

# The Research Behind It All



# Research on Social-Emotional Learning in the Early Childhood Years



The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning defines “social-emotional development” as “the developing capacity of the child from birth through 5 years of age to form close and secure adult and peer relationships; to experience, regulate, and express emotions in socially and culturally appropriate ways; and to explore the environment and learn—all in the context of family, community, and culture” (CSEFEL 2008). Below is an evidence-based case for why children should be intentional taught SEL skills in the early years.

- Preschool programs can produce positive effects on children’s behavior and later reductions in crime and delinquency when designed to develop the whole child, including social and emotional development and self-regulation (Barnett 2008).
- Children who enter kindergarten with positive emotional competence, developed social skills and self-regulation have improved attitudes about school and improved grades and achievement (Spodek and Saracho, 2013).
- A convincing body of evidence has been accumulated to indicate that unless children achieve minimal social competence by about the age of 6 years, they have a high probability of being at risk for social-emotional difficulties as adults (Ladd 2000; Parker and Asher 1987).
- Strong evidence links social-emotional health in the early childhood years (birth to 6) to:
  - Subsequent school success and health in preteen/teen years
  - Long-term health and well-being in adulthood
  - Promotion of resilience
  - Prevention of later mental health problems (Durlak et al. 2011)
- Research suggests that a child’s social and emotional adaptation and academic and cognitive development are enhanced by frequent opportunities to strengthen social competence during early childhood (Hartup and Moore 1990; McClellan and Kinsey 1999).
- Research stresses that promoting young children’s social-emotional competencies significantly enhances school readiness and success (Denham and Weissberg 2004; Freedman 2003).
- A landmark review recently found that students who receive SEL instruction improved an average of 11 percentile points on standardized achievement tests (Durlak et al. 2011).
- Research by the Child Mental Health Foundations and Agencies Network (2000) found that when children enter kindergarten socially and emotionally incompetent, they are often not successful in the early years of school. In addition, they can have behavioral, emotional, academic, and social development problems into adulthood.
- Social-emotional development and cognitive development are intertwined. The two cannot be seen as independent, as they affect each other (Preschool California 2012).
- Young children must learn to send and receive emotional messages using their knowledge about emotions and their abilities to regulate emotions so that they may successfully negotiate interpersonal exchanges, form relationships, and maintain curiosity about and enthusiasm for

their world. When they do so, they have more satisfying, successful relationships with others, especially with new peers (Denham 1998; Halberstadt and Lozada 2011).

- Recent reviews of the research have concluded that “there is a growing body of scientifically-based research supporting the strong impact that enhanced social and emotional behaviors have on success in school and ultimately in life” (Zins et al. 2004).



# The Development of the Kimochis® Early Childhood Curriculum



In the development of the lessons and activities that comprise the *Kimochis® Feel Guide: Early Childhood Edition*, important conceptual paradigms and research findings were consistently referred to. In addition, the following important elements necessary for a sound social-emotional learning program were considered:

- Research and resources
- The young child’s brain and social-emotional development
- Emotional intelligence (emotional competence)
- Five core social-emotional competencies, as defined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)
- Development of emotional literacy
- Instructional design in social-emotional learning programs
- Influence of character education principles
- Positive behavior supports based on the Teaching Pyramid Model
- Gender differences
- Cultural considerations
- Strategies and Enhancements for Students with Social-Emotional Challenges
- Alignment with standards (e.g., Head Start and numerous state standards)

## RESEARCH AND RESOURCES

The *Kimochis® Feel Guide: Early Childhood Edition* is based on sound theories of child development and social-emotional learning. Scientific, empirically based research studies were referred to while developing the Kimochis® Lessons, to ensure that concepts and approaches proven to have beneficial effects on the development of social-emotional skills in children were included. A number of theoretical models and conceptual paradigms were studied, including: theories of emotional intelligence (Goleman 1995; Bar-On and Parke 2000); the social information processing model (Crick and Dodge 1994); social cognitive theory (Bandura 1989); and cognitive behavioral therapy (Kendall 2005).

In addition, the following resources were utilized to attain current research and information on social-emotional learning in early childhood education: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL); Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL); Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention (TACSEI); and National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (NECTAC). Numerous books, articles, and journals on early childhood were also reviewed for relevant and recent research regarding social-emotional learning in young children (see “References” in Appendix K).

