



WINTER 2010

# NEW DIRECTIONS

## Early Childhood Direction Center

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ECDC is a regional clearinghouse that provides free information, referral, technical assistance and support to families, professionals, and community agencies concerned with children birth to five with suspected or diagnosed delays or disabilities.

We provide ongoing community training programs for both parents and professionals.

ECDC is funded by the New York State Education Department, hosted by Women and Children's Hospital and provided in-kind support from People Inc.

If you would like to be included on our list serve to receive the latest federal, state and local updates, please send an email to [ecdc@kaleidahealth.org](mailto:ecdc@kaleidahealth.org) and indicate whether you are a parent or a professional.

## Promoting Emotional Literacy in Young

### Children

By Tracey Banks



We hear about early literacy for children and most of us probably think of reading and writing, but there is another component to early literacy that is equally, if not more important for children to be successful in school and in life – Emotional Literacy. Emotional literacy, also referred to as social-emotional development, is the ability to identify, understand, and respond to emotions in yourself and others in a healthy way. Children who have strong emotional literacy tolerate frustration better, get into fewer fights, and engage in less self-destructive behavior than children who do not have strong social-emotional skills. These children are also healthier, less lonely, less impulsive, more focused, and they have greater academic achievement. (*Research from Center for Social Emotional Foundations and Early Learning What Works Brief #21 September 2005*)

Social emotional development is affected by a variety of factors, such as an individual's unique biology and temperament as well as life experiences. Adults can play a major role in supporting emotional development in young children by responding to each child's needs with warmth and respect by smiling, touching or talking; modeling appropriate behaviors by interacting with other adults and children with kindness and generosity; and praising positive emotional responses by children.

Another strategy to increase children's emotional literacy is to help them identify, understand and express emotions in a healthy way. Some easy things for parents and caregivers to do are:

- Label your own feelings throughout the day in front of children (see the list of feeling words below)
- Observe children and label their feelings as they experience them
- Talk about feelings shown by characters in children's books, on TV or in movies
- Allow children to feel a variety of emotions, but teach them healthy ways to express them
- Play games and sing songs involving feelings, such as "If you're happy and you know it"

#### Feeling Words to Teach Children

Happy	Sad	Cheerful
Mad	Brave	Bored
Confused	Proud	Surprised
Curious	Excited	Disappointed
Frustrated	Worried	Stubborn
Generous	Shy	Uncomfortable
Jealous	Lonely	Loving

Emotional literacy is a critical part of children's overall development. Young children deal with many of the same emotions adults do, but they often do not have the words to talk about how they are feeling. It is up to adults to teach children to understand and deal with their emotions in appropriate ways.

For more ideas to support social emotional development in young children check out [www.vanderbilt.edu.csefel/index.html](http://www.vanderbilt.edu.csefel/index.html)

**Communicating with Your Pediatrician**

It is a good idea to take the time to build a positive relationship with your pediatrician. Your child's health and well-being will benefit if you use these tips to keep the lines of communication open.



Make good use of the phone and email. If you have a routine question that doesn't require urgent care, find out how your doctor wants to be contacted. Some set aside specific times to answer phone calls and some prefer to answer questions through email. If however your child has a symptom that you are concerned about, fever, rash, vomiting, or diarrhea call your pediatrician's office right away. Before you call make sure to write down all your child's symptoms including their temperature and any specific questions that you have. Keep the pen and paper handy to write down the doctor's instructions.

Always plan ahead. Come to all appointments with written questions and concerns. Address your concerns in a timely manner. Don't wait until the doctor is getting ready to walk out the door to bring up your concerns. You may have to make another appointment if you need more in-depth answers.

Give all the information that you can. The more you fill your doctor in on everything going on in your child's life, the more he can help you. Bring any other records of your child's health, especially those from other doctor's your child has seen. Even if it is not a specific medical issue, for example a divorce or death in the family, let your doctor know and he can refer you to someone who can help.

Trust your doctor's judgment on medical issues. You may think your child needs an antibiotic but your doctor may have a medically sound reason for not prescribing one. But make sure that you are heard and if you are uncomfortable with a specific diagnosis or treatment, get a second opinion.

Before you leave the office make sure that you understand all instructions that the doctor has given you. Write them down. If you don't understand anything he has said ask him to explain things in simpler terms.

And finally know the next step. How soon can you expect to see an improvement in your child and do you need to make a follow up appointment.

Keeping the lines of communication open will help everyone help your child.

**Websites to investigate:**

Website about early literacy: [www.earlyliteracylearning.org](http://www.earlyliteracylearning.org)  
 Hopeful Parents is an online community that connects parents of children with special needs through shared stories.  
<http://www.hopefulparents.org/>

**Dear ECDC:**

I have concerns about my child's development. My pediatrician feels that he will catch up eventually. I don't want to wait. What are my options? Marie

**Ask ECDC**

Vickie Rubin responds:

Parents know their children the best and are often the first to recognize that their child may have a delay. We encourage you to openly share your opinion with your pediatrician, including observations that support your concern. Are you worried about your child's gross motor development (walking, running, jumping, balance), fine motor (using their hands to eat, dress, write, color, play), language (speaking and understanding what others are saying), cognitive (thinking skills, learning new skills, remembering) or social (getting along with peers and adults). ECDC has a developmental checklist that can be used as a "guideline" for typical development.

<http://wchob.org/ecdc/tools.asp>

You have options if you have a concern about your child's development, even if the pediatrician does not agree with you. If your child is under two years six months, you can call your local Early Intervention Program for a free evaluation and if eligible receive free services for your child and family.

<http://www.health.state.ny.us/community/infantschildren/earlyintervention/>

If your child is closer to three years old, you can contact the special education department at your school district. They will give you information on where to send a request in writing for an evaluation, also at no charge to your family.

Please call ECDC for district or early intervention contact information and a more detailed description of the referral process. We can answer your questions and point you in the right direction.