

The Development of Character

Research on children's character development suggests that experiences with adults and other children during the first five early years set the tone that will ensure a positive or negative result. Components needed for positive character development can be found in the following domains:

- Physical Development (mental health)
- Approaches to Learning
- Social and Emotional

Adult and child, as well as child and child interactions, throughout each day provide children with opportunities to model appropriate behaviors and practice successful social skills. Consistent attention to opportunities to discuss feelings, rules, and how behaviors impact others must be paid by adults working with young children. The development of positive character skills is vital to life success (Galinsky, 2010) and is based on the creation of loving, trusting relationships. The necessary components of a positive character are not developed through the coloring of worksheets about feelings or through engaging in cute experiences such as bathing baby dolls but through conscious efforts both planned and intentionally embedded during the ever present "teachable moments" presented each day through life with children.

Adults working with young children must be aware of how their actions and words either promote the development of positive character or diminish it.

A book written by Ellen Galinsky, *Mind in the Making* (2010), gives us yet another prospective concerning the learning and development of young children. After interviewing more than a hundred of the most prominent child development researchers and neuroscientists she has condensed her findings into the following essential life skills that every child must develop in order to be successful.

Skill 1: Focus and Self Control

Skill 2: Perspective Taking

Skill 3: Communicating

Skill 4: Making connections

Skill 5: Critical Thinking

Skill 6: Taking on Challenges

Skill 7: Self-Directed, Engaged, Learning

Development of these essential skills requires involvement of the prefrontal cortex or the thinking brain. Many researches now call these the executive functions of the brain. The successful maturing of these skills is dependent on intentional, **playful**, and loving experiences created by the adults who interact with young children.

The following concepts should be a focus of all experiences so that children are positively guided toward positive character development:

Honesty	Cooperation
Self-Awareness	Impulse Control
Responsibility	Kindness
Patience	Perseverance
Helpfulness	Courtesy/Manners
Forgiveness	Loyalty
Tolerance	Friendship
Diligence	Respectfulness
Gentleness	Empathy
Taking the Perspective of Others	