2. CHILD GUIDANCE TECHNIQUES

Equally as important as preschooler’s intellectual and physical development is their social and emotional development. Parents, teachers, and child care providers, the adults with which the preschool child spends a great deal of time, must be skilled at providing appropriate guidance as the child learns to deal with the environment. If the right techniques are applied by the adults working with them, preschoolers can make daily strides toward learning about the control they have over themselves and the influence their surroundings have on them.

- The adult must offer encouragement.
- The adult must give clear directions.
- The adult must offer praise when it is due.
- The adult must be patient, cheerful and friendly.
- The adult must avoid comparing children in any way.
- The adult must allow children time to complete projects.
- The adult must talk in plain language spoken in a pleasant tone or voice.
- The adult must try not to interfere during play unless a dangerous situation occurs, clarification is needed, or a child is having a difficulty.
- The adult must prepare children for transitions from one activity to the next.
- The adult must give children the chance to do as much as they can for themselves.
- The adult must allow children to make some decisions and to solve problems on their own.
3. SOCIAL ACTIVITIES, PART I

Prior to entering kindergarten, children must become accustomed to the social environment outside their homes. While playing and interacting with other preschoolers, children will become aware of and sensitive to the needs and feelings of their peers as well as the adults around them. It is important for children to form attitudes conducive to getting along with others.

Take pictures of your child. Display the pictures in an album, in a scrapbook, or on a bulletin board. Talk to your child about them. Say, “Here is a picture of you when you were one week old. What were you like then?” (Bald, tiny, couldn’t walk, drank from a bottle, are likely responses.) Children enjoy telling how they’ve “grown up.” Look at more recent pictures and listen as your child tells about them. (Now you might get answers like big boy, rides tricycle, dresses self, ties shoes, sets table, has friends, eats hot dogs, builds with legos, writes name, and goes to preschool.)

Encourage your child to look in a full length mirror and describe what is seen. In describing themselves, children might use such words as tall, curly hair, girl, red dress, black belt, black shoes, freckles, smile, cut knee with a bandaid, white teeth, white socks with ruffles, furry play bunny.

Trace an outline of your child on a large piece of cardboard or freezer paper. Help the child cut out the pattern and then color the eyes, ears, nose, mouth, hair, clothing, and other details. Put the full-sized likeness on the door to your child’s room or some other location. Activities like this let children know you think they’re special. Children need to understand that there is no other person exactly like them.

Help your child make hand, foot and finger prints in clay. When the clay hardens, use the personalized objects as paperweights or accents around the house.

Play a game at bath time to make children aware of their various body parts. “Scrub something that rhymes with pies.” Use hose for nose, tips for lips, hears for ears, bear for hair, list for wrist, linger for finger, tree for knee, neat for feet, etc.

Make people out of play dough. Remind children to look at their own bodies to see the different parts they need to include in their models.

Make a family scrapbook together with your child. Ask your child to help decide what to include: pictures of all family members, pets, vacations or trips, souvenirs like a dried flower grown in the garden, the ticket stub from a movie, the wrapper from the family’s favorite pizza, or whatever is important to your family.
4. SOCIAL ACTIVITIES, PART II

*Shaping preschoolers’ behavior development requires a good deal of two-way communication between the parent and other adults with whom the children spend time. Parents must keep in touch with their preschooler’s day care teachers and also with parents of their preschooler’s playmates, in order to monitor their child’s behavior development. Parents need to know how their preschoolers behave at the day care center or the neighbor’s house, and day care teachers need to know how the preschoolers act at home, in order to best plan experiences and activities for them.*

Help your child make a book of children. Pictures of boys and girls from different countries wearing native costumes can be cut from magazines or old catalogues. A variety of hair styles, clothing and skin color should be used.

Stoop down to the child’s level when visiting. This makes the child feel more important. By the same token, it is good to have at least some child-sized housekeeping equipment. This could be a small wooden iron and ironing board, a small plastic lawn mower, or cupboards and sink made out of wooden boxes.

Arrange special areas for your child to use for social interaction. This might be a corner of the downstairs, a tree house, the child’s bedroom, if large enough, part of the attic or a portion of the yard.

Provide plenty of time for your child to play alone and with other children, away from you. The child and you need some time away from each other. Many bowling leagues churches and women’s clubs now provide day care in addition to other day care facilities you might find in your area.

Try to give the same amount of your time to each of your children, regardless of their ages. Visit with each of your children when they come in from school, even if you have an infant that requires a lot of your attention.

Have frequent talks with your children. Learn their attitudes and feelings, and find out what they are doing in preschool and with their friends when they play. Find out about their likes, their dislikes, their joys and their sorrows. Let them know you have the same feeling, although they may be reactions to different things.

Offer your child frequent praise for a job well done. There’s no need to praise inappropriate behavior, but good behavior should not go unnoticed.

