



# Music and ... Social-Emotional Skills

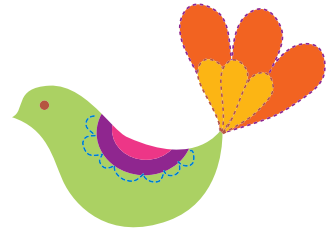
Full Research Booklet

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Ages 3 to 5 years old



## Introduction



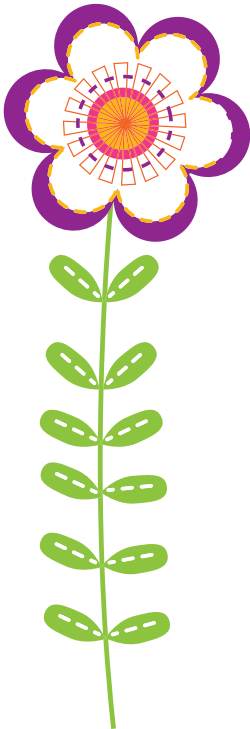
### Social-Emotional Learning: What is it and why does it matter?

Imagine being given this choice: you can

- (a) help your child achieve top-of-the-class academic successes, or
- (b) help your child become well-adjusted and socially adept.

Of course, it's hard to imagine any parent not choosing the latter, though who would want to abandon the former? (And isn't it good that parents don't have to make decisions like these?)

Every parent would like for his or her child to be socially able and emotionally secure. These skills feel good and enable more opportunities and fuller enjoyment of more varied experiences. But social-emotional development is about more than just fun and games.



Here's the good news: Supporting one set of skills doesn't leave the other set behind. Research demonstrates, in fact, that **the development of good social and emotional skills correlates closely with cognitive development and academic success.**<sup>1</sup> The same set of skills that fosters emotional security and social success also predicts school-readiness and academic achievement, tying closely to advances in cognitive development and even to higher academic testing scores.<sup>2</sup>



## Three Areas of Social-Emotional Development

Because social-emotional learning is harder to delineate and define than other, more quantifiable preschool skills, early childhood experts tend to focus on three general areas of social-emotional development at the preschool age: sense of self, responsibility for self and others, and prosocial behavior.

### 1. Sense of Self

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#### What is it?

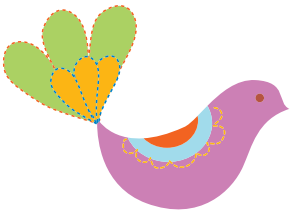
A three-to-five-year-old child who has an age-appropriate sense of self is confident, perceiving him- or herself as competent, effective, and able to complete a large set of relevant tasks independently.

The child is able to recognize, identify, and manage his or her own feelings, has mechanisms for soothing him- or herself when in mild or moderate distress, has a sense of what is “fair”, and will stand up for his or her “rights” if it appears they have been violated.

He or she is able to adjust to new situations, and to demonstrate trust in adults by asking for help when needed and expressing him- or herself freely and confidently.<sup>3</sup>

#### How does it work in a Kindermusik class?

Sometimes, research doesn’t reveal something brand new and surprising; instead, it puts data behind something we’ve always suspected but have never before proven. Scientific studies, for example, now tell us that **children’s self-esteem is directly connected with their perception of themselves as competent.**<sup>4</sup> Groundbreaking? No. Good to know for certain? Absolutely.



## Developmental Milestones: *Sense of Self*<sup>11</sup>

By the age of five, most children:

- 🍃 Begin to develop and express a sense of individuality and personal preference (e.g., says, “See my toys!”).
- 🍃 Label own feelings and those of others based on facial expressions or tone of voice (e.g., looks at a picture in a book and says, “She’s scared.”).
- 🍃 Have developed preferences for one or two trusted adults who act as secure bases for exploration and play.
- 🍃 Can use coping strategies such as words, pretend play, and drawing to manage distress and intense emotions.

