

FOCUS

on Early Childhood Mental Health



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What Parents Need to Know About Social-Emotional Development

A 2009 national survey of parents of children from birth to 3 years showed that many parents don't understand how much the social and emotional development of their children is affected by early experiences.

Some details from the survey:

- Most parents (69%) think that the ability to experience feelings like fear and sadness occurs later in life.
- Two-thirds are unaware that very young babies can sense and be affected by their parents' moods;
- A majority is not aware that children can feel good or bad about themselves by at least age 2
- Almost two-thirds expect children to be able to control their emotions by age 3, when in fact that ability only develops between ages 3 and 5.

What the results mean:

- Early experiences matter, so pay attention to signs that your child is feeling anxious, protect him or her from scary situations, and follow routines that help provide security.
- Be aware of your own feelings so you can manage them in ways that don't negatively affect your child.
- Help your child develop good self-esteem by giving lots of love and affection and expressing joy in his or her accomplishments and milestones.
- Have appropriate expectations for how well your child can manage his or her feelings. Not expecting more than your child is capable of will help reduce stress for both of you.

Other significant findings from the survey:

- More than half of parents say that the way they were raised affects how they parent their own children.
- Half of parents have a caregiver for their child other than themselves, most frequently a grandparent.
- Fathers' parenting experience is different than mothers, and they are not as well-informed about social-emotional development.
- Parents regularly turn to their own mothers for parenting advice.

Source:

"Young Children's Social-Emotional Development: Key Findings from a 2009 National Parent Survey,"

www.zerotothree.org/parentsurvey

"Key Findings from a Zero to Three 2009 National Parent Survey," www.zerotothree.org/parentsurvey