## THE YOUNG CHILD'S BRAIN AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Research has unequivocally documented that early experiences have a significant effect on the development of children's brains and cognitive, social, physical, and emotional underpinnings. Actually, 85% of a person's brain development occurs before age 5. These first years of life set the stage for lifelong development (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine 2000).

When an infant is born, 100 billion brain cells or neurons are in the brain. However, the critical connections that determine a child's emotional, social, and intellectual structure are not yet developed. These critical connections are formed by the care, attention, and stimulation provided by parents, caregivers, and early childhood educators. When children experience positive and nurturing interactions, a release of chemicals is activated in a child's brain that rouses activity and promotes growth and development (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child 2004; Shonkoff and Meisels 2000). This chemical reaction occurs when the child is interested and engaged and involved in social contact that is positive and interactive (Thompson 2000). Repeated positive experiences are essential for children's brains to make strong connections and to make those connections permanent (Education Commission of the States 2006). For example, when adults repeat words and phrases to their babies, the infants learn to understand speech and strengthen the language connections in the brain. Connections are also strengthened when children have daily opportunities to practice their developing social competence and to interact directly with their environment (Wisconsin Council on Children and Families 2007). By the time a child is 3 years old, the child's brain has formed about 1,000 trillion connections, almost twice as many as adults have.

The developing brain is particularly sensitive to environmental influences, such as toxic early life stress or trauma. The brain continues to develop certain capabilities throughout life, but most of the critical structural and functional organization takes place in childhood. In fact, by the age of 3, the brain has reached 90% of adult size, while the body is still only about 18% of adult size (Perry 2000). Dr. Bruce Perry has studied children who have experienced severe trauma and/or neglect and found that these children have altered brain growth. During traumatic experiences, children's brains are constantly in a fear state. This activation of key neural systems in the brain leads to adaptive changes in emotional, behavioral, and cognitive functioning that promotes survival. The chronically traumatized child can develop a host of physical signs (e.g., altered cardiovascular regulation) and symptoms (e.g., attentional, sleep, and mood problems) that can make their lives difficult (Perry 2013). Luckily, the brain is "plastic," meaning it is able to change its response to experiences, especially in early childhood. Early identification and intervention is crucial to modifying and influencing the development of traumatized children in positive ways.

Early childhood educators have an opportunity to make a difference for young children and their development. In a study completed by the National Institute for Early Education Research (2007), results indicated that every type of early childhood program examined had moderate positive effects in all domains of child development. Early childhood programs work!

## **EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE (EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE)**

When Daniel Goleman published his first book on emotional intelligence in 1995, it was seen as a revolutionary, paradigm-shattering idea. His beliefs about emotional intelligence are summarized thusly:

“If your emotional abilities aren’t in hand, if you don’t have self-awareness, if you are not able to manage your distressing emotions, if you can’t have empathy and have effective relationships, then no matter how smart you are, you are not going to get very far” (Goleman 1995).

“Emotional intelligence” is defined as the ability to understand, empathize with, and respond appropriately to others. The term “emotional competence” is often used when talking about early childhood because of its developmental emphasis (Denham, Zinsler, and Bailey 2011). Emotional competence includes a child’s ability to appropriately express, interpret, and regulate their emotions, as well as to understand the emotions of others.

These abilities work together to make a school experience successful (Izard et al. 2001). Emotions are everywhere in the early childhood classroom. Young children develop emotional competence as they learn alongside and in collaboration with their teachers and peers. Emotional competence is also directly related to success in relationships. When young children are able to use the knowledge and skills they have learned about emotions, they can skillfully negotiate relationships and keep a healthy curiosity about the world and others (Rubin, Bukowski, and Parker 2006).

The lessons contained in the Kimochis® Feel Guide: Early Childhood Edition teach children how to recognize and understand emotions in themselves and others. Children also learn effective self-regulation skills that help them make responsible social decisions in emotionally charged moments. This guide is based on the premise that feelings fuel behavior and, therefore, children need concrete tools to help them cope with these behaviors in an emotional world.

