

Social and Emotional Development

Social and emotional development begins in children's earliest relationships. Through warm, responsive caregiving, children develop secure attachments that provide a foundation for exploration, learning, emotional security, and healthy relationships. As children grow, they are learning to:

- Build trusting relationships
- Understand and express emotions
- Develop friendships
- Solve social problems
- Develop a positive sense of identity and belonging

Children develop social and emotional skills at different rates and in different ways. Children may show these skills through:

- Facial expressions
- Movement
- Behavior
- Play
- Home language(s)
- Gestures
- Signs
- Spoken words
- Assistive communication (ACC)
- Other familiar ways of communicating and participating

Children's family, abilities, communities, relationships, experiences, and opportunities all shape how they build relationships, express emotions, interact with others, and develop a sense of who they are.

Inside This Learning and Development Area

This area includes four strands and 14 learning goals. The table below highlights what children are learning in this area and how adults can support that learning through warm relationships, responsive interactions, everyday routines, play, and meaningful experiences.

Strand	Children are learning to...	Adults support learning by...
Relationships With Adults	Build trusting relationships with familiar adults and seek support for comfort, learning, and problem-solving.	Building warm, responsive, predictable relationships and responding consistently to children's cues, needs, and interests.
Relationships With Other Children	Develop friendships, cooperate, share play, and solve social problems with support.	Supporting peer relationships, turn-taking, cooperation, problem-solving, repair, and care for others.
Emotional Functioning	Express feelings, needs, and ideas in many ways and manage emotions with support.	Naming emotions, modeling regulation, offering comfort, and coaching children through big feelings and daily challenges.
Sense of Identity and Belonging	Build confidence, self-awareness, identity, and a sense of belonging.	Honoring each child's family, abilities, communities, experiences, strengths, and contributions.

Play Across Social and Emotional Development

The play continuum shows how children build social and emotional skills through a balance of child-directed, shared, and adult-supported play experiences. Across the continuum, children have opportunities to explore preferences, act out feelings and relationships, play with peers, solve social problems, and practice cooperation, regulation, confidence, and belonging.



Learning and Development Area. Social and Emotional Development (SE)**Strand 1. Relationships with Adults****Goal 1. Child learns to use adults as a resource to meet needs.**

Birth to 9 months	8 to 18 months	16 to 36 months	3–4 years	4–5 years
Communicates needs to familiar adults using a variety of behaviors.	Seeks help from familiar adults for something wanted or needed.	Asks familiar adults for help in difficult tasks or situations.	As children grow, these earlier foundations of using adults as a resource for support and problem-solving continue to develop. Children move from seeking help in immediate situations to using adults more intentionally for guidance, learning, and support, while also showing growing initiative, participation, and use of familiar strategies to manage tasks and challenges with support as needed.	
Examples of Children’s Observable Behaviors				
• Communicates needs or wants through crying, looking, reaching, smiling, body movements, sounds, gestures, or repeated actions. • Directs attention toward a familiar adult, object, or activity connected to a need. • Changes expression or behavior when a need is met or not yet understood and may repeat communication attempts.	• Looks toward, reaches for, or moves to a familiar adult when help is needed. • Takes an adult’s hand, gestures, or brings an adult to a person, object, or place. • Uses sounds, signs, words, actions, or persistence to request help or more when the first attempt is not understood.	• Uses words, signs, gestures, facial expressions, movement, assistive communication (ACC), or combinations of these to ask for or show a need for help. • Seeks out a familiar adult when something is hard, confusing, or not working, or when help is needed during routines, self-care, play, peer interaction, or problem-solving. • Communicates or shows what kind of help is needed and continues working after receiving adult support.		
Examples of Supportive Strategies				
• Respond promptly and consistently to children’s cues, communication attempts, and help-seeking through gestures, movement, sounds, signs, words, or actions. • Learn each child’s engagement and disengagement cues, such as turning toward or away, brightening, stilling, reaching, arching, fussing, gaze shifting, or needing a pause. • Name needs, actions, problems, and help in simple language, such as “You want up,” “Help open,” or “You needed help opening that.” • Model simple help-seeking during play, routines, and problem-solving using words, signs, or gestures toward objects or picture cards. • Stay nearby during difficult tasks, offer a short break, or step in with hints, partial help, choices, or support before frustration escalates. • Build trusting relationships and routines where asking for help is viewed as a positive and appropriate strategy.				

Learning and Development Area. Social and Emotional Development (SE)**Strand 1. Relationships with Adults****Goal 2. Child engages in positive relationships and interactions with adults with increasing security and consistency.**

