



Social-Emotional Learning Continuum

(From Age 3 to 11)

The importance of social-emotional learning is deeply rooted in our mission and core values at The Little School. In every classroom, the foundation for learning is a warm, inclusive community, and strong, caring relationships between children and teachers. Teachers plan and implement social-emotional curriculum – often integrated with other subjects – that allows children daily opportunities to practice empathy and cooperation and develop community-minded habits and values. Play is also an important arena of social learning where children develop their sense of autonomy and their independent voice, even as they develop the values, rules and responsibilities of citizenship in a community. Through play, children actively engage their bodies and minds in social learning – they negotiate roles, flex their imaginations, experience conflict and peace-making, cooperate for a common goal, work as a team, share materials, forge friendships, assert their feelings and rebound from disappointments. Drawing on

many decades of research and experience, our Social-Emotional Continuum describes a typical social-emotional profile of children from age three to eleven, and outlines some of the key areas of learning at each age/grade. Broadly, the areas of social and emotional learning include:

- **Self-Awareness:** The ability to reflect on one's own feelings and thoughts.
- **Self-Management (or Self-Regulation):** The ability to control one's own thoughts and behavior.
- **Social-Awareness:** The ability to empathize with others, recognize social cues and adapt to various situations.
- **Relationship Skills:** The ability to communicate, make friends, manage disappointments, recognize peer pressure and cooperate.
- **Responsible Decision-Making:** The ability to make healthy choices about one's own behavior while weighing consequences for others.

Typical Characteristics of Three-Year-Olds:

3-Year-olds are acquiring verbal skills at a rapid rate, and they are using these skills with their teachers, peers and care-givers to express their feelings and interests in new ways.

Temperament – the child’s unique personality and disposition – plays a big part in the way the child experiences separation or manages new routines and transitions. The world for 3-year-olds is still very small, their awareness of space, time, number, etc. is forming. Routines are important, especially as they learn to recognize and regulate physiological cues like hunger/thirst, hot/cold body temperature. Threes are typically self-absorbed and have relatively short attention spans. Much of their work at school involves developing awareness of others, sustaining attention to imaginative play, and developing their endurance and participation for the social and cognitive demands of a school day.

The Three-Year-Old is Learning....

- How to separate from caregivers and self-soothe.
- To use words (instead of physical gestures) to express feelings and needs, usually with the support of adult modeling
- To respond appropriately to physiological cues in the school setting (toilet, hunger, thirst, etc.)
- The power of make-believe to explore the real and pretend world.
- Awareness of others – names, roles, needs, feelings
- To practice speaking, singing and participating within a group circle time
- Beginnings of empathy – to use emotional vocabulary (sad, angry, silly, mad, happy)
- That the world is bigger than “me” – developing ideas of family, community, school, past, present, future
- To identify similarities and differences – race, gender, preferences
- To practice purposeful decision-making during different times of the day: choice time, sharing, snack time
- To manage the routines and transitions of each part of the school day

Typical Characteristics of Four-Year-Olds:

Four-year-olds are busy expanding their self-awareness – recognizing myself and comparing myself to others. They are typically friendly, talkative, and excited about friendships. As they participate in imaginative play and activities, they are practicing new social norms and communication skills. They are very much in the here and now, and also very literal, interpreting the world as they see it. Curious and eager to learn, 4's often enjoy pursuing particular topics and interests (e.g. dinosaurs, trains, favorite characters from books or movies) and building their play around these interests. Predictable routines, firm limits and clear boundaries are important. As they move toward greater independence 4-year-olds often test limits and can be argumentative. With peers they can sometimes be boastful, controlling and physical. They need consistent modeling and practice of appropriate behavior, including how to express their needs and feelings with words.

The Four-Year-Old is Learning....

- To play with friends and classmates – usually side-by-side – with more cooperative give and take regarding turns, roles, sharing.
- Increasing independence in following in group norms and routines – meetings, quiet time, materials use, clean-up, transitions, class “jobs”
- To plan ahead, regarding some activities, choices and games
- To understand and comply with limits and boundaries, after some natural testing
- To recognize and identify some of the feelings, needs and wants of peers and adults.
- To be observant and responsive to hurt feelings, with adult modeling.
- Pro-social language to express similarities and differences between themselves and others.
- Self-care and self-advocacy around physical needs; social norms for privacy, toileting
- To speak effectively to an audience of peers

Typical Characteristics of Kindergarteners (5-6 year-olds):

Five-year-olds are energetic explorers of their environment, active do-ers, makers and players who need to move their bodies and explore materials with all their senses, and they especially enjoy doing this with friends. Even as they are still quite egocentric – limited in their ability to see others' points of view – they are also beginning to play cooperatively with greater understanding about rules and fairness. Fives can be bossy and possessive of “best friends,” but also invested in being helpful, caring and friendly. As they begin to express feelings and regulate their emotions, they may show some inconsistency between following and disobeying rules. They need consistency and predictability of rules and routines. Most of the time they want to be “good” and respond well to clear and simple expectations.

The Kindergartener is Learning....

