

A parent's guide to...

Personal, Social and Emotional Development

Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED) 'involves helping children to develop a positive sense of themselves, and others; to form positive relationships and develop respect for others; to develop social skills and learn how to manage their feelings; to understand appropriate behaviour in groups; and to have confidence in their own abilities', according to the revised Early Years Foundation Stage (see box).

Put simply PSED is about three things that can help a child to develop into a balanced, healthy individual who is confident, caring and respected by others. These are:

- Personal Development, which is about your child developing their own unique personality and interests
- Social Development which is about your child developing relationship skills such as turn-taking in a conversation, or being a good friend
- Emotional Development which is about your child understanding their own and other people's feelings and



PSED is about the three things that help a child develop into a balanced individual

learning to manage their own feelings.

Children who develop well in these three areas have been found to cope better with life's challenges. They are the sort of children who don't give up when the going gets tough and who bounce back in the face of adversity. Focusing on helping your child to develop these skills will give them a greater chance of enjoying their time in pre-school and school and of developing success and happiness in the future.

And while temperament is to a moderate degree inherited, PSED is probably the area that parents can influence most, not just when their child is a baby but right through adolescence and into adulthood.

What are you already doing to support this?

Barely an hour of the day will go by when you are not helping your child's development in some aspect of PSED.

- You probably talk to your child about the things they

enjoying doing – such as going to the park or shops, or visiting relatives. This helps your child to understand what they enjoy and also tells them that you are interested in them.

- Other things that parents do without thinking about it are reminding children about funny things they have done, or telling little anecdotes about them: ‘When you were two you tried to climb inside Grandma’s suitcase because you didn’t want her to go home.’ By doing this, you are helping your child develop as someone with personality traits all of their own. Through this, children develop self-awareness.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT Why is it important for children to develop personally?

Personal development begins before birth because even

in the womb your baby will show you his or her character, for example, whether they are lively or more sedate; and after birth you will begin to notice physical characteristics and a temperament which distinguish your child from others. Developing in this way is important because having their personality acknowledged gives your child the strength to grow up feeling confident in themselves.

What else can you do to support this area at home?

- Talk to your child about their



favourite activities – whatever they are – such as walking along a wall, riding a bike or doing jigsaw puzzles. This will help your child to feel proud of themselves and confident about the things they enjoy and can do – a good starting point for helping your child feel they can do lots of things.

- Let your child join in with your activities – whether that is with cooking, shopping, sorting the washing or putting things away in the right place – as this makes them feel that they are capable and competent and will help them develop self-assurance.
- Let your child make choices about, for example, where to have their bedtime story, which toys to take on an outing or which clothes they are going to wear (when the choice is appropriate). This gives a child some sense of

control in their lives and helps them to feel that their choices have been respected. Even a one-year-old can make choices, such as, between a rice cake or a bread stick.

- Show your child photographs of special family members, friends, events and places that are important to you – such as a picture of an elderly relative, a new baby, a former home or celebration. This helps them develop a sense of being part of a community of people, with their own culture, experiences and places that interest them.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT Why is it important for children to develop socially?

Social development helps a child to be part of a family or group and to become friends with other children. Getting along with others has been shown to be highly significant for children’s mental health, because acceptance by others is so important to making your way in life. It is also important because it helps children learn the rules or customs of their own culture and how to treat other people appropriately.

What are you already doing to support your child’s social development?

- You probably take your child to lots of events or places



Helping the child to do things for others is an important part of social development

where they meet up with other children. When you remind them to ask for something politely or to wash their hands before they begin eating you are helping them to become socially competent because they are learning the rules our society expects.

- You will also be helping your child to remember to thank people who help them or to be kind to another child who is sad or upset – through these very simple everyday actions you are passing on what are important social skills.

What else can you do to support this area further at home?

- Help your child to do things for others – for example, feeding a rabbit, making a card for somebody who has a birthday or is ill or giving away extra

toys they no longer play with.

