

# REACH

*Resource • Education • Advocacy • Crisis • Intervention • Hope*

*Aspiranet and State of California Adoption Support*



## Hello REACH families,

Our Spring 2022 newsletter brings the conclusion of the Five Protective Factors: Social and Emotional Competence of Children. The other protective factors: Parental Resilience, Social Connections, Concrete Support in Times of Need, and Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development, were themes in the previous four newsletters. Social and Emotional Competence of Children, is a child's ability to interact positively with others, self-regulate behavior, and effectively communicate feelings. You may be more familiar with the term "mindfulness" which embodies this protective factor. Mindfulness in children positively influences relationships throughout life. When we foster MINDFULNESS, children are better able to understand and communicate with the world around them. In many ways, social and emotional development opens the door to richer and deeper learning. Since relationships are the foundation of all learning, it makes sense that having strong relationships helps children learn.

Quick Tips To Build Social and Emotional Competence:

- Read a book to your children about feelings and emotions. Here is a [link](#) to a list of books.
- Talk about emotional expressions and what they communicate.
- Encourage and reinforce children for using feeling words. Learn more [here](#)!
- Notice and label children's feelings. Using a mirror is a great way to do this.
- Plan activities to teach and reinforce concepts about emotions. Get ideas [here](#).
- Label your own feelings. Modeling is still the best teacher for your child.

Quick Tips inspired from this reference: <https://www.nhchildrenstrust.org>

Aspiranet REACH continues to support the permanency and resiliency of families, especially through our Aspiranet Statewide Permanency Support Program. This program provides financial support and linkages to services, such as specialized therapies, camps, respite, and much, much more! Please visit [www.aspiranet.org/aspsp](http://www.aspiranet.org/aspsp) to apply and for more information. If you would like to learn more about REACH services and how we can support your family, please contact a REACH Social Worker: Griselda Santillan Mejia ([gsantillanmejia@aspiranet.org](mailto:gsantillanmejia@aspiranet.org)) or Tara Soria ([tsoria@aspiranet.org](mailto:tsoria@aspiranet.org)).

Sincerely,

The REACH Team: Sandra, Tara and Griselda

State  
Spring 2022

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# Social and Emotional Learning in Children: Why it Matters and How to Start

by Hortencia Casarez

There is a lot of talk these days about SEL, Social Emotional Learning - but what exactly is it? SEL is the process of learning social skills and emotional regulation. This learning process is most effective when learned early in childhood and continues to be built upon up through the high school years. Social-emotional skills are essential for success in school, work, and life. Through SEL, children learn to manage their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, practice empathy, and show appropriate levels of affection and care. They also learn how to overcome challenges, solve problems, make responsible decisions, set healthy boundaries and maintain thriving relationships. Through SEL children learn to recognize what is happening within them, bring awareness to their emotions, and effectively regulate impulsive behaviors. It helps them pause, take a deep breath, and think about a situation before acting out on it. Children also learn to identify other people's perspectives and emotional cues, which helps them have more friends, show compassion despite having differences, solve conflicts in peaceful ways, and communicate clearly about what they need. This helps children feel more connected to others and their community and lessens their risk of being left out or bullied. Children who learn and practice SEL achieve more academically, have improved attitudes and behaviors, and act in disruptive ways much less often. Students with healthy SEL skills are twice as likely to earn a college degree, 50% more likely to graduate high school, and have a full-time job by age 25! When children learn how to recognize and manage their own emotions and respond appropriately to others, their lives can be better overall. It is not difficult to imagine how this skill set is important at school, on the playground, and at home. Simply put, social-emotional learning is a vital skill that children need to be successful in every facet of life.

Now that you know what SEL is and its importance as a protective factor across the lifespan, let's talk about a few simple ways that you can nurture these fundamental skills early on in your children's lives.

## MODELING

One of the best skills that caregivers can develop with their children is the ability to experience, express, and manage emotions, communicate needs, and establish positive and rewarding relationships. Skills like sharing, cooperating,



taking turns, and checking in with one another are behaviors that caregivers can model daily and effortlessly. Caregivers who can model these skills and provide space to develop and practice these skills are building resilience in their families!

