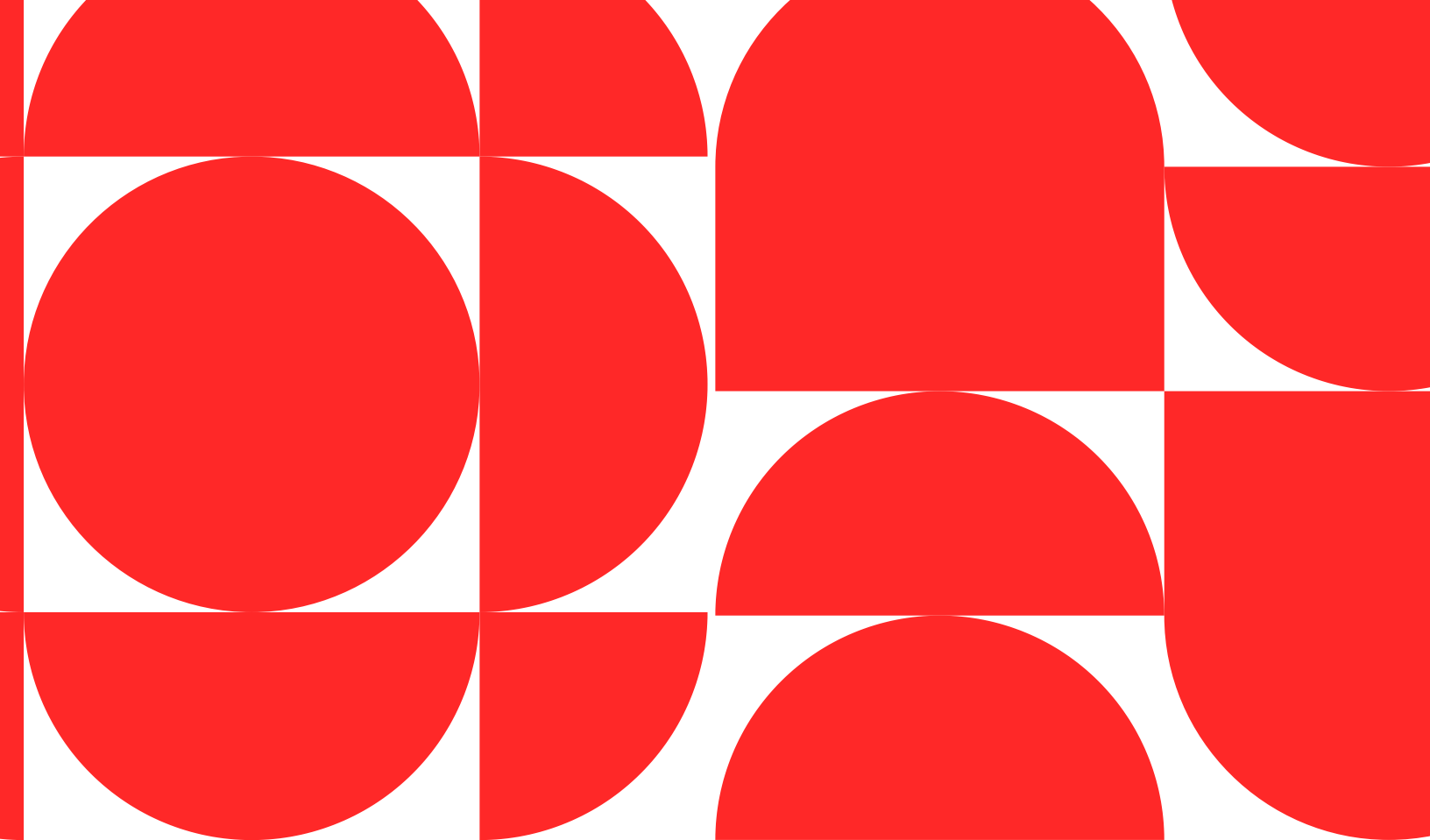




Supporting Preschool and Kindergarten Children's Social-Emotional Competence

A Practical Strategy Toolkit for Early Childhood Educators

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Welcome Note

Dear Early Childhood Educators

This toolkit translates research findings on educators' practices that support preschool children's social-emotional competence into practical classroom strategies for early learning environments.

It is designed for early childhood educators working in preschool and Kindergarten settings who support children's emotional regulation, peer relationships, and social problem-solving skills during everyday classroom experiences.



Why This Matters

Social-emotional competence helps children develop confidence, manage emotions, build relationships, and participate successfully in early learning environments. These early skills influence how children interact with peers, respond to challenge, and engage in classroom routines and learning experiences.

Research suggests that educators play an important role in supporting social-emotional development through responsive relationships, intentional teaching, and play-based interactions.



Key Message:
Small, purposeful educator interactions can significantly influence children's social-emotional growth.

Reflective Question:
How do your everyday interactions help children feel safe, supported and emotionally understood?

Teacher-Child Relationships

Build Strong Teacher-Child Relationships

Strong teacher-child relationships create the foundation for children's social-emotional development. When children feel safe, supported and understood, they are more confident participating in the classroom routine and interacting with peers.

For example, an educator notices a child becoming upset during clean-up time and responds by calmly acknowledging the child's feelings, offering reassurance, and helping them transition using familiar classroom routines.

Educators Can:

- Respond calmly to children's emotions.
- Acknowledge children's feelings using emotion language.
- Provide reassurance during challenging situations.
- Create predictable classroom routines.
- Engage in one-to-one conversations during play.



Key Message:

Strong teacher-child relationships create the emotional foundation children need to regulate, connect, and participate confidently in classroom life.

