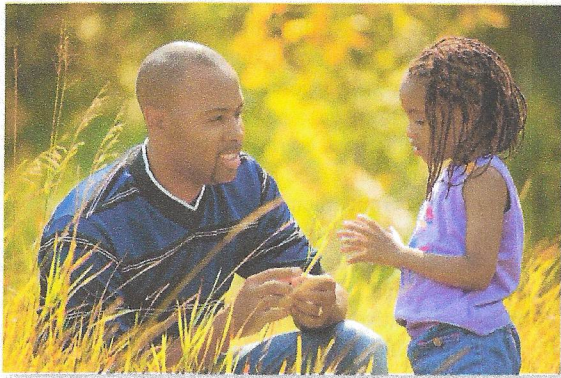


early childhood (Keller, Ford, & Meacham, 1978). For example, preschool children often describe themselves in terms of activities such as play. In sum, in early childhood, children often provide self-descriptions that involve body attributes, material possessions, and physical activities.

Although young children mainly describe themselves in terms of concrete, observable features and activities, at age 4 to 5, as they hear others use psychological trait and emotion terms, they begin to include these in their self-descriptions (Marsh, Ellis, & Craven, 2002). Thus, in a self-description a 4-year-old might say, “I’m not scared. I’m always happy.”

Young children’s self-descriptions are typically unrealistically positive, as reflected in the comment of the 4-year-old who says he is always happy, which he is not (Harter, 2012, 2016). They express this optimism because they don’t yet distinguish between their desired competence and their actual competence, tend to confuse ability and effort (thinking that differences in ability can be changed as easily as can differences in effort), don’t engage in spontaneous social comparison of their abilities with those of others, and tend to compare their present abilities with what they could do at an earlier age (which usually makes them look quite good).



Young children are more psychologically aware of themselves and others than used to be thought. Some children are better than others at understanding people’s feelings and desires—and, to some degree, these individual differences are influenced by conversations caregivers have with young children about feelings and desires.

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Understanding Others Children also make advances in their understanding of others (Danovitch & Mills, 2018; Harter, 2016; Landrum, Pflaum, & Mills, 2016; Ma & others, 2018). Young children’s theory of mind includes understanding that other people have emotions and desires (Devine & Hughes, 2018a, b). And at age 4 to 5 children not only start describing themselves in terms of psychological traits but also begin to perceive others in terms of psychological traits. Thus, a 4-year-old might say, “My teacher is nice.”

An important part of children’s socio-emotional development is gaining an understanding that people don’t always give accurate reports of their beliefs (Mills & Elashi, 2014). Researchers have found that even 4-year-olds understand that people may make statements that aren’t true to obtain what they want or to avoid trouble (Lee & others, 2002). Another important aspect of understanding others involves understanding joint commitments. As children approach their third birthday, their collaborative interactions with others increasingly involve obligations to the partner (Tomasello, 2014).

Young children also learn extensively through observing others’ behavior. For example, a recent study found that young children who observed a peer being rewarded for confessing to cheating on a task were more likely to be more honest in the future themselves (Ma & others, 2018).

Both the extensive theory of mind research and the recent research on young children’s social understanding underscore that young children are not as egocentric as Piaget envisioned (Birch & others, 2017; Devine & Hughes, 2018a, b). Piaget’s concept of egocentrism has become so ingrained in people’s thinking about young children that too often the current research on social awareness in infancy and early childhood has been overlooked. Research increasingly shows that young children are more socially sensitive and perceptive than previously envisioned, suggesting that parents and teachers can help them to better understand and interact in the social world by how they interact with them (Thompson, 2015). If young children are seeking to better understand various mental and emotional states (intentions, goals, feelings, desires) that they know underlie people’s actions, then talking with them about these internal states can improve young children’s understanding of them (Thompson, 2015).

However, there is ongoing debate about whether young children are socially sensitive or basically egocentric (Birch & others, 2017). Ross Thompson (2012, 2015) comes

down on the side of viewing young children as socially sensitive, while Susan Harter (2012, 2016) argues that there is still evidence to support the conclusion that young children are essentially egocentric.

Emotional Development

The young child's growing awareness of self is linked to the ability to feel an expanding range of emotions. Young children, like adults, experience many emotions during the course of a day. Their emotional development allows them to try to make sense of other people's emotional reactions and to begin to control their own emotions (Blair, 2017; Morris & others, 2018; Rogers & others, 2016).

Expressing Emotions

Recall that even young infants experience emotions such as joy and fear, but to experience *self-conscious emotions* children must be able to refer to themselves and be aware of themselves as distinct from others (Lewis, 2010, 2014, 2015, 2016). Pride, shame, embarrassment, and guilt are examples of self-conscious emotions. These emotions do not appear to develop until self-awareness appears around 18 months of age. In a recent study, the broad capacity for self-evaluative emotion was present in the preschool years and was linked to young children's empathetic concern (Ross, 2017). In this study, young children's moral pride, pride in response to achievement, and resilience to shame were linked to a greater tendency to engage in spontaneous helping.

During the early childhood years, emotions such as pride and guilt become more common. They are especially influenced by parents' responses to children's behavior. For example, a young child may experience shame when a parent says, "You should feel bad about biting your sister." One study revealed that young children's emotional expression was linked to their parents' own expressive behavior (Nelson & others, 2012). In this study, mothers who expressed a high incidence of positive emotions and a low incidence of negative emotions at home had children who were observed to use more positive emotion words during mother-child interactions than did the children of mothers who expressed few positive emotions at home.

Understanding Emotions

Among the most important changes in emotional development in early childhood is an increased understanding of emotions (Calkins & Perry, 2016; Kuhnert & others, 2017; Perry & Calkins, 2018). Young children increasingly understand that certain situations are likely to evoke particular emotions, facial expressions indicate specific emotions, and emotions affect behavior and can be used to influence others. One study found that young children's emotional understanding was linked to an increase in prosocial behavior (Ensor, Spencer, & Hughes, 2011). Also, in a study of 5- to 7-year-olds, understanding others' emotions was related to the children's emotion regulation (Hudson & Jacques, 2014).

Between ages 2 and 4, children considerably increase the number of terms they use to describe emotions. During this time, they are also learning about the causes and consequences of feelings (Denham & others, 2012).

When they are 4 to 5 years old, children show an increased ability to reflect on emotions. They also begin to understand that the same event can elicit different feelings in different people. Moreover, they show growing awareness that they need to manage their emotions to meet social standards. And by age 5 most children can accurately identify emotions that are produced by challenging circumstances and describe strategies they might call on to cope with everyday stress (Cole & others, 2009).

Regulating Emotions

Emotion regulation is an important aspect of development. In particular, it plays a key role in children's ability to manage the demands and conflicts they face in interacting with others (Blair, 2017).