



The Socio-Emotional Development of Children 0 to 6 Years of Age: *A Tool for Early Childhood Stakeholders*

This knowledge translation tool, developed by the Institut national de santé publique (INSPQ), is based on the synthesis *Développement socioaffectif de l'enfant entre 0 et 5 ans et facteurs associés*. The synthesis and tool were developed as part of the *Initiative concertée d'intervention pour le développement des jeunes enfants* (ICIDJE) working group, "Intervention Support" component.

The tool consists of two parts:

- 1. The pyramid of social-emotional development from 0 to 6 years of age**
- 2. Social-emotional development from 0 to 6 years of age: one step at a time**

Each part may be used independently.

- **1. The pyramid of social-emotional development from 0 to 6 years of age**
(infographic + glossary)

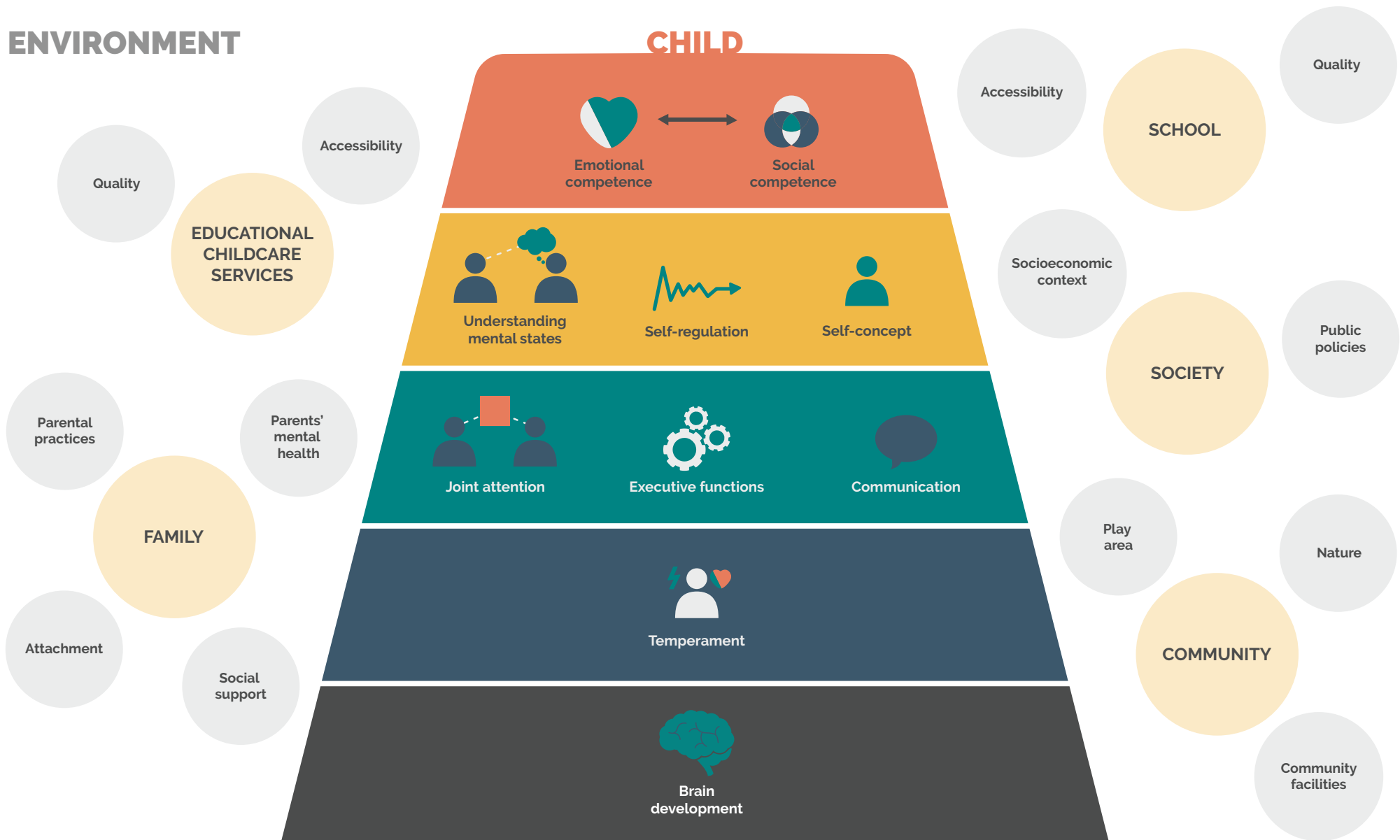
This section includes an infographic presenting a comprehensive framework of key aspects that influence the development of children's social and emotional skills and their interrelationships. It is supplemented by a glossary that explains the terms used.

