

# The Vermont School Readiness Series

## Social-Emotional Development

### Our Children's Social-Emotional Development

#### Kindergarten teachers tell us

(and many parents already know) that one of the keys to children's starting off successfully in school is their ability to get along with others (peers and adults), and to control their own behavior and emotions. When children lack these skills, they can't learn as well. Coincidentally, employers tell us that successful employees are those who have the social and emotional skills to work effectively with teammates and supervisors, to motivate themselves and others. The foundations for these skills, as with so many others, are laid in early childhood.

Of course, young children can't be expected to do these things perfectly, any more than adults can! But being able to separate comfortably from parents or other caregivers, adapt to daily transitions, and cope positively with conflicts and frustrations are fundamental to school success. Indeed, they're just as important as having basic cognitive skills, such as recognizing letters or counting.

**It's expected that there is a wide range** of normal social-emotional development among young children, just as there is in other areas of development. Some children are naturally more outgoing, others more shy; some are quick to react to frustration, others are more easy-



going; some welcome stimulation and adapt well to new situations, others are more cautious and comfortable with routines. Some of these traits will change as children grow older and have new experiences, while others may be enduring parts of personality.

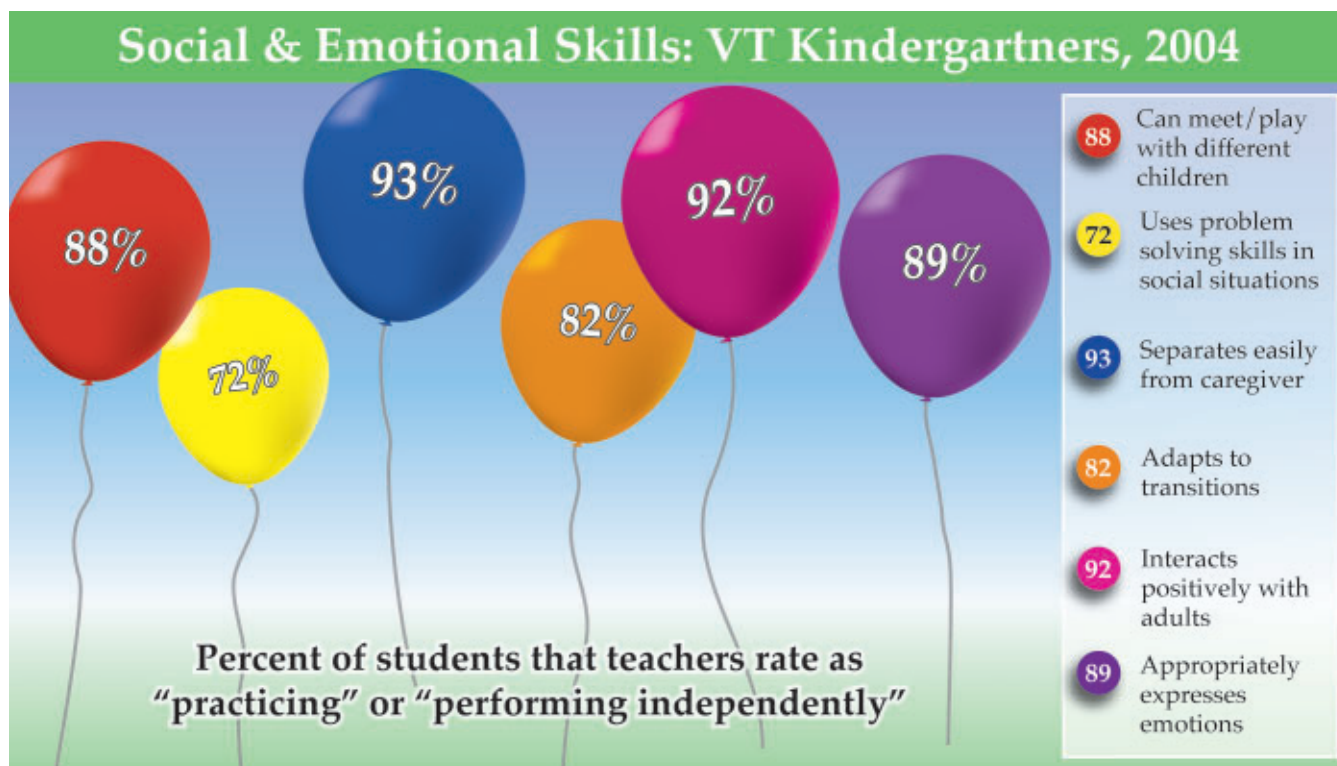
However, some children have unusual difficulty managing their own behavior and/or their interactions with others. These children (perhaps as many as one in four) need additional support from parents and other caregivers, and sometimes from behavioral specialists, so that they can successfully adapt to the new challenges of school.