## NORMALIZE

Expressing emotions and having them accepted and validated is important for both children and grown-ups. And there's a whole spectrum of emotions to feel! While many grown-ups view emotions as good or bad, the truth is that emotions are not good or bad — they just are. Emotions are a way for your body to give you clues as to how it's reacting to its environment. To be a well-balanced individual who experiences the full range of human experiences, we need to show children that all emotions are valid and welcome so they can express those emotions in appropriate and healthy ways.

## EDUCATE

When children, teens, adults, and parents understand why they felt an emotion, why they had a thought, or why they chose to react in a certain way, they can better understand themselves. They can begin to make connections between feelings, thoughts, behaviors, and events. Education is such a powerful tool! Educating your children about their emotions helps them better express themselves and better understand others. Use feelings charts, lists of feelings words, read children's books and ask questions about the characters' reactions, and make up silly songs about feelings. Make learning fun!

Even if you didn't have proper role models when you were a child, you can give your child their own beginning and start right where you are, with what you have right now. Raising children who are emotionally and socially competent is as easy as modeling, normalizing, and optimizing small opportunities for learning in their daily lives. Teachable moments present themselves regularly. Use them to your advantage and leverage their power to make big differences!

# The Importance of Social-Emotional Competence

By Yaneth Arceo

The ability of children to interact positively with others, regulate their behavior, and effectively communicate their feelings has a positive impact on a child's relationship with their family, adults, and peers. A child will sometimes have difficulty expressing his emotions because he does not understand them. This can be frustrating to both him and the caregivers who want to help him. However, developing the child's abilities to express his feelings can help him deal with these feelings. Children who have nurturing relationships with caring adults who provide consistent care develop skills that help them to develop social and emotional intelligence. These relationships provide a safe environment where children feel secure in expressing their thoughts and feelings

According to research by Michigan State University Extension, everyday interactions, such as the following, can assist in building the protective factor of social and emotional competence in children:

**Role modeling:** When children are around adults who show positive behavior, they will mimic their actions and words. Ensure your children are surrounded by positive role models by using constructive and respectful words and actions.

**Safe environments:** Make sure children can express their feelings through play and language. Let your child know you understand all their feelings by responding to them.

**Guidelines:** The rules for children should be clear and reasonable. Children may act out when the rules are changed. Be sure to clearly communicate rules and consequences to your children.

**Calm and steady actions and reactions:** Children are counting on you for stability and structure. Pay attention to good behavior, and keep calm when you can't. Plan ahead. Think about how your daily schedule might change, and make sure you have extra clothes, snacks, or toys on hand.

**Self-care:** The energy needed to care for the children in your life depends on you being able to manage your own stress and anger. Finding ways to handle your stress and anger will help you relax and be able to care for the children in your life.

**Know where to go:** Take advantage of the many resources available to assist with caregiving. Use recommendations from teachers, childcare providers, counselors, medical care providers, clergy, and local human service agencies to guide you when you need additional assistance.

Credit: Gail Innis, Michigan State University Extension

# Book Review: Far From the Tree

by Robin Benway

What does it mean to be a family?

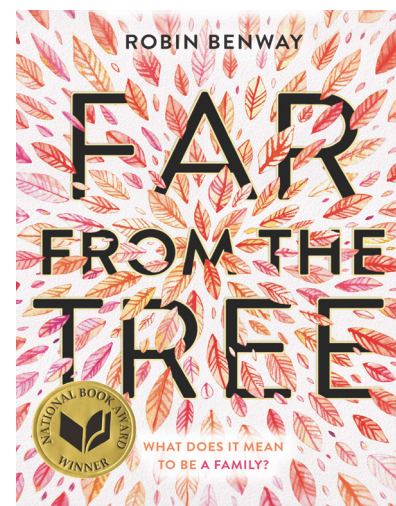
This topic is addressed in the fictional book *Far From The Tree* along with adoption, teen pregnancy, foster care, and LGBTQ.

Grace was adopted at birth and raised as an only child. During her junior year of high school, Grace gives birth to her daughter, who Grace nicknamed Peach, and makes a plan of adoption for Peach with a loving couple. This spurs Grace to want to meet her birth mother and find out how she felt when she made a plan of adoption for her all those years ago.

During her search for her mother, Grace discovers she has two siblings. A younger sister, Maya, was adopted at birth by a couple who thought that they could not have children. After adopting Maya, her parents had a biological child, Lauren. Maya, with her snarky attitude and brunette hair, tries to find where she fits in with her family, filled with people with red hair and positive attitudes.