Birth to 9 months	8 to 18 months	16 to 36 months	3–4 years	4–5 years
Responds positively to familiar adults and becomes calm with adult support during stressful moments.	Looks to familiar adults for emotional support and may show distress when separated from them, especially during unfamiliar routines or settings.	Engages in positive interactions with familiar adults and seeks them for comfort when distressed or tired.	Engages in positive interactions with adults, separates from trusted adults in familiar settings, and uses adults to help solve problems.	Shows connection and engagement in interactions with trusted adults and uses familiar routines and supports during separation in familiar settings.
Examples of Children's Observable Behaviors				
• Looks toward, quiets, or relaxes in response to a familiar adult's voice, touch, or presence. • Smiles, vocalizes, moves, or shows recognition of familiar adults during everyday interactions. • Accepts comfort from a familiar adult during distress, tiredness, overstimulation, routines, or stressful moments.	• Looks to, reaches for, moves toward, or stays close to a familiar adult when uncertain, upset, tired, or separated. • Seeks closeness, contact, reassurance, or comfort from a familiar adult during challenging moments. • Returns to familiar adults for comfort and security while exploring and recovers more easily from upset with trusted adult support.	• Initiates or joins positive interactions with familiar adults during play, routines, conversation, or caregiving. • Seeks a familiar adult for comfort, help, or reassurance when upset, tired, overwhelmed, or uncertain. • Returns to interaction, play, routines, or activity after receiving comfort or support from a familiar adult.	• Communicates, shares ideas, or shows connection with trusted adults using words, gestures, facial expressions, movement, signs, assistive communication (ACC), or other familiar communication modes. • Separates from familiar adults in familiar settings, using routines, reassurance, or support as needed. • Seeks adults for help with problems, questions, difficult situations, or reassurance, and then returns to play or activity.	• Initiates conversations or interactions with trusted adults and joins longer two-way exchanges using familiar communication modes. • Shows connection, engagement, or comfort during shared activities, conversations, routines, and problem-solving with adults. • Interacts with trusted and less familiar adults with support that matches the child, relationship, setting, situation, and day.
Examples of Supportive Strategies				
• Respond promptly and consistently to children's cues for comfort, connection, reassurance, and support. • Use warm, predictable caregiving routines and repeated responsive interactions so children experience adults as safe, familiar, and dependable. • Offer comfort in ways that match each child's signals, preferences, family routines, and sensory needs, including voice, touch, proximity, quieter spaces, or familiar objects. • Stay close during uncertainty, frustration, stress, or separation, and provide calm reassurance, predictable goodbye/reunion routines, and reconnection. • Encourage exploration while remaining available as a safe person to return to for comfort, help, and shared interaction.			• Build trusting relationships by using children's names warmly, listening, following through, keeping routines predictable, and following through on what you say you will do. • Support separations with familiar routines, calm reassurance, welcoming environments, family partnerships, and trusted adults. • Engage children in meaningful conversations about their ideas, feelings, experiences, questions, and problem-solving efforts. • Stay available as a supportive resource while allowing children to participate, explore, solve problems, and reconnect as needed. • Offer easy, optional ways to interact with less familiar adults while matching support to the child, relationship, setting, and situation.	

Learning and Development Area. Social and Emotional Development (SE)**Strand 1. Relationships with Adults****Goal 3. Child engages in prosocial and cooperative relationships with adults with growing participation and support.**

Birth to 9 months	8 to 18 months	16 to 36 months	3–4 years	4–5 years
Recognizes familiar adults and may avoid or withdraw from unfamiliar adults.	Stays close to familiar adults and looks to them for security when unfamiliar adults approach.	Watches or waits for reassurance from a familiar adult before approaching an unfamiliar person and may then interact positively.	Shows emerging understanding of familiar expectations and uses adult support during moments of refusal, frustration, or disagreement.	Responds to adult requests and directions with growing understanding and support as needed, and resolves minor conflicts with adult support.
Examples of Children's Observable Behaviors				
• Turns toward, smiles, vocalizes, reaches, calms, or shows recognition in response to a familiar adult's voice, face, touch, or presence. • Shows different responses to familiar and unfamiliar adults. • Uses familiar adults as a source of comfort and security in new situations or when approached by an unfamiliar adult.	• Moves toward, stays near, or reaches for a familiar adult when an unfamiliar adult approaches. • Looks to a familiar adult's face, voice, or body language for reassurance in new social situations. • Observes, pauses, or briefly interacts with an unfamiliar adult while checking back with a familiar adult for security.	• Watches an unfamiliar person from a distance before deciding whether to approach. • Seeks reassurance from a familiar adult through looking, words, gestures, movement, or proximity before interacting. • Participates in simple positive interactions with a visitor or less familiar adult, such as showing a toy or sharing a book, with support as needed.	• Participates in greetings, farewells, or everyday social routines with familiar adults using words, gestures, eye gaze, movement, signs, assistive communication (ACC), or other familiar responses. • Follows adult requests or directions with reminders, choices, or support. • Uses adult support to work through refusal, frustration, or disagreement and rejoin routines or interactions.	• Participates in greetings, interactions, and shared routines with familiar adults with support that matches the child and setting. • Responds to adult requests or directions in most situations with reminders or support as needed. • Resolves small problems or disagreements with adults through words, listening, follow-through, or repair with support as needed.
Examples of Supportive Strategies				
• Provide consistent, responsive caregiving so children build familiarity and trust with key adults. • Introduce unfamiliar adults gradually while a familiar adult stays close, allows the child to watch first, and offers calm reassurance. • Respect children's cues for closeness, caution, withdrawal, observing, or needing more time during new interactions. • Use familiar adults, family information, warm voice, predictable routines, and easy, optional shared activities to support comfort with unfamiliar adults. • Model friendly greetings and simple ways to interact while honoring each child's pace and avoiding forced interaction.			• Build positive daily routines that include greetings, check-ins, warm conversation, clear expectations, and respectful requests. • Offer brief choices, visual cues, or gentle prompts that help children respond to adult requests and routines with support as needed. • Stay calm during refusal, frustration, disagreement, or limit-testing and help children return to expected behavior. • Model respectful disagreement, problem-solving, and repair, such as apologizing and trying again calmly. • Acknowledge children's cooperation, repair, follow-through, and efforts to resolve conflict with adult support.	

