



The Protective Factors

An E-Book Series for Supervised Visitation Programs



Emotional and Social Competence of Children

The Sixth Protective Factor in a Series of Six



Introduction

Research indicates that children who have well-developed social and emotional competencies are at a reduced risk for child abuse and maltreatment. Emotional competence can be defined as a child's ability to identify and express his or her feelings. Social competence refers to a child's ability to interact with other people. Emotional competence and social competence go hand-in-hand, as both involve skill sets that help to express, define, and interpret emotions. Emotional and social competencies also allow children to relate and respond to the feelings of others, as well as communicate their needs.

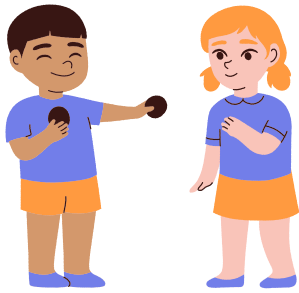
Objectives

After completing this training, social service providers and supervised visitation personnel should:

- Understand what an emotionally and socially competent child looks like in a family setting and be able to describe different examples in the home.
- Know about the importance of emotional and social competence and the positive effects on children and families.
- Be able to use strategies to help parents promote emotional and social competence in their children.
- Understand the specific ways that supervised visitation personnel can help parents promote emotional and social competence in their children.
- Know about the resources available to social service providers, as well as for families looking for more information about emotional and social competence in children.

Emotional and Social Competence in the Home

BELOW ARE SEVERAL EXAMPLES OF WHAT AN EMOTIONALLY AND SOCIALLY COMPETENT CHILD MAY LOOK LIKE IN THE HOME:



A young child sharing her snack with her sibling.



A girl asking her friend if she is okay after a fall.

A girl asking her parents to participate in an extracurricular activity.



A high school youth talking with her parents about being bullied.



BELOW ARE SEVERAL EXAMPLES OF WHAT A CHILD WITH UNDERDEVELOPED EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL COMPETENCE MAY LOOK LIKE IN THE HOME:



A young boy breaks household items when he becomes angry.



A little boy cries whenever he gets an answer wrong on his homework.

A girl becomes upset and quits whenever she is not winning at a game.



A child refuses to share anything with his brother.

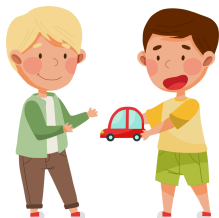


The Importance of Emotional and Social Competence for Children

Emotional and social competence allows children to build healthy and positive relationships, as well as help children manage their moods and behaviors. Generally, children who are emotionally and socially competent do better in school and build stronger relationships.

CHILDREN WHO ARE EMOTIONALLY AND SOCIALLY COMPETENT:

Listen, share, cooperate, and help others.



Are able to control their behaviors in an age-appropriate way.

Are better able to successfully establish relationships with their peers.



Perform better academically and behaviorally in school settings.



CHILDREN WHO ARE UNDERDEVELOPED EMOTIONALLY AND SOCIALLY MAY:

Have difficulty in peer relationships, as well as with interpreting the emotions of others.



Have lower levels of confidence and motivation, especially at school.



Find it challenging to focus or to stay on task.



Struggle with controlling their feelings and behaviors.



Think about it....



Knowing about the importance of emotional and social competency, what are the risks to families with children who are emotionally and socially underdeveloped? What are the risks to the family if the parent is emotionally and socially underdeveloped? How might the child, parent, or family as a whole be affected?

Strategies for Working with Families

Social service providers can help parents learn about the importance of emotional and social competence for children and how to foster it in their children. There are many different opportunities for social service providers to discuss emotional and social competence with parents. Some opportunities are described below:

- 1 Talking with parents during intake and follow-up procedures to social service delivery.
- 2 Exploring options with parents when they express concerns regarding their children.
- 3 Discussing emotional and social competence with parents during supervised visitation.
- 4 Educating parents about occupational, educational, and social resources.
- 5 Chatting with parents during pick-up, drop-off, or parent-teacher meetings.



Skill Building

There are different skills that help parents foster emotional and social competence in their children. Some are described below, along with information on how social service providers can help parents to develop these skills:

CREATE A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

- Offer warmth and acceptance when discussing emotions with the child.
- Encourage active play and offer support and guidance when the child expresses fear or frustration when trying something new.
 - When feeling emotions, help name, validate, and manage those emotions.
 - Listen to the child when he or she expresses thoughts. Use validation and clarification to reflect understanding and acceptance.
 - Express the importance of giving children “face” time. Encourage the parent to be attentive and expressive with the child at every age.



COMMUNICATE

- Encourage parents to talk regularly with the child about his or her day and explore the child’s thoughts and feelings.
- Give parents tools to help the child communicate emotions, including how to communicate and listen to others effectively.
- Encourage parents to remain aware, sensitive, and supportive of the child in conversations about feelings.
- Following times of “acting out,” wait until the child is calm and have the parent talk with the child. The two can come up with different ways of handling the problem together.