## **THE FIVE CORE SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL COMPETENCIES (CASEL)**

According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (2003), the goal of an SEL program is to foster the development of five interrelated sets of cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These five core competencies provide children a foundation for social relationships and academic achievement, as evidenced by more positive social behaviors, fewer conduct problems, less emotional distress, and improved test scores and grades (Greenberg et al. 2003). As children master these competencies, they develop concern for others, make good choices, and take responsibility for their behaviors. Accordingly, the Kimochis® Lessons were developed around these five core competencies.

### **I. Self-Awareness**

Self-awareness is the ability to recognize and name personal emotions. It also includes the ability to understand your own needs, as well as your strengths and limitations. This awareness of self is crucial to early school success. When children have an awareness of their own emotions, thinking, and behavior,

they have a better chance to succeed in school, life, and work (Galinsky 2010). A critical component in understanding others is being able to label feelings that reach beyond the basics of happy, sad, and angry. For social success, a child needs to recognize where along an emotional continuum our communicative partner may be and figure out how our partner's emotional state affects (or should affect) our behavior (Vagin 2012).

Research has shown that 4-year-olds have an understanding of their psychological selves and of their feelings and intentions. As self-understanding develops, it guides moral development and also sets the stage for self-control and self-regulation (Marsh, Craven, and Debus 1998; Marsh, Ellis, and Craven 2002). Young children who can identify emotions in themselves are more likely to have success when they transition into kindergarten (Eisenberg, Fabes, and Losoya 1997).

## **2. Self-Management**

Self-management is the ability to regulate emotions and behaviors so that goals are achieved. It also involves persevering with difficult tasks and in complex social interactions. By age 4, children can begin to self-regulate by anticipating what to do and changing their responses (Florez 2011). It requires children to remember and generalize what they have been taught, to initiate changes in their behavior, and to constantly monitor their behavior in varying situations. These foundational self-management skills are emerging during the preschool years as the brain develops (Shonkoff and Phillips 2010).

A very important job of parents, caregivers, and early childhood educators is to provide experiences to children that allow them to manage and regulate their emotions. This job continues throughout early childhood into the adolescent years. The development in self-management is visible in the difference between the impulsivity of a toddler and the deliberate behavior of a 5-year-old. The relevancy of self-management skills to school success is obvious. When early childhood educators are asked to identify areas of critical importance with regard to school success, they often name competence in cooperation and self-control as highly significant (Lane, Pierson, and Givner 2003).

## **3. Social Awareness**

Social awareness is the ability to understand what others are feeling and have the understanding to take their perspective. Theory of mind is the ability to understand how different beliefs, motivations, moods, and levels of knowledge affect our own behavior as well as the behavior of those around us. Theory of mind is a necessary component of perspective-taking. Perspective-taking refers to our ability to relate to others, empathize with them, and see things from their viewpoint. In order to do this, we must be able to perceive what their motivations are as well as appreciate their feelings and thoughts. Researchers also refer to social awareness as the development of empathy, which is the response we have when we are able to recognize and understand another's emotions. Empathy plays an important role in relationship to academic and emotional success. It has been found that children who have good perspective-taking skills are better liked by their peers (Fitzgerald and White 2003). Preschoolers progress through a period of development that helps them to understand that people's intentions, desires, feelings, thoughts, and beliefs are motivators of behavior. As their ability to identify emotions in others increases, they are able to explain the causes of emotions and their consequences in developmentally more complex ways (Denham 2006; Lagattuta and Thompson 2007). Preschoolers

who are more socially and emotionally perceptive have greater success in their relationships with peers and adults (Denham et al. 2003).

#### **4. Relationship Skills**

To be successful in school, children need to be able to form positive social relationships, work together, and deal effectively with conflict. Research suggests that when children are intentionally taught social skills, given opportunities to practice, and provided guidance in teachable moments, they develop positive peer relationships, acceptance, and friendships (Dunn and McGuire 1992). Children who learn social-emotional skills early in life are more self-confident, trusting, empathic, intellectually inquisitive, competent in using language to communicate, and capable of relating well to others (Cohen et al. 2005).