## What Do We Know About Vermont's Children?

Kindergarten teachers in Vermont annually complete a brief assessment of their students at the beginning of the school year. Part of their assessment has to do with children's social-emotional development. In the 2003-04 school year, teachers told us that that most

kindergartners were using important social and emotional skills (see chart). However, only about two-thirds of kindergartners across the state were adequately demonstrating all of these important skills.<sup>1</sup> Both kindergarten and preschool teachers say that children who are disruptive or who have other serious behavioral problems are their biggest classroom challenge.<sup>2</sup>



### For More Information:

*Your child's pediatrician*

*Your local Community Mental Health Center*

**Autism Society of VT & Autism Information Center**

Provides information, support and training on Autism Spectrum Disorders  
1-800-559-7398  
www.autism-info.org

**Family, Infant and Toddler Project of Vermont**

FITP is a family-centered statewide system of early intervention services for infants and toddlers who have a delay in their development or a health condition that may lead to a delay in development, and their families.  
1-800-870-6758  
www.state.vt.us/health/hi/cshn/fitp/fitp.shtml

**Parent-to-Parent of Vermont**

Parent-to-Parent of Vermont provides a network of support and information for families whose child has a chronic illness or disability or has been born prematurely  
1-800-800-4005  
www.partparvt.org

**Prevent Child Abuse - Vermont**

PCAVT is an umbrella organization of educational services to the families of Vermont  
(802) 229-5724  
Parents' Stress Line: 1-800-CHILDREN or 1-800-244-5373  
www.pcavt.org  
E-mail: pcavt@together.net

**Vermont Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health**

A family-run organization supporting families whose children are experiencing or are at risk to experience emotional, behavioral, or mental health challenges  
1-800-639-6071

**Vermont Parent Information Center**

provides families of children who have special needs with information and support regarding their child's disability, the education process, and community resources  
1-800-639-7170  
www.vtpic.com

## What Can You Do?

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Many of children's behavioral and emotional difficulties can be eased if they are addressed early. Parents, of course, are the most important influences on their child's emotional and social skills. But teachers, physicians, policy makers, and others also play important roles.

- Help ensure all pregnant women get early, comprehensive prenatal care. Low birthweight, which is often a result of inadequate prenatal care, is associated with many emotional and behavioral problems in children.
- Help families get out of poverty. We don't understand all of the ways poverty affects child development, but we know it is damaging. Poor nutrition may be one factor leading to emotional and social difficulties.
- Help parents learn how to be more nurturing, as well as how to set effective limits for their child's behavior. Parenting classes are available in most Vermont communities.
- Help parents who need it get treatment for mental illness, including depression.

**Help ensure that all young children are screened for any emerging social or emotional concerns.**

- Help all parents get at least some education beyond high school. Children of parents with little education are more likely to have emotional and behavioral problems.
- Help prevent child maltreatment. Abused children become seriously impaired in their social and emotional development.
- Help ensure that all young children are screened for any emerging social or emotional concerns.
- Help improve the quality of early care and education. Teachers need special training and, in some cases, on-site professional support, to help children with social and emotional challenges succeed.



<sup>1</sup> Vermont Agency of Human Services, and Vermont Department of Education. Vermont School Readiness Assessment Initiative.

<sup>2</sup> Raver CC, and Knitzer J. Ready to enter: What research tells policymakers about strategies to promote social and emotional school readiness among three- and four-year-old children. National Center for Children in Poverty. New York, 2002.

## School Readiness Series:

### What Do We Know?

Children's readiness for kindergarten  
Schools' readiness for children

### Are Our Young Children Healthy?

Children who are overweight or at risk  
Health factors affecting learning

### Families With Special Challenges

Children living in poverty  
Domestic violence and substance abuse  
Incarceration of parents  
Refugees

### Social-Emotional Development

Behavioral/emotional development  
Interaction with other students  
Challenges for teachers

### Children With Special Needs

Who are children with special needs?  
Support information

### The Workforce in Early Care & Education

Caring for caregivers  
Paid caregivers  
Investing in quality childcare

**The School Readiness Series** is one of several research initiatives currently supported by the Vermont Research Partnership. Too many children enter kindergarten with physical, social, emotional and cognitive limitations that could have been minimized or eliminated through early attention to child and family needs. States are developing comprehensive school readiness indicator systems, a necessity to sustain current investments in the most effective programs for children and to make the case for increased investments to improve outcomes for young children and their families. Vermont's School Readiness Series strives to communicate that "readiness" is a shared responsibility of families, schools and communities. The Series provides fundamental school readiness indicators and resources for additional information about what can be done to help young Vermonters make the most of school.

**The Vermont Research Partnership** was established in 1998 as a collaborative between the Agency of Human Services, the Department of Education, and the University of Vermont. The Partnership's primary objective is to study and improve the effectiveness of community-based initiatives undertaken by these three parties. The Vermont Research Partnership develops shared research agendas on topics of particular importance for enhancing policies and practices that affect children, youth, and families. Projects engage the diverse perspectives of researchers, program directors, practitioners, and community members from across the state.



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