Learning and Development Area. Social and Emotional Development (SE)**Strand 2. Relationships with Other Children****Goal 1. Child engages in and maintains positive relationships and interactions with other children.**

Birth to 9 months	8 to 18 months	16 to 36 months	3–4 years	4–5 years
Shows interest in other children and recognizes familiar children through actions and sounds.	Participates in simple back-and-forth interactions with other children and shows familiarity with regular playmates.	Seeks out other children and participates in nearby, parallel, pretend, or short shared play with support as needed.	Maintains interactions with other children and shows prosocial behaviors with support such as adult guidance, peer support, reminders, or familiar strategies.	Sustains interactions with peers for longer periods and uses prosocial strategies with support as needed.
Examples of Children's Observable Behaviors				
- Looks closely at another child and watches the child's movements, sounds, expressions, voice, or presence. - Reaches toward, touches, smiles at, vocalizes to, or shows recognition of another child during nearby interactions. - Participates in brief shared moments with another child with adult support nearby.	- Engages in simple back-and-forth actions, such as rolling a ball, handing an object, copying a movement, or exchanging sounds. - Shows recognition of familiar peers through smiles, gestures, sounds, movement toward them, or interest in being near them. - Watches, imitates, joins, or responds to another child during play, routines, or a shared activity for a short time.	- Shows interest in starting play, communicating, or joining an activity with other children using familiar communication modes. - Responds to peers' invitations, actions, words, gestures, or communication during play and routines. - Seeks out familiar peers and participates in nearby, parallel, simple cooperative, or pretend play with one or more children.	- Joins and stays engaged in play or conversation with other children for several minutes. - Uses familiar communication modes to enter play, maintain interaction, share, take turns, or solve simple peer problems with support as needed. - Interacts with peers beyond a preferred friend or familiar playmate and continues peer interaction after minor disagreements with adult support.	- Sustains play, conversation, or shared work with peers for longer periods of time. - Shows prosocial behaviors such as sharing, taking turns, helping, including, and cooperating with support, reminders, or familiar strategies as needed. - Participates with preferred and less familiar peers and negotiates roles, materials, ideas, or repairs after conflict with support as needed.
Examples of Supportive Strategies				
- Provide safe, closely supervised opportunities for children to see, hear, notice, play near, and interact with familiar peers. - Position children face-to-face or side-by-side when appropriate and arrange materials and spaces in ways that invite shared attention and play. - Narrate children's interest in one another, name peers, and describe actions to support recognition, connection, and communication. - Model and support simple peer interactions such as greeting, giving, rolling, copying, offering a toy, sitting nearby, or joining with gestures, words, signs, or actions. - Stay close to support gentle touch, turn-taking, shared attention, and sustained peer interaction without taking over play.			- Model and coach ways to join play, invite others, respond to peers, offer ideas, or bring related materials. - Provide small-group play, projects, and conversations with familiar peers and peers outside children's usual preferred group. - Prompt children to notice peers' ideas, needs, and participation, such as who wants a turn or how everyone can have a part. - Support a welcoming environment by watching for when children are being left out or only playing with certain children, and helping children welcome peers into play, projects, and routines.	

Learning and Development Area. Social and Emotional Development (SE)**Strand 2. Relationships with Other Children****Goal 2. Child engages in increasingly cooperative play and interactions with other children.**

Birth to 9 months	8 to 18 months	16 to 36 months	3–4 years	4–5 years
Responds to another child's actions or sounds during play.	Participates in simple imitation games and plays alongside other children with similar toys or materials.	Plays near or alongside other children, imitates or joins simple shared actions, and begins to take turns or participate in short shared activities with adult support.	Often plays cooperatively with other children and works with them to plan and carry out play together.	Plays with other children in increasingly coordinated ways and helps make plans for shared play.
Examples of Children's Observable Behaviors				
• Watches another child's movements, sounds, play, voice, actions, or toys with interest. • Turns toward, reaches toward, touches, vocalizes, or shows alertness when another child is active nearby. • Participates in brief shared play moments with adult support nearby.	• Copies another child's sounds, movements, or simple actions during play. • Plays next to other children using similar toys or materials. • Joins simple imitation games, such as running, clapping, banging, making sounds, or trying similar actions with toys.	• Takes turns with another child during simple games, shared activities, or common routines with support as needed. • Joins peers briefly in building, pretend play, movement activities, or shared tasks by imitating, playing alongside, sharing materials, or following a simple shared idea. • Follows a peer's lead or invites another child into play around a common idea, material, or activity.	• Participates with one or more peers in deciding what to play and how to do it using familiar communication modes. • Takes on roles, shares ideas, and helps carry out a shared play plan for short periods. • Adjusts actions, materials, roles, or steps to stay engaged in cooperative play with adult, peer, or familiar support as needed.	• Helps make and carry out plans for shared play with peers. • Sustains coordinated play with other children for longer periods of time. • Negotiates roles, ideas, materials, or changes in the play plan and works through minor disagreements with support as needed.
Examples of Supportive Strategies				
• Provide safe, closely supervised opportunities for children to observe, respond to, imitate, and play near one another. • Arrange side-by-side play with duplicate, similar, or open-ended materials that invite shared attention, imitation, and simple turn-taking. • Narrate children's interest in one another, name actions, and support gentle touch, comfort, and safety. • Model simple imitation and peer play by joining children's actions, adding one small variation, and waiting for a response. • Stay nearby during early shared play to name roles, offer simple turn-taking language, and help children rejoin or continue play.			• Provide time, space, and materials for small-group dramatic play, building, collaborative games, projects, and peer planning. • Help children talk through roles, materials, plans, and changes before and during shared play. • Model cooperative language such as "What do you think?", "Can we try your idea?", or "How can everyone have a job?" • Support children in negotiating, revising plans, solving small problems, and continuing shared play with support as needed. • Reflect with children about what helped the plan work, how they solved problems, and what they could try next time.	

