



TATS Guide



Essentials for Social Development and Emotional Competencies

A guide to take a closer look at strategies to support social skill development and emotional competencies in Prekindergarten (PreK)

Contents:

- **Be Proactive:** Review ways to set up the environment and develop activities to address developmentally appropriate skills in PreK. Uncover the essentials that will establish a foundation for learning and review considerations for underlying causes of behaviors.
- **Considerations for Supporting Children's Social Development:** Strategies to increase desirable behaviors in the classroom
 - *Staff Collaboration and Consistency*
 - *Communication with Families*
- **Strategies to Support Young Children:** Consider components of addressing social development for all children and all causes and levels of behaviors. Take a closer look at skills and strategies to teach and support.
 - *Instructional and Preventative Strategies:* Universal strategies to provide to all children
 - *Individualized Strategies:* Strategies to address decreasing a specific behavior for a student
- **Appendix of Resources and Strategies**
 - Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards (FELDS)
 - Importance of Building Relationships
 - Providing Supports for Sensory Needs
 - Teaching Problem-Solving Skills
 - Social Narratives
 - Strategies for Calming and Self-Regulation



Be Proactive: Start with a Closer Look!



Be Proactive

- Set up an environment that supports children in their social development, as well as in their needs for understanding the structure and routines of their day. Support needs for modes of communication. [TATS - Classroom Spaces](#)
- Develop activities that are developmentally appropriate and individualized for varying developmental levels and needs. Provide time for movement and songs, plan lessons that relate to real life and incorporate hands-on activities. [TATS - Embedding Instruction](#)
- Teach social skills and self-regulation through direct instruction and planned lessons. Provide guided practice and facilitate interactions. Teach and model calming strategies along with strategies for identifying and understanding emotions. [Developing and Teaching a Social Skills Lesson](#)
- Determine what to teach. Examine children's unmet expectations in relation to skills that they have not yet learned. Social skills should be addressed through direct instruction and guided practice. Don't assume that all children enter PreK with knowledge and practice of social skills. Just like literacy, social skills need to be taught and practiced.

Start with the essentials that address the needs of young children. These essentials will establish a foundation for learning that will enable children to learn, practice and remember the skills that you are teaching. Be sure that supports from the [Essentials for Supporting Young Children](#) are in place, taught and used consistently. Essentials described in this document are universal design strategies and should be implemented for every child.

Consider underlying causes of behaviors. Early childhood professionals must consider many possibilities when a child is exhibiting behaviors of concern. Reflecting on possible underlying causes behind the behavior, or the influences on the behavior, is essential to establishing and maintaining a healthy experience for each child. [Tips to Consider - Reflecting on Challenging Behavior](#)



Considerations for Supporting Children's Social Development

Increasing desirable behaviors = Decreasing challenging behaviors

Teach replacement skills - Provide preventative strategies - Address individual needs



Vary the methods you use for re-directing. Maintain physical proximity so that you can speak calmly and quietly when re-directing. Use visual prompts and visual reminders to redirect.

Teach, model and provide practice on Alternate Behaviors (often referred to as Replacement Behaviors or Desirable Behaviors). When you are trying to reduce the frequency of an undesired behavior, it is important to introduce and teach children a behavior they can use instead and still get the same result (attention, an item or reward).

Provide descriptive feedback to let children know exactly what they did that you are praising. Give encouragement along with praise when children attempt a task, even if it is not perfect; praise the attempt and improvement.

Keep in mind the differences in "Won't Do" and "Can't Do". Don't assume that children have developed social skills or understand emotions. Begin from the point of view of "What do I need to teach?"

Important Note: Plan ahead and be prepared so that you are able to respond to behaviors consistently. Plan your first statements as well physical reactions when behaviors occur (calming, redirecting, safety for all). Developing a plan for consistency will help staff avoid inadvertently reinforcing behaviors that you are trying to reduce. "Responding to behaviors" also includes reinforcing behaviors that you and the family want to increase.

Staff Collaboration and Consistency

Consistency of preventative and individualized strategies is a vital aspect in planning and implementing lessons and interventions. Staff collaboration is the key to providing children with the consistency needed to improve their skills.

Staff should train and plan together in order to maintain consistency. Each staff member should have information about sensitivities, needs and goals of each child in order to help make their actions consistent with children's needs.

- Develop a consistent response to a child's behavior.
- Plan actions to maintain safety without escalating a situation.
- Calming and self-regulation words and actions.
- Facilitating play.
- Prompting and redirecting during activities.

