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Mr Dexter See

WHAT COMES TO MIND WHEN YOU HEAR THE TERM "A CHILD'S SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT"?

Ms Keren David: When we talk about a child's social-emotional development, we refer to the relationships he has with adults and peers. It also refers to a child's sense of self-identity in relation to others, the recognition of his abilities, expression and regulation of emotions, and development of empathy, as well as a sense of confidence and competence.

Madam Norhidayah Binte Noorzali: The term brings to mind a child's awareness of his emotions, and his ability to handle and adapt to different settings – at the playground, in preschool or at home – as well as with different groups of people, whether it is with siblings, older family members, friends or teachers.

Ms Juanita Binte Johan Ong: Socialemotional development also refers to the child being able to regulate his feelings and moods, which in turn affects his behaviour – how ready he is to learn, and how supported and equipped he is in managing setbacks or stress.

Mr Dexter See: In my view, the socialemotional aspect of a child's development is how the child expresses himself, and his interactions with others in different settings, environments or situations.

WHY IS NURTURING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS IN CHILDREN SO IMPORTANT?

Ms David: It is widely accepted that the development of social and emotional skills has an impact on a child's mental well-being and lifelong learning. This learning includes life skills such as problem-solving, thinking, planning and decision-making. Having such skills also lead to better mental health and well-being. Children who have positive social and 37. Educator, PCF emotional skills Sparkletots @ are more likely to

become effective learners, confident adults and better-engaged citizens.

ngineer, Father

of a boy, 11

Dr Chong Shang Chee: Indeed, research has found that emotional experiences in early childhood potentially shape the learning, longer-term outcomes and mental health of individuals. This means that apart from the genes (or biological makeup) of a child, his environment and interactions with others have the potential to shape his development, and contribute to strengthening his confidence and resilience.

PARENTS, WHAT DO YOU DO AT HOME TO HELP FOSTER YOUR CHILD'S SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT?

Mdm Norhidayah: Every moment can become an opportunity for a child to pick up social and emotional skills. Instead of chastising my daughters when they misbehave, I find that when I take the time to identify and acknowledge their feelings, and explain what just happened, they are

then able to make their own observations and decide on the right course of action when a similar incident crops up again. They become more aware of their behaviours and how their actions can affect others.

Mr See: I try to be as present as I can as a father, and respond to my son's babble, gestures and cries. This is just my way of reassuring him that all is okay, and that I am here. My wife and I also ensure that he is acquainted with extended family members so that he is not fearful of different faces. We try not to be overly protective and let him explore his surroundings on his own now that he has started to walk.



Senior Consultant, Khoo Teck Puat-National University Children's Medical Institute | Head, Child Development Unit, Division of Development and Behavioural Paediatrics I Assistant Professor, Yong Loo Lin Schoo of Medicine, National University of Singapore

Research has found that experiences in early childhood potentially shape the learning. longer-term outcomes and mental health of individuals.

Tips on how you can lay a strong social-emotional foundation in children, from Dr Chong Shang Chee.

- INCREASE YOUR INTERACTION WITH CHILDREN, Infants and toddlers have immense capacity for human interaction and are wired from birth to do so.
- In pre-school, educators can increase opportunities for adultchild interactions or child-child interactions for language and social learning. In infant care, educators can create a language-rich environment where they speak and use appropriate language frequently with infants.
- At home, parents can reduce their children's exposure to the television, computer, tablet or mobile phone. You can spend more time interacting, talking or playing with them instead.

2. MAKE YOURSELF AVAILABLE" TO CHILDREN.

Infants and toddlers require a "serve and return" type of interaction with adults to enhance their social and emotional development.

- When a baby "serves" with his babbling or a toddler "serves" with his newly-learnt words, adults can return the serve in a directed, meaningful way.
- When a baby "serves" with a smile, or with gestures to get attention, the adult should return it with interest, attention and affection.
- Adults need to be emotionally available. This ensures that our responses are nurturing, loving and meaningful. This reciprocity builds a strong architecture for the baby's social and emotional development as well as his language and thinking skills.