Learning and Development Area. Social and Emotional Development (SE)

Strand 2. Relationships with Other Children

Goal 3. Child uses basic problem-solving skills to resolve conflicts with other children.

Birth to 9 months	8 to 18 months	16 to 36 months	3–4 years	4–5 years
Early adult-supported interactions help children notice and respond to social situations. As peer awareness grows, children begin to recognize simple social problems, such as wanting the same toy or needing a turn. With adult support, they start to take part in problem-solving. These early experiences build the foundation for resolving conflicts with peers over time.			Recognizes social problems and suggests solutions to conflicts with adult support.	Recognizes social problems, suggests solutions, and compromises during group play or work using adult support, peer support, or familiar problem-solving strategies as needed.
			Examples of Children’s Observable Behaviors	
			• Notices when a conflict or social problem happens during play or routines. • Communicates or shows awareness of simple problems, such as not getting a turn, wanting the same toy, or feeling left out, using familiar communication modes. • Suggests or tries a possible solution with adult help, such as taking turns, sharing, trading, asking for help, or choosing another idea.	• Identifies, describes, or communicates social problems during group play, conversation, or shared work. • Suggests more than one solution to a peer conflict or shared problem. • Compromises by taking turns, changing plans, sharing roles, agreeing on a new idea, or seeking adult help for harder situations.
			Examples of Supportive Strategies	
			• Help children name social problems with simple, neutral language, such as “You both want the truck” or “There is one shovel and two children.” • Model solution words and actions, such as asking for a turn, trading, waiting, choosing another idea, or asking for help, using gestures, visuals, or demonstrations as needed. • Stay nearby during peer conflict and coach children to describe or show the problem, think of possible solutions, try a familiar strategy, and keep play going. • Use books, stories, puppets, role play, group activities, and shared decision-making to practice noticing problems, compromise, negotiation, and respectful listening. • After children are calm and reconnected, briefly reflect on what happened, what helped, who may need repair, and what they might try next time.	

Learning and Development Area. Social and Emotional Development (SE)**Strand 3. Emotional Functioning****Goal 1. Child recognizes and interprets emotions of others with the support of familiar adults.**

Birth to 9 months	8 to 18 months	16 to 36 months	3–4 years	4–5 years
Pays attention to others' emotions shown through facial expressions, voices, or actions.	Responds to others' emotional expressions by sharing an emotional reaction.	Shows understanding of others' emotions by labeling them, asking questions, or responding in appropriate nonverbal ways.	Identifies common emotions in others and begins to connect emotional expressions with familiar situations, actions, or events.	Interprets others' emotions using facial expressions, tone, body language, context, and knowledge of what happened, with adult support as needed.
Examples of Children's Observable Behaviors				
• Watches others' faces, voices, actions, or emotional exchanges with interest. • Pauses, turns toward, becomes alert, or looks between an emotional event and a familiar adult. • Changes facial expression, body movement, or vocalization in response to others' emotional expressions.	• Smiles, laughs, or shows excitement when others show happiness or excitement. • Looks concerned, quiets, becomes upset, or mirrors expressions, sounds, or movements when others show distress or fear. • Looks to familiar adults to help interpret emotional tone or expressions during play, routines, or group activity.	• Uses familiar communication modes to identify or show awareness of some feelings in others. • Asks, comments, gestures, or otherwise shows curiosity about why someone may feel happy, sad, mad, hurt, or another emotion. • Responds to others' emotions with facial expressions, gestures, comforting actions, pauses in play, or changes in behavior.	• Identifies common emotions in peers or adults, such as "happy," "sad," "mad," "scared," or "hurt." • Notices facial expressions, tone, body language, actions, or familiar events that give clues about how another person may feel. • Responds to another person's emotion with attention, comfort, space, or adult help.	• Describes others' emotions using more specific feeling words, such as "worried," "frustrated," "excited," "disappointed," "embarrassed," or "proud." • Uses facial expressions, tone, body language, context, or prior events to explain why someone may feel a certain way. • Guesses what emotions are shown in stories, pretend play, peer interactions, or real events, and adjusts words or actions with support as needed.
Examples of Supportive Strategies				
• Use warm, responsive interactions that help children notice facial expressions, tone of voice, actions, and emotional exchanges. • Offer possible feeling words during everyday routines, such as "You might feel happy when I sing" or "Maybe that loud sound felt scary. I'm here." • Watch for children's engagement and disengagement cues, and respond in ways that help them feel safe while noticing others' emotions. • Name what children may be noticing in others and connect emotions with what is happening in the moment. • Use face-to-face play, songs, books, pictures, mirrors, pretend scenarios, and everyday events to help children notice and respond to emotions.			• Use real interactions, photos, books, familiar stories, puppets, and role play to help children notice emotional cues and possible causes. • Offer feeling words as possibilities, such as "It looks like she might feel sad because the tower fell." • Ask simple questions such as "What happened?", "How might he feel?", "How do you know?", or "What might help?" • Help children connect emotions to events, actions, needs, intentions, and perspectives. • Model respectful responses to emotions, including listening, offering comfort, giving space, or getting adult help.	

