

Social-Emotional Competence Begins At Home

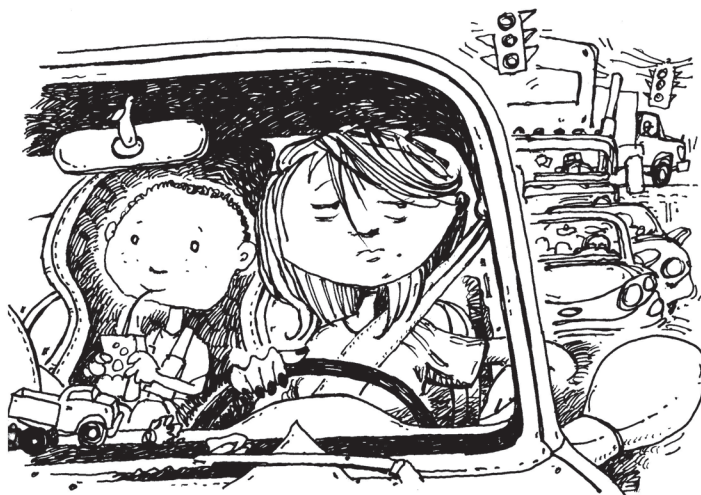
Family life brings many joys and, for parents, many responsibilities. Whether it's preparing children to learn and do well in school or teaching them how to treat others with respect, parents are the first and most important teachers their children will ever have.

One of the greatest gifts parents can give their children is guidance that teaches them healthy self-control. Self-control is the ability to pay attention to our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors and to manage them in effective ways. When children develop a healthy sense of self-control in early childhood, they do better in school as adolescents and are better liked by their peers. They also have higher self-confidence and fewer behavior problems, and they are more resilient in the face of stress.

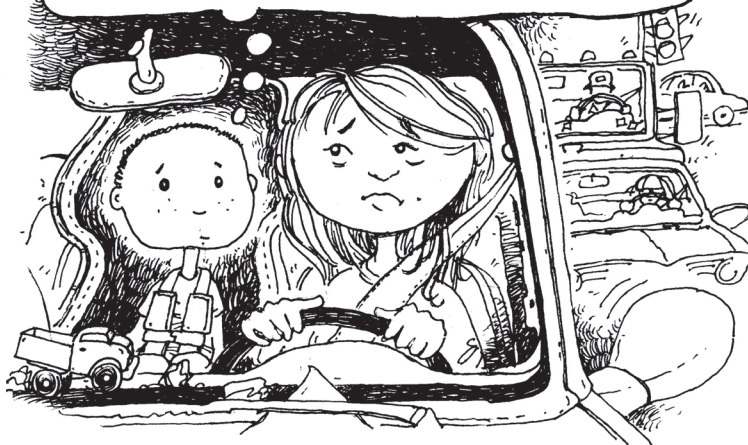
Parents who provide the type of guidance children need to develop healthy self-control interact with their children in ways that maintain a positive relationship—even in disciplinary encounters. The skills that parents need to do this are referred to as social-emotional competencies. The purpose of this publication is to describe the key skills in each of the four areas of social-emotional competence so that parents can recognize their areas of strength and needs for growth. Improving our own social-emotional skills will make us better teachers of the healthy self-control our children need to be successful and happy in life.

Defining Social-emotional Competence

Social-emotional competence combines emotional intelligence and social skills. Being emotionally intelligent means being able to recognize and understand our own and others' emotional states. It also means being able to communicate about our own emotions accurately and to be aware of the emotional content of others' communications. Our social skills reflect our ability to direct our attention to important verbal and nonverbal information coming from others and to respond in ways that consider their needs as well as our own.



SO THAT'S WHAT MOM MEANS WHEN SHE TELLS ME TO MIND MY WORDS.



Adults already have developed many of the skills that make up social-emotional competence and use them daily, not only in their family interactions but also in the workplace and other social situations. Some of us are better than others, though, when it comes to using our social-emotional skills in high-stress situations. The good news is that even in adulthood these skills can be learned and practiced and made better.

Four Areas of Social-Emotional Competence

Self-Awareness

While our five senses give us information about the world around us, the sensations inside our bodies are another type of information that tells us about what we want, need, expect, believe, and value. Being aware of these sensations and the feelings that result from them connects us to ourselves and to others.

This awareness is particularly important when we are called to respond to parenting situations that churn up strong emotions. When we are better tuned into our emotional selves, it's more likely we will be able to catch our emotions rising before they become so strong that we no longer are in control of our words and actions.

Key self-awareness competencies include the following:

- Recognizing our own internal experiences of emotional arousal
- Labeling accurately our emotions
- Knowing our values and strengths
- Maintaining a well-grounded sense of self-confidence

Self-Management

In general, it's hard to manage well a problem we don't understand. Likewise, it's hard to manage emotions

we don't understand or aren't aware of. The skills of self-management build upon the skills of self-awareness. When we recognize what is happening inside us, we can apply the skills of self-management to help us keep our relationships with our children on a more positive, constructive track.

Key self-management competencies include the following:

- Regulating our emotions
- Expressing our emotions appropriately
- Controlling our impulses
- Persevering in addressing challenges
- Setting goals and monitoring our progress toward them

When we use self-awareness skills, we are tuned into our embodied, emotional selves. This awareness is the healthy base for our abilities to manage our emotions, impulses, and behaviors. The result of building these competencies is that we are better able to understand and regulate ourselves.

Social Awareness

Developing and using the skills of social awareness increases our capacity to recognize important aspects of what others want, need, expect, believe, value, and feel. Just as self-awareness makes it possible for us to better connect with and understand ourselves, social awareness makes it possible for us to better connect with and understand others.

Key social awareness competencies include the following:

- Being aware of others' emotional states
- Taking the perspective of others
- Empathizing with others

- Recognizing/appreciating differences and similarities among individuals and groups

Relationship Management

Positive relationships develop over the course of many interactions that show sensitivity and caring and build trust. The relationships we have with others actually shape our brains and affect our physical health and emotional well-being. Relationship management skills rely on our abilities in each of the other three areas of social-emotional competence. Tracking and managing our own internal experience while at the same time tuning into the emotional states and perspectives of the other person are abilities that enable us to create the positive relationships we want in our families.

Key relationship management competencies include the following:

- Establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships
- Preventing, managing, and resolving interpersonal conflict
- Resisting inappropriate social pressure
- Seeking help when needed

Developing social-emotional competencies makes us better models for our children of how to manage and solve problems, persist in the face of difficulty, and treat others and ourselves with respect.

Sources for further reading

Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence, 10th Anniversary Edition: Why it Can Matter More than IQ*. Bantam Books, 2005.

Daniel Siegel and Mary Hartzell, *Parenting from the Inside Out: How a Deeper Self-Understanding Can Help You Raise Children Who Thrive*. Tarcher/Penguin, 2003.



HE-0951

Ellen Abell, *Extension Specialist*, Associate Professor, Human Development and Family Studies, Auburn University

For more information, contact your county Extension office. Visit www.aces.edu/directory.

Published by the Alabama Cooperative Extension System (Alabama A&M University and Auburn University), an equal opportunity educator and employer.

New Sept 2014, HE-0951

© 2014 by the Alabama Cooperative Extension System. All rights reserved.

www.aces.edu