

# **SOCIALIZATION**

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**Book**  
Number 4



MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services

## **PARENT HELPER...The Series**

The Maryland State Department of Education publishes a series of PARENT HELPER handbooks covering a variety of skill development areas.

- BOOK 1, Parent Helper: **Overview**
- BOOK 2, Parent Helper: **Communication**
- BOOK 3, Parent Helper: **Cognition**
- BOOK 4, Parent Helper: **Socialization**
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## Introduction

### PARENT HELPER: Socialization

Parents are the primary teachers of their children in the early years. The PARENT HELPER: **SOcialization** handbook is one in a series of publications written specially for parents. This handbook presents information designed to help you foster your child's social growth and self esteem as you work with educators and other professionals that serve your child.

Because no two children are exactly alike, and since some children may face special challenges, this handbook simply offers broad and general guidelines. Working together, parents and early care and education providers can share knowledge, creativity, and commitment for making the most of each young child's development.

Many suggestions found here come from parents. Others have been successfully used by early care and education providers. It is hoped that the suggested activities will assist you in creating a secure, loving environment which will encourage your child's social skills development.

## From Here to There...

### Development of Socialization

Your child's self-concept is her sense of identity—molded as she discovers who she is, what she can do, and how she is important to others. When your child feels good about herself, she will bring a “can do” attitude to learning experiences. Her strong self concept can help her approach life's challenges and accept occasional setbacks.

How you feel about your child's progress influences how she feels about herself. She needs to be praised, encouraged, supported and enjoyed. She needs your persistence, reassurance and love to reach her potential.

Your child's social learning will occur through many developmental pathways. As her primary caregiver, you design the everyday situations for her to explore her capabilities. The approaches described in this book challenge you to take advantage of daily activities to encourage your child's social development.

### Developmental Milestones

The following **Developmental Milestones** offer a general sequence and age range for skill development in young children. You may find this information helpful in gauging your child's development and in planning learning activities that match your child's age and developmental level.

As you observe your child's development, keep in mind that your child may develop at a different pace than what is suggested here. If at any time, however, you become concerned about your child's development, contact your child's early care and education providers.

# Developmental Milestones - SOCIALIZATION

|                        |   |                        |  |
|------------------------|---|------------------------|--|
| <b>0 to 3 Months</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enjoys being tickled and held</li> <li>• Smiles spontaneously or in response to a smile, voice or touch</li> <li>• Quiets when picked up</li> <li>• Expresses pleasure with physical activity</li> <li>• Maintains brief eye contact while being fed</li> </ul>  | <b>18 to 24 Months</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cries or fusses for a short period of time when parents are absent</li> <li>• Plays alone for extended periods of time</li> <li>• Enjoys accompanying adults on short walks</li> <li>• Shows intense positive and negative reactions</li> <li>• Becomes easily frustrated</li> <li>• Shows pride in own actions</li> <li>• Pays attention to other children</li> </ul>                              |
| <b>3 to 6 Months</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notices strangers</li> <li>• Likes physical play</li> <li>• Laughs aloud often</li> <li>• Voices pleasure or displeasure</li> <li>• Approaches own image in a mirror</li> <li>• Cries when left alone or put down</li> <li>• Shows awareness of strange environments</li> </ul>  | <b>24 to 36 Months</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Varies mood in response to others' reactions</li> <li>• Initiates own play activities, plays in simple games</li> <li>• Indulges in pretend and make-believe play</li> <li>• Requests that specific stories be read</li> <li>• Avoids hazardous situations</li> <li>• Attempts to take turns with others</li> <li>• Plays or works on own project when near other children</li> </ul>               |
| <b>6 to 9 Months</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plays "peek-a-boo"</li> <li>• Expresses pleasure when playfully handled</li> <li>• Reacts playfully to own image in a mirror</li> <li>• Plays unattended for short periods of time</li> <li>• Understands and adapts to social signals like smiles and harsh tones</li> <li>• Shows displeasure when a familiar item is removed</li> </ul> | <b>36 to 48 Months</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shares toys upon suggestion</li> <li>• Performs simple errands</li> <li>• Consciously identifies with parents</li> <li>• Initiates play in group and remains to play</li> <li>• Plays cooperatively with other children</li> <li>• Shows sympathy or concern when appropriate</li> <li>• Enjoys helping and participating</li> </ul>  |
| <b>9 to 12 Months</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responds appropriately to adults' mood changes</li> <li>• Shows preference for one toy over another</li> <li>• Laughs aloud in play with adults</li> <li>• Temporarily responds to "no"</li> </ul>   | <b>48 to 60 Months</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Calls attention to own performance</li> <li>• Chooses another child to play with</li> <li>• Talks about family members</li> <li>• Prefers to be with peers rather than adults</li> <li>• Controls emotions and expresses them in acceptable ways</li> <li>• Uses social responses such as saying "please" and "thank you," raising a hand before speaking out in class, standing in line</li> </ul> |
| <b>12 to 18 Months</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Repeats performances that are rewarded with laughter</li> <li>• Exhibits specific emotional behaviors such as fear, joy and anger</li> <li>• Gives affection; returns hugs and kisses</li> <li>• Makes some decisions for self</li> </ul>  | <b>60 Months +</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understands the need for rules and playing fair</li> <li>• Comforts playmate in distress</li> <li>• Plans and builds constructively</li> <li>• Relates clock time to daily schedule</li> </ul>  |



