

## **Research Summary: Social and Emotional Development (SED) Domain in the DRDP-K (2015) and KIDS (2015) Kindergarten Assessment Instruments**

The **Social and Emotional Development (SED)** domain assesses children’s developing abilities to understand and interact with others and to form positive relationships with nurturing adults and their peers. The knowledge or skill areas in this domain include identity of self in relation to others, social and emotional understanding, relationships and social interactions with familiar adults, relationships and social interactions with peers, and symbolic and sociodramatic play.

### **SED 1: Identity of Self in Relation to Others**

This measure highlights how the child shows increasing awareness of self as distinct from and also related to others. In the early preschool years, the child expresses simple ideas about self and connection to others. In the later preschool years, the child describes her own preferences or feelings and describes the feelings or desires of family members, friends, or other familiar people. “The sensitivity of preschool children to adults’ evaluative judgments of their performance is an important influence on self-perception (Stipek, Recchia, & McClintic, 1992)” (California Department of Education, 2010, p. 21). By kindergarten, the child compares his or her own preferences or feelings to those of others, and by ages six to seven he or she identifies and evaluates strengths and weaknesses by comparing self with others.

In addition to beginning to perceive the self in terms of simple psychological attributes, a major influence on self-understanding at the latest level of the continuum is social comparison (Harter, 2006). In part because children are in daily circumstances that enable them to compare their skills and characteristics with those of other children, they measure their capabilities in relation to other children (Altermatt, Pomerantz, Ruble, Frey, & Greulich, 2002; Pomerantz, Ruble, Frey, & Greulich, 1995). This contributes to children’s more realistic self-evaluations, at times instilling self-confidence in their strengths, and at other times contributing to worry about their weaknesses by comparison with other children. These social comparisons extend to children’s personal characteristics (e.g., friendship and popularity with other children) as well as their academic skills.

### **SED 2: Social and Emotional Understanding**

This measure highlights how a child shows developing understanding of people’s behaviors, feelings, thoughts, and individual characteristics. The research indicates that children first develop these abilities for basic positive emotions (e.g., happy) and negative emotions (e.g., sad, mad), and then increasingly understand more complex emotions in themselves and others, and respond accordingly. In the early preschool years, the child identifies his or her own and others’ feelings. Following that, the child in later preschool years communicates ideas about why one has a feeling or what will happen as a result of a feeling (Thompson & Lagattuta, 2006). By kindergarten, the child communicates ideas about how own or another’s personality affects how one thinks, feels, and acts. By ages six to seven, the child uses understanding of another’s personality traits to explain and predict their behavior.

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At the later levels of the continuum, children attribute simple psychological traits to others based on their evaluations of their behavior as good or bad, and children also derive expectations for others' actions based on these attributions (Alvarez, Ruble, & Bolger, 2001). These expectations enable them to make simple predictions about people's actions: which child is likely to be brave, nice, messy, mean, generous, stingy, and so forth (Heyman & Gelman, 1998; Yuill & Pearson, 1998). This is an important advance on the earlier stage, when children attributed simple personality traits to others. Using these trait attributions to predict another's actions contributes to greater social competence and greater perspective-taking concerning others' dispositions and motives.

### **SED 3: Relationships and Social Interactions with Familiar Adults**

This measure highlights how a child develops close relationships with one or more familiar adults (including family members) and interacts in an increasingly competent and cooperative manner with familiar adults. "Young children rely on their primary teachers or caregivers in early childhood settings in much the same manner that they rely on their family caregivers at home" (Howes & Spieker, 2008). "Preschoolers exhibit their reliance on their primary preschool teachers through their preference to be with the adult; the adult's capacity to assist and comfort them when others cannot; their efforts to attract the teacher's positive regard (and avoid criticism by this person); their pleasure in shared activity with the adult; and the greater ease with which they can disclose and discuss troubling topics (such as distressing experiences) with the primary preschool teacher or caregiver" (California Department of Education, 2010, p. 33). The research literature on the development of relationships with adults emphasizes the security children derive from adults as well as children's growing skills to initiate and reciprocate interactions with adults. In the early preschool years, the child engages in extended interactions with familiar adults in a variety of situations (e.g., sharing ideas or experiences, solving simple problems). In later preschool years, the child communicates with familiar adults about her own ideas or experiences; she also seeks information or explanations from familiar adults about her ideas or experiences. By kindergarten, the child works cooperatively with familiar adults, over sustained periods, to plan and carry out activities or to solve problems. By ages six or seven, the child shows interest in how familiar adults' experiences, feelings, and thoughts affect their behavior.