- Show your child the benefits of ‘team work’ – young children often find it very difficult to share their possessions but they can be helped to enjoy doing something collaboratively if adults show them how! It might be that you are sweeping up leaves and everybody throws their armful of leaves into a barrow that several children can push together and tip into a bag.
- Show your child how to be sensitive to others – books and stories are good for helping children understand about difference – for example, Elmer the Elephant didn’t like being the only elephant that wasn’t grey yet he had to become grey to find out that being grey wasn’t much fun! ➤



THE REVISED EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) sets the standards that nurseries, childminders and other early years providers in England must meet to ensure that children develop and learn well and are kept healthy and safe.

The skills, abilities and knowledge that a child is likely to learn in the vital early years, between birth and age five, are divided into seven areas of Learning and Development in the revised EYFS: three Prime and four Specific.

The Prime areas are:

- Physical Development

- Personal, Social and Emotional Development, and
- Communication and Language.

The Specific areas are:

- Literacy
- Mathematics
- Knowledge of the World, and
- Expressive Arts and Design.

All the areas are important and interconnected. However, the Prime areas are seen as fundamental in the earliest years from birth to three, as they support all of children’s development and later learning. Without enough of the right kinds of experiences in the Prime

areas, children may struggle with their learning, find it difficult to communicate well and their confidence and emotional resilience may be affected.

Importantly, the revised EYFS recognises that children learn through:

- playing
- exploring
- being active
- creating, and
- thinking critically.

It acknowledges too that children develop at their own rates and in their own ways, so ‘stages of development’ have no fixed age boundaries.

EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Why is it important for children to develop emotionally?

Emotional development helps a child to understand that everybody has their own feelings and that feelings are perfectly normal and acceptable. It also helps them to understand that these can sometimes feel overwhelming but that they can be managed most of the time if they talk them through with you or another adult. Finally, developing emotionally enables children to understand that other people have feelings which may not be the same as their own. Empathising with others in the early years is key to being a considerate person throughout life.

What are you already doing to support your child's emotional development?

- The most important aspect of helping a child develop emotionally usually happens in the months and weeks before a child is born and continues from birth as they are welcomed into your family. As a parent you develop strong bonds with your child which encourages them to become attached to you and to see you as the most important person in their lives. By developing this loving relationship you help them to feel loved and cared for. When a child feels these emotional bonds with a parent or caregiver, they experience the world as a good place and expect that other people will treat them the same.
- Other things parents do that help children develop



Developing emotionally enables children to understand other people's feelings

emotionally are offering them reassurance when they are ill, or worried or anxious, and helping them to deal with difficulties, such as when another child snatches something from them, or disappointments, for example, when a visit to a relative has to be cancelled. By explaining to the child what has happened and discussing (even if you do all the talking) why something has or hasn't happened allows a child the chance to experience their sadness, or anger and then to be ready to be optimistic that the situation will change.

What else can you do to support this area further at home?

- Talk to your child about feelings – whatever they are – it may be that they are afraid of something they have seen, or a noise they have heard. Dismissing fears often creates bigger ones; acknowledging that feelings exist reduces them and makes them more manageable. When you help a child to express their feelings

they understand that their feelings are only temporary. Sharing your own feelings and explaining how you felt when you hurt your foot, or burnt the tea or saved the goldfish from going down the plug hole helps a child to understand that there all sorts of feelings and the pleasant ones can be fun and the less pleasant ones can be overcome or managed.

- Choose stories that focus on feelings – the reason stories are so effective in helping children develop emotionally is that they provide experiences that, while powerful, are removed from reality – because they remain inside a book. You will almost certainly be able to find a book that helps deal with difficulties that your child is facing – do they, for example, find it hard to say 'sorry' when they have fallen out with a friend? Whatever the issue, a book can help focus on the dilemma and on ways of dealing it.

By Ann Langston, director of Early Years Matters consultancy