- To listen and participate in classroom meetings and lessons – typically 10-20 minutes
- Respect for classroom rules about boundaries: outdoor areas, personal space, use of materials and equipment.
- Greater independence – self-care, use of materials, and ability to self-select and sustain activities.
- To make transitions effectively with cues (“Two minutes ‘til clean-up.”)
- To identify and discuss different identities, feelings, backgrounds--with adult modeling
- To express empathy and compassion; demonstrate caring language: “Are you okay?” “I see ___ is sad,” etc.
- To participate in social problem-solving with greater understanding of how their words and behavior affect other people’s feelings and actions.
- The rules of fair play: turn-taking, tagging, being it, negotiating roles in imaginative play
- To demonstrate more cooperation and ownership of responsibilities: “we can clean up together.”
- To be more inclusive and flexible in play, and to share power and control with peers – without being bossy
- To take responsibility for choices and actions, and understand natural consequences.

Typical Characteristics of First Graders (6-7 year-olds):

Six-year-olds are in a stage of dramatic change. Their bodies and minds are becoming capable of complex skills such as reading, riding a bike, writing with a pencil, telling jokes and riddles. They are typically interested in more in-depth exploration of information and their interests extend to greater understanding of how, when, why things happen. Sixes tend to be competitive and egocentric and can become easily upset when criticized or frustrated. They might test authority and rules, complain, tattle or throw tantrums – and are learning ways to regulate their strong emotions and soothe themselves and others when upset. Focus on peers and friendships can be quite intense – more complex imaginative games, block play and physical games will typically illuminate moments of compassion, cooperation and social maturity, alongside quarrels and “quitting” and arguing over rules.

The First Grader is Learning...

- To keep body in own space and engage and focus during group times (meetings/lessons) – working up to 15-20-30 minutes.
- Authentic ways to demonstrate kindness, empathy and compassion.
- To generate and follow class rules with greater awareness of why rules apply to everyone.
- To be more flexible in understanding and adapting to changes in routines, rules or expectations
- Verbal communication that reflects more reciprocity and awareness of others ideas, feelings or needs
- To resolve conflicts and practice new language with adult modeling---negotiate, accept responsibility, make amends
- To consider an audience when speaking or sharing in a group (e.g., show & tell, math talks, guest-reader)
- To take responsibility for mistakes and accept consequences for behavior and poor decisions.
- To calm self and recover from emotional upset in a reasonable amount of time.
- How to express powerful emotions appropriately and to regulate actions/behaviors along social norms.
- To talk about identity and differences in ways that show a growing sense of empathy and understanding of different points of view.

Typical Characteristics of Second Graders (7-8 year-olds):

Seven-year-olds are in the process of becoming increasingly individualized and independent. This process demands greater skills in managing their thoughts and emotions, regulating their behavior and articulating their feelings. They are learning to defer gratification, solve small problems on their own, and reflect on who they are in new ways. Sevens may be moody and easily disappointed; complex feelings may be just below the surface. They may sulk or pout and escalate the gravity of their worries and mistakes. It is fairly typical for sevens to express that friends are mean, or pick on them, or don't like them. Adults play an important role in providing reassurance, supporting resilience and developing positive individual and group identity. They also provide an important sense of security when it comes to rules, routines and modeling the language of social problem solving. Seven-year-olds may prefer playing or working alone, or with one close friend, and enjoy interactive play and talking about real or imaginative topics learned from books, TV, movies or games.

The Second Grader is Learning...

- How personal behavior connects to abstract social terms, e.g. “trust,” “responsibility.”
- To self-reflect on learning, participation or behavior.
- To understand both sides of a situation and talk out problems by negotiating or compromising
- To explain feelings and needs using “I statements.” – e.g. =”I got angry when you took my book and tore the cover, and I’d like you to ask first before using any of my stuff.”
- Skills in controlling emotional or behavioral impulses; counting to ten, taking a deep breath
- Participate effectively during group times, following norms with greater consideration of teacher questions and peer’s thoughts and ideas
- To be helpful, share leadership, and be community-minded in new ways – performing in plays or sing-alongs, volunteering as library helpers, being book buddies with a younger class, etc.
- That caring and inclusive behavior lead to positive social connections with their peers; (and by contrast, how meanness, bossiness and exclusion might reflect back on them)
- Greater awareness of diversity and the importance of understanding different perspectives and experiences.

Typical Characteristics of Third Graders (8-9 year-olds):

Eight-year-olds are brimming with big ideas, amazement and curiosity. They love group activities in both work and play, and often rise at the chance to talk and explain their knowledge. New awareness and sensitivity is developing in regard to self and others – they may be critical of performance, ability, physical and personal qualities – and need support and modeling in how to express this awareness in ways that are helpful and not hurtful. They often take on big challenges, and make big plans, but may lack the skills to carry them out, and need help working toward manageable goals. Eights are typically outgoing with peers and can handle and enjoy new levels of playful engagement, humor and competition. Strategy games like chess, card games like Pokémon, or sports and physical challenges may become passionate endeavors. Imaginative play is complex and fluid, and typically involves larger groups. Eights are usually enthusiastic about school, but also question authority, push back or create alibies – trying to “get away with” not doing what is asked.