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## The Discovery Process... How Children Learn

### Using Their Senses.

Early experience with seeing, hearing, touching, moving and tasting build self awareness and spark interest in others. To a young child, parents and siblings are the most exciting “others.” As the family provides loving care and stimulating experiences, the child begins to develop a sense of self.

### Exploring and Experimenting.

Children discover the world through exploration. They move about exploring, discovering and trying out new behaviors. The effects that these behaviors have on others, and how others respond to these behaviors, help shape the direction that children take. Social behaviors that are rewarded with positive responses are usually repeated and enhanced.

### Imitating Others.

Children learn by watching and imitating others. They develop new skills by first observing others then imitating the actions they observe. Repeating imitated actions eventually leads to use in functional situations. Tried and true baby games like “peek-a-boo” and “pat-a-cake” can be quite effective at teaching young children to imitate. As children develop new skills they are usually eager to imitate “big kid” ways of older siblings or other children.

### Playing.

Children gradually learn the ‘give and take’ of group play. Enjoying playing near other children comes before the ability to play cooperatively with others. As play skills progress, young children can practice new social roles and act out many social situations within the security of make-believe play.



## **You Can Help Your Child Learn**

**Try the following to help your child develop social skills.**

### **Build a sense of security.**

Given a loving and responsive home environment, your child will be able to establish a sense of self apart from the people and things around him. Patience, consistency and loving discipline are acts of caring that support your child as he strives toward independence.

### **Be sensitive to your child's signals.**

As an individual, your child shows unique ways of responding to new people and new experiences. Although she may not be able to put her feelings into words, she may need your reassurance when entering into unknown territory. Sometimes fearfulness and negative behaviors are signs that your child is not quite ready for the challenge at hand.

### **Make your child an equal in the family.**

Membership in a family involves learning to share—sharing time, sharing resources, sharing one another's love. As your child grows more capable, he should be provided opportunities to perform tasks which contribute to the functioning of the family. He also needs to be shown how to express how much he cares about the people he loves.

### **Be aware of your child's limitations.**

Realize that your child's social capabilities are largely determined by her overall developmental level. If your child has special needs or developmental

delays, your expectations should be based on her developmental level instead of her chronological age.

### **Go from the known to the unknown.**

Prepare your child for new experiences by linking the familiar to the unknown. If your child has met the librarian or visited the children's room in the community library, participating in preschool story hour may not be such a scary event.

### **Encourage friendships with other children.**

As children develop, they need companionship with other little people. Follow your child's preference in selecting friends and provide opportunities for frequent play experiences at home and in your community. Being accepted and liked by other children becomes increasingly important as he grows and develops. Learning to survive squabbles, hurt feelings, and changing affections is part of the normal but sometimes painful process of making friends.

### **Praise. Praise. Praise.**

Set up social situations for your child to be successful and show your pleasure with hugs, smiles, and perhaps special treats. Step in to help her if she is frustrated or on the brink of failing. Reward her with plenty of praise for accomplishing what she could and for having courage to attempt the rest.

# Make Home Your Child's First Learning Environment



From the very beginning, your child has an important place within your family. By being responsive to your child's need for comfort, play and love, you build a foundation for interactive social relationships. The drive for independence emerges as developmental skills grow. Even as your child tries to do more and more for herself, she will still rely on you for support and guidance. A parent's delight in small accomplishments can set expectations for larger successes.

Since your child's first learning environment is the home, you will want to make it a caring and stimulating place that is responsive to your child's needs and interests. The following ideas and activities are suggestions which may be helpful in creating a responsive learning environment. Use your child's developmental level rather than her chronological age to guide your activity choices. Additionally, do not think that you must introduce all of the activities at one time in the sequence listed within each grouping. Personalize these suggestions in ways that make sense for your child and family.