*NOTE: Every child is unique, and different children may reach milestones at different times. If you’re concerned about your child’s development, talk to your pediatrician.*

One of the beautiful things about a Kindermusik class is that it includes activities that are sure to build a sense of competence (and, it now follows, confidence). In any given Kindermusik class, children might play homemade drums, “fly” like birds, pretend to be seeds growing from the ground, use their voices to imitate the sound of water running, or listen to the sound of a horse trotting and galloping. They would be specifically encouraged to play the drums in creative ways, to “fly” and “grow” and “pop” in whatever ways feel good to them, and to listen and move and vocalize freely and expressively. In other words, “competence” (doing things “right”, succeeding) is tied directly to exploring, doing things creatively, and expressing individuality, activities that lead to satisfaction, pride, and good feeling for the children. There are no wrong answers.<sup>5</sup>

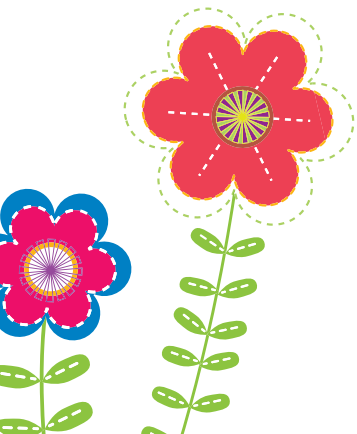
Not only that; children in Kindermusik classes are also **guided to explore emotions**—recognizing, identifying, and empathizing with the emotions of characters in songs and stories, recognizing and identifying moods in pieces of music, and learning to manage their own impulses

(taking turns, respecting space, sharing, moving cooperatively) as they engage in the class as part of a group.


A trusting relationship with classmates and adults, revealed as a key to learning, comes most easily when emotional connections, coordinated movement, and free expression are valued and encouraged the way they are in Kindermusik.<sup>6</sup> With trust, “quiet” children come out of their shells. Otherwise “inattentive” children become suddenly attuned. Children try things they’ve never tried before. Children ask for help when they need it. All of this breeds more trust. And **all of this fosters children who are confident, competent, expressive, independent, and cooperative.**<sup>7</sup> Amazing.


## What you can do at home

 **Can you feel me now?** Enrich your child’s “emotional vocabulary” by using art, music, and stories to identify emotions. No doubt you’ve got happy, sad, surprised, and angry pretty much covered. In stories, that is—but how about in music? Stretch your emotional legs and see if you can find a story, illustration, or piece of music that represents some other feeling, perhaps fear, embarrassment, silliness, determination, or relaxation. Not only does this activity develop your child’s vocabulary; it also helps him or her to identify—and even to manage—his or her own emotions. Try using a relaxing piece of



music when he or she is anxious, for example, or reading a story about a character who is embarrassed, to temper his or her own embarrassing event.<sup>8</sup>

 **Cue up the confidence** Music play-alongs have no wrong answers! Grab some instruments, cue up some music, and play, play, play. There's nothing better for self-esteem than a good old-fashioned come-as-you-are jam session.<sup>9</sup>

 **Who's runnin' this show?** Though allowing a child to dictate certain whats and whens of his or her day is great for developing confidence, a good dose of routine is a nice way to set children up for success. A child who knows what's coming and his or her role in it will be better able to prepare for and succeed at the demands of the day.<sup>10</sup>

## 2. Responsibility for Self and Others

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### What is it?

