

# **Nurturing Young Minds: An Insight into Social and Emotional Learning in Early Years**

*Katrina Di Girolami, The Great North Early Years Stronger Practice Hub Lead*

## **Introduction:**

Now more than ever Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) has a critical importance in the early years of a child's life. In this blog, we'll explore evidence-based strategies and resources drawn from the [Education Endowment Foundation](#) (EEF) to support the holistic development of children's social and emotional skills. Through this blog, we will look into the research, share practical tips, and celebrate the significant impact of SEL on children's well-being and lifelong success.

## **Understanding Social and Emotional Learning:**

Social and emotional learning encompasses a range of skills crucial for children's holistic development, including self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and effective communication. The [EYFS framework](#) recognises the significance of nurturing these skills from an early age, as they form the foundation for future success in school and beyond. The PSED areas of learning and PSED Early Learning Goals (ELG) encompass several SEL skills so PSED sessions can therefore provide valuable contexts in which to teach social and emotional learning.

Drawing on insights from the EEF's [Improving Social and Emotional Learning Guidance Report](#) and guidance report, we understand that SEL not only contributes to children's emotional well-being but also enhances their academic achievement. Research shows that children who possess strong social and emotional skills are better equipped to focus, engage with learning tasks, and develop positive relationships with peers and adults.

## **Improving Social and Emotional Learning:**

Here are some evidence-based strategies informed by the EYFS framework and EEF research:

- **Embed SEL in the Curriculum:** Integrate SEL into everyday activities and routines, such as circle time, storytelling, and collaborative play. Use age-appropriate resources and materials that promote emotional literacy and problem-solving skills.
- **Foster Positive Relationships:** Create a nurturing and supportive environment where children feel valued, respected, and emotionally secure. Encourage positive interactions between children and adults, and model empathy and kindness in your own interactions.
- **Teach Emotional Regulation:** Help children recognise and manage their emotions by teaching coping strategies such as deep breathing, mindfulness exercises, and expressing feelings through art or storytelling. Provide opportunities for children to practise self-regulation in real-life situations.
- **Promote Social Skills:** Facilitate opportunities for children to develop social skills such as sharing, taking turns, and resolving conflicts peacefully. Use cooperative games, group projects, and role-playing activities to encourage collaboration and teamwork.
- **Involve Families and Communities:** Engage parents, caregivers, and community members in supporting children's social and emotional development. Provide resources, workshops, and opportunities for families to learn about SEL and reinforce these skills at home.

You can find more strategies in the [Improving Social and Emotional Learning Guidance Report](#) and in the [Personal, Social and Emotional Evidence Store](#) on the EEF website.

### **The Benefits of Implementing SEL strategies:**

The [EEF Early Years Toolkit for 'Social and Emotional Learning Strategies'](#) found that on average, children who take part in SEL interventions make around three additional months' progress in early years settings and reception classes. The evidence suggests that SEL strategies can have a positive impact on young children's social interactions, attitudes to learning, and on aspects of early learning across the curriculum.

### **Measuring Progress and Reflecting on Practice:**

Finally, it's essential to regularly assess children's progress in SEL and reflect on your own practice. Use observation, assessment tools, and feedback from families to track children's development and identify areas for improvement. Collaborate with colleagues to share best practices, seek [professional development opportunities](#), and continuously refine your approach to promoting SEL in early years education.

### **Conclusion:**

By prioritising social and emotional learning in early years education and implementing evidence-based strategies informed by the EYFS framework and EEF research, we can empower young children to thrive emotionally, socially, and academically. Together, we can foster a culture of emotional intelligence and create nurturing environments where every child can reach their full potential.