Indeed, an important advance in children's interactions with familiar adults at the later levels of the continuum is greater depth in their appreciation of the psychological perspective of the adult. Children advance from a basic grasp of the adult's goals, desires, and feelings to a broader understanding of the adult's beliefs and thoughts, as well as their causes. This derives, in part, from children's greater skill in psychological role-taking, in which they figuratively step into the adult's perspective to imagine how things look from the adult's psychological point of view, "trying on" the adult's feelings and expectations (Selman, 1980). Viewed in a somewhat different but complementary manner, children of this age are advancing to an "interpretive" theory of mind in which they understand that people's experiences are shaped by their interpretations of what happens, which are affected by mental and emotional processes (Carpendale & Chandler, 2008). This deepens children's appreciation of what those interpretive mental and emotional processes are, their causes, and how they influence behavior.

**SED 4: Relationships and Social Interactions with Peers**

This measure highlights the way in which a child becomes increasingly competent and cooperative in interactions with peers and develops friendships with several peers. The literature on the development of cooperation indicates that children's capacities for cooperation grow in conjunction with their growing social cognitive capacities (e.g., emotion understanding and perspective taking). These social cognitive capacities along with the skills they learn as they develop relationships with peers enables children to respond compassionately and cooperatively as they progress through the preschool years. In the early preschool years, the child participates in brief episodes of cooperative play with one or two peers, especially those with whom the child regularly plays. Following that, the child initiates sustained episodes of cooperative play (including pretend play), particularly with friends, that may involve larger groups, more complex communication, and coordination (Howes, 1988; Vandell, Nenide, & Van Winkle, 2008). In kindergarten, the child organizes or participates in planning cooperative play activities with several peers, particularly with friends. By age six or seven the child shares his own feelings, thoughts, and opinions with other children, especially if they are friends.

Indeed, the later levels address the developmental period that witnesses the growth of psychological self-disclosure and the growing intimacy that this creates in friendships (Dunn, 2004; Rubin, Coplan, Chen, Bowker, & McDonald, 2011). Children increasingly enjoy talking about their own thoughts, opinions, feelings, evaluations, and other personal perspectives and learning about these from others, especially friends. Agreement is a source of pleasure because it confirms that friends share similar perspectives. At times, however, this sharing of psychological perspectives extends to evaluations of others, often negatively critical, which can lead to social exclusion.

**SED 5: Symbolic and Sociodramatic Play**

This measure highlights the growth in children's symbolic and sociodramatic play that accompanies the growth of cognitive and social skills. In early preschool years, young children create symbolic uses for familiar objects, and may do so in the company of another child. In the later preschool years, children engage in pretend play sequences (such as making a meal and then serving it to another child) that involve coordination with the roles and actions of others. In the early elementary school years, particularly in first grade, children extend their play in other ways, such as games with rules. At the same time, symbolic and socio-dramatic play increases in complexity and sophistication, especially with friends (Dunn, 2004). As a reflection of their greater psychological understanding, for example, children create roles of greater depth and complexity, sometimes involving unique background characteristics or personality attributes. In addition, play becomes more highly inter-coordinated, involving a rapidly evolving story line, sudden shifts in narrative direction, and sometimes involving original imaginary uses of objects, including action figures. However, pretend play decreases in the years to come as children increasingly organize their social activity around different kinds of play activity, often in larger groups.

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