Learning and Development Area. Social and Emotional Development (SE)**Strand 3. Emotional Functioning****Goal 2. Child expresses a broad range of emotions and increasingly recognizes these emotions in self and others.**

Birth to 9 months	8 to 18 months	16 to 36 months	3–4 years	4–5 years
Expresses emotions through crying, smiling, laughing, facial expressions, body movements, or gestures.	Expresses emotions in ways shaped by the child's background and the reactions of familiar adults.	Expresses a range of emotions, including more complex emotions, with growing awareness of how emotions affect others.	Expresses a broad range of emotions and begins to use words to describe strong emotions in self and others.	Expresses a broad range of emotions, notices more complex emotions in self and others, and uses words to describe emotions.
Examples of Children's Observable Behaviors				
• Expresses emotions through crying, smiling, laughing, startling, facial expressions, body movements, sounds, gestures, or posture. • Shows pleasure, discomfort, fear, frustration, or other emotions in response to what is happening around them. • Signals emotions in ways that invite comfort, attention, shared enjoyment, or response from familiar adults.	• Shows a variety of emotions, such as joy, frustration, fear, comfort-seeking, excitement, or protest in familiar situations. • Expresses emotions through words, sounds, gestures, facial expressions, actions, or familiar patterns shaped by home and care experiences. • Looks to familiar adults and adjusts emotional expression in response to adult tone, support, or reactions.	• Expresses many emotions through words, gestures, facial expressions, tone, actions, or familiar communication modes. • Shows more complex emotions such as pride, embarrassment, guilt, surprise, or disappointment in familiar situations. • Begins to notice that their emotions or actions affect others and uses adults to help communicate or manage stronger emotions.	• Expresses different emotions across play, routines, conversations, and social situations. • Uses simple feeling words, signs, gestures, facial expressions, movement, assistive communication (ACC), or other familiar modes to describe or show awareness of emotions in self or others. • Notices when others show strong emotions and responds through words, actions, attention, or adult support.	• Uses familiar communication modes to describe or show awareness of a variety of emotions, including more complex emotions such as worry, embarrassment, disappointment, or pride. • Notices emotional cues in others and connects emotions to causes or situations in everyday experiences. • Communicates about emotions during play, conflict, routines, or reflection with support, prompting, or familiar communication modes as needed.
Examples of Supportive Strategies				
• Respond promptly and sensitively to children's emotional cues, expressions, and communication throughout routines, play, and care. • Offer possible feeling words in warm language, such as "You might be upset," "Maybe you want a break," or "You look excited to see Grandma." • Partner with families to understand how emotions are expressed, interpreted, comforted, and supported at home. • Name a range of emotions during play, routines, and social situations, and connect emotions with events, actions, and effects on others.			• Use everyday moments, books, stories, photos, visuals, and real experiences to help children notice, name, and discuss emotions in self and others. • Model emotions vocabulary by connecting emotions to events and inviting children to correct or add to adult words. • Encourage children to express emotions through words, gestures, tone, movement, signs, assistive communication (ACC), or other familiar modes.	

Learning and Development Area. Social and Emotional Development (SE)

Strand 3. Emotional Functioning

Goal 2. Child expresses a broad range of emotions and increasingly recognizes these emotions in self and others.

Birth to 9 months	8 to 18 months	16 to 36 months	3–4 years	4–5 years
• Support children in expressing emotions safely through words, gestures, movement, signs, visuals, assistive communication (ACC), or other familiar forms.			• Create a classroom environment where a wide range of emotions can be expressed, discussed, and supported safely.	

Learning and Development Area. Social and Emotional Development (SE)**Strand 3. Emotional Functioning****Goal 3. Child expresses care and concern toward others.**

Birth to 9 months	8 to 18 months	16 to 36 months	3–4 years	4–5 years
May mirror another child's emotions, such as crying when another child cries.	Shows concern when another child is upset and may seek adult help or offer comfort.	Shows concern for others who are hurt or upset and tries to comfort them with words or actions.	Pays attention when others are distressed and may seek adult support to help.	Pays attention when others are distressed and responds with care by seeking adult support or offering reassurance.
Examples of Children's Observable Behaviors				
• Cries, startles, pauses, looks toward, or becomes alert when another child shows distress or another strong emotion. • Changes facial expression, body movement, or vocalization in response to another child's distress. • Looks to a familiar adult when another child is upset and may show a brief shared emotional response.	• Looks at, moves toward, or pauses play to attend to a crying or upset child. • Moves toward or looks to an adult when another child is upset. • Uses sounds, gestures, facial expressions, simple words, or offers an object to respond to another child's feelings.	• Notices when another child or adult is hurt, crying, or upset. • Uses words, gestures, signs, facial expressions, actions, assistive communication (ACC), or comfort objects to show concern or offer help. • Seeks adult help or pauses own activity when another person is distressed.	• Notices when another person is hurt, sad, upset, or distressed and briefly stops to attend to the person. • Shows concern, asks what happened, comments, gestures, pauses, or otherwise communicates awareness. • Seeks adult support or offers brief reassurance, comfort, help, or space during peer distress.	• Notices when peers or adults are distressed and responds in caring ways. • Offers reassurance, comforting words, help, or space, or gets an adult when more support is needed. • Adjusts words or actions in response to another person's emotional state with support as needed.
Examples of Supportive Strategies				
• Stay close and respond calmly when children notice, mirror, or react to another child's distress. • Comfort and regulate children while using simple, reassuring language to describe what is happening. • Reduce overwhelming stimulation when needed by lowering voice, reducing noise, limiting extra touch or movement, or moving to a quieter space. • Notice and name early signs of concern for others, including looking, pausing, gesturing, moving closer, offering an object, or seeking adult help. • Model caring actions such as getting help, offering a comfort object, giving space, or using gentle touch only when welcomed.			• Encourage children to notice when others are hurt, sad, frustrated, worried, or need support. • Model caring words and actions, such as "Are you okay?", "Do you want help or space?", offering comfort, inviting a peer to rejoin, or getting an adult. • Use books, stories, real events, and classroom routines to discuss what people may feel and what might help. • Coach children to choose respectful, welcomed responses, including listening, offering reassurance, giving space, helping, including, or seeking adult support. • Recognize thoughtful responses to others' distress and help children reflect on how caring actions can support others.	