Include related service providers and seek their assistance in making plans.

Communication with Families

Communication with children's families will help you learn information and assist in collaborating on strategies. It is important that you discuss families' goals for their children and that they know how to participate in following up on the strategies used in the classroom. Provide families with information about child development and help them set reasonable expectations for their children.

Emphasize to classroom staff the importance of maintaining consistent communication with families. Communication should be honest but focus on positives, such as "social lessons we are teaching" and "what you can practice at home."

Families should be involved in the planning and should be included, along with related service providers, in meetings related to their child's needs.

Important: Although family involvement contributes significantly to children's success, it is important to remember that families are varied in their capabilities, schedules, and backgrounds. Teachers can best meet the needs of children by respecting all families and working to include them in the best possible ways.

Universal Strategies to Support Young Children

**Consider these components of addressing social development for all children and all causes and levels of behaviors.
Universal strategies should be provided to all children, all day, every day.**

<i>Behaviors to Decrease</i>	<i>Instructional and Preventative Strategies</i>	<i>Individualized Strategies</i>
<i>Possible reasons to examine</i> Doesn't know the skill Hasn't had practice Unable to communicate Activity too long Trouble attending Changes in schedule Needs environmental support Wants attention Disabilities and health	<i>Universal Strategies for Support</i> Build a relationship with each child Model and provide modes of communication Provide multiple means for children to respond Provide multiple types of experiences for learning Help children build relationships with each other Teach, practice, model calming techniques Teach, practice, model social interactions Visual structure and support Reteach, remind, review Guided practice "Catch them being good" – focus on praise and reinforcement	<i>Individualized Strategies</i> <i>Follow-up, Re-teach, Reactions</i> Address needs for trusting relationships Remain calm Model calming techniques Remind of safe area for calming Redirect with individual visuals Re-teach, model, and facilitate problem-solving and calming skills Teach skill of asking for help Facilitate and guide play skills Individualized communication strategies

Identified Skills to Teach and Support

Skills listed below are those that are considered vitally important to young children. The skills are important because they are those that impact children's success in school as well as in friendships and personal development. Children need direct instruction and guided practice of these important skills. They also need opportunities to practice these skills in environments that are designed to facilitate their success and with adults who plan and develop support strategies.

Participation, classroom skills, and safety

Listening and Watching
Following Directions
Waiting for attention, delaying rewards
Following routines
Asking for help
Participating in activities
Safe behaviors for self and others

Friendship and peer-related skills

Sharing and Taking Turns
Cooperating – working together
Acknowledging another's request
Joining in group activities
Respecting others' materials and areas
Developing play schemes
Interacting, communicating with peers

Emotional competencies

Self-regulation
Calming down
Recognizing and identifying emotions
Dealing with emotions
Empathy, understanding, compassion
Requesting, accepting help
Problem-solving

Classroom Participation and Safety

Behaviors to Decrease	Instructional and Preventative Strategies	Individualized Strategies
Leaving the area Avoid activity (too difficult, doesn't know skills) Seek preferred activity Attention	Use visuals for mini-schedule of activity. Provide movement breaks at specific points in activity. First-then schedules to show preferred activity next Timer, countdown steps Teach asking for help. Restate rules before beginning. <u>Social Script for staying in area</u>	Provide individual practice to increase comfort with activities. Allow for part of activity – shorter time, fewer steps. Individualize social story and first-then with photos. Reduce distractions. Have child verbalize and pre-plan actions. Physical cue for area (carpet square, photo of area).
Refusing to participate Saying “no” to requests Pushing activity away <i>Avoid, doesn't have skills</i>	Remind of expectations prior to beginning. Use positive words to encourage to begin and praise during. Praise participation and effort, not product. Show finished product and steps to completion. Model and support various modes of communication.	Start task in different area and move to group. Social scripts and first-then with photos. Limit number of steps, materials presented. Do first few steps and then fade prompt. Individualize communication strategies.
Running ahead or away instead of staying with the group <i>Attention from adults and peers Uncertain of opportunities</i>	Designate classroom jobs –show them on calendar. Teach and remind of rules for lining up, staying with group. Pair with a peer buddy for walking, playing with group. First-then to show a time for running. Attention and praise for staying with group.	Assign to be adult's “helper”. Provide heavy work, vary motor movements. Focus on imitation of motor actions. First-then with photo of destination. Give the child errands to run with adult.
Climbing on furniture	Rule reminders, first-then for climbing on playground later. Photos of classroom areas with statements about actions. Teach self-monitoring and awareness of body in locations.	<u>Social book for Safety</u> Tape shoeprints on floor for placement of feet. Monitor closely and reward for “feet on floor”. Photo of child sitting, standing, playing paired with a sticker chart for reinforcement.
Hitting, Kicking, Pushing, Throwing items at others	Direct instruction lessons for problem solving “What to do if” lessons and role play. Adjust environment for safety of adults and children. Identify triggers and warning signs, redirect.	<u>Addressing Behavior Concerns</u> Attend to children who might be or were hurt, move them to another area Use plans for calming. Follow up with lesson and reminders about emotions when child is calm.
Biting Development Communication Sensory input	Stick to a schedule, consistent routines, prepare for changes. Allow for visual exploration in new activities. Provide relaxing and soothing activities. Teach problem solving skills. Provide modes and strategies for communication.	Provide items for chewing and reminder to use. Attention, praise, reinforcement for desirable behaviors in situations where biting occurs. Provide lessons that encourage impulse control and self-regulation.



