



# Social Emotional Tips FOR Families with Infants

## Introduction

The quality of each infant's relationships with familiar adults—especially their parents—sets the foundation for social and emotional health. Social and emotional health is a child's growing ability to:

- express and manage a variety of feelings
- develop close relationships with others and
- explore his/her surroundings and learn (adapted from Zero to Three, 2001)

Children who experience the world as responsive to their needs, predictable, and supportive develop the social and emotional foundations that help them become ready to learn (Norman-Murch, 1996). For example, when a parent shares a smile with their infant son, rocks and cuddles him throughout the day, and gently responds to his needs, the child learns that he is safe. This sense of security allows the child to explore, learn and engage in the world and with people around them. A child who can do these things has an easier time being successful in school and life. Research tells us that attending to the social and emotional needs of very young children throughout the day—as part of their every day rituals and routines—promotes positive attachments that are critical to their developing trust for others and empathy.

***Social and Emotional Tips for Parents of Infants*** provides a set of (5) one-page posters that families can refer to during specific daily routines including: dressing, meal times, play time, resting and diapering. Putting these posters up around the house can serve as a reminder of what to say or do to nurture the social and emotional health of their infants every day. Each poster has (5) simple tips that parents can try with their child such as: *following a child's interests during playtime*. Each tip includes sample language that parents can try, “*Lily, I see you bouncing to the music, let's dance together.*” Each poster also offers a rationale for using the tips that is based on research. The practical strategies, sample language and rationale in each poster can help families to:

- Practice using behavior and language that supports healthy, positive connections with children
- Learn more about social and emotional health and
- Understand the importance of social and emotional health to school readiness.

## Acknowledgements

This resource was created by Mary A. Mackrain, Kathy S. Hepburn and Deborah F. Perry with guidance from the director and parents of the Lake Orion, MI. Early Head Start Program.



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY CENTER  
FOR CHILD AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

MARCH 2012

This product was developed with funding provided by the Office of Head Start, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, through an Innovation and Improvement Grant (90YD0268).



## Social Emotional Tips for Families with Infants

### Intended Users and Examples of How to Use this Resource

This resource is primarily intended for use by those supporting families with infants. This may include staff such as: Early Head Start home visitors and center-based teachers, or early childhood mental health consultants.

Examples of how professionals can introduce these posters to families include:

- **Working together during a home visit**

For example, an Early Head Start home visitor might introduce one of the posters during a home visit as a way to expand conversations about building connections during daily routines. Together the home visitor and parents might look at the tips and highlight some of the things the parent already does to support social emotional health and discuss one new thing they might want to try.

- **Facilitating a small or large group training session for parents**

For example, an early childhood mental health consultant might use the posters to enhance a parent training on social emotional development.

- **Facilitating an ongoing group experience for parents**

For example, a teacher might introduce one poster at a time during monthly parent get-togethers, encouraging families to try several tips and report about their experiences at the next meeting.

For more information about social and emotional health of young children, visit the Center for Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation website at <http://ecmhc.org>.

Examples of additional social and emotional resources found on <http://ecmhc.org> website include:

- **Everyday Ideas for Increasing Children's Opportunities to Practice Social Skills and Emotional Competencies**

<http://ecmhc.org/ideas/index.html>  
The Everyday Ideas are available in a variety of formats including, Twitter postings ("tweets"). The Everyday Ideas offer strategies that can be used in a classroom and supplemental materials that can be sent home for families to use. The ideas are organized by the type of skill that would be targeted when using the strategy: emotions, friendship skills, problem solving, and handling anger and other difficult emotions.

- **The Infant Toddler Temperament Tool (IT<sup>3</sup>)**

<http://ecmhc.org/temperament/index.html>

The Infant Toddler Temperament Tool includes a short on-line survey that allows parents and caregivers of infants and toddlers to recognize and explore their own temperament traits and those of a child for which they provide care. The IT<sup>3</sup> generates personalized results, which support parents and caregivers in understanding how adult and child similarities and differences in temperament traits may affect "goodness of fit." Along with these personalized results, the IT<sup>3</sup> describes best practice tips adults can use to foster the unique temperament of each child within their care.

- **Recognizing and Supporting the Social and Emotional Health of Young Children Birth to Age Five**

<http://ecmhc.org/tutorials/social-emotional/index.html>

This on-line tutorial provides professionals with a detailed definition and understanding of the milestones related to social and emotional health in infants and young children (birth up to age five) as well as strategies that adult's (parent's and other caregivers) can use to support these behaviors within every day routines in the home and within early care and education settings.