Reflective Question:

How do you intentionally build trusting and emotional safety with each child in your classroom?

Intentional Social-Emotional Teaching

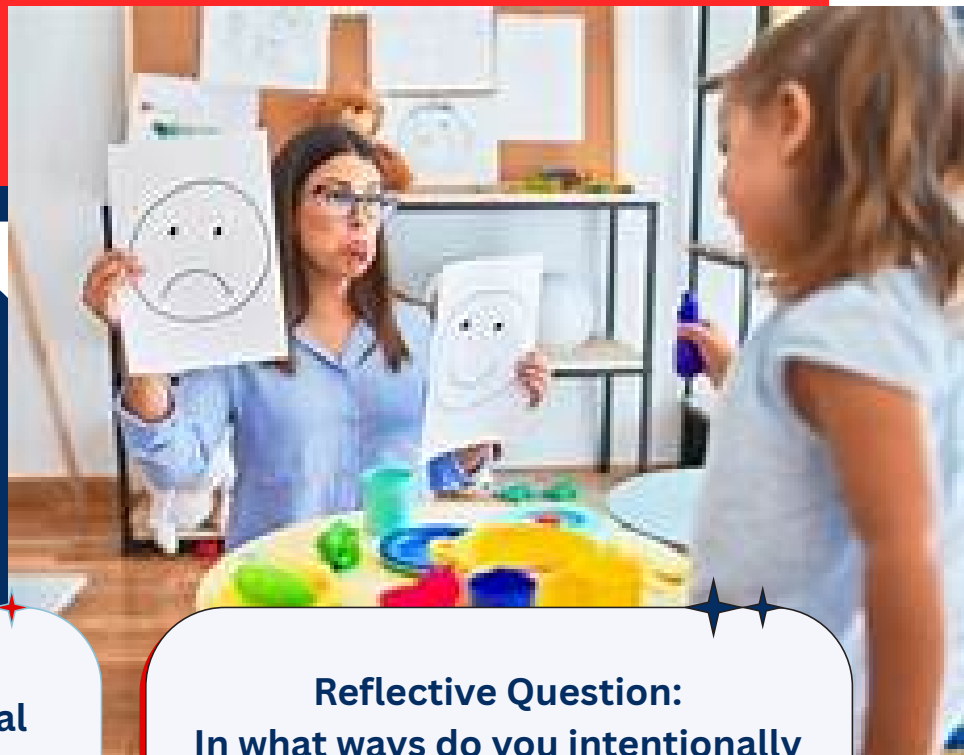
Teach Social Emotional Skills Intentionally

Children benefit when educators model emotional language and guide problem-solving strategies during everyday classroom routines and play experiences.

For example, during centre time, an educator models phrases such as, “You look frustrated. Let’s think about what might help?”, to support children in identifying and communicating their emotions.

Educator Can:

- Modelling emotions during interactions.
- Support children in identifying how others may feel.
- Guide conflict-resolution conversations
- Use visual emotion supports
- Embed social-emotional learning into transitions and routines.



Key Message:

Children learn social-emotional skills best when educators model, teach, and reinforce them during everyday classroom experiences.

Reflective Question:

In what ways do you intentionally model emotional language and problem-solving throughout the day?

Play-Based Learning Supports Social-Emotional Learning

Use Play-Based Learning to Support Social Skills

Play provides meaningful opportunities for children to practice cooperation, communication, and emotional regulation in authentic classroom situations.

For example, an educator joins dramatic play and helps children negotiate roles, take turns, and solve disagreements while remaining engaged in the shared play scenario.



Educators Can:

- Scaffold cooperative play experiences.
- Support turn-taking language.
- Guide peer problem-solving conversations.
- Model inclusive play behaviours.
- Extend dramatic play scenarios.

Key Message:

Play gives children meaningful opportunities to practice communication, cooperation and self-regulation in authentic social situations.

Reflective Question:

How do you use play-based learning to support children's peer relationships and social problem-solving?

Professional Learning + Evidence-Based Supports

Use Evidence-Based Practices and Professional Learning

Professional learning helps educators strengthen their confidence in supporting children's social-emotional development and in encouraging the consistent use of effective classroom strategies.

For example, after noticing frequent peer conflict during play, educators reflect together on classroom interactions and plan more intentional modelling of problem-solving language during future activities.



Educators Can:

- Participate in social-emotional learning professional opportunities.
- Reflect on relationship-building practices.
- Collaborate with teaching partners.
- Implement structured social-emotional learning supports when needed.
- Adapt strategies based on children's strengths and needs.

Key Message:

Reflective practice and professional learning help educators strengthen their confidence and consistency when supporting children's social-emotional development.

Reflective Question:

What strategies or professional learning opportunities could strengthen your current approach to supporting children's social-emotional competence?

Key Takeaway

Strong teacher-child relationships, intentional teaching practices, play-based learning experiences, and professional learning opportunities work together to support preschool and Kindergarten children's social-emotional competence.

These practices are most effective when embedded in everyday classroom interactions rather than treated as separate activities. When educators intentionally support children's emotional understanding, peer relationships, and social problem-solving throughout the day, they help create learning environments where children feel safe, capable, and connected.

How to Use This Toolkit

Educators can use these strategies during classroom routines, play-based learning experiences, transitions, and peer interactions to intentionally support children's developing social-emotional skills.

These practices do not require separate programs or curricula. Instead, they can be woven into everyday experiences that already occur in early learning environments. Even small changes in educator language, modelling, and responsiveness can strengthen children's confidence, relationships, and emotional understanding.



Reflective Question:
**Which strategy from this toolkit
could you begin using more
intentionally in my classroom right
away?**