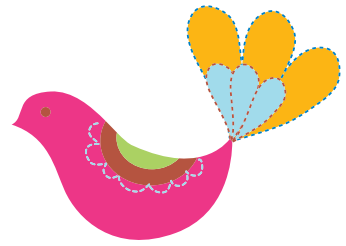
More and more studies are pointing to a cluster of behaviors—identified as “self-control skills”—as vital predictors of children’s future performance in school,<sup>12</sup> even specifically linking these skills with emerging math and literacy skills.<sup>13</sup>

Children who display well-developed self-control skills (a sense of responsibility for their own actions and an understanding of their impact on others), are **better able to control their impulses, pay attention, work flexibly toward goals, and show an ability to plan and organize their actions.** (For example, a self-regulated child can wait his or her turn in line without frustration, will resist blurting out answers

when other children have been asked a question, and might be observed suggesting fair solutions to a playground problem.)<sup>14</sup>

A three-to-five-year-old child with an age-appropriate sense of responsibility for self and others will **exhibit not only responsibility for his or her own well-being, but also respect for class environment and rules, including the safety and emotional well-being of other children.**

He or she will have a grasp on the give-and-take of a group, adjusting his or her expectations to make fair compromises with others. The child can use knowledge of his or her own feelings and emotions to connect with others, even offering gestures of empathy, comfort, and shared joy. In addition,



### Developmental Milestones: *Responsibility for Self & Others*<sup>19</sup>

By the age of five, most children:

- 🍃 Can follow simple instructions and sustain attention.
- 🍃 Seek adults' help in resolving a conflict, and accept adult-suggested compromises.
- 🍃 Are learning simple alternatives to aggressive ways of dealing with conflicts (e.g., trading one doll for a more desired one by saying, "You have THIS dolly, okay?").
- 🍃 Are learning to play games with rules.

*NOTE: Every child is unique, and different children may reach milestones at different times. If you're concerned about your child's development, talk to your pediatrician.*



the child will generally adhere to and be able to predict home and class routines, and be able to self-direct and complete tasks independently.<sup>15</sup>


## How it works in a Kindermusik class

A scientific study conducted specifically on Kindermusik and its unusually strong impact on self-control indicates that it's precisely the kinds of activities Kindermusik integrates—namely, activities that require systematic changes in child behavior—that are ideal for the exercise and development of self-control.


A typical Kindermusik activity, for example, might ask children to respond to auditory cues (e.g., changes in pitch or tempo) by speeding, slowing, starting, stopping, or changing movement; to take a turn playing an instrument, then pass it to another child; or to choose a single instrument from a basket, then put it back at the end of the activity. Across all populations tested, **there has been a direct correlation between these kinds of self-control tasks and school success.**<sup>16</sup>


There is no better time to focus on self-control, another study reveals, than the preschool years. Brain research indicates that the development of self-control skills is linked to the maturation of the prefrontal cortex area of the brain.<sup>17</sup> Can you guess when that maturation occurs?<sup>18</sup>

## What you can do at home

 **Red light, green light** You remember the old game. Play it the way you remember it, or develop any number of variations. The goal is just to add cues—audio (e.g. go when music plays; stop

when music stops), visual (e.g., go when lights are on; stop when lights are off), or otherwise—that will give your child’s self-control a workout.

 **To have and to hold** Put your child in charge of something! A sense of responsibility for self correlates with a sense of responsibility for others—so give your child a plant, assign him or her to clean his or her own cereal bowl every morning, or ask him or her to carry a bag of recyclables down to the curb every trash night.

 **Taking turns** Take turns at the dinner table sharing stories about your day. You can even issue a challenge, (e.g., *What’s something funny that you saw happen today?*) Encourage everyone to add something to the conversation. It’s a great bonding exercise, and a great exercise for learning to wait one’s turn.

### 3. Prosocial Behavior

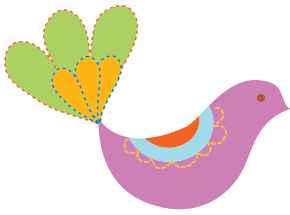
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#### What is it?

Prosocial behavior goes beyond simply “being social” and instead describes acts that specifically show recognition of and empathy for the feelings of others. It involves ethics, sharing, cooperation, caring gestures, and compromises for cooperation and group harmony.

