



12–36 Months

Social-Emotional: Social Interaction Skills¹

WHEN INTRODUCED: Block 1

BEHAVIORS TO OBSERVE

- Participates in back-and-forth interactions with a trusted caregiver
- Shows interest in peers
- Engages in cooperative action(s) with a peer(s)²

EXAMPLES OF OBSERVATION OPPORTUNITIES

This *Guide* uses 12–24 months and 24–36 months age designations in relation to when specific types of emerging skills often can be observed. The age parameters are not firm; the timing of developmental pathways and milestones varies considerably across children.

Behaviors may be observed during a care routine, playtime, or guided activity. Pertinent ELM activities (Social-Emotional) are cited in parentheses. The activities pertain to the age group indicated in the example. Examples without an age identification pertain to any age of toddler (12–36 months).

Participates in back-and-forth interactions with a trusted caregiver

- Engages in two-way exchanges of communication and/or play with toys
 - 12–24 months: rolling a ball back and forth with a caregiver (Block 2, Option 1), taking guided turns with a caregiver in building a tower with blocks (Block 2, Option 2), or exploring play dough with a caregiver (Block 3, Option 2)
 - 24–36 months: playing with a dollhouse and props (Block 4, Options 1 and 2) or with zoo animals, dollhouse, or blocks (Block 5, Options 1 and 2)

Shows interest in peers

- Watches and/or imitates the action(s) of a peer(s)
 - during a snack or mealtime
 - while playing near a peer(s) during an open-ended playtime
 - during a guided activity
 - 12–24 months: manipulating play dough (Block 3, Option 3) or building with blocks (Block 5, Options 2 and 3)
 - 24–36 months: exploring play dough (Block 3, Options 1–3) or playing with a dollhouse and related toys (Block 4, Option 3)



Engages in cooperative action(s) with a peer(s)

- Shares a play space, toy(s) or other material(s), and/or activity with a peer(s)
 - 12–24 months: takes caregiver-guided turns³ with a peer(s) in making motions that others copy (Block 2, Option 3) or while washing dirty toys (Block 8, Option 2)
 - 24–36 months: takes caregiver-guided turns with a peer(s) while building a pretend farm (Block 1, Option 1), picking a farm animal out of a basket (Block 1, Option 2), pretending to be an animal crossing a bridge (Block 2, Option 1), or using markers (Block 2, Option 2)

EXAMPLES OF FOLLOW-UP LEARNING SUPPORTS

Reintroduce

Participates in back-and-forth interactions with a trusted caregiver

- 12–24 months: Repeat an activity that provides good opportunities for promoting back-and-forth interactions and features a material of interest to the toddler. Possibilities include rolling a ball (Block 2, Option 1), building a block tower (Block 2, Option 2), or working with play dough (Block 3, Options 1 and 2). Another possibility is to emphasize opportunities for two-way exchanges in a Block 1 option. Give special attention to the strategies suggested in Block 1, Option 3 for initiating and sustaining back-and-forth exchanges with the toddler.
- 24–36 months: Repeat Block 4, Option 1 or 2. The Option 2 description offers specific ways to initiate and sustain two-way interactions with a toddler. Depending on the toddler's social interaction skills, you may wish to offer one of the more complex activities for a younger toddler (12–24 months) related to back-and-forth exchanges, such as the Block 3, Option 2 work with play dough.

Shows interest in peers

- 12–24 months: Repeat Block 3, Option 3, which includes many opportunities to encourage a toddler to look at what a peer(s) is doing with play dough. Careful watching of a peer's actions may prompt a toddler to also imitate what a peer is doing, but noticing a peer's actions is a valuable goal by itself (see the What to Look For section of this activity option).
- 24–36 months: Consider repeating the Block 3, Option 1 activity, with explicit emphasis on your watching and imitating a toddler's actions with play dough as a way of demonstrating how to watch and imitate. Block 3, Options 2 and 3 also provide many opportunities to talk about and demonstrate watching and imitating a peer. The Block 3, Option 3 activity description offers suggestions on helping a toddler notice how another toddler reacts to his/her actions.



Engages in cooperative action(s) with a peer(s)

- 12–24 months: Encourage a toddler to play next to another toddler. Comment on how 2–3 toddlers are playing near one another. The intent is for the toddler to experience sharing play space. It is not necessary for the toddlers to be engaged with the same types of toys or activities. Repeat Block 2, Option 3 to promote simple imitation of movements. The activity description includes guided turn-taking, so each toddler has an opportunity to demonstrate what his/her peers can imitate.
- 24–36 months: Repeat Block 1, Option 1 and/or Block 2, Option 1 or 2 to provide experiences in sharing play space and activity.