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## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES When Your Child is an Infant

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### **Comfort your child when needed.**

1. Crying is your infant's way of communicating. Responding to your baby's cries promptly and consistently will not "spoil" him. However, seek help from professionals if our child's crying is frequent or persistent. Your child's pediatrician or early care provider may be able to suggest ways of holding, walking or rocking to soothe him.

### **Respond to your child's need to have contact with others.**

2. Infants, like bigger people, get bored and lonely. Get into a habit of taking your baby with you as you move about the house. Let her see you, touch you and hear you.

### **Initiate play with your child.**

3. Babies often seem content with routine care like feeding, burping, bathing and diaper changes. Although your baby may not seem to want additional attention, he does need you to make the first steps toward play. Cuddle, squeeze, rub, kiss, sing, and talk to your quiet child.

4. Look for small changes in your baby's behavior that may be her way of responding to you. Try to hold and position your baby so that she can see your face and you can see hers.

### **Introduce your child to new people.**

5. Family members and friends play an important role in your child's life. Allowing him to develop relationships with family and friends will enrich his circle of special people. Keeping up your social life will renew your energy and help your child with his social learning.

### **Encourage investigation.**

6. Being able to find out about things for themselves is exciting work for little people. Foster your child's exploration in a safe environment. Designate one or two drawers for your toddler and vary the contents frequently. Make sure the drawers are within her reach and contain safe objects which can be easily and safely explored. Try not to restrict your little adventurer to a playpen for long time periods.

**Support decision-making.**

7. As your child begins to signal definite opinions about himself and his world, help him make appropriate decisions. Whenever possible, offer two acceptable choices and let your child make the decision. For example, you could ask: “Do you want cereal or eggs for breakfast?” or “Do you want to wear your football jersey or your soccer shirt to school today?” Praise your child for making his own decision.

**Respect ownership.**

8. Gaining a sense of “mine” marks an important developmental step in self-awareness. As your child shows a preference for certain toys or items, make sure she has access to these favorites. Talk about things and people in terms of what belongs to your child and what belongs to others. For example, “These are your shoes. Those are your brother’s shoes.” Your child may also appreciate a special place of her own to use for quiet play and to secure treasured possessions.

**Celebrate independence.**

9. Many young children are eager for new tasks and experiences. Others, however, require coaxing and extra encouragement. Regardless of how your child approaches challenges, success will be important for the development of self concept. Direct your child toward challenges for which he is developmentally ready. Break down big tasks into smaller parts. Show him each step but allow him to try each step for himself. For example, if your child wants to make a garden, you might break down the project into several simple steps:

- Step 1: Dig the holes
- Step 2: Drop the seeds in the holes
- Step 3: Cover the seeds with dirt
- Step 4: Water the covered holes

**Be prepared for “stormy weather.”**

10. Anger, conflict, negative expression, and temper tantrums are normal expressions of young children as they become more self-directed. Patience, loving discipline and consistency are parent skills that help guide children through rough times. Let your child know that it is what she has done, not her that you dislike. For example, say “I don’t like that screaming,” instead of saying “You are bad.”
11. As your child directs anger at you, it may help if you vocalize her feelings. For example: “I know you’re mad because Mommy dumped the water out of your pool, but it’s dinner time now, not pool time.” Let your child know that getting angry is understandable but that certain ways of showing anger, such as biting and kicking, are not acceptable. Show her that these behaviors will result in a predictable consequence, such as being sent to her room.

**Expect ‘play skills’ to develop gradually.**

12. Watching others, entering into playful situations, taking turns, being a follower and being a leader are all social behaviors that result from teaching, experience and developmental readiness. Parents and siblings are ideal teachers of these skills. Provide role models, shape and reward your child’s social responses.

**Talk to your child about feelings.**

13. Because you know your child best, you can help him identify feelings and put those feelings into words. Try to see the world through your child's eyes, and at the same time, try to show him that other people also have feelings. For example, you could say: "How would you feel if Sheila messed up your new toy?" or "I bet you're sad because Daddy can't put you to bed tonight. I think he misses you too." or "Don't you feel proud that you walked up the stairs by yourself? I am proud of you and very happy."