In studies, prosocial behavior seems linked, not surprisingly, to both listening skills and expression skills,<sup>20</sup> as both are necessary to making connections with others. Children who demonstrate prosocial behaviors are **more likely to play well with others, express recognition of the feelings of others, and even engage in conflict-resolution behaviors.**<sup>21</sup>



## Developmental Milestones: *Prosocial Behavior*<sup>29</sup>

By the age of five, most children:

- 🍃 Show an interest in other children and copy what they do.
- 🍃 Will play cooperatively with another child for a time.
- 🍃 Begin to develop real friendships.
- 🍃 Offer simple help (e.g., a hug, comfort object, or encouraging word) to peers who are in need, upset, hurt, or angry.

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Repeatedly and undeniably, the demonstration of good prosocial behaviors has been statistically associated with teachers' assessments of children's school-readiness,<sup>22</sup> with the development of positive friendships and relationships in school,<sup>23</sup> and even with greater literacy skills, as demonstrated in testing. Children who can communicate their needs, recognize emotions, and produce appropriate solutions to interpersonal conflicts have an easier time forming positive relationships and benefit more from the learning environment of school. As the authors of these studies suggest, **"Social development and academic development are inextricably connected."**<sup>24</sup>


## How it works in a Kindermusik class

Simple observation makes it clear that music activities like those in Kindermusik provide a wonderful opportunity for social interaction and positive connections.<sup>25</sup>

Group activities foster opportunities for cooperation, conversation, coordinated movement, hand-holding, and the


abandonment of inhibitions. As a whole, groups who have engaged in musical activities are more confident and better adjusted than groups who engage only in traditional, non-group, non-musical activities.<sup>26</sup>



In addition, research suggests that music activities enable children to better decode the musical aspects (such as rhythm, stress, and intonation) of speech, and even to better identify emotions and tones in spoken language.<sup>27</sup>





All of these skills—listening, decoding speech, connecting with others, adjusting to a group—are essential to the development of what one study defines as “social competence”, or the capacity for children to engage successfully with other children, to set and meet social goals, to develop friendships, and to gain entry into the peer groups they choose. **“The preschool period is a particularly important time for the development of social skills,”** the researchers state. “It is at this time when children begin to expand their social interactions beyond their parents and take on the developmental task of building relationships and acceptance with their peers.”<sup>28</sup>

## What you can do at home

 **Play AWAY** Get out of the house! Play groups, organized preschool activities, sports, music, foreign languages...it matters less *what* they’re learning than *how* they’re learning. Arrange for your child to engage in group activities that require cooperation, adherence to group rules, and complex communications between individuals. Group play and the lessons that come with it are essential to school-readiness.



 **The sounds of feeling** Go out of your way to expose your child to the sounds of emotion. Seek out a variety of music styles that yield and represent a variety of emotional states. Attend a poetry reading, a live music performance, storytime at the local library. Seek out also stories in which characters experience different emotions, and in which other characters react positively and helpfully. Consider yourself on a never-ending scavenger hunt, seeking out the sounds of expressive language and music, emotion in sound.

 **The mother tongue** Explore another language with your child. Just as exposure to the variations of musical tone develops a child's ear for musical expression, so too does exposure to the variations of tone and expression in language develop a child's ear for spoken expression. On top of all that, exposure to new cultures and the establishment of connection to other cultures helps children develop precisely the prosocial behaviors researchers say are so important.

## *Conclusion*

Study after study on social and emotional learning in young children reveals that while emphasizing "academic" skills doesn't necessarily make your child emotionally secure or socially capable, **supporting your child's emotional and social growth does enable academic and cognitive advancement.**

So. The best thing you can do to raise a happy, well-adjusted, socially-secure child? (Easy, right?) Just support the development of confidence, competence, trust, and emotion-recognition. And don't forget empathy, sharing, and compromise. Oh, and did we mention self-control . . .? Ok. Sounds like a tall order. Well, here's some extra incentive. The best recipe for raising a child who is likely to succeed in school? Exact same thing.

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