Learning and Development Area. Social and Emotional Development (SE)**Strand 3. Emotional Functioning****Goal 4. Child manages emotions with growing use of familiar strategies and adult support.**

Birth to 9 months	8 to 18 months	16 to 36 months	3–4 years	4–5 years
Becomes calm with adult support when held, rocked, or talked to by a familiar adult.	Seeks comfort when distressed, accepts reassurance from a familiar adult, or uses self-comforting behaviors to calm down.	Uses strategies to cope with stress or strong emotions, such as seeking a familiar object or adult.	Uses familiar strategies during less intense emotions and seeks or accepts adult support when emotions are stronger or harder to manage.	Uses a growing range of strategies to manage emotions and seeks adult support for more intense emotions.
Examples of Children's Observable Behaviors				
• Quiets, relaxes, or stops crying when a familiar adult holds, rocks, feeds, or speaks softly. • Shows signs of calming, such as slower movement, softer sounds, relaxed posture, or changed breathing when comforted. • Turns toward a familiar voice, touch, or soothing routine and returns to a calmer state with responsive adult support.	• Moves toward, reaches for, stays close to, or looks to a familiar adult when upset, unsure, or stressed. • Accepts comfort through touch, words, proximity, familiar routines, or comfort objects. • Uses self-comforting behaviors, such as sucking fingers, holding a comfort item, or moving close to an adult, and recovers more easily with familiar support.	• Seeks a familiar adult, toy, blanket, quiet space, or familiar routine when upset. • Uses simple strategies such as hugging a comfort item, asking for help, moving away, or taking space during stress or intense emotions. • Communicates emotions or needs during distress using familiar communication modes and accepts adult coaching to return to play or routines.	• Uses simple strategies during mild frustration, such as pausing, trying again, taking a short break, seeking comfort, or using words, with support available as needed. • Expresses emotions or needs in less intense situations using familiar communication modes. • Seeks adult help when emotions become more intense or harder to manage and uses familiar calming strategies with guidance.	• Uses a variety of strategies, such as talking, breathing, taking space, seeking comfort, or trying again, to manage emotions. • Chooses familiar calming strategies in everyday situations with adult support available as needed. • Seeks adult support for more intense emotions, responds to suggested strategies, and re-engages after frustration, disappointment, or conflict.
Examples of Supportive Strategies				
• Respond promptly and consistently when children show distress, using calm, predictable soothing routines and warm, responsive caregiving. • Watch for engagement and disengagement cues, such as turning toward or away, reaching, arching, stiffening, crying, quieting, or changes in gaze, movement, or breathing. • Reduce overwhelming sensory input, such as noise, bright light, extra touch, or too much activity, during stressful moments. • Stay nearby during upsetting or unfamiliar situations and offer reassurance, familiar routines, comfort objects, quiet spaces, or trusted adults. • Teach and model simple calming strategies during calm moments, such as breathing together, asking for help, holding a comfort item, moving to a quiet space, or saying "I need a break."			• Encourage children to try familiar calming strategies during everyday frustrations while adults stay nearby and available to support. • During strong emotions, provide calm presence, coaching, and support; after children are calm, briefly reflect on what helped and what to try next. • Support simple repair after children are calm, such as checking on someone, helping fix materials, drawing a picture, or practicing words for next time. • Create emotionally safe environments where strong emotions can be managed safely and adults are available to help.	

Learning and Development Area. Social and Emotional Development (SE)**Strand 4. Sense of Identity and Belonging****Goal 1. Child understands some characteristics of self and others.**