When young children are provided practical social-emotional strategies and modeling by adults, they develop the ability to initiate and join groups of peers, to cooperatively and spontaneously share with others, to communicate in ways that others understand, and to use strategies (i.e., turn-taking) to avoid conflict (Howes 1987 and 1988; Vandell, Nenide, and Van Winkle 2006). Children who enjoy positive relationships with peers experience higher levels of emotional well-being and have self-beliefs that are stronger and more adaptive than children without positive peer relationships. They also tend to be engaged in and even excel at academic tasks more than those who have peer relationship problems (Rubin, Bukowski, and Parker 2006).

#### **5. Responsible Decision-Making**

When young children learn to make positive choices about their personal and social behavior, they are making responsible decisions. Focus in the classroom and school community needs to be placed on problem-solving, reflection, perceptive thinking, self-direction, and motivation skills that will contribute to lifelong success (Adams and Hamm 1994). Research shows that students need effective problem-solving skills when making decisions about social situations (Denham and Almeida 1987). Children also need to know how to make good choices about their own behavior in the classroom and at school.

These five core social-emotional competencies are taught throughout the Kimochis® Lessons in this guide. At the top of each lesson, you will find a reference to which core competency is taught in that specific lesson. Refer to the tables in Appendix H and J to see how the lessons in the curriculum are aligned with these five core competencies.

### **DEVELOPMENT OF EMOTIONAL LITERACY**

To correctly perceive emotions in themselves and others, children need to have rich, diverse emotional language. When children have a wide range of emotional vocabulary, they are able to discriminate more easily between feelings (for example, mad as opposed to disappointed). They also can communicate with others more effectively about their internal feeling states and talk about their own personal social experiences (Feldman et al. 1993). Children who have a strong base in emotional literacy cope with frustration better, are less physically aggressive, and have fewer self-destructive behaviors than children who do not. These children are also healthier, not as lonely, have better impulse control, are more focused, and have greater academic achievement (Joseph, Strain, and Ostrosky 2005).

Children are building their vocabulary by leaps and bounds in preschool. Researchers have found that children can acquire and retain two or three words a day through instruction that is contextualized (in-the-moment) and contains clear explanations of new words (Stahl 1999). Other researchers have found that direct and explicit approaches are effective in increasing children's vocabulary (Whitehurst and Lonigan 1988). The ability to label emotions is a learned skill and develops at different rates for different children. Three important variables influence how individual children develop their emotional vocabulary: (1) the child's temperament and personality; (2) parental or caregiver support; and (3) amount of emphasis placed on building emotional literacy by early childhood educators and caregivers (Joseph, Strain, and Ostrosky 2005). Adult input can have a significant influence on how children develop their "language of feelings." When parents and adults directly teach emotional vocabulary and incidentally reinforce the vocabulary concepts throughout the social day, children will develop a rich "feeling vocabulary" to use in challenging social situations (Novick 2002).

The Kimochis® Lessons provide children, educators, and parents a common vocabulary that allows everyone to "speak the same language" about feelings and emotions. When everyone understands and uses this feeling vocabulary, social-emotional learning is consistent across all learning environments. Adults can give prompts using the vocabulary to guide children to do and say the right thing in challenging emotional situations. Peers can learn to cue each other using gentle prompts that foster mutual respect, kindness, and compassion.

Refer to the "Vocabulary" notes in each lesson as well as to the Kimochis® glossary in the Appendix for terms and language cues applicable to this curriculum. The Homelinks letters, which are handouts for parents, also define the common language used in the Kimochis® Lessons so parents can prompt and guide their children at home, reinforcing all they learn in school.

## INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN IN SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING PROGRAMS

SEL programs typically entail an instructional process that ensures that children will learn and use the skills the programs impart in everyday life decisions and contexts. A sound and widely adopted instructional design that features "fundamental and incidental" core features used in many empirically supported approaches to SEL programs, is described in Maurice Elias's contribution to the edited book *Building Academic Success on Social and Emotional Learning: What Does the Research Say?* (Elias 2004). These core features include:

**Identify a skill and state a rationale for its use in children's lives:** The Kimochis® Lessons were carefully selected based on early childhood standards and research as necessary for successful social-emotional functioning. Each lesson has a clearly stated objective that informs early childhood educators of the learning goal for the lesson.

**Model and teach components of the skill:** The Kimochis® Lessons initially demonstrate the skill through adult modeling. The Kimochis® Characters are also used to demonstrate the skill through "puppet shows."