**Practice social situations and manners.**

14. Knowing "how to act" in different social situations is not easy for young children. By giving your child clear guidelines for good behavior, rewarding her efforts, and giving her opportunities to practice, your child will learn patterns of acceptable social skills. For example, practicing a quiet voice or whisper in make-believe play will prepare your child for appropriate quiet manners in the library. Acting out the giving of presents can be a rehearsal for a first away from home birthday party.
15. Model and teach good manners. Your child will learn from a wide variety of ordinary social experiences, like going shopping, eating at restaurants, playing in parks, and visiting friends and relatives.

16. Young children tend to lapse into less mature behavior when frustrated, tired, or in unfamiliar situations. Occasional public outbursts and temper tantrums can be expected. Instead of becoming discouraged by your child's behavior, however, try to evaluate it objectively noting the successes as well as the problems.

**Encourage friendships.**

17. Having friends is a very important part of growing up. Your child's friends may be neighborhood kids or classmates and can span several years in age. Playing with older children can help stretch your child's abilities and provide models of more grown-up behavior. Playing with younger children gives him a chance to "shine" when taking the lead in initiating and directing play.
18. If your child is in preschool, she may have certain children that she chooses as special friends. Inviting schoolmates to play at your house can be a nice way of supporting your child's friendships. Additionally, inviting children to play with your child may be a way for her to build new friendships. Then, as your child progresses in playing with other children, she will welcome the freedom to create her own fun by making friends, choosing materials, setting rules, selecting roles and settling disputes.

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### **Take advantage of community resources.**

Participating in community activities is one way for your child to have fun while gaining social experience with peers. Many communities offer a variety of activities designed to build social skills among preschool children.

Examples include:

- Story hour at the library
- Dance and music classes
- Community and school fairs
- Water play and swim lessons
- Holiday parades and parties
- Children's films at the local theatre
- Supervised play at playgrounds
- Children's exhibits at museums
- Community garden plantings

Before assuming that your child will not be able to participate in a community activity because of a special need, talk to the event coordinators to find out if there is a way for your child to participate.

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### **If your child has a special need or disability...**

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#### **...Playing with others may present challenges.**

1. Modify your home environment for play. Your creativeness, along with help from your child's therapists, can result in play areas that accommodate her special needs. For example:
  - A supportive seat built into your sandbox corner could allow a child with physical disabilities to participate in outdoor play with neighborhood preschoolers.
  - A one-story doll house that is built without a roof might be enjoyed by a child positioned over a wedge or on a prone board.
2. If your child uses special equipment for mobility, outfit him with a basket or satchel attached to the device to enable him to transport toys and objects independently.
3. Children will be naturally curious about your child, especially if she uses special equipment or has obvious physical challenges.

Explain—or even better, let your child explain—her disability to them in simple terms. Encourage your child's playmates to investigate how her braces, crutches or wheelchair work.

4. Parents are often concerned that their children may accidentally hurt a child with a disability. Your attitude about your child's abilities and clear expectations about her and what she can and cannot do may reduce other parents' hesitation about their children playing with your child.

#### **...Opportunities for independent activities may require time and planning.**

1. As your child matures, he needs the satisfaction of doing things for himself. Set aside time during the day or week to help him practice skills that build independence and allow him to do "big kid" jobs, like loading the clothes dryer; sorting forks and spoons from the dishwasher; placing dirty clothes in the hamper; picking up his own toys; feeding the family pet; helping to wash the family car; and assisting with meal preparations.

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## **If your child has difficulty communicating with others...**

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### **...Expressing thoughts and feelings may be difficult.**

1. Speech is learned through modeling what is heard. Have your child's hearing tested to see if she hears what is being said.
2. *Stop, look and listen* to show your child that communication is important to you.
3. Model short descriptive phrases that reflect what he is trying to say.
4. Interpret your child's speech *only* when absolutely and obviously necessary.
5. Praise and encourage your child's use of whatever communication abilities she has.

### **...Asking questions may be frustrating.**

6. Encourage your child to repeat the question, tell you in another way or show you through actions, if possible. Respond to questions that he asks with facial expressions as well as to those that are spoken. Answer your child's questions with words that match his level of understanding. Check his response to make sure that you satisfied his need for information.

### **...Understanding what others are saying may be confusing.**

7. When necessary, rephrase what is being said with words that are easier for your child to understand.
8. Be a model for others, explaining that it may be best if they use short sentences.
9. Use facial expressions and body gestures to make messages clearer for your child.