- **2. Social-emotional development from 0 to 6 years of age: one step at a time**
(infographic + explanatory table)

This section includes an infographic presenting the sequence of emergence of social and emotional competence between the ages of 0 and 6. A table accompanies the infographic and gives concrete examples of the different elements represented.

The pyramid of socio-emotional development from 0 to 6 years of age

ENVIRONMENT



READING KEYS

- The development of social and emotional competence (top of the pyramid) is influenced by the child's characteristics and global development (the rest of the pyramid) and environment (the circles).
- Brain development between 0 and 6 years of age is the foundation upon which basic skills (e.g., communication) are built, upon which other skills (e.g., understanding mental states) are built, all of which are involved in social and emotional competence.

The pyramid of social-emotional development from 0 to 6 years of age: glossary

This glossary defines the important concepts of the pyramid of social-emotional development from 0 to 6 years of age. The examples that are given to illustrate the concepts thus involve children aged 0 to 6 years. It is important to note, however, that the skills shown in the pyramid as part of overall development become increasingly complex through adulthood.

CHILDREN

Children have characteristics that are unique to them and that do not depend on the people around them and their living context. These personal characteristics influence how they relate to others and how others react to them.

Example: *Children are born with their own ways of reacting to the outside world (e.g., they cry a little or a lot when they are hungry).*

ENVIRONMENT

The environment includes all the settings in which the children grow up. Their living contexts, such as their family, daycare, or school, are included in their community, which in turn is included in their society. Certain factors in each environment may enhance social-emotional development or, conversely, render it more difficult.

Example: *Good parental mental health is a protective factor for this development, whereas mental health problems in the family are a risk factor.*

BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

The brain is composed of millions of neurons that connect to each other through synapses. Synaptic connections develop as a result of biological factors as well as the child's experiences. Connections are strengthened when they are used; conversely, they may disappear when they are not stimulated. The fact that the brain is sensitive to experiences is called malleability or neuroplasticity. A child's brain has a greater potential for plasticity than an adult's.

Example: *At birth, a child has the ability to recognize the sounds of all the languages of the world. As he or she hears the sounds of his or her native language(s), the child will lose this ability.*

TEMPERAMENT

Biological characteristics that shape a child's emotional and behavioural responses to the environment.

Example: *When a baby's needs are not met, one baby reacts with irritability, while another reacts with less intensity; the two do not have the same temperament.*

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS

Cognitive processes that allow children to voluntarily coordinate their thoughts and actions in order to achieve a goal. Working memory is an example of executive functions. It is a skill that allows the child to store new information during an activity and to reuse it, without losing sight of what he is doing.

Example: *At the park, a girl wants to drink water from a drinking fountain, but another child is waiting. Since her father has told her to wait her turn, she has taken her place in line. She remembers what her father said thanks to her working memory and thus blocks her desire to drink immediately.*

JOINT ATTENTION

A child's ability to pay attention to what another person is looking at or pointing at, and to invite others to direct their attention to an object or event of interest, in particular by pointing. This ability is the basis for social interactions.

Example: *A boy pays attention to the bird that his father is looking at. He understands that the adult is drawing his attention to the animal.*

NON-VERBAL AND VERBAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

The ability to communicate a message using facial expressions, miming, gestures (non-verbal), and words (verbal) that allow a child to express what he or she is feeling, thinking, or needing.

