Early Years Evidence Store

Supporting Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED)

Education Endowment Foundation

Evidence consistently shows that when educators apply PSED approaches they can improve children's outcomes.

There is a growing body of evidence to support individual PSED approaches, however not all are equally well-evidenced yet. As PSED approaches are mutually reinforcing, we recommend that educators use a combination of them.

Effective approaches to support PSED	What is it?	Evidence summary of the approach	Putting the approach into action
01 **Teaching Awareness of Emotions and Feelings**	**This approach involves the educator supporting the child to notice their feelings and emotions, and the ways that they express them.**	This approach can improve children's understanding and awareness of emotions. In the research, educators used stories to prompt discussions about emotions, label them, and scaffold children's reflections to connect emotions and events. There is evidence that older preschool children can make greater gains from this approach than younger children. However, the evidence suggests that this approach can have at least some impact on children as young as two years old. We therefore recommend teaching awareness of emotions and feelings to all children in the early years. Focusing on emotions in early years settings may particularly benefit those who experience more stress or less support at home	• Labelling emotions and feelings • Discussing emotions and feelings • Explaining emotions and feelings • Scaffolding children's reflections
02 **Teaching and Modelling Managing Emotions and Feelings**	**This approach involves the child and educator working together to help children manage their emotions in ways that minimise any negative impact on others.**	Proactively and explicitly teaching children strategies for managing their emotions is an effective approach for improving their PSED outcomes, particularly for socio-economically disadvantaged children. When educators model how to use the strategies, and have conversations with children about them, they can help children to apply them successfully.	• Scaffolding children's reflections • Modelling how to manage emotions • Providing techniques to manage strong feelings • Reminding children when to employ the techniques • Scaffolding opportunities to manage strong feelings
03 **Teaching and Modelling Social Communication**	**The educator sensitively teaches children to notice and understand verbal and non-verbal social communication. Educators teach and model how to listen and respond.**	Showing children good examples of social communication is a relatively well evidenced way of supporting their learning about social communication, often using puppets and stories. However, it is important to note that there is only a small amount of research looking at this approach in isolation. This approach is typically combined with other PSED approaches. There is some evidence that it can improve children's PSED outcomes such as prosocial behaviour. In addition, when educators have conversations with children about prosocial behaviours, they can help the children to adopt those behaviours.	• Modelling non-verbal communication, body positioning, and gestures • Promoting waiting, joint attention, and engagement • Providing opportunities to consider appropriate non-verbal communication • Demonstrating the rules of social communication • Reminding children of the rules of social communication

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04 Teaching Relationship Skills	**The educator teaches children to cooperate, negotiate and collaborate, to build relationships over time. The educator teaches children the value of connecting with others.**	Most research has studied this approach in combination with others. It shows that positive interactions modelled by educators and other children can help children build relationships and improve their relationship skills. Providing opportunities for collaborative play and joint problem-solving can enhance opportunities for children to practise their relationship skills. Involving parents so that they use the same approaches to building relationship skills at home with their children could enhance outcomes.	• Reflecting on the impact of words and actions on others • Providing opportunities to develop connections and relationships with others • Exploring unique qualities, preferences, similarities, and differences • Scaffolding when and how to ask for help • Explaining the advantages of working cooperatively
05 Teaching How to Sustain Positive Relationships	**This approach involves teaching a child to adapt, be assertive, or change their behaviour to promote effective collaboration in different situations.**	Teaching children how to sustain positive relationships can impact on their social skills and understanding of emotions. Educators can support children by providing opportunities for them to collaborate, as they work towards a shared goal or solve a problem. Communication and language skills are an important part of sustaining relationships. Educators can introduce useful vocabulary or scaffold children's interactions during conflict resolution.	• Scaffolding children's ability to express themselves and their needs • Providing strategies to minimise and resolve conflict • Providing opportunities for decision making • Providing opportunities for collaboration • Developing a sense of belonging, care, and responsibility • Modelling valuing children's rights or agency in sharing when words or actions have impacted them
06 Promoting Self-Care	**The educator supports children's growing independence in positive self-care habits and routines, to promote their well-being, health, and safety.** **These habits and routines include healthy habits (e.g. healthy food, physical activity), hygiene habits (e.g. toileting, handwashing) and safety habits (e.g. road and sun safety).**	Promoting self-care can improve a range of self-care outcomes, including children's knowledge, attitudes and some behaviours. This approach is most likely to be effective when it is regular, consistent and part of everyday routines. Highlighting the importance of self-care routines to children, and demonstrating how to perform them, may also be important. Working in partnership with parents (e.g. by sharing information, tips or tasks) can also support children's self-care.	• Discussion • Instruction • Prompting • Participating • Using mistakes

Developing Self-Regulation and Executive Function is another approach educators can use to support children's PSED.

This has its own section and downloadable summary on the Early Years Evidence Store.

Explore the store to find out more about this and related guidance for supporting children's mental health and well-being.