

Research Summary: Social and Emotional Development (SED) Domain in the DRDP (2015) Assessment Instrument

The **Social and Emotional Development (SED)** domain assesses children’s developing abilities to understand who they are and interact with others and 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 infancy, this consists of physically exploring the self in relation to others, recognizing the self and the sound of one’s name, and also identifying others who are familiar (Fogel, 2007). In the early preschool years, the child expresses simple ideas about self and connection to others. In the later preschool years, the child describes his or her own preferences or feelings and describes the feelings or desires of family members, friends, or other familiar people (Bretherton, Fritz, Zahn-Waxler, & Ridgeway, 1986). “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.

Young children exhibit their developing sense of self when they point or reach to draw another’s attention to something that has caught their interest, when they later use their names or refer to “me” and insist on “do it myself” (Stipek, Gralinski, & Kopp, 1990), and when they describe their physical characteristics and express their feelings and preferences to others (see the review by Goodvin, Thompson, & Winer, 2015). In addition to beginning to perceive the self in terms of simple psychological attributes, a major influence on self-understanding at the higher level of the continuum is social comparison (Harter, 2006). Older preschoolers notice and comment on how their preferences and feelings are different from those of others, and are beginning to try to understand why these differences occur.

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 years, infants develop expectations for familiar people and have acquired understanding of how to interact with them by anticipating their reactions. 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 his or her own or another’s personality affects how one thinks, feels, and acts.

These early achievements in social and emotional understanding indicate that even young children are not egocentric as they were traditionally believed to be, but are instead very interested in what other people think and feel and understanding why (Wellman, 2014). This is shown when infants respond appropriately to another’s emotional expressions, sometimes using them to guide their own

reactions to someone who is unfamiliar (Baldwin & Moses, 1996). It is also shown when toddlers correctly identify what another person feels or desires and responds appropriately even when it is different from how the child is feeling (Repacholi & Gopnik, 1997). Preschoolers also communicate with others about the causes of others' actions and feelings, developing their own ideas about these reasons (see Thompson, Goodvin, & Meyer, 2006, for a review). At the later levels of the developmental continuum, children attribute simple psychological traits to others based on their evaluations of the others' 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).

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" (California Department of Education, 2010, p. 32). "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 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 (Easterbrooks, Bartlett, Beeghly, & Thompson, 2013). In infancy, this is shown in the preferences that infants and toddlers have for those who are familiar, especially when they are distressed, and their efforts to initiate interaction with these special people. 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 his or her own ideas or experiences; the child also seeks information or explanations from familiar adults about his or 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.

An important advance in children's interactions with familiar adults throughout the continuum is greater depth in their understanding of the adult's perspective. Children advance in their awareness of the adult's intentions and feelings, and this contributes to their skills in working and playing cooperatively with that person. 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). 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 how children become increasingly competent and cooperative in interactions with peers and develop friendships with several peers. The research indicates that children's capacities for cooperation grow in conjunction with their growing social cognitive capacities (e.g., emotion understanding, perspective taking, social problem-solving) (Dunn, 2004). These social cognitive capacities along with the skills they learn as they develop relationships with peers enable children to respond positively and cooperatively as they progress through the preschool years. In the initial years, infants show their interest in other children in their play initiatives and emotional excitement. 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.

Throughout this developmental process, essential social skills are developing that will benefit children in their peer relationships in the years to come (Rubin, Coplan, Chen, Bowker, & McDonald, 2011). These include initiating and sustaining positive sociability, managing conflict, sharing, negotiating over fairness and rights, establishing one's status in the small preschool peer group, and understanding other children as both similar to and different from the self.

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 (Garvey, 1990). Symbolic play begins early in a very young child's exploration of the functional uses of objects and later pretending one object is something else. In early preschool years, young children create a greater range of symbolic uses for familiar objects, and may do so in the company of another child (Gowen, 1995). 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. At the same time, symbolic and sociodramatic 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 original imaginary uses of objects, including action figures.

As these advances indicate, pretend play provides a forum for the development of many skills, including creativity, social role-taking, emotion regulation, and negotiation and compromise with other children (Lillard et al., 2013). Although researchers are still studying the impact of symbolic play on these and other skills, there is no question about children's interest in sociodramatic play and its growing sophistication with children's increasing social and cognitive abilities.