Help your child to make gifts and cards to give to friends and relatives. Help your child remember people on special days like Christmas, Valentine’s Day, and birthdays. Presents might be something the child helped to cook, an art project, or a small piece of wrapped candy or gum.
5. SOCIAL ACTIVITIES, PART III

Adults responsible for guiding children’s behavior must be prepared to provide a wide variety of both structured and unstructured activities and experiences.

Certain games like Farmer in the Dell, Captain May I, dodgeball, or musical chairs provide planned play and involve specific rules, whereas letting a child choose among such activities as puzzle working, dressing up, block building or painting, provides unstructured or free play.

A pet in the home can provide many opportunities for your child to develop socially. The child can learn much in helping to care for the pet. The child learns that pets, like people, need food, shelter, exercise, and love. The child learns responsibility in helping to feed, to brush, to walk, and to show affection to the pet.

Provide your child with many chances to play with both boys and girls about the same age. If you live in a rural area and the homes are far apart, have a coffee and invite several mothers to visit together while the youngsters play. Or set up a group of several neighbor children to play in turn at different homes on alternate days. Take your child to the park, to a wading pool, the church nursery, and other places where young children are together. Music is a wonderful social outlet for young children. Through music children can develop their abilities to listen, to hear and to react. Children enjoy singing and dancing in time of music, and they love to make their own sounds on instruments or with their voices. A favorite music experience of young children is to sing a round, like “Row, row, row your boat.” Singing a round is an effective group as well as individual experience. Each child is responsible for learning one part, but it’s up to a group of children to keep their part of the song going at the same time another group of children sings a different part. Talk with your child about social situations. “What happened at Sue’s birthday party? Did you have cake there?” Did Sue like her presents? What kind of birthday party do you want to have in July?

Arrange social interaction for your child involving the family, friends, relatives, and neighbors. Let your child help plan a picnic, a block party, a backyard party, or a trick-or-treat group. Encourage the child to entertain and be in charge of a younger sibling or to help you deliver loaves of home made bread to the neighbors. Involve your child in a group effort like preparing supper. Let the child sprinkle cheese and onions on the taco salad or carry the berries to the table.

Encourage your child to visit with other children. When you return from a trip, ask your child to tell a friend about it. “Tell Mary all about our trip to Arkansas.” Putting an experience into words promotes social and language growth.
Children generally go through a series of fairly regular steps on learning to deal with their feelings and in reaction to stimuli. How and when children learn to control their feelings depends largely on how their parents react to them. Responsible adults must be available to help channel children’s actions along appropriate lines. Here is what parents can do to help:

Make Definite Household Rules

Your children need a sense of structure and that means having rules. Parents must devise a set of household rules, which should be discussed with the children. Then, you should expect them to be followed by everyone, except in unusual circumstances. One such set of rules might involve household routine, requiring that all family members are expected to be on time for meals at 7:00, 12:00, and 6:00, with snacktimes set at 10:30 and 3:00, for example. A related rule might be that everyone helps with dishwashing, or that the dog must be walked right after meals. Perhaps naptime is at 1:00, and clean-up just before bedtime at 7:30.

Be consistent

Consistency between both parents in two-parent homes is important. Your children can tell when one parent is less apt to enforce rules. Both parents must decide what is important and what is not, and then act accordingly. Consistency from one time to the next is also important in single-parent homes, or the children will learn to take advantage. First, get the children to help you decide what the rules should be. Be sure to have rules that are easy for children to remember and understand.

Set Reasonable Consequences

If children break the rules, they must accept an appropriate consequence. A child running in the house might be asked to go outside, while a child who hurts another child might be asked to take a time out. Promise only things you intend to do when the rules are broken.

WRONG: “If you watch television one more minute, I’ll throw the set out the window.”
RIGHT: “That’s all the television for this morning. Why don’t you go outside to play now?”
WRONG: “You can’t have any more parties since you pushed Bob.”
RIGHT: “I know you’re excited about the party, but you can’t push your brother. Sit here for now, and take a time out.”

Discourage Temper Tantrums

Your children now know the basic rules and had a part in deciding on them. They know it isn’t right to demand everything on the grocery store shelf. You must not give in to outbursts by buying everything the children cry for.
7. EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES, PART II

Adults responsible for guiding children’s behavior will want to promote the development of a variety of skills for giving and receiving accurate messages. Children must learn to think about and try to describe what they are feeling, if they are going to be able to communicate effectively. Adults can guide children to communicate their feelings through words, gestures, facial expressions, voice volume, enunciation and inflection.

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**Be There**

Listen to your child. Laugh and talk with your child. Support your child and provide encouragement. Like you, your child will have good days and bad days. Discuss this. If your child is feeling low, tell about a time you felt that way. Tell about the time your childhood pet ran away or the time you had the measles.