Take a Closer Look ... Children's *disabilities and delays* often impact their patterns of behavior. Disabilities might contribute to a child's difficulties in learning and remembering information from lessons.

Offering choices is an important strategy for helping children decrease avoidance-type behaviors and increase participation. Making choices can help children develop problem-solving skills and at the same time give them some control over a situation.

Friendship Skills

<i>Behaviors to Decrease</i>	<i>Instructional and Preventative Strategies</i>	<i>Individualized Strategies</i>
Grabbing items from others <i>(difficulty sharing, taking turns)</i>	When you see a child trying to share or take turns, make sure you give lots of praise and attention. Play games with children that involve sharing and turn-taking. Provide multiples of same items/activities that are high preference. Use a timer when necessary to indicate turns (preferably one that indicates time passing in a visual manner). Anticipate when the child wants an object/activity, and cue to ask/gesture to join in play ("Can I play?" or "My turn"). Teach children common class language to use when they want a turn. Examples: "I want to play alone right now." "Can I have a turn when you're done?" "Can I use this if I give it right back?"	Offer alternate activity/toy Use <i>first-then visual cue</i> "first ask, then play". Use a "my turn" visual cue chart for highly preferred objects/activities. Validate and label children's emotions: "You are frustrated because you want ____." Use neutral words, such as "You both want to use that firetruck." Talk children through the conflict: "What are you going to do?" "Tell me some ideas." "How could you solve this conflict?" Offer children more than one solution so they can choose one by themselves.
Dumping out toys or materials <i>Doesn't have play skills Gain attention from peers Throwing items instead of playing Attention, Frustration, Avoidance</i>	Include a large variety of highly preferred, highly motivating materials in play areas – remember to include a wide variety of developmental levels. Provide visual scripts and guided interactive play to assist children who need support in understanding how to use some toys and <i>visuals</i> that are specific to toys and materials. Increase engagement for all children through the use of peer buddies.	Provide visual choice board of a limited number of toys for play. Help the child learn to play by using least-to-most prompting (verbal, gesture/model, physical assist) to teach play scheme. Introduce a limited number of play schemes at a time. Prompt the child to ask/gesture for "help".
Upsetting peers' play, destroying their products	Provide a distraction with an appropriate activity - offer a different toy or game. Play along to promote complete engagement. Provide toys that can be put together and taken apart again and again.	Set clear limits in very concrete terms – provide a visual depicting that destruction is not acceptable. Say "knocking down your friend's tower is not okay, but you can build and knock down your own." Provide praise for positive behavior, rather than punishment for undesirable behavior.
Speaking (signs, gestures, noises) rudely to others	Stay Calm. Decode the behavior and provide empathy. Do not try to teach during a heightened state – wait until you and the child are calm. Model respectful communication and strategies to deal with feelings of anger and frustration.	Offer choices of acceptable alternatives and be sure to respect the choice once it's made. Once the child is calm, provide a social story that explains theirs and others' feelings and suggests appropriate behaviors.



Take a Closer Look... Children's **communication skills** are the key to developing (and keeping) friendships and to building a strong social support network. Check out these resources for [**building communication skills**](#) and providing a strong foundation for developing relationships and [**facilitating peer interaction**](#).

It is important to teach social skills when children are calm and engaged.