Birth to 9 months	8 to 18 months	16 to 36 months	3–4 years	4–5 years
Listens and responds when hearing own name used by a familiar adult.	Responds when called by name and notices when others recognize what the child can do.	Identifies and compares physical similarities and differences between self and others.	Describes visible characteristics, preferences, abilities, and similarities or differences between self and others using respectful language with adult support.	Describes self and others in more specific ways and recognizes that people can share some characteristics while differing in others.
Examples of Children's Observable Behaviors				
• Quiets, smiles, coos, looks, or turns toward a familiar adult when hearing own name. • Shows recognition of own name during play, routines, or conversation. • Responds differently to own name than to other words or voices in familiar situations.	• Looks toward, moves toward, or shifts attention when called by name during play or routines. • Shows awareness when adults notice or respond to a new skill or accomplishment. • Repeats an action or looks to an adult after seeing that another person noticed what the child did.	• Notices and communicates about visible similarities and differences between self and others using familiar communication modes. • Describes characteristics such as hair, size, clothing, body features, or familiar roles using words, signs, gestures, play, or other supports. • Compares self with peers, family members, or adults in simple ways and responds to books, play, or conversations about personal characteristics.	• Describes self and others using concrete characteristics such as hair, skin, size, clothing, abilities, family roles, languages, or interests. • Notices similarities and differences among people during play, books, routines, or conversation. • Uses respectful words, gestures, questions, play, or stories to talk about self, others, preferences, belongings, and roles with adult support.	• Describes characteristics of self and others in more detailed and respectful ways. • Recognizes that people can share some characteristics while differing in others, without ranking people as better or worse. • Uses play, drawing, storytelling, or conversation to communicate and learn about identities, families, communities, languages, and experiences.
Examples of Supportive Strategies				
• Use children's names often during warm, responsive routines, play, transitions, and interactions. • Pause after saying a child's name and respond warmly to the child's attention, movement, sound, or other response. • Partner with families to use children's names, family names, and familiar identity words in respectful and consistent ways. • Use books, mirrors, photos, dolls, figures, and everyday conversation to help children notice and describe self and others. • Model respectful language for similarities and differences, and provide materials that reflect different appearances, families, abilities, languages, and identities.			• Use books, mirrors, photos, dolls, figures, art materials, stories, and conversations to help children describe characteristics of self and others. • Model respectful language for similarities and differences, such as "People can be the same in some ways and different in other ways." • Support children's questions and comments about differences with brief, accurate, respectful responses. • Actively include different people, families, abilities, languages, identities, and experiences in dramatic play, story retelling, art, building, classroom jobs, projects, and displays.	

Learning and Development Area. Social and Emotional Development (SE)**Strand 4. Sense of Identity and Belonging****Goal 2. Child develops a sense of belonging to family, community, and other groups through relationships with others.**

Birth to 9 months	8 to 18 months	16 to 36 months	3–4 years	4–5 years
Shows awareness of familiar routines through expected behaviors.	Anticipates familiar routines and activities.	Refers to recent personal or family experiences and events.	Communicates a sense of belonging to family and an emerging connection to the larger community through words or other modes of expression.	Shows a sense of belonging to family and community and shares details about those connections when invited or with familiar supports as needed.
Examples of Children’s Observable Behaviors				
• Opens mouth, reaches, becomes alert, calms, smiles, or shows excitement when a familiar routine begins. • Lifts arms, leans in, shifts body position, or responds predictably during familiar caregiving routines or transitions. • Shows recognition of familiar people, actions, objects, songs, or materials connected to daily routines.	• Moves toward or gathers familiar items connected to a routine, such as shoes, cup, or blanket. • Goes to a familiar place or position when a routine is about to begin. • Shows awareness of what comes next through actions, gestures, expressions, or participation in repeated routines.	• Communicates about something that happened recently using words, signs, gestures, play, drawing, or other familiar forms. • Talks about or shows familiar people, places, events, or experiences from home, family, care, or the recent past. • Connects a current object, activity, or conversation to a recent personal or family experience.	• Communicates connection to family, home life, classroom, or community through talking, drawing, singing, movement, play, home language, signs, assistive communication (ACC), or other familiar modes. • Shares family experiences, traditions, languages, important people, places, groups, or events through conversation, play, art, or movement. • Expresses comfort, pride, familiarity, or connection when participating in family, classroom, or community experiences.	• Shares stories and details about family, classroom, or community experiences with familiar supports as needed. • Talks about or shows important people, places, roles, traditions, languages, or events connected to family and community life. • Makes connections between personal experiences, group belonging, and the lives of others in the classroom or community.
Examples of Supportive Strategies				
• Keep daily routines predictable, responsive, and connected to familiar people, objects, songs, actions, and family practices when possible. • Narrate routines with simple language, gestures, songs, visuals, or familiar cues so children can anticipate what is happening now and next. • Invite children to participate in routines by reaching, moving, gathering items, helping with a step, or showing recognition in familiar ways. • Use photos, objects, drawings, family materials, books, play, and conversation to support children’s recall and expression of recent experiences. • Partner with families to learn about meaningful routines, people, languages, events, and experiences children may want to share or see reflected.			• Create opportunities for children to share family experiences, traditions, languages, important people, and community connections in many forms. • Include books, music, materials, visuals, dramatic play props, and experiences that reflect children’s families and communities. • Use welcoming language that respectfully names children’s important people, languages, family practices, traditions, and communities. • Encourage respectful listening and classroom connections by helping children learn from similarities and differences in family and community experiences.	