# 5 Simple Tips

To Support Your **Infant's** Social Emotional Health During



## Dressing

- 1 Talk about what you are doing.**  
*"Mila, Daddy is going to put your shirt on now."*
- 2 Practice patience.**  
*"David, this shirt is hard for mommy to get over your head, I am going to try a different way."*
- 3 Leave extra time.**  
*"It will be time to go to child care soon, let's get you ready Sasha."*
- 4 Offer positive words.**  
*"Ellen you wiggled your foot into the sock. Way to go!"*
- 5 Have fun.**  
*"We got your shirt on Dedrea, let's clap your hands!"*

## You Are Your Child's First Teacher!

Together, you and your infant can make dressing a special time for connecting. When you show patience and use gentle words, your infant learns from you how to be kind and patient. When you talk positively about what you are doing together your child learns that you like taking care of them, *"Daddy is going to dress you in warm clothes today for our walk, it's chilly outside."*





# 5 Simple Tips

To Support Your **Infant's** Social Emotional Health During



## Meal Time

- 1 Hold your baby while feeding.**  
*"I am going to feed you now Brayden. Mommy is going to find a comfortable spot for us."*
- 2 Look in their eyes and connect.**  
*"I see you looking at me Gabe, I love looking at you too."*
- 3 Talk and sing to your baby while feeding.**  
*"You like the orange carrots Calvin, I see that smile!"*
- 4 Consider breastfeeding.**  
*"Let's find a cozy spot for mommy to feed you Jeremiah."*
- 5 Notice signs from your baby that say, "I am done" or "I need more."**  
*"Kara you are turning your head away, I think you are all done eating."*

## You Are Your Child's First Teacher!

You and your baby can connect during mealtimes through cooing, singing and looking at each other. Babies love your face and voice. You help them to feel safe when you speak gently. When you know what your baby needs and react, for example by feeding them, it sends a message to your baby that their needs are important.





# 5 Simple Tips

To Support Your **Infant's** Social Emotional Health During



## Play Time

- 1 Follow their interests.**  
*Lily, I see you bouncing to the music, let's dance together!"*
- 2 Talk about what you see.**  
*"Sal, look at those big, red apples! Do you want to hold one for me?"*
- 3 Sing and read.**  
*That's it David, snuggle in and let's look at this story together."*
- 4 Offer encouragement.**  
*"Helena, you almost rolled over, come on big girl, let's try again!"*
- 5 Have fun and laugh together.**  
*"Daddy loves your giggles, Talia!"*

## You Are Your Child's First Teacher!

Infants are wired to learn and connect with people they love. Playing with your baby every day builds your parent-child bond. When you sing, read and talk with your baby and look into their eyes, it helps their brain to grow.





# 5 Simple Tips

To Support Your **Infant's** Social Emotional Health During



## Rest Time

- 1 Create a routine.**  
*"Time to take a bath Gia and then we'll get ready for your nap."*
- 2 Use routines across settings.**  
*"Let's pack your favorite book and blanket for Ms. Joslyn to use with you at child care today Jayden."*
- 3 Leave time for transitioning.**  
*"We have had fun playing Hanna, let's go for our walk before bed time."*
- 4 Take care of the basics.**  
*"Justin, let's change your diaper before you rest."*
- 5 Take time to refuel.**  
*"Nina, daddy has to take a break too so we can play again later."*

## You Are Your Child's First Teacher!

Infants, need time each day to rest. Just like us! Gentle routines—doing the same thing every day, will help your infant know what to expect and will help them ease into resting. Planning ahead to meet your infants needs each day will make it easier for them and for you, *"Sara, we will be out with your grandmother today, I will pack some extra diapers for you and snacks for us."*





# 5 Simple Tips

To Support Your **Infant's**  
Social Emotional Health During



## Diapering

- 1 Create a routine.**  
*"Hi Derry, you had a good nap! Let's check your diaper."*
- 2 Know the signs.**  
*"Eli, I see you pulling on your diaper, do you need to be changed?"*
- 3 Take time to Connect.**  
*"Look at that big smile Henry! You make mommy smile too!"*
- 4 Offer choices.**  
*"Kia do you want the red ball or the bear to hold while Daddy changes you?"*
- 5 Practice patience.**  
*"I know you don't like to be changed but we need to take good care of you. Mommy is almost done."*

## You Are Your Child's First Teacher!

Diapering is an every day routine that creates an opportunity for connecting with your infant. When you coo, babble and talk with your infant it sends a message that they are important. They love your voice and face! Creating a simple routine for diapering—doing some things the same every day, can help your infant know what to expect and will make the experience smoother for each of you, *"Daddy is going to change your diaper and sing our song and then we will go play with our toys!"*