References: Social and Emotional Development (SED)

- Alvarez, J. M., Ruble, D. N., & Bolger, N. (2001). Trait understanding or evaluative reasoning? An analysis of children's behavioral predictions. *Child Development, 72*, 1409–1425.
- Baldwin, D., & Moses, L. (1996). The ontogeny of social information-processing. *Child Development, 67*, 1915–1939.
- Bretherton, I., Fritz, J., Zahn-Waxler, C., & Ridgeway, D. (1986). Learning to talk about emotions: A functionalist perspective. *Child Development, 57*, 529–548.
- California Department of Education. (2010). *Preschool learning foundations* (Vol. 1). Sacramento, CA: Author.
- Dunn, J. (2004). *Children's friendships: The beginnings of intimacy*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Easterbrooks, M. A., Bartlett, J. D., Beeghly, M., & Thompson, R. A. (2013). Social and emotional development in infancy. In R. M. Lerner, M. A. Easterbrooks, & J. Mistry (Vol. Eds.), *Handbook of psychology, Volume 6, Developmental psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 91–112). New York, NY: Wiley.
- Fogel, S. (2007). *Infancy: Infant, family, and society* (5th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.
- Garvey, C. (1990). *Play*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Goodvin, R., Thompson, R. A., & Winer, A. C. (2015). The individual child: Temperament, emotion, self, and personality. In M. Bornstein & M. E. Lamb (Eds.), *Developmental science: An advanced textbook* (7th ed.) (pp. 491–533). New York, NY: Psychology Press/Taylor & Francis.
- Gowen, J. W. (1995). Research in review: The early development of symbolic play. *Young Children, 50*, 75–84.
- Harter, S. (2006). The self. In N. Eisenberg (Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology* (6th ed., Vol. 3, pp. 505–570). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Heyman, G. D., & Gelman, S. A. (1998). Young children use motive information to make trait inferences. *Developmental Psychology, 34*, 310–324.
- Howes, C. (1988). Peer interaction of young children. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development, 53*, 1–92.
- Lillard, A. S., Lerner, M. D., Hopkins, E. J., Dore, R. A., Smith, E. D., & Palmquist, C. M. (2013). The impact of pretend play on children's development: A review of the evidence. *Psychological Bulletin, 139*, 1–34.
- Repacholi, B., & Gopnik, A. (1997). Early reasoning about desires: Evidence from 14- and 18-month-olds. *Developmental Psychology, 33*, 12–21.

- Rubin, K. H., Coplan, R., Chen, X., Bowker, J., & McDonald, K. (2011). Peer relationships in childhood. In M. Bornstein & M. E. Lamb (Eds.), *Developmental psychology: An advanced textbook* (6th ed., pp. 519–570). New York, NY: Psychology Press.
- Selman, R. L. (1980). *The growth of interpersonal understanding*. Orlando, FL: Academic Press.
- Stipek, D., Gralinski, J. H., & Kopp, C. B. (1990). Self-concept development in the toddler years. *Developmental Psychology, 26*, 972–977.
- Stipek, D., Recchia, S., & McClintic, S. (1992). Self-evaluation in young children. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development, 57*, 1–95.
- Thompson, R. A., Goodvin, R., & Meyer, S. (2006). Social development: Psychological understanding, self understanding, and relationships. In J. Luby (Ed.), *Handbook of preschool mental health: Development, disorders and treatment* (pp. 3–22). New York, NY: Guilford.
- Thompson, R. A., & Lagattuta, K. (2006). Feeling and understanding: Early emotional development. In K. McCartney & D. Phillips (Eds.), *The Blackwell handbook of early childhood development* (pp. 317–337). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Vandell, D. L., Nenide, L., & Van Winkle, S. J. (2008). Peer relationships in early childhood. In K. McCartney & D. Phillips (Eds.), *The Blackwell handbook of early childhood development*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Wellman, H. M. (2014). *Making minds: How theory of mind develops*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Yuill, N., & Pearson, A. (1998). The development of bases for trait attributions: Children's understanding of traits as causal mechanisms based on desire. *Developmental Psychology, 34*, 574–586.

Additional References: Social and Emotional Development (SED)

- Howes, C., & Spieker, S. J. (2008). Attachment relationship in the context of multiple caregivers. In J. Cassidy & P. R. Shaver (Eds.), *Handbook of attachment: Theory, research, and clinical applications* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Singer, D. L., & Singer, J. L. (1992). *The house of make-believe: Children's play and the developing imagination*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.