Grace's older brother, Joaquin, who was raised in foster care, has never felt he was worthy of love and belonging. He believed if his mother did not want him, who would? Joaquin's current foster family approached him about adoption but after being in foster care for seventeen years, Joaquin knows the letdowns and twists that exist in the world. To protect the foster family from his hurt he keeps his secrets to himself and tries to push them away.

While fictional, *Far From the Tree* is an engaging story that provides insight into many different aspects of adoption and foster care and how different people view and feel about their roles in their families. Grace, Maya, and Joaquin all come from different upbringings but learn they are a family. Together they realize what family means in all its different forms and how to search for it, accept it and hold on to it.







## Building Social Emotional Competence in Children

By Griselda Santillan Mejia

A child's relationship with their parents plays a significant role in the child's healthy social and emotional development. Parents model how to express and communicate emotions, how to self-regulate, and how to create healthy relationships with others. The development of social and emotional skills are critical to a child's ability to have appropriate relationships with adults, peers, friends and family. The development of social emotional skills does not happen naturally. Research has shown that social-emotional skills develop through the relationship, interactions and experiences a child has with a consistent, caring and attuned adult. Children who have appropriate social-emotional skills are able to recognize their own and others' emotions and have the skills to be able to understand the perspective of others. They also have the skills to recognize appropriate or inappropriate ways to respond in situations.

What are social-emotional skills?: Child development skills. Pathways.org. (2002, January 21) <http://pathways.org/topics-of-development/social-emotional/>

Wheel of emotions. (2012) Therapist Aid. <https://www.therapistaid.com/therapyworksheets/wheel-of-emotions-children>

### How can parents help their child gain social emotional skills?

- Parents can create an environment where children feel safe to express their emotions by being respectful and respecting boundaries
- Being responsive and attuned emotionally by listening actively and engaging during conversation
- Modeling empathy by encouraging children to apologize or "make things better"
- Separating emotions from actions
- Ask open-ended questions about their emotions such as "what are you feeling?" or "where do you feel it?"
- Remind your child that feelings are okay to have whether they are positive or negative
- Talk about "what you are feeling" using feelings wheels like the one above

# Virtual Parent Education and Support Groups

## Parent Support and Education Group on Mondays (English):

Tuesday, 4/26/22 • 5:30 pm - 7:30 pm

Tuesday, 5/24/22 • 5:30 pm - 7:30 pm

Monday, 6/27/22 • 5:30 pm - 7:30 pm

## Parent Support and Education Group on Wednesdays (Spanish):

Wednesday, 4/27/22 • 9:30 am - 11:30 am

Wednesday, 5/25/22 • 9:30 am - 11:30 am

Wednesday, 6/22/22 • 9:30 am - 11:30 am

## Parent Café:

Thursday, 4/21/22 • 10:00 am - 11:30 am

Thursday, 5/19/22 • 10:00 am - 11:30 am

Thursday, 6/16/22 • 10:00 am - 11:30 am

All groups are being held  
via Zoom at this time.

Flyers will be sent out prior to  
each group with details to join.

If you'd like to be added to the  
invite list, please contact us!

## Upcoming Training:

We will be hosting a training on

April 26th (10am-Noon), with

Barb Clark of NACAC, called:

**Trying Differently, Rather Than Harder.**

Please contact us if you are interested in  
attending, or refer to the information on  
the flyer invitation.







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## REACH Post-Adoption Support Services

**REACH offers services in Madera, Mono, Mariposa & San Benito Counties:**

**Monthly Educational/Support Groups** – Monthly meetings where families are able to receive education/training and meet other adoptive families in the community. Please check with each respective site to learn if licensing or certification hours are provided.

**Quarterly REACH Newsletter** – Quarterly newsletters filled with adoption articles, local trainings, book reviews, on-line resources and more.

**Educational Workshops and Trainings** – A variety of workshops and trainings are made available in Madera and San Benito Counties.

**REACH Library** – The REACH library is open and available for book review and check outs during the monthly support groups or by appointment.

**Case Management** – REACH clients are provided with information, resource referral or other assistance as needed. Although Case Management Services are generally provided via telephone, special arrangements for face to face case management can be arranged.

**Crisis Counseling** – Crisis intervention is available. Please contact our REACH staff for this support.