Example: *A girl expresses that she wants a toy out of her reach by pointing to it and "whimpering": she is communicating in a non-verbal way.*

SELF-REGULATION

A child's ability to control physiological (e.g., crying), emotional, behavioural, and cognitive responses and to adapt to new situations accordingly. During early childhood, the child alternates between co-regulation, helped by an adult, and self-regulation. As the child grows, he or she tends more and more towards self-regulation, sometimes called self-control.

Examples: *A boy cries because he is afraid before falling asleep at naptime. He comforts himself by hugging his stuffed animal. He demonstrates self-regulation by modulating his emotional responses.*

A girl is at the mall and wants to run. However, she stays close to her mother because she knows that is the rule. She demonstrates self-regulation by controlling her behavioural responses.

SELF-CONCEPT

Children's perceptions of themselves and their characteristics, which are influenced by both their experiences and the views of others. Self-concept includes self-image and an evaluative part, self-esteem. Self-concept is related to personality and identity.

Example: *A girl, while drawing her family, represents herself by saying: "I am a girl and I have brown hair."*

EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE

Set of skills that involves being able to express positive and negative (or pleasant and unpleasant) emotions, to understand them (notably by identifying and associating them with situations), and to manage them by using strategies such as seeking support.

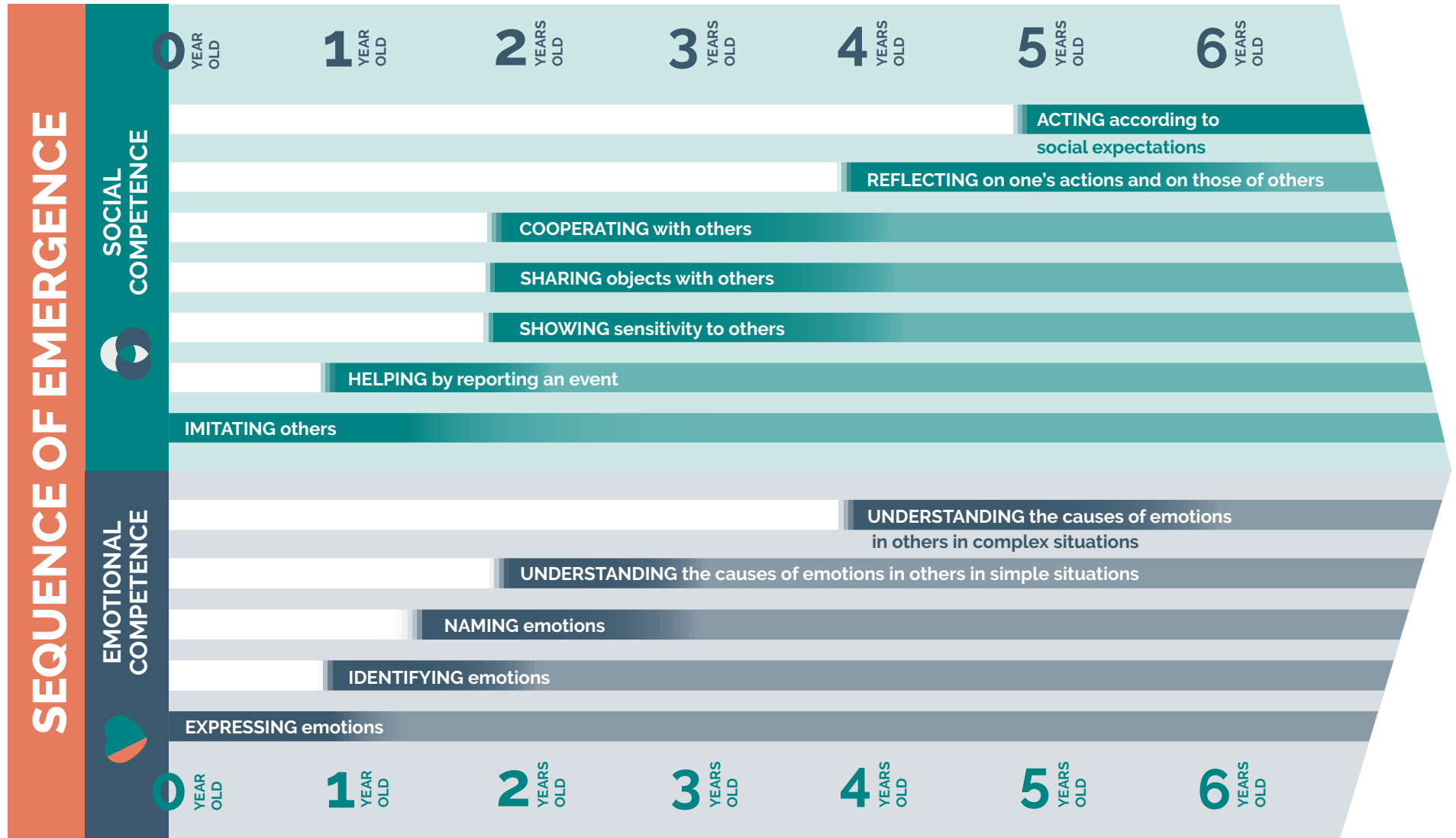
Example: *A boy encounters a large dog that scares him while walking down the street with his mother. He tells his mother that he is afraid. He is thus hoping that she will help and protect him.*