Emotional Competencies

<i>Behaviors to Decrease</i>	<i>Instructional and Preventative Strategies</i>	<i>Individualized Strategies</i>
Avoiding participation (moving away, crying, aggression to avoid activity) <i>Over or under reactions to the environment</i>	Provide sensory experiences that are calming Make adaptations that will support the activity Teach, practice and model belly breathing. Create, teach and practice a social script on how to tell someone you need help/a break/something. Model telling the children that you are feeling over/underwhelmed, need help or need something and how you resolve it.	Make a point to connect with the child one-on-one throughout the day (build trust and relationship) Keep the child and others safe during upset Remain calm and model calming techniques Ask the child what would help their body feel calm and give two positive choices if they need help (hug, breathing)
Having frequent periods of dysregulated emotions with difficulty calming down	Be mindful of the environment and factors that may trigger for a period of dysregulation. Explain different things to children; tell them what you are doing and why. Help the child find a way out of the episode. Look for physical signs that an upset emotion is about to occur and teach the child to notice the signs.. Use books, stories, and social scripts to teach emotions and calming strategies. Role-play, model, and practice self-calming techniques.	Remove barriers or stressors from a situation and allow the child to feel supported. Build connection with the child, remind them that you will keep them safe. Provide opportunities for brain breaks-whatever type of movement or sensory input is helpful for the child. Create a calm space in the room and teach the child to go there and use calming techniques when they feel the upset, angry or frightened emotion coming. Have the child help others do calming activities.
Resisting help or failing to accept help	Provide visuals that break down tasks and show expectations Model and provide time to practice expectations (group and individual) and asking for/accepting help Read books, stories and social scripts about needing, asking for and accepting help (everyone needs help sometimes)	Build relationship with the child (connection and safety)-consider that the child may have to do things for themselves at home and needs to learn to trust that someone will be there to provide help. Acknowledge that the child would like to do it themselves. Let them know you are right there if they need help
Making negative statements about self and others	Model and practice making positive statements about self and others (make sure you are not modeling the negative). Read books, stories and social scripts about how words can help or hurt and about self-image. Make it a point to acknowledge kindness in your class.	If the child says something negative about someone else, ask them how that might make the other person feel. Follow with examples from books and social scripts describing kind words. Make sure to counter the negative statement with something positive Have that child notice helpful/kind acts in the class (kindness recorder).



Take a Closer Look... Differences in emotional reactions and sensory overload are often difficult to distinguish. In both situations, children need assistance in staying safe and in calming their bodies.

Emotional Competencies (continued)

<i>Behaviors to Decrease</i>	<i>Instructional and Preventative Strategies</i>	<i>Individualized Strategies</i>
Difficulty showing or lacking empathy or understanding of emotions	Consider the developmental age (not chronological) of the children in your class-empathy isn't able to happen until after about 36 months developmentally but can be taught long before. Teach about emotions - what do they look like/feel like/mean. Read books, stories and social scripts about emotions. Role-play emotions, what they mean and how to handle them. Teach empathy by practicing caring for baby dolls. Model talking about emotions and being empathetic.	Build relationship with the child (examples below) Use a mirror to talk about/teach emotions Notice-your mouth is going like this, your eyebrows are going like this, your hands are in a fist like this, you seem angry (this should be in a calm and nonjudgmental way) Model empathy with the child Help the child notice how they affect others- look at their face, their face is saying that they do not like it when you take the toy
Difficulty waiting for attention or reinforcement	Consider the developmental age of the children and set expectations that are appropriate for each child's developmental level. Model, teach and practice how to gain the attention of others. Use social scripts and role-play to practice gaining attention. Make time throughout the day to connect with each child. Have pictures of each child's family available for the children to access when they are missing someone. Greetings and goodbyes built into the daily routine.	Specifically build times throughout the day to make a one-on-one connection with the child. Have that child be a helper to others and provide attention and praise for helpful actions. Join in play with the child and invite them to enter a play scheme with you and peers. Gently remind (verbally and visually) the child about "waiting", then make sure the wait time is short and that attention is positive and rewarding. Express understanding that waiting is hard, praise efforts and make sure that wait time is reduced. Talk to the child and initiate conversations and activities based on the child's interests, family, pets, etc. Join in activities and play

Take a Closer Look ...