TEACHING AND PRACTICING

- Have parents teach behaviors like listening, saying “please” and “thank you,” and other ways to be polite, as well as give the child opportunities to practice these behaviors.
- Parents can encourage self-control by staying calm in situations that may usually incite anger.
 - Encourage parents to read books or watch movies with the child and ask him or her about specific emotions and behaviors using the characters. For example, the parent can ask, “How do you think Mr. Bear is feeling right now?” or “What would you do if you were Mr. Bear?”
 - Provide parents with tools to teach children how to identify and label emotions and the appropriate behaviors that accompany different feelings.



ABILITY TO DEMONSTRATE EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL COMPETENCE

- Discuss ways that the parent can model healthy management of their own emotions.
- Develop methods parents can use to properly respond to the child in challenging situations.
- Teach the parent how to express emotions around his or her child, identify problematic areas and strengths, and then develop better responses together.



A Note on Communication Competency...

Have visual aids such as books, magazines, posters, toys, etc. that reflect a variety of people and backgrounds. It is important for children to both see people like themselves represented in their environment and to be exposed to different perspectives. Remember to talk with the parents about their values and expectations for their children.

Case Example

Read this case example and answer the questions that follow.

A teacher with a classroom of 3 and 4 year old preschoolers has noticed that one of the boys in her class does not interact with the other children during play time. When she calls on him, he becomes very shy and puts his head down. Sometimes he will nod his head yes, shake it no, or gesture that he does not know, but he will not speak. He sometimes leans over to a friend and whispers to her, and she will then speak for him, but he will not speak aloud to the class. Besides avoiding verbal communication, the child does well in all other aspects of the class. The teacher discovers in a conversation with the parents that at home, the child is very talkative and lively. The parents are aware that outside of the home he will rarely speak and believe that he is just extremely shy. He does not appear to be unhappy, especially at home, and he is able to communicate at an age-appropriate level.

Questions:

1. What are some positive factors in this situation that can be built upon?
2. What are some ways that the parents could help to increase the child's comfort level with speaking outside of the home?

Possible Answers:

1. The child appears to be on track developmentally, does well in class, behaves well, and is able to speak (although he chooses not to most of the time). Also, it seems that the family is aware of his issue with speaking outside of the home. Importantly, he does seem to be comfortable speaking with one person in the class; that relationship could be used to increase the child's comfort level with speaking.
2. The parents could talk with their child to gain an understanding of why the child does not like speaking. They could try to do activities outside of the home that involve other children and families to expose the child to other social environments. They can also give the child specific tasks to practice in those environments.



Supervised Visitation Chart

The chart below describes opportunities that supervised visitation personnel can take advantage of with parents and children to encourage the development of emotional and social competencies and the positive effect this may have on the child.

Opportunities for Supervised Visitation Personnel	What the Parent Can Do	Positive Effect on the Child
During intake, provide the parent with information regarding age-appropriate social and emotional competency.	The parent can respond to the child's emotional and social needs at the different stages of his or her development.	The child will have his or her needs met and will be less likely to "act out."
During parenting time, encourage parents to model positive social behaviors.	The parent teaches the child how to share, help others, work together, and show respect.	The child develops the social skills needed to interact positively with others.
During parenting time, make tools available, such as the Feelings Thermometer or storybooks, to help the child identify emotions.	The parent can use tools to help the child identify emotions and appropriate responses to feelings.	The child learns how to name his or her feelings and behaviors.
When the child becomes upset, encourage parents to talk with the child about their feelings using validation, active listening, and clarification to express empathy and understanding.	The parent communicates with the child in a way that expresses understanding and care.	The child feels safe and accepted when expressing feelings.
When the child becomes frustrated, talk about the importance of teaching healthy emotional expression and explore how the caregiver reacts to the child being happy, sad, anxious, angry, etc.	The parent can model healthy emotional expression and teach the child how to express their own emotions and how to respond to a variety of situations.	The child learns how to express emotions in a constructive way.



Case Example

Read this case example and answer the questions that follow.

A supervised visitation monitor is working with a young mother and her eight-year-old child. During the visit, she notices that when the child first arrives to visitation, though shy, she appears happy and comfortable. As soon as the mother arrives, the child becomes visibly tense and anxious. The monitor notices the mother attempting to make conversation with her daughter about different topics, but whenever the child begins to express a feeling or opinion, the mother disagrees with her and criticizes her. The child becomes increasingly quiet throughout their time together. After some time, the mother asks her if something is wrong. The girl says that she feels like she can't ever do anything right and that she is always wrong and begins to cry. Her mother yells, "Stop crying. You have no reason to be upset!"

Questions:

1. Can you identify positive behaviors that the mother engages in that can be built upon?
2. What problematic behaviors do you see on the part of the mother?
3. What strategies could be suggested to the mother to replace the problematic behaviors?

Possible Answers:

1. The mother expresses interest in the child and appears to be attentive to the child's change in mood when she becomes quiet. She also acknowledges that her actions have caused this change in mood and desires to understand what she has done wrong. It also seems to bother the mother when the child begins to cry.
2. The mother reacts to the child with criticism whenever the child expresses her opinion. The mother also uses hostility to get the child to stop crying.
3. It is good to talk to the child, rather than criticize her when she expresses an opinion or feeling that is not favorable to the mother. The mother can ask her child to elaborate on her opinion or say, "You know, I don't agree, but it is okay for us to have different opinions." Emphasize the harm in using threats to get a child to stop a behavior and provide the mother with ways in which she can soothe her child through validation and affection.