**Provide rehearsal and feedback in a safe environment:** Students practice the skill immediately after the modeling/teaching component by using the Kimochis® Characters and enacting role-plays with other children. This creates a safe environment that provides children opportunities for rehearsal and feedback.

**Offer prompts and cues and ensure recognition/reinforcement for real-world skill application:** Each week's lessons include suggestions that early childhood educators can follow to prompt and cue children to generalize the learned skills to everyday activities. Strategies are also provided to guide early childhood educators on how to acknowledge and reinforce children when they use the new skills throughout the school day.

Each lesson in the *Kimochis® Feel Guide: Early Childhood Edition* is based on this approach to instructional design.

## CHARACTER EDUCATION PRINCIPLES

Character development is the foundation of successful social interaction. The sooner character values are learned, the more natural they become to children. Developing character is often seen as the responsibility of parents. However, this task can be shared by schools and the community.

Character education is the deliberate effort to develop values that are good for the individual and good for society. Dr. Thomas Lickona (1991) defined these values as good because they:

- Affirm our human dignity
- Serve the common good
- Promote the well-being and happiness of the individual
- Define our rights and obligations
- Answer the question: "Would you want to be treated this way?"
- Answer the question: "Would you want everyone to act this way in a similar situation?"

The Kimochis® early childhood curriculum integrates five character values or principles into the lessons. These core values reflect the Kimochis® Way. Children learn tools and strategies that help them live these values and principles daily. These character principles are directly aligned with the lesson objectives in the curriculum.

### Be Respectful

- Use considerate voice, face, and words
- Listen to others and be open-minded
- Demonstrate tolerance and acceptance of differences
- Show consideration for others' feelings
- Cooperate with others

## **Be Responsible**

- Speak up for self and others
- Know the difference between right and wrong
- Admit and own mistakes
- Be in control of words and actions
- Align words and actions
- Choose to be truthful

## **Be Resilient**

- Bounce back from disappointments and challenges
- Work through difficult emotions
- Turn adversity into something positive

## **Be Compassionate and Kind**

- Have empathy and concern for others
- Look for moments to be kind to self and others
- Be open-minded
- Forgive others
- Express gratitude

## **Be Brave**

- Do the right thing, even if it is unpopular or inconvenient
- Try new things
- Persevere with difficult tasks and actions

## **POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT THROUGH THE TEACHING PYRAMID MODEL**

Positive behavior support (PBS) is a process that focuses on children's challenging behaviors as a way to understand the purpose of the behaviors and to teach new skills to replace the challenging behaviors. Recent research has demonstrated that PBS can result in a decrease in problem behaviors (Fox 2003). The PBS process provides strategies for early childhood educators and families to help children with challenging behaviors become more successful in school, at home, and in the community. Recently, PBS has been seen as a model to be implemented schoolwide, whereby the staff work together to ensure that children understand behavioral expectations and receive instruction in social-emotional learning.

### **The Teaching Pyramid**

Lise Fox and her colleagues conceptualized a tiered framework for early childhood classrooms to support positive behavior (Fox et al. 2003). This framework, labeled the Teaching Pyramid Model (see figure page 267), provides a continuum of supports and services designed for young children to build social competence and prevent challenging behaviors. This framework has three tiers of intervention.