The ideas in the attached document are based on Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards (FELDS) and provide information about specific topics related to building relationships and provide information to further your understanding of the developmental needs of young children. [Addressing Social Skills in the Classroom](#)

Strategies for Building Teacher-child Relationships

- Get to know each child individually
- Express empathy, comfort and safety
- Have a positive attitude
- Set expectations, encourage and support

Essentials for Social Development and Emotional Competencies
Appendix of Resources and Strategies

Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards (FELDS)

The standards include objectives and benchmark skills for children from Birth – Kindergarten. FELDS is an excellent source of information for scaffolding activities to address a range of needs. Additional links included here provide resources and ideas for addressing social skills in these FELDS component areas.

- Emotional Competencies
- Managing Emotions
- Building and Maintaining Relationships with Adults and Peers
- Developing a Sense of Identity and Belonging
- [Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards](#)
- [Addressing Social Skills - TATS - Tips correlated with FELDS](#)
- [Embedding Instruction of Social Skills \(from Rock Your Classroom\)](#)

The Importance of Building Relationships

Children need to feel safe before a relationship can be built with them. They need to trust that your responses will be consistent and that they will not be hurtful.

Make a point to do something one-on-one with the child several times throughout the day when in the "building" process (remember that this takes time and must be consistent). When engaging the child for connection, make sure you are playful, present in the moment, making eye contact (or attuned if eye contact is not comfortable for the child) and that there is some sort of touch/physical contact (again, at the child's comfort level).

Greetings, goodbyes, reading a book, singing a song, doing a hand game, diaper changing, playing with a toy, peek-a-boo and fun sensory activities can all be opportune times for one-on-one connection.

Providing Supports for All Children's Sensory Needs

Help the children in your class find ways to self-regulate that work for them. Examples: yoga, quiet time, sensory tools/fidgets, gross motor play/exercise/jumping/dancing, listening to music, hugs/squeezing/smooshing, singing and breathing exercises.

Setting up the room environment should involve consideration of each of the senses:

- Visual organization, lighting variations, spaces in the room to reduce visual input if needed.
- Allow for headphones if needed to address echo/reverb, startling noises, environmental noises (lights, AC, fans from electronics).
- Reduce/avoid strong smells if possible (perfume, food, cleaning products).
- Allow access to water/hydration, have healthy snacks in classroom for children who require additional snacks or oral motor breaks.
- Provide different types of seating and positioning (beanbag chairs, small rocking chairs, cushions, boxes, sit disks, weighted lap pads, standing).
- Provide sensory tools whenever needed (chewies, stuffed animals, weighted objects, fidgets, sensory bottles).
- Create micro-environments in the room that allow for varying levels of sensory input and varying needs for stimulation (quiet zones, lower-lighted areas, active areas that may house materials for gross-motor movement).

Teaching Problem-Solving Skills

Along with problem-solving process, use specific activities that are designed to teach self-regulation.

Important: Model and provide guided practice.

Important: Teach and support the language and vocabulary along with the problem-solving steps. Be certain that modes of communication are modeled and supported.

Problem-solving process for identifying feelings:

1. THINK about what happened
2. THINK of how your body feels.
3. RECOGNIZE the feeling.
4. SAY, "I feel _____"

Problem-solving:

1. RECOGNIZE that you are angry or upset (or other feeling)
2. COUNT, BREATHE, JUMP (appropriate action)
3. THINK about your choices: Examples: Walk away, take deep breaths, get help from teacher or parent
4. ACT out your choice

Additional Resources for Teaching and Supporting Problem solving from National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations:

- [Tucker the Turtle Songs and Finger plays](#)
- [We Can Be Problem-solvers \(social script in book form\)](#)
- [Peer-mediated Social Skills \(posters and scripts for peer interactions\)](#)

Social Narratives

Social narratives are important as a strategy for both helping children understand social situations and providing consistent reminders of social actions. A social script of narrative should focus on one behavior, state facts about a situation and provide ideas for what the child should do in specific situations.

Links to examples:

- [Social Script with Self-monitoring example](#)
- [Individualized Rules and Self-monitoring](#)
- [Social script for problem-solving](#)
- [Social narratives from Head Start site](#)

Strategies for Calming and Self-regulation

Providing and teaching strategies for calming and self-regulation are vital components in teaching social behavior. The keys to enabling children to best use calming strategies are as follows:

- Direct instruction
- Modeling
- Guided practice

Links to resources follow:

- [Teaching Young Children Self-control Skills \(includes scripts for specific skills\)](#)
- [Help Us Calm Down poster](#)
- [Strategies for Teaching Self-calming](#)

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TATS is funded by the State of Florida, Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (BEES), through federal assistance under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part B, Section 619.