Other Resources

- **Teaching Your Child To: Identify and Express Emotions:** A publication by The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning that focuses on how parents can help their child learn about expressing emotions in constructive ways.

http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/familytools/teaching_emotions.pdf

- **Raising Children Network:** Strategies that caregivers can use to encourage positive behaviors in children.

http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/encouraging_good_behaviour.html



The Feelings Thermometer

The Feelings Thermometer can be used to help a child identify what he or she may be feeling and appropriate responses to those feelings.

HOW AM I FEELING TODAY?

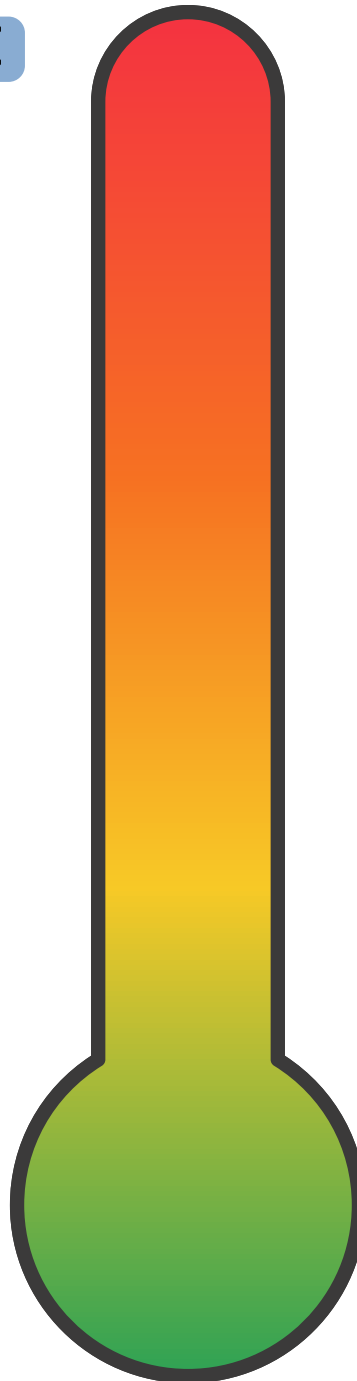
WHAT WORDS DESCRIBE HOW I FEEL?

- Angry
- Furious
- Very sad
- Anxious

- Frustrated
- Anxious
- Annoyed
- Upset

- Nervous
- Worried
- Confused

- Happy
- Relaxed
- Content
- Ok



WHAT CAN I DO TO FEEL BETTER?

STOP
and ask
for help!

- Take deep breaths
- Count to ten
- Do something else
- Find a quiet space

- Think of something happy
- Find something fun to do

Smile!
You are feeling
GREAT!

Child Care Cue Cards

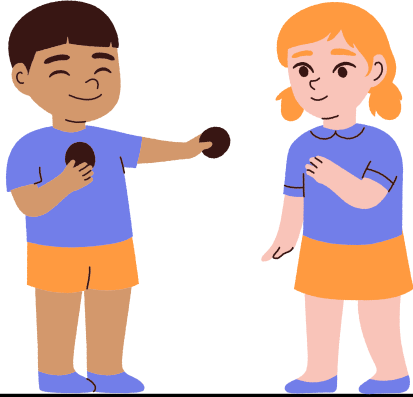
As supervised visitation providers, you can use the following child care cue cards with parents and their children during supervised visitation. The cue cards are a way to teach children how to act or react in different situations. It is a good way to show children how to act appropriately. Below are scenarios parents can ask their children to think about and match to the best cue card.

1. You want something, such as a toy or food. What would you do?
2. You are playing with a toy and another child wants to join you. What would you do?
3. There is a line to go down the slide. What would you do?
4. You are having problems with a question during school. What would you do?
5. Another child is bullying you. What would you do?
6. A child is doing something that you don't like. What would you do?



Child Care Cue Cards

SHARING



ASKING FOR HELP



IGNORING



ASKING TO STOP POLITELY



**PLEASE AND
THANK YOU**



**WAITING YOUR
TURN**



How to Show You're Listening



FOCUS ON THE SPEAKER

Sit comfortably, face the speaker, and make good eye contact.



LIMIT DISTRACTIONS

Put away phones and turn off the TV.



USE ENCOURAGING RESPONSES

Say “Mhmm” or “Okay” to create a welcoming conversation.

SHOW INTEREST

Ask questions to show your interest.



RESPOND TO SHOW UNDERSTANDING.

Give a supportive response, such as “I can tell this is very important to you”.



AVOID INTERRUPTING THE SPEAKER

Focus on what the speaker is saying and avoid preparing your response until there is a natural pause in conversation.



SHOW SUPPORT WITH YOUR BODY LANGUAGE

Providing the speaker with nods, smiles, and an open posture puts the speaker at ease and show your support.

References

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