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## **If your child seems to be developing at a slower rate...**

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### **...Learning new social skills will require time, patience and practice.**

1. Help your child by providing social stimulation at a level that matches his abilities.
2. Show attention and loving persistence when playing with her. Learning to respond to others is an important first step in developing social skills. When she shows awareness of other children, encourage her interest by providing opportunities for her to be near other children. Show children how to talk and play with her.
3. Reinforce his attempts to imitate. Praise, encouragement and rewards may motivate him to continue his efforts.
4. Break down new tasks into very small, simple parts to encourage steady learning.

## Around the House: Sample Teaching Activities for Children with Disabilities

### **Sample Activity #1: DEBBIE'S S PARENTS HELP HER RE-LEARN SOCIAL SKILLS**

**Description:** Debbie was a toddler when she experienced a serious illness that resulted in brain damage. All the developmental skills learned so easily in her first year were lost. She began functioning like an infant again. Yet unlike most infants, Debbie seemed extremely passive—content with lying quietly most of the day and crying only when hungry.

**Activity:** Debbie's parents, working with her doctors and early intervention specialists, recognized that she needed a great deal of loving stimulation to begin to respond to people once again.

Her Mother noticed that Debbie seemed most alert about halfway through a feeding, when he was not terribly hungry anymore but not yet tired. Debbie's mother experimented with a routine of a few minutes of special smiling, stroking, talking, and singing. Each time she looked carefully at Debbie's responses. She was encouraged to note signs that Debbie was attending more to her. Debbie was looking at her more intently and for longer periods, and she seemed to relax more when she was being held.

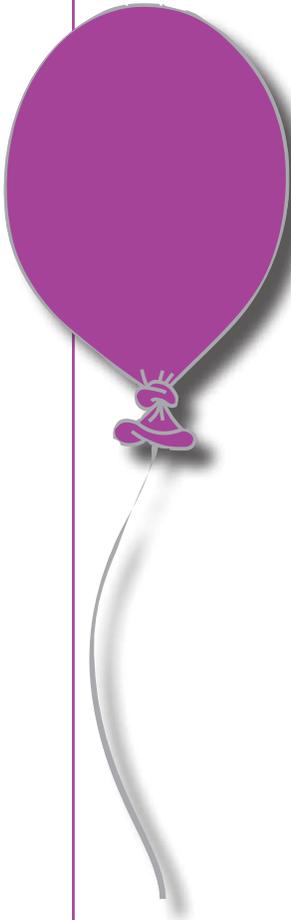
Her Mother added a similar special play break each time she changed her diapers.

The changing table was ideal for face to face contact and the act of getting dry pants invited stroking and cuddling.

Debbie's Dad was determined to keep her in the mainstream of family activities. Because she was too large for a regular sized infant seat, he worked with her therapist to adapt her high-chair and car seat so that she could see from a semi-reclined position. He made it a practice to take Debbie with him as he watched television, cleaned up after meals, or did other jobs around the house. Debbie began to follow him with her eyes and seemed to show a hint of a smile when he came back into view.

Debbie's rate of progress was very slow and a full year passed before she regained the sparkle in her eyes and rewarded her parents with smiles. Yet her progress was steady and probably resulted from her parents' patient efforts to help her respond to them.

## Around the House: Sample Teaching Activities for Children with Disabilities



### **Sample Activity #2: RONALD LEARNS THAT “GOOD” BEHAVIOR IS A GOOD THING!**

**Description:** Four-year-old Ronald is a member of a busy family. On weekday mornings, the family needs to perform with the precision of a drill team to get Mom, Dad, Ronald, and the new baby ready by eight o'clock sharp. Although Ronald is cooperative and capable of doing things for himself at other times during the day, his morning behavior is his absolute worst. He often has temper tantrums over what he has to wear or what he has to eat—sometimes for no apparent reason at all. Often he is not ready for the school bus so his Mom or Dad has to drive him to school, making themselves late for work.

**Activity:** Ronald's parents realized that his “bad” behavior in the morning was making him the center of attention during a time that being good did not result in anything very special happening. Once Ronald was in the car on the way to school, he was his normal, pleasant self and seemed to enjoy seeing his parents talk to his teacher for a few moments and say hello to his friends.

To change this pattern, his parents set up a new routine that built in special rewards for Ronald's good behavior. Ronald's parents took turns getting him up twenty minutes earlier in the morning. As a reward for cooperative behavior in dressing, including doing some of it himself, Ronald got to choose the breakfast menu and spend some time with his parents making pancakes, mixing juice or pouring cereal.

Ronald's parents also recorded his good behavior on a chart which he carried in his lunch box to school. His teacher looked for it as soon as he arrived and praised him for being such a big helper at home.

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