Learning and Development Area. Social and Emotional Development (SE)**Strand 4. Sense of Identity and Belonging****Goal 3. Child expresses confidence in own abilities and positive feelings about self through relationships with others.**

Birth to 9 months	8 to 18 months	16 to 36 months	3–4 years	4–5 years
Participates in back-and-forth interactions using facial expressions, sounds, gestures, and responses to others.	Expresses desires and preferences and seeks adult attention to objects or new skills of interest.	Contributes own ideas, skills, and abilities to activities with growing initiative, participation, and support as needed.	Shows pride in completing daily routines and learning new skills and may share ideas or positive feelings about self.	Shows pride in accomplishments, shares them with others, and contributes ideas in group discussions when invited or with familiar support as needed.
Examples of Children’s Observable Behaviors				
• Smiles, vocalizes, gestures, moves, or responds to an adult’s face, voice, or action. • Pauses, responds, repeats actions, or uses sounds and movements to continue back-and-forth social exchanges. • Shows interest in shared social play, such as peekaboo, imitation, or turn-taking routines.	• Shows preferences by gesturing to, reaching, vocalizing, moving toward, or choosing desired people, objects, or activities. • Brings an object, gestures to, or looks to an adult to share interest or gain attention. • Repeats or shows an action, skill, or accomplishment and watches for an adult’s response.	• Shares ideas, actions, preferences, or new skills during play and routines with support as needed. • Participates in tasks such as dressing, pouring, building, carrying materials, or helping with growing initiative and support as needed. • Shows pride, satisfaction, interest, or connection after participating, trying a skill, helping, or contributing to an activity.	• Shows pleasure or pride after completing a routine, learning a new skill, finishing a task, or contributing to an activity. • Calls attention to accomplishments by showing, telling, demonstrating, or asking an adult to notice. • Shares ideas or positive feelings about self, effort, or contribution using familiar communication modes with support as needed.	• Shares accomplishments, work, new skills, strengths, or opinions with adults and peers when invited or with familiar support. • Shows what was done, how it was done, or why it matters through words, drawing, movement, demonstration, signs, assistive communication (ACC), or other familiar modes. • Contributes ideas, questions, or solutions during group discussions and shared activities.
Examples of Supportive Strategies				
• Engage children in warm, responsive back-and-forth interactions throughout routines, caregiving, play, songs, and games. • Imitate, respond to, and pause for children’s expressions, sounds, gestures, movements, preferences, and attempts to initiate or continue interaction. • Offer meaningful choices and respond consistently when children show interests, preferences, new skills, or accomplishments. • Join children in shared attention around objects, actions, discoveries, and routines that matter to them. • Use positive descriptive feedback that names children’s efforts, ideas, skills, participation, and contributions.			• Notice and describe children’s accomplishments, effort, persistence, ideas, and contributions during routines, play, and learning. • Invite children to share what they did, learned, tried, contributed, or felt proud of using familiar communication modes. • Provide regular opportunities for children to share work, ideas, accomplishments, and questions with individuals, small groups, or the class. • Use prompts that help children reflect on strengths, effort, and progress, such as “What did you try?”, “What helped?”, or “What are you proud of?” • Create routines where every child can contribute, be recognized, listen to others, and build on shared ideas.	

Learning and Development Area. Social and Emotional Development (SE)**Strand 4. Sense of Identity and Belonging****Goal 4. Child recognizes self as a unique individual and shows awareness of self in relation to others.**

Birth to 9 months	8 to 18 months	16 to 36 months	3–4 years	4–5 years
Learns about self by exploring hands, feet, body, and movement.	Experiments with hands, body, movement, and gestures to discover new abilities and relate to others.	Shows awareness of own thoughts, feelings, and preferences and those of others.	Describes own physical characteristics, behaviors, likes, and dislikes and shows awareness of self as a unique individual.	Describes personal characteristics and interests and explains how self is similar to or different from those of other people.
Examples of Children's Observable Behaviors				
- Looks at, touches, mouths, or explores hands, feet, body, or movement during play and routines. - Moves arms, legs, head, or body and notices the effects of those movements. - Repeats body movements, such as kicking, waving, rolling, or reaching to explore what the body can do.	- Uses gestures, body movements, actions, reaching, waving, or showing to communicate or respond to others. - Tries new ways of moving hands and body to see what can happen. - Repeats actions that help connect with adults or other children during play and routines.	- Uses words, signs, gestures, actions, or other familiar communication modes to express wants, feelings, preferences, choices, or opinions. - Shows awareness that self and others may want, feel, or prefer different things. - Notifies and responds to others' feelings, reactions, or preferences in simple ways.	- Describes or shows, personal characteristics, such as appearance, abilities, behaviors, preferences, or belongings, using familiar communication modes. - Shares ideas about what makes self special, different from others, or connected to own name, work, roles, or contributions. - Talks about things liked or disliked and describes self in increasingly specific ways with adult support.	- Describes personal interests, traits, experiences, abilities, and identity in more detail. - Compares own characteristics, preferences, ideas, or experiences with those of others without ranking or judgment. - Communicates about their place in groups, relationships, family, community, or shared connections using familiar communication modes.
Examples of Supportive Strategies				
- Provide safe opportunities for children to explore hands, feet, body, movement, gestures, and sensory experiences throughout the day. - Offer supervised floor time, mirror play, songs, routines, and materials that support body awareness and active exploration. - Notice and describe children's movements, actions, choices, feelings, preferences, and growing abilities in positive, specific ways. - Respond consistently when children use movement, gesture, sound, words, signs, or actions to communicate or relate to others. - Use everyday routines, books, play, and conversations to name self, others, feelings, wants, preferences, and different perspectives.			- Invite children to describe interests, characteristics, preferences, strengths, identities, and experiences in respectful ways. - Provide books, materials, play, art, and conversations that children see themselves and their families reflected in. - Model welcoming language, such as "People can be the same in some ways and different in others" and "We notice and respect differences." - Support perspective-taking by asking what is important to someone, how experiences are alike or different, and what shows respect. - Reinforce that each child belongs and has unique characteristics, shared connections, and meaningful contributions.	