Reinforce

Participates in back-and-forth exchanges with a trusted caregiver

- 12–24 months:
 - Engage the toddler in open-ended play with blocks, with emphasis on your active role as a play partner (Block 5, Option 1). See the What to Look For section of this activity plan.
 - Invite the toddler to select a ball for rolling back and forth with you through a tunnel (Block 12, Option 1).
 - Engage in a joint activity, such as building a tower with blocks (Block 24, Option 1), that provides an opportunity to exchange ideas about how to do something.
- 24–36 months:
 - Invite the toddler to select 1–2 puzzles that you can work on together (Block 12, Option 1). Promote back-and-forth discussion of the pieces and where each might fit. If the toddler wishes to work independently on the puzzle, suggest doing the first puzzle together and the second puzzle by himself/herself.
 - Support give-and-take communication with a toddler by engaging him/her in helping to care for nontoxic plants in your room (Block 14, Option 2).

Shows interest in peers

- 12–24 months:
 - Repeat the Block 10, Option 2 activity for a toddler to identify himself/herself and others in pictures of children in your room. Also, toddlers enjoy playing peekaboo and will welcome a repeat of the Block 10, Option 2 activity involving peers in the room.
 - Repeat the Block 12, Option 2 activity of several toddlers painting on the same large sheet of paper. The activity is an opportunity to draw a toddler's attention to what other toddlers are doing with their brushes and paint.
 - Adapt the Block 6, Option 3 activity by inviting a toddler to demonstrate a physical movement, such as turn around, for other toddlers to do. The activity promotes paying attention to and imitating a peer's actions.



- 24–36 months:
 - Support a toddler’s emerging awareness of differences across people by repeating the Block 9, Option 1 book sharing on how children are the same and different.
 - Offer repeated experience with the Block 5, Option 3 play activity and encourage a toddler to notice what others are doing. There are also opportunities to share materials in this activity.
 - Support a toddler’s familiarity with other toddlers in your room by encouraging the toddler to look at and talk about pictures of peers engaged in activities in your room (Block 11, Option 1) and help you say the names of some peers (Block 11, Option 2).

Engages in cooperative action(s) with a peer(s)

- 12–24 months:
 - Offer the Block 8, Option 3 activity with play telephones as a potential launch to other types of shared activity with a peer(s). See the What to Look For section of the activity plan for suggestions.
 - Repeat Block 13, Option 1 to encourage a toddler to join several others in sharing the task of cleaning tables. Block 13, Option 3 extends this effort by encouraging toddlers to help organize materials in the room.
 - Repeat the Block 24, Option 2 informal gathering as an opportunity to point out naturally-occurring instances of sharing materials and possible turn taking. The activity is also a chance to encourage a toddler to notice what a peer(s) is doing.
- 24–36 months:
 - Serve as a coach in helping a toddler share items with peers in shared activities, such as grocery store play (Block 3, Option 3), creative explorations with play dough (Block 13, Option 2), and dramatic play (Block 15, Option 1).
 - Repeat a book reading focused on sharing toys (Block 13, Option 1).
 - Offer a theme-based play experience (Block 15, Option 2) that provides opportunities for you to facilitate sharing of space, materials, and (maybe) joint activity.



EXAMPLES OF PORTFOLIO ENTRIES

I have observed Julienne's activities during playtimes twice this past week. Both times she watched what another toddler was doing next to her without losing focus on her own play with a doll and a toy bottle. Noticing what a peer is doing is an important step toward playing with a peer. Social interaction skills take time to develop, and I will make sure we provide appropriate play opportunities as Julienne's social skills move forward.

Hunter is showing more interest in sharing toys with friends in our room. This week he willingly shared materials with peers in three different guided play activities I offered. Sharing toys and other materials is a key part of playing well with others. I will continue to support Hunter's emerging skill in sharing during play and other times during the day.

Endnotes

- 1 The categories, behaviors, and some follow-up support examples are informed by the following source: Bricker, D., Capt, B., & Pretti-Frontczak, K. (2002). *Assessment, evaluation, and programming system for infants and children, 2nd ed., Vol. 2: Test, birth to three years and three to six years*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.
- 2 Cooperative actions at this age include sharing (1) play space, (2) a toy or materials, and (3) an activity with a peer. These actions are promoted in ELM activities for toddlers as early steps toward positive peer interactions. ELM activity plans also provide supports for taking turns, including demonstrations of turn taking and guided experiences in taking turns (such as a caregiver announcing a turn). These supports are intended to prepare toddlers for a stronger emphasis on taking turns in ELM activities for children 3–5 years of age. Skill in taking turns is not included as a behavior to observe among toddlers because, in general, most toddlers cannot be expected to independently engage in taking turns with a peer.
- 3 The caregiver-guided turns in these activities help a toddler share a material(s) and/or activity with a peer(s).