

PRESCHOOL

3-6 YEARS
OLD

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

CHARACTERISTICS

- Self-concept: sense of self
- Self-esteem: value of self
- Self-regulation of emotions: in progress!
- Social competence: social interaction skills
- Empathy: understanding others' feelings

PROSOCIAL BEHAVIORS

2-3 years old:

- understand other's perspective
- comfort others
- aware of social behaviors

3-4 years old:

- make lasting friendships
- resolve small conflicts
- recognize their own ideas

4-6 years old:

- play more cooperatively
- social relationships outside family
- personalities show in their relationships

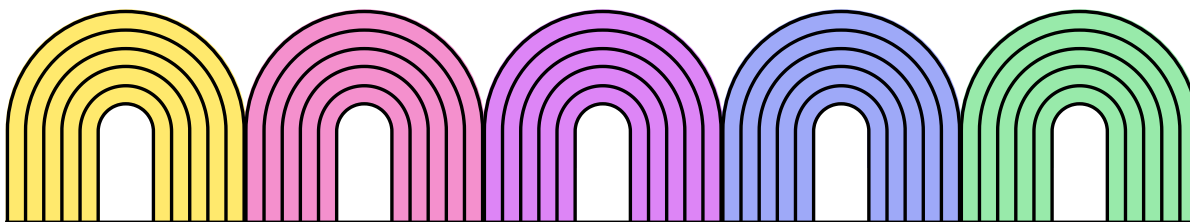
LEVELS OF SOCIAL PLAY

- Solitary play: child plays independently with different toys
- Parallel play: child plays independently with similar toys
- Group play: child plays with other children with group-centered goals

Early in the preschool years, children often engage in parallel play. As they grow and mature, their play does too! They begin to enter group play.

PSYCHOSOCIAL CONFLICT

According to Erik Erikson, there are eight stages of psychosocial development. For little ones ages 3-6 years old, the conflict being resolved is initiative versus guilt. This means children are seeking control over their actions, trying new things, and decision making. They feel proud when things go well, but guilty or bad when they make mistakes or are told they're wrong.



CHALLENGES IN SOCIAL PLAY

- Struggles with sharing and turn-taking
- Difficulty managing big emotions during play
- Always wanting to be in charge
- Some aggression when conflicts arise with peers
- Frequent use of “no” or refusal to follow group rules
- Excluding others from play

HOW YOU CAN FOSTER INITIATIVE

- Encourage curiosity by letting them explore in safe ways
- Celebrate effort, not just success, to build confidence
- Offer gentle guidance instead of pointing out everything they did “wrong”
- Give them small choices to practice independence

PROMOTING PROSOCIAL BEHAVIORS

- Model and encourage caring behaviors
- Help your child understand the impact of their actions on others
- Assign tasks to promote responsibility
- Teach social skills through interactions with other children
- Practice resolving conflicts
- Rehearse relational negotiation skills

YOUR ROLE IN SOCIAL PLAY

- Create opportunities for social play at home and in groups
- Encourage play with a variety of other children
- Join in play to model positive social behaviors
- Provide props and materials to support pretend play
- Use theme-based props
- Redirect aggressive play into positive behaviors

INITIATIVE & “NO”

For children ages 3-6, saying “no” is part of building initiative. At this stage, they’re learning to make choices, test limits, and feel a sense of control. While constant “no’s” can feel frustrating for parents, it’s actually a healthy way for kids to practice independence and decision-making! With gentle guidance and encouragement, children can learn how to balance independence with cooperation.