

# Supporting Social & Emotional Development in Kids Ages 5-8

Sometimes it's hard to talk about emotions. These tips can get you started.

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## Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is knowing your emotions, strengths and challenges, and how your emotions affect your behavior and decisions.

### **How to talk to your child about what feelings look like:**

While watching TV or reading a book, ask your child, "What do you think this character is feeling? How does his face look when he feels that way?" You can follow that with, "Show me what happy looks like for you," and, "What does sad look like to you?"

### **How to talk to your child about the emotions they're feeling as they're having them:**

If your child seems angry or frustrated, you can say, "I noticed your eyebrows are closer together and your arms are folded. Tell me how you're feeling right now."

### **How to help your child recognize their strengths, and encourage their interests:**

You can say, "What's your favorite subject in school? What do you like to do the most on the weekends?" If they like pets, you can tell them, "I see that you love to play with your pets. Would you like to volunteer with me at a shelter where there are lots of other animals you can help take care of?"

## Self-Management

Self-management is controlling emotions and the behaviors they spark in order to overcome challenges and pursue goals.

### **Help your child understand goal-setting by starting with small goals.**

Ask your child specifically what they would like to accomplish in the next week, or tomorrow. What are you going to do after dinner? What do you want to do, or practice, this weekend?

### **Allow your child to overcome challenges independently.**

For example, if you see your child struggling, you may want to say, "What else could you try that might work better?" or "I think you can do this. How else can you solve it? What can you change or do differently?"

### **How to talk to your child about resilience and perseverance.**

For example, when trying a new activity together, say, "I know that roller-skating was hard. It was hard for me too, but if we keep trying we'll get better at it. I'm proud of you for trying something new!"

### **Point out times when your child perseveres or shows grit.**

For example, if your child gets a good grade on a test, try not to just say, "Congratulations on that good grade." Instead, say, "You studied so hard for that grade and you didn't give up. I'm proud of your perseverance."

## Social Awareness

Social awareness is understanding and respecting the perspectives of others, and applying this knowledge to social interactions with people from diverse backgrounds.

### **How to talk to your child about the feelings of others in real-life social interactions:**

"How do you think that your friend Alice felt when you shared your favorite toy with her today?" "Why do you think she felt this way?" "How did it make you feel when we did this nice thing for her?"

### **How to discuss friendly and courteous behavior with your child:**

"Did you remember to smile today?" "Did you remember to be polite and say 'please' and 'thank you?'"

### **Build your child's sense of curiosity in everyday situations:**

"Why do you think that happened?" or "How do you think that happened?"

**Teach your child to respect others. For example, when speaking with your child about physical differences, keep your explanations simple, like,**

"Your classmate is in a wheelchair because a part of her body does not work." Be sure to include comments about what these children can do, and what they do well, like "I notice that Cindy smiles and brings joy into your classroom, too, and even though she is different from you, you may have some things in common. Why don't you try to be her friend?"

**How to talk to your child about respecting diversity:**

"Even though we all are different, we are similar in many ways. We all love our families, and like it when people are kind to us. It's important to respect and be nice to all people, no matter where they come from or who they are."

## **Relationships**

The ability to interact meaningfully with others and to maintain healthy relationships with diverse individuals and groups contributes to overall success.

### **How to talk to your child about friendships:**

"Did you meet anybody new in class today? Who are your best friends at school?"  
Ask your child about the qualities they look for in a friend, by saying, "Why do you like to play with Jamal after school? What makes him a good friend?" or "Has Shannon ever said anything that made you feel sad?"

### **Teach your child about the value of kindness in relationships.**

You can say, "The lady at the grocery store was so nice to me today. She helped carry my bags to the car. Was anyone nice to you at school today? Did someone help you today or were you a good helper?"

### **Show your child how to thank someone through actions and not just words.**

If your child comes home from school and says, "Shruti was nice to me today because she shared her snacks with me," you can follow that with, "Do you want to take some snacks to share with Shruti tomorrow? Do you think that's a good way to say thank you?"

### **For children going through hard times with friends, try**

"If Leah doesn't want to play with you, you may want to ask her if you did anything to hurt her feelings. Do you think you should say sorry? If you say sorry, she might feel better. If she did something to you, maybe you can ask her why she did that."

### **How to talk to your child about bullying:**

"I noticed that you looked sad when I picked you up from school today. Did anything happen? Are you having problems with any of your classmates? Is anyone calling you names or being mean to you? Did a classmate hurt someone else feelings? If you see anything like this happen, I need to know so we can do something about it."

## Responsible Decision-Making

Responsible decision-making is the ability to make choices that are good for you and for others. It is also taking into account your wishes and the wishes of others.

### **Promote decision-making by allowing your child to make some choices on their own.**

You may want to provide them with options, and ask, "What book would you like to read at bedtime tonight? Your favorite one or the one we just checked out at the library today? What kind of snacks do you want me to pack in your lunch? Carrots or apple sauce?"

### **Use bedtime stories to talk about responsible decisions.**

Talk about the problem as you're reading, using terms like, "How would you solve this problem?" or, "What is the problem again?" and "What should the character do now?"

### **How to talk to your child about consequences:**

"You have to hold my hand or walk right next to me when we're in a crowd. If we get separated you might get lost and I would be very scared and worried," instead of, "A stranger might take you," which is a more realistic outcome.

### **How to talk to your child about consequences:**

“What do you think will happen if we don’t wear our coats outside today?” or, “If you don’t go to sleep on time, what do you think you’ll be like at school tomorrow?” or, “How do you think your sister will feel if you play with her favorite toy without asking?”

### **Give your child the opportunity to make reparations when they hurt someone.**

For example, if your child breaks a sibling’s toy, you can say, “Your brother was very sad that you broke his toy. How can you make him feel better? You may want to say ‘I’m sorry I broke your toy. I know it hurts your feelings that it’s broken. Next time I’m playing with your toys I will try to be more careful.’”