




Nurturing and developing children's social skills

Children do not need to be in large group social settings to learn social skills, all human beings (young and old) have the same social-emotional needs. When we meet these needs consistently in children's lives, children grow up happy, fulfilled and better able to reach their full potential.

A common myth in early childhood education is that children need to attend large, group-based care environments to develop social skills. Expecting a child to interact with a large number of children and adults in these kinds of environments before they are ready can actually be more detrimental than helpful when it comes to developing social-emotional needs.

These needs can sometimes be better met in the family home and in small in-home childcare settings, where children have the opportunity to express themselves and foster authentic attachment relationships with others. The base from which all social skills grow from is a strong attachment relationship with a primary caregiver who can model what positive interactions look like with others. Small group environments allow children to learn how to:

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- Understand and display their emotions
 - Communicate well
 - Play with others in a way that allows joint attention, sharing, turn taking, cooperation and appropriate play
 - Interact and engage with others in an appropriate way
 - Understand and recognise how other people are feeling in particular situations (fostering empathy)
 - Develop and maintain friendships
 - Grow resilience

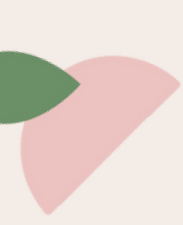
The key thing to remember is that children can only develop these social skills in relationship with others. This is where small group care environments meet an important need and allow children to grow and foster these skills.

What are the social and emotional needs of children that help foster social skills?

1. To be safe and secure. Children need to feel that they are living and learning in a safe environment and that the adults in their lives are working to keep them from physical and emotional harm. They need parents to protect their feelings and not put them in situations in which they cannot succeed.

2. To be loved and have a sense of self-worth. Children need to know that their parents think they are the center of the universe. They need to believe there is someone who will go to the end of the earth for them to show them they matter.

**Creating connections,
building futures**




3. To receive attention and be understood. Children need to know that someone is paying attention to them. They need to expect that parent's value what they have to say and take joy in what they do

4. To have a sense of control and predictability. Children need to feel like they have some control in their lives. They need parents who are predictable in their behaviors and who structure the day with predictable routines and rituals.

5. To recognize and be able to handle strong feelings. Children need to know that the emotions that overwhelm them sometimes are normal. They need parents to remain calm in the face of their feelings, to help them give their feelings a name, and to provide them with safe and healthy ways to express their feelings.

6. To have a sense of power and feel independent and competent. Children need to feel powerful sometimes. They build this sense of power when given choices, when presented with tasks at which they can succeed (sometimes with a little help), and when parents notice what they do well.

7. To be engaged in stimulating pursuits. Children need to experience the world. Their brains develop when they are presented with interesting materials to see, touch, hear, smell, and taste.



8. To enjoy relationships and have a sense of belonging. Children need to know that if they were not in this world, someone would miss them. They need to feel their parents are glad they are theirs and that they can count on their parents to be there for them.

Summary

Children learn social skills in environments where their emotional needs are met and where they have opportunities for exploration and experimentation.

In-home care and education provides opportunities for children to develop their social skills in small group environments, alongside larger group-based settings in the community, such as libraries, parks, music and pre-school settings. These different settings support children to learn to adapt their social behaviours to suit the environments they are in.

Ultimately, a smaller learning environment means that each child's educator can support them through the different social stages whilst also supporting them with their social and emotional needs.