SOCIAL COMPETENCE

Set of skills that allow one to recognize and process social cues and respond to them with appropriate behaviour, taking into account the demands of one's social environment. These skills help develop and maintain quality interpersonal relationships and enjoy social experiences.

Example: *A girl sees that her friend has fallen off her bicycle and hurt herself. She approaches and asks, "Are you okay?"*

Social-emotional development from 0 to 6 years of age: one step at a time



READING KEYS

- Each line represents an emotional or social competence.
- The dark colour represents the period of competence emergence, and the light colour represents the period of complexification.
- The periods of emergence are wide given the great degree of variability between children.
- The development of one competence enables the appearance of the next.
- Emotional and social competencies emerge in parallel and are reinforced.

Social-emotional development from 0 to 6 years of age: one step at a time:

Explanation of emotional and social competence

The sequences presented in the figure give an indication of the periods of **emergence** and **complexification** of certain emotional and social competence. For some competence, complexification lasts a lifetime! The following tables provide concrete examples of how competence is manifested, during both emergence and complexification.



EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE

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| Expressing emotions | <p>Emergence: the child spontaneously generates facial expressions related to different types of emotions he feels, such as joy, sadness, anger, disgust, and fear (0 to 1 year old).</p> <p>Complexification: After 1 year, the child experiences other emotions such as embarrassment and envy, and later, guilt, shame, and pride.</p> |
| Identifying emotions | <p>Emergence: The child is able to identify the emotion expressed by others, especially when asked to point out the emotion in a real or illustrated person. At first, she better recognizes expressions of joy, anger, and sadness. For example, she points to the sad friend in a book when asked (1 to 2 years old).</p> <p>Complexification: The older the child gets, the more she becomes able to "decode" facial expressions related to different emotions. Gradually, she begins to recognize fear, surprise, and disgust, among other emotions.</p> |
| Naming emotions | <p>Emergence: The child names facial expressions related to basic emotions (joy, sadness, anger) and uses them progressively in his everyday language. For example, he will say, "me angry" when upset (1½ to 3 years old).</p> <p>Complexification: Between the ages of 2 and 3, as language develops, the child is able to name more and more emotions in himself and in others, in relation to different situations in daily life. For example: "I'm feeling very happy this morning because I'm going to see Grandma."</p> |
| Understanding the causes of emotions in others in simple situations | <p>Emergence: The child understands the cause of another person's emotion in a simple everyday situation. For example, she understands that a peer is sad because his parent left the daycare and another is angry because she did not get what she wanted. The child can also imagine, when told that someone is in the dark, that the person is afraid. (2 to 3 years old).</p> <p>Complexification: Later, the child understands that a person can feel an emotion that may differ from her own when faced with the same situation. For example, one child might love dogs but understand that another child is frightened by them.</p> |
| Understanding the causes of emotions in others in complex situations | <p>Emergence: The child understands that it is possible to feel several emotions (sometimes conflicting) at the same time. For example, when told a story, he may remember that a child was happy to go to the zoo, but was also sad because his father was sick and couldn't go with him (4 to 6 years old).</p> <p>Complexification: Later, he understands that people's emotions can be based on their belief about a situation, even if that belief is wrong. For example, observing another child finding a box of candy, the child understands that the other child is happy because he thinks the box is full. If the child observing knows the box is empty, he will expect the other to be disappointed upon discovering the truth.</p> |