**Being Sorry**

Help your child learn to feel and say “I’m sorry.” Children need to know when they’ve made mistakes, and they need to learn to say so. They should be sorry if they hurt someone, if they break a rule, or if they know their friend is sad. You must also be willing to say you’re sorry when you make mistakes.

**Pats on the Back**

Provide encouragement for your child. “That’s a good try,” “You’ve almost got it now,” “Why don’t you try it again tomorrow?” and “I know you’ll be riding the bike soon,” all offer the kind of boost children need to feel good about themselves.

**Set A Good Example**

Avoid being over-emotional, although it is fine to express yourself. Try to keep your own feelings under control; especially anger and frustration. You want your child to learn self control, so it’s up to you to provide a good model.

**Keep Your Own Fears To Yourself**

Try not to let your own fears be obvious, or the child may develop then as well. If airplane travel or darkness frighten you, try to keep that to yourself. The child needn’t be bothered by your problem.

**Keep A Sense of Humor**

If you have a sense of humor, it is likely that your child will develop one too. Don’t take yourself too seriously. Laughter is contagious and healthy. Smiling and laughter make us feel good, and ease tensions. Laugh with your child, laugh at yourself, and laugh at the ridiculous. Say, “Mommy put her shirt on backwards by mistake. Isn’t that silly?” Whenever we smile, the world looks a little brighter.
Parents, guardians, relatives, and teachers of preschoolers must all work together to provide an environment in which children feel comfortable with themselves and their surroundings as their behavior develops.

Prepare Children For New Situations

Children need to know what to expect at a wedding, a funeral, a fair, the dentist’s office, or their first time at a child care center. If you can either explain the situation or place the child will encounter, or make a trial run, the child is more likely to feel comfortable about the new experience.

Don’t Compare Children

Remember that each child is an individual. Try to avoid comparing children with other siblings, friends, relatives, or “super children.” Respect each child, and accept each one on individual terms.

Help Your Child Make Decisions

Encourage your child to choose clothing, the daily snack, the lunch menu, a friend to play with, and what to do next. Children will not always make decisions that are appropriate.

Teach Your Child To Wait

Help your child learn to delay or put off some immediate desires. What might happen if the child jumps in the wading pool fully clothed? What might happen if the child fails to wait until another child gets to the bottom of the slide? How will Jane feel if Billy takes her popsicle away?

Teach Your Child To Share

Some things a child can share are stories, smiles, jokes, treats, toys, turns on a swing or in a game, and love.

Encourage Proper Manners

Teach the child that you expect to hear polite words like “Thank you,” “Please,” and “Excuse me.” Be sure to use those same polite words as you talk to children.

Look Ahead

Read and discuss stories that anticipate the emotional problems your child is likely to encounter. If you want to discuss reactions to divorce, a move, or the new baby with your child, look up the subject in the card catalogue at the closest library, or ask the librarian for help. Children’s books are now available on almost every subject imaginable.
9. SPECIFIC BEHAVIOR TO FOSTER

Preschool children are completely self-centered by nature. They think the world revolves around only them. They consider their own needs, wants, and feelings to be all-important, and they do not consider the feelings, needs, and wants of others, until encouraged and trained to do so by people whose opinions and examples they trust and respect.

Preschool children are seeking answers to the mysteries of the universe and they are forever questioning. “Why? How? Who? What? When?” are frequently asked by preschoolers who are just beginning to deal with understanding simple reasons for difficult concepts.

Preschoolers must have constant support and reinforcement for the tasks they attempt and for the feelings they want to express.

Preschoolers are just beginning to learn a basic sense of control over their feelings. While just a year ago they might have pushed down a playmate who grabbed the toy they had, now they might think instead to say, “I’m playing with the truck. You can have it when I’m done.”

Preschoolers will begin to imagine fears now. Monsters, tornados, and fires will invade their dreams at this point because they have been exposed to scary stimuli.

- Let preschoolers make a reasonable number of decisions on their own and accept the consequences of their choices.
- Exhibit a sense of humor whenever appropriate, and the preschooler will pick up the habit.
- Urge preschoolers to express their feelings appropriately without embarrassment or concern. Let them cry when sad, babble to you when happy, show you a project they’ve created, or just hug you or their stuffed toy.
- But establish family rules against inappropriate social and emotional displays (No Hitting; No Screaming). These rules should apply for the entire family. Help your children understand why limits are necessary.
- Listen to your child. Make time to listen, no matter how busy your schedule. Children need to know that their feelings are important. If you don’t listen to them when they express themselves, who will?
- If your preschooler is having some sort of difficulty relating to feelings, show empathy. That means putting yourself in the child’s place. Remember how you felt when you were little, and tell your child about a similar feeling you had. Perhaps your preschooler will then learn to empathize with others.
- Encourage your child to try some tasks alone, to avoid overdependency on you. Preschoolers can get out their own breakfast cereal, or make a peanut butter sandwich, as well as pick up their toys.