Keren David

THE CHILD". Parents need to adjust or tailor their parenting styles, behaviours and responses to their infants' and toddlers' unique personality traits, temperaments and behaviours. This does not mean that we do not discipline, set boundaries or have no expectations for the children with more challenging temperaments.

- Modify our expectations of how the child should respond, give them time to do so, and teach them how to cope when they can't. This will lead to more positive interactions and less use of punishment (which cannot change a child's temperament).
- Research shows that "parenting to fit the child" enables parents to address the unique needs of their child, leading to positive outcomes in terms of his learning, achievement, as well as his social development and behaviour.

about their emotions. These special Lego blocks have facial expressions that depict [feelings such as] joy, sadness and anger. These Lego project sessions help children recognise and understand the range of emotions they might be feeling.

HOW CAN EDUCATORS AND PARENTS WORK **TOGETHER TO STRENGTHEN A CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT IN THESE TWO AREAS?**

Ms David: Educators should be observant and look out for tell-tale signs that a child is struggling socially or emotionally, and then work closely with his family to facilitate the 'catching on' of these skills. My educators and I make it a point to get to know the children's families. This helps us understand more about their child and gain insights into their behaviours, strengths and likes. Children come from various backgrounds and cultures and their family makeup and upbringing can also be very diverse. All these can affect the way children regard themselves and relate to others.

We work with parents closely and direct them to appropriate resources such as articles and books that can help them understand and support their child better. I also share my personal and professional experiences with those who have concerns. It is important for educators to build a strong and trusting partnership with parents, so that we can explore strategies together, to fully support the child.

Mdm Norhidayah: I am appreciative when educators recommend courses or reading materials to enrich parents' knowledge on early childhood research and techniques. My husband and I welcome any help to better equip ourselves with the necessary skills to support our children. An open line of communication between educators and parents on a regular basis is also very important. Should anything be a cause for concern, I can at least reinforce at home what has been taught to my children.

Dr Chong: Positive and healthy environments, interactions and experiences help to enhance socialemotional development. These are essential to positive outcomes in children's development. Both parents and educators should use more positive language when interacting with children to create healthy environments and experiences.

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Blouse & Denim Jeans UNIQLO, Pink Tank Model's Own On Elisha: Printed Dress arees Mango Kids, Headband Kookies + Milk On Norhidayah: Yellow Knitted Card

THIS SPREAD On Karen: White Sleeveless I Mustard Palm Tree Printed Tee & White Dunga

Homemaker. Mother of two daughters, aged six and three



Teaching social and emotional skills through stories.

Children of Star Learners pre-school centres learn positive character traits such as respect, gratitude and determination – which build their social and emotional skills - through Stanley the Starfish. Stanley is the main protagonist in a series of "big books" that is part of the centre's Stanley Starfish™ Character Development Programme, designed to nurture confident and resilient children.

"At Star Learners, we believe that character education isn't simply telling the child what is right or wrong," says Ms Angelina Cho, Centre Leader at Star Learners @ Rivervale. "Doing this only imposes a set of rules, rewards or punishments that result in limited or random change."

Storytelling or reading is a teaching strategy that has produced positive outcomes in the way children behave with their peers. Ms Cho attributes its success to the universal appeal of stories. "Children are naturally interested in stories. The stories in these big books provide natural 'stepping stones' for the children to get into the character's shoes to help them understand the traits and feelings, which they can in turn apply to themselves."



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EDUCATORS, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT SOME OF YOUR CENTRE'S STRATEGIES THAT ENSURE CHILDREN PICK UP SOCIAL-**EMOTIONAL SKILLS?**

Ms David: During assembly time, educators make it a point to share whatever good social-emotional behaviour a child has displayed with his peers. We offer praises and celebrate positive behaviours with physical gestures such as high-fives and pats on the shoulder. This makes the child feel happy and good about himself, and boosts his confidence. In class, every child is also given a leadership role. For example, some are tasked to assist younger ones in simple duties such as putting books back on the shelves. This encourages bonding and sharing. Being entrusted with responsibilities also helps children to build self-esteem and a strong belief in their own strengths and competencies.

Ms Juanita: In our centre, we've introduced a Lego project that encourages children to speak



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Ms Keren David