SOCIAL COMPETENCE

| | |
|------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Imitating others | <p>Emergence: A newborn imitates simple adult facial expressions (e.g., opening mouth, sticking out tongue). An infant imitates actions (e.g., clapping or tapping on something) (0 to 1 year old).</p> <p>Complexification: A child increasingly imitates adult gestures and behaviour. For example, she might stir a spoon in a cup or pick up a broom at the same time as an adult. Around 2 years old, a child can imitate in a delayed manner. For example, by pretending to cook because she has seen her parents do it before.</p> |
| Helping by reporting an event | <p>Emergence: The child helps adults by reporting an event. For example, he points to a falling object, knowing that the adult was not paying attention, or he picks up the object and hands it to the adult (1 to 2 years old).</p> <p>Complexification: Later, the child tries to assist adults in everyday tasks. For example, he puts toys away when parents do.</p> |
| Showing sensitivity to others | <p>Emergence: The child will readily comfort people who seem to need it. For example, she will hug a friend who is sad or in pain in order to comfort her (2 to 4 years old)</p> <p>Complexification: The more a child develops an understanding of emotions and their causes, the more likely she is to be sensitive to others. For example, she may ask a caregiver: "Are you mad because I didn't clean up?" She could also tell the caregiver to be happy because the children did crafts.</p> |
| Sharing objects with others | <p>Emergence: The child gives items that are asked for. For example, he gives a bite of food to his mother when asked. A little later, he offers a cherished object. For example, he hands a stuffed animal to a friend (2 to 4 years old).</p> <p>Complexification: The child increasingly shares objects with people who are less close, for example, with children in daycare with whom he does not often play.</p> |
| Cooperating with others | <p>Emergence: The child enters increasingly into relationships with others, in a less "self-centred" way. For example, she agrees to wait her turn in a game (2 to 4 years old).</p> <p>Complexification: Later, the child learns to play with other children for the purpose of having fun and/or achieving a goal. For example, she builds a tall block tower with friends at daycare, or pretends to cook with her sister, or imagines a story involving stuffed animals with her.</p> |
| Reflecting on one's own actions and those of others | <p>Emergence: In their social interactions, the child incorporates increasingly complex contextual elements into their thinking (for example, forming an opinion about what is fair or not), and acts accordingly. For instance, when distributing stickers to reward their peers after a game of soccer, they may distribute them unequally in a way they consider fair, such as giving more stickers to those who made more effort (between 4 and 6 years old).</p> <p>Complexification: The child begins to use "prosocial lying" for the benefit of others. For example, they keep it a secret that a friend broke a puppet so that the friend is not punished.</p> |
| Acting according to social expectations | <p>Emergence: The child learns to disguise his emotions, not saying exactly what would be "more appropriate" to say in certain situations in order to conform to social expectations. For example, he tells someone that he or she looks good in a picture when asked, so as not to hurt that person's feelings (5 to 6 years old).</p> <p>Complexification: In parallel or later, the child becomes capable of lying to his own detriment. For example, the child will show happiness and say thank you when receiving a disappointing gift.</p> |

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