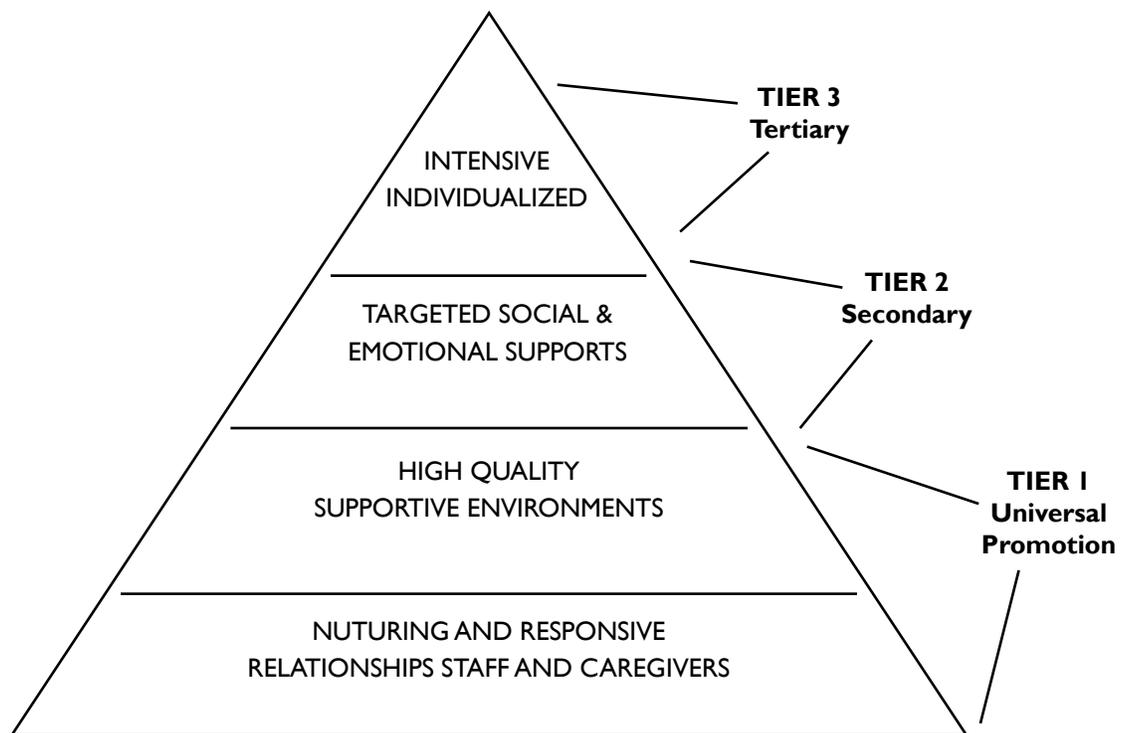
The first tier of the Teaching Pyramid Model consists of two levels of a universal classroom practice that focuses on the prevention of challenging behaviors and the development of social competence in all children. The first level focuses on developing positive relationships with children, families, and staff. Research supports the notion that responsive and nurturing relationships are essential to a child's development (National Research Council 2000). These early relationships set the foundation for future relationships. Practices such as actively engaging children, teaching within routines and play, responding

to children's verbal interactions, promoting the communication of all children, and reinforcing and encouraging attempts at learning are encouraged. The second level of the universal tier involves providing a supportive learning environment, including implementing a curriculum that promotes learning in all developmental areas, using developmentally and culturally appropriate teaching practices, providing predictability in classroom rules and routines, reinforcing clear behavioral expectations, and providing a physically safe environment. For many children, these two levels of classroom practice may be all that are needed to support average social-emotional development.

The secondary prevention tier of the Teaching Pyramid Model focuses on children who are delayed or may be at risk for developing age-appropriate social skills and emotional regulation. All preschool-aged children need some level of adult guidance and instruction to learn how to express their emotions, play with peers, and solve problems. However, some children will need more focused intervention to learn specific social-emotional skills (Denham et al. 2003; Strain and Joseph 2006). Families of these children will also need guidance to help them foster social-emotional competence at home.

The tertiary intervention tier of the Teaching Pyramid Model applies to a few young children who have patterns of persistent challenging behaviors and need an individualized, comprehensive intervention approach. Although the lower levels of the pyramid may be in place, these children need a behavioral assessment to determine the function of their challenging behaviors. They also require an individualized behavior support plan outlining specific strategies to address the triggers of each behavior, teach replacement behaviors, and provide consistent response to problem behaviors (Dunlap and Fox 2009).

## Teaching Pyramid Model<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Fox, L., Dunlap, G., Hemmeter, M.L., Joseph, G. E., and Strain, P.S. (2003). The teaching pyramid: A model for supporting social competence and preventing challenging behavior in young children. *Young Children*, 58 (4), 48.

The Kimochis® early childhood curriculum can be used as a Tier 1, universal, classroom-based program to equip children with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they need to recognize and manage their emotions, demonstrate caring and concern for others, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle challenging situations constructively.

The Kimochis® early childhood curriculum can also be used as a Tier 2, secondary prevention program. Educators can use the curriculum in small-group settings to focus on specific skills that are especially problematic for children in this population. These difficult skills could include: sharing, taking turns, handling upset feelings, cooperating and attending in a large group, and proficiency in play with others.

