

Understanding Your Child's Needs: Social, Emotional and Mental Health



Every child's journey is unique, shaped by their social, emotional and mental health. As parents, understanding this area of development can often feel overwhelming – particularly when a child has other significant needs or finds it difficult to express how they're feeling.

In this guide, you'll find clear, supportive insight into how social, emotional and mental health influences your child's routines, learning and relationships, how to recognise their cues and respond with confidence, and strategies you can implement to support their development.

You'll also find clear signposts to further sources of advice and support for your family.



Social, Emotional and Mental Health - What is it and why does it matter?

Social, emotional and mental health is about how we understand ourselves, manage our emotions, build relationships and navigate our daily life and the challenges it brings.

Let's take a closer look at each area:

Social health focuses on building listening and communication skills and supporting our connections with others.

Emotional health focuses on recognising, expressing and regulating our emotions.

Mental health focuses on how we think, feel and respond to situations, and how we build resilience, confidence and an ability to cope with challenges and setbacks.

So – why is a child's social, emotional and mental health so important? When their social, emotional and mental health is supported, children are more likely to feel safe, valued and motivated to learn. They're also more likely to establish and maintain positive relationships and enjoy activities at school and in their local community as they build confidence and independence.

Without support in these areas, children can face challenges in behaviour and difficulties with friendships and relationships, which can result in withdrawal and challenges with concentration and learning.

Spotting the Signs



Children often show us how they're feeling through their behaviour, particularly if they don't quite have the words to express themselves. By noticing small changes in their routines, behaviours and mood, you can begin to recognise when they might need extra support.

It's common to notice children struggling to concentrate or engage with learning – your child might seem more distracted, restless or unusually quiet at school or at home. These changes can sometimes be mistaken for a lack of effort, but they're often early signals that something is interfering with their social, emotional or mental health.

Avoidance is another common sign. Children might refuse to go to school, disengage from friendships and relationships or hesitate in trying new activities and joining in with social interactions. This can manifest in tears, sudden outbursts of anger or increased frustration and irritability, which isn't a reflection of defiance, but of finding it difficult to cope with big emotions alone.

It's also common to notice changes to children's sense of confidence. Instead of approaching challenges with curiosity, you might notice your child begins to doubt themselves, a shift which indicates that their emotional or mental health is under strain.

Because many children are unable to, or simply aren't ready to, put their feelings into words, it's usually their non-verbal communication that speaks the loudest. Slumped shoulders, a lack of eye contact, restless fidgeting and lethargy or restlessness are common signs, as well as a lack of interest in play or hobbies that once brought them happiness.

You might also notice your child:

- becoming more withdrawn;
- becoming more talkative;
- seeking reassurance more often than usual;
- changes to their sleeping and eating patterns;
- responding differently to familiar situations or environments;
- reacting to triggers like transitions or overwhelming social interactions.





What You Can Do to Ask for Help or Make Requests

Noticing any of the signs we've highlighted can be really concerning and overwhelming for parents, but being present, reassuring and consistent in your responses can make a big difference. Let's take a look at other strategies you can implement to create a safe and supportive home environment.

Establish routines and boundaries.

Consistent mealtimes, bedtimes and rhythms to your daily life act like anchors, providing security, stability and predictability.

Talk about feelings.

Gently naming emotions models empathy and supports your child's emotional literacy, helping them to learn and understand the language of emotions and, hopefully, supporting them in expressing themselves over time.

Promote wellbeing and self-care.

Make time for play, rest, art, reading, breathing exercises – anything that helps your child to wind down and listen to their mind and body. Emphasising the importance of taking time for ourselves from an early age supports children in developing coping mechanisms for managing stress.

Physical wellbeing is closely linked to both emotional wellbeing and mental health. Building regular outdoor time into your child's routine – whether that's a walk to the park, a game of football or simply enjoying the garden – helps them to release energy, lift their mood and improve their concentration.

Support social skills and self-esteem.

Social skills and self-esteem grow hand in hand – when children feel able to connect with others, they're more likely to feel confident in themselves and their worth.

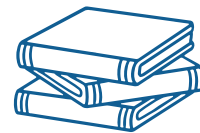
Imaginative play is an effective way of acting out everyday situations – like meeting a new friend in the playground or visiting somewhere new – providing children with the opportunity to experiment with what they might say and explore new approaches without the pressure of a new, real-life experience.

Social stories are another powerful tool – offering short, simple narratives to describe different situations, what to expect and how we can respond, enabling children to break down experiences into clear, predictable steps to reduce uncertainty and build confidence in navigating social interactions.

Celebrate small wins.

Recognise and celebrate your child's strengths and the magic in the small moments. Acts of kindness, creative ideas, perseverance – let your child know just how much you value each one. Root your encouragement in who they are, rather than what they achieve, and continue to offer gentle guidance and unwavering support as they grow.

Working Together



Supporting a child's social, emotional and mental health works best when it's a collaborative effort. Parents, schools, local authorities and other professionals each bring unique insights and expertise, and by working together, you can create a consistent, supportive network around your child.

Sharing observations, concerns and successes helps everyone to understand your child's needs and respond collaboratively, establishing a seamless system of support between home, school and the wider community.

Here are our suggestions for effective collaboration:

- Keep communications open, regularly sharing successes and concerns with teachers, support staff and other professionals.
- Establish, build and maintain positive relationships with those in your support network, focusing on shared goals and solutions.
- Don't hesitate to ask questions or seek clarifications on strategies, resources or terminology if you're unsure.
- Document progress and keep records of what works well or any changes you notice.
- Stay consistent in reinforcing strategies at home that are being used elsewhere so that your child benefits from the consistency.



Finding Further Support



It's important to know that you don't have to navigate this journey alone – there are so many resources available to support you in supporting your child's social, emotional and mental health journey.

Knowing when to reach out is key – if you notice your child's struggles are persistent, intensifying or beginning to affect their learning, relationships or your family's daily life, it might be the time to speak to their teacher, SENCo or GP for support.

Local and national charities are invaluable in providing guidance, information and strategies – from parent helplines to specialist services, there's a wealth of knowledge and support available to you and your child:

[YoungMinds](#)

[The Children's Society](#)

[Kids Charity](#)

Here at Twinkl, we're also on hand to support your family on this journey – scan the QR codes below to explore our expanding range of guidance.



Finally, please don't forget your own wellbeing. Reach out to parenting groups, charities, local services and your friends and family for support, reassurance and to share experiences, and take time for rest and self-care if you can. Parenting a child with additional needs or emotional challenges can feel overwhelming at times, and taking care of yourself is an essential part of being able to take care of your child.

We hope you find the information on our website and resources useful. These resources are those which we have generally found to be of benefit to learners with SEND. However, every child's needs are different and so these resources may not be suitable for your child. It is for you to consider whether it is appropriate to use these resources with your child.