The Third Grader is Learning...

- To work cooperatively with others – taking turns, listening to each other, valuing others’ points of view--- with tasks that demand increasing levels of challenge, strategy or project outcomes.
- To communicate effectively with awareness of others – especially learning appropriate language and filters to appraise self and others in regard to performance, ability, personality, appearance
- Increasing ability to plan, follow through, and self-regulate – managing impulses and distractions, especially in group lessons, meetings and work times.
- Strategies for successful inclusion of peers, and speaking up on behalf of self and others
- Willingness to look at a situation from another point of view; greater empathy and tolerance when it comes to understanding differences.
- To be more resilient in managing the ups and downs of social dynamics, and more flexible and willing to compromise
- To participate in establishing and following group norms and expectations.
- To recognize positive and negative peer pressure and consider ways to respond effectively.
- To channel their excitement toward positive, sociable, productive outcomes.

Typical Characteristics of Fourth Graders (9-10 year-olds):

Nine-year-olds are blossoming in their intellectual interests; eager to seek out explanations for how and why things work, and more interested in the bigger world issues of justice and fairness. They can invest in hard work, add flourish, and pay attention to more details in their work, but at the same time they can become easily distracted, or complain, quit, or criticize if things aren't going as they imagined. Wider mood swings take place at this age, and broad swings of effort are also typical when it comes to the quantity and quality of work---greater will power, endurance and a willingness to try, might accompany complaints like, "It's boring," "I can't," "This is stupid." They need adults' light-heartedness, humor and encouragement to lighten their mood and relieve anxiety, as they hold them to higher expectations. Nine's can be fickle with who they work with and socialize with – they typically prefer same-gender partners and can be competitive and argumentative working in groups. On the playground, it is an age when cliques may form. Also, exposure to popular culture (video games, movies, YouTube, books, etc.) can inspire play, conversation and associating behavior. Watchful adults, mentoring, modeling and guidance is especially important in this social arena.

The Fourth Grader is Learning...

- To exhibit more depth – and less impulsivity – in decision making.
- To understand and express various sides of a moral dilemma and explore differences in values and perspectives.
- How to express healthy disagreements and listen and respond to others' opinions respectfully.
- Self-advocacy: to recognize when they need to ask for help – socially or academically
- To identify and discuss social issues like bullying, gossiping, stereotyping, with support and guidance from adults
- To manage time and expectations using tools like checklists, rubrics, simple goal-setting
- Proactive communication when it comes to discussing fairness, rules, inclusion/exclusion.
- Words and phrases that demonstrate thinking on behalf of others: "I noticed you looked sad when we were working on our drawing together, what's wrong?" "Are you okay?" "Can I help you clean that up?" "I think people at our table need more quiet to concentrate."
- To notice and identify character traits such as empathy, discipline, initiative, resilience and persistence in self and others.
- To channel and pursue their interests through purposeful reading, writing, forming clubs, etc.
- To speak to an audience with greater awareness of presentation skills

Typical Characteristics of Fifth Graders (10-11 year-olds):

Ten-year olds are picking up steam in the academic and social arenas, finding new kinds of confidence and pride in their accomplishments, typically more relaxed, cooperative and content around peers and adults. They have a new-found work ethic and stamina for intellectual challenges; able to concentrate and work independently for longer periods of time. Cooperative work has become easier for them as they are more open to working with different genders, generally more tolerant of different learning styles and more flexible when it comes to trivial things. Tens listen well, but like to talk, still without much self-consciousness about time, or tangents. They are open to learning mediation and problem-solving skills with greater autonomy and selflessness, but need adult support dealing with complex or serious social dynamics that may arise within the peer group. In games and activities, ten-year-olds may still argue over teams and fairness, and leaders can emerge to sway group dynamics for better or for worse. Boys and girls work well together, but experiment with social power differently. Some may fight, forgive and forget, others might hold onto grudges or prolong patterns of resentment, many are avoiders of conflict, or even peace-makers. Peer opinion and popular culture may influence behavior, language and attitude.

The Fifth Grader is Learning...

- How to think, plan and act on behalf of others e.g. community service, discussions about social, community, global or political issues.
- Effective strategies to balance competition, teamwork and cooperation
- How to complete collaborative tasks: compromise about disagreements, agree on common goals and share work, cooperate with difficult peers.
- To follow social norms in meetings, lessons and discussions with more awareness of the social nuance (e.g. voice, tone, reciprocity, or use of non-verbal gestures and signals)
- To acknowledge their relative age/maturity within the school community and to participate (or even seek out) roles of leadership, mentorship, performance or public speaking.
- To listen to both sides of a dilemma or problem, to take responsibility for mistakes and generate solutions.
- To think independently about personal preferences and recognize peer pressure.
- To go out of their comfort zone, at times, when facing individual challenges – to exert greater confidence and effort to address weaknesses and tackle challenges.
- To cope with a wider range of emotional ups and downs – identify and use strategies to overcome upsets and show resilience.
- Greater awareness about more complex group dynamics and how to act or advocate accordingly