Finally, the Kimochis® early childhood curriculum could also be used in a Tier 3, focused intervention program for children receiving individualized attention directed at specific areas of skill-building.

## **GENDER DIFFERENCES**

Gender differences are biological, in addition to being cultural. The biological foundation for gender differences includes hormonal influences on the brain (Berger 2003). These differences begin in the fetal stage of development, when the sex hormones begin to influence brain development. This continues throughout childhood. These gender differences in the growth of the brain result in overall development that is different for each sex. For example, infant girls tend to talk earlier than boys, and their language development continues to be more advanced than that of boys throughout early childhood (Fenson et al. 1994; Leaper, Anderson, and Sanders 1998). The average preschool boy tends to be more aggressive, whereas the girls tend to be more verbal. In general, the development of boys' brains and overall nervous systems is delayed compared to that of girls (Berk 2002; Leaper, Anderson, and Sanders 1998). Brain development has an effect on the development of cognition, emotional regulation, and attention. This could influence a boy's readiness for school in areas such as attention span, activity level, and academic achievement.

It is important for early childhood educators to reflect on their own attitudes about boys and girls. Any hidden bias or preconception must be examined, as it may influence interactions with the children and how they are taught. This reflection will help teachers interact with both boys and girls with fairness and equality. It is also important to remember that many gender-related characteristics at this young age are likely to be shaped by cultural and family influences.

The Kimochis® Lessons in this guide incorporate interesting facts and information about gender differences. These provide insight to help teachers understand their students and how gender might influence their behaviors. If a child raises worrisome questions about gender in the classroom, be sure to talk to the child's parents or caregivers.

## **CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS**

When considering the social-emotional development of young children, culture must be seen as an important and dynamic influence. Children of all cultures are expected to develop basic social-emotional competence. However, a child's culture will have an effect on how this competency is taught and achieved (Rubin and Menzer 2010).

It is very important to avoid the use of stereotypes (generalizations about specific groups) to describe differences in cultures. But being aware of some cultural generalizations can help us understand what is considered acceptable and unacceptable behavior among certain people and places, helping us interact more effectively. Building one's knowledge of cultural beliefs can help avoid misunderstandings and help provide the best education for children. There will always be differences between individuals within a culture and in different situations. Teachers may have a multicultural classroom with children from many different cultures. It would be very difficult to learn the specific social values and beliefs of each. Therefore, one way to think about world cultures is as either "individualistic" or "collectivistic." Each of these worldviews can influence how early childhood educators approach the education of young children (Kruse and Neill 2006).

Western cultures (such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and Europe) tend to focus on the individual and independence. This worldview promotes individual achievement, self-expression, and personal choice. Self-esteem is typically developed by providing praise. Cognitive skills and verbal skills are highly valued. This worldview tends to generate a high level of productivity and individual freedom. However, unsuccessful social relationships and social isolation can sometimes result.

Many Hispanic and Asian cultures tend to be more collectivistic, meaning that they see themselves as members of a group who are dependent upon one another. Group consensus, cooperation, and success are encouraged. Respect for cultural norms, authority figures, and elders is promoted. Normal behavior and social skills in children tend to be developed through censure rather than praise. This worldview can foster a high level of cooperation and solidarity within a group.

As early childhood educators work with children and parents from different cultures, it is important to remember that both worldviews are essential to the development of social-emotional competence. Understanding these worldviews will help nurture children's independence, initiative, and self-esteem, in addition to group cooperation, collaboration, and development of empathy. This approach allows accommodation of all the cultures of the children in the classroom.

Throughout the Kimochis® Lessons, information on cultural influences is interspersed where relevant. If questions arise about a child's cultural values or beliefs, ask the child's parents or caregivers for clarification. They can provide the best information about how to respond to questions or concerns that might arise.

## **ALIGNMENT TO EARLY CHILDHOOD STANDARDS**

The Kimochis® early childhood curriculum is highly compatible with a range of state, federal, and professional association standards. The curriculum also aligns closely with the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework: Social and Emotional Development Domain. For further information, refer to the Kimochis® Educators Portal at [www.kimochis.com](http://www.kimochis.com).