



## ***Why Social-Emotional Skills Matter***

Social-emotional development is about how children learn to:

- Understand and express feelings
- Get along with others
- Handle big emotions
- Build trust and feel safe in relationships

These skills are *just as important* as learning numbers or letters—and they grow best through **warm relationships, play, and predictable routines.**

## ***What This Looks Like in the Playspace***

In a Playspace, children develop social-emotional skills when they:

- Try taking turns with a toy
- Ask for help or comfort
- Express frustration safely
- Work through challenges with a volunteer or peer
- Feel proud of something they created or did

Even small moments—like giggling together, playing peek-a-boo, or sitting quietly side by side—help build trust, safety, and confidence.



## *Your Role as a PAL*

As a Playspace volunteer, your role isn't to teach or manage behavior. You're here to:

- Create a **calm, welcoming** space
- Follow the child's lead, offer choices, and validate their feelings
- Model kindness, patience, and flexibility

This helps children experience what safe, supportive relationships *feel like*, which builds the foundation for all other learning.

## *Why We Don't "Teach Manners"*

We don't require kids to say "please" or "thank you," insist they share, or correct what may seem like "rude" behavior—and here's why:

- Many children in shelter are coping with stress or instability and are focused on feeling safe.
- When overwhelmed or tired, their behavior may reflect unmet needs—not a lack of manners.
- Respect and kindness are learned through supportive relationships, not correction.

Instead of teaching manners, we **model compassion, patience, and respect**—and trust that those seeds will grow in time.

## TRY IT YOURSELF!

# Nurturing Social-Emotional Growth



*Help children feel safe, seen, and empowered by using these simple techniques to support social-emotional learning in the Playspace.*

WHAT YOU CAN DO	WHY IT HELPS
Get down to the child's eye level	<b>Builds connection</b> and reduces power struggles
Reflect feelings: <i>"You look upset. That was hard."</i>	Helps children <b>feel seen and heard</b>
Offer choices: <i>"Do you want to color or build?"</i>	Supports <b>autonomy and confidence</b>
Narrate play: <i>"You're stacking so many blocks!"</i>	Builds <b>language and awareness</b>
Take a calming pause if things escalate	Models <b>emotional regulation</b> without shaming