Social and emotional development is the foundation for all learning and development. Research tells us that social and emotional development in the early years can impact many aspects of a child’s life, including school, interpersonal relationships, and even his/her physical health as an adult. Remember, social and emotional development is about the child and parent* together. The National Center for Systemic Improvement (NCSI) developed this tool to help practitioners, because practices that support the parent-child relationship support the child’s social and emotional development.

**Build a relationship with the parent**

- Ask how the parent is doing, too.
- Listen – use empathic responses so the parent knows she is being heard.
- Ask about the family’s typical routines, including what is working well and what is difficult.
- Try to understand the parent’s goals/dreams and periodically inquire about them. Show that you care.

**Support the parent’s understanding of typical development**

- Share examples of what is typical and what is not.
- Identify and celebrate the child’s strengths – For example, “Wow! Look at how smoothly he picked up that Cheerio with his fingers!”
- Babies cry… discuss when crying is okay and that crying is how babies communicate.

**Support the parent to better understand their child**

- Observe and discuss the child’s cues.
- Comment when the baby looks calmer when held by the parent: “She is so much happier in your arms...”
- Speak for the baby: “Thank you for picking me up! I needed some snuggles with you.”
- Point out the child’s actions and wonder together about why she might have taken those actions: “I wonder why she threw that cup down? I wonder what she is feeling?”
- Identify times when the child may need a break from interacting.
- Identify when the child does something well – such as when he is able to calm himself.
- Encourage the parent to make observations about their child.

**Support the parent to respond to their child**

- Point out and praise when the parent responds to their child’s cues.
- “Wonder” with the parent: “I wonder how he would react if you held him facing you instead of facing out.”
- Help the parent think of activities that will lead to interactions the parent and child will enjoy together.
- Encourage the parent to use routines to create predictability in the child’s day.
- Discuss options for limit-setting for negative behaviors.
- Model the patience and compassion with the parent that you would like to see the parent provide to the child.
- Encourage the parent to comfort their child when the child needs comforting.

*"Parent" is used to represent all primary caregivers."