Case Study: Leo’s Journey

# Discovering Social Connections – Leo's Journey

## Student Profile:

* Name: Leo P.
* Age: 4 years, 2 months
* Program: Full-day preschool program at Sunny Meadows Learning Center
* Primary Language: English
* Relevant Background: Leo is an only child who spent his first three years primarily at home with a caregiver. He entered the preschool program 6 months ago. His language development is within age expectations, and he shows strong curiosity and engagement with hands-on activities. However, teachers have noted consistent difficulty with social interactions and emotional regulation, particularly during unstructured play and transitions. His parents report similar struggles at home, especially when sharing toys with visiting cousins or adapting to changes in their home routine. This case study is part of a Child Find referral for initial evaluation for Special Education services.

## Observed Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Needs:

Observations from multiple preschool staff (lead teacher, assistant teacher, playground monitor) over a 4-week period reveal several consistent patterns in Leo's social-emotional functioning:

1. Challenges with Sharing and Turn-Taking:
2. Observation: Leo frequently struggles to share toys or materials with peers, often holding onto desired items tightly, pulling them away, or refusing to let go when a peer requests a turn. He rarely initiates sharing. During structured turn-taking activities (e.g., passing a ball), he may hoard the item or become distressed when it's another child's turn.
3. Impact: Leads to frequent peer conflicts, limits his participation in cooperative play, and can result in social isolation during play periods.
4. Difficulty with Emotional Regulation (Beyond Simple Frustration - Intensity/Duration):
* Observation: When Leo experiences strong emotions (frustration, anger, sadness), his reactions are often intense and prolonged. He may engage in behaviors such as crying loudly, screaming, falling to the floor, hitting/kicking out (rarely connecting, but aggressive gestures), or throwing objects. These meltdowns can last for several minutes and are difficult for adults to de-escalate without significant individual attention.
* Impact: Disrupts classroom activities, requires significant adult intervention, and can be frightening or confusing for other children.
1. Limited Use of Words to Express Needs and Feelings:
* Observation: While Leo has good receptive and expressive language for general communication, when he is distressed or wants something, he often resorts to pointing, grunting, whining, or physical actions (e.g., pushing a peer away, grabbing a toy) rather than using words to articulate his needs or feelings. He rarely says "my turn," "I'm sad," or "I want that."
* Impact: Leads to misunderstandings, increases frustration for Leo and others, and limits his ability to resolve conflicts verbally.
1. Challenges with Following Multi-Step Directions and Transitions:
* Observation: Leo often struggles to follow more than one-step directions, especially if there are distractions or he is highly engaged in an activity. Transitions between activities (e.g., from free play to circle time, from outdoors to indoors) are particularly difficult for him; he may resist moving, continue playing, or exhibit distress.
* Impact: Disrupts classroom flow, increases the need for individual adult prompts, and can make him feel disoriented or overwhelmed.

## Educational Impact:

These SEL needs significantly impact Leo's ability to:

* Participate successfully in group play and cooperative activities.
* Manage daily routines and transitions within the preschool environment.
* Develop positive peer relationships.
* Independently regulate his emotions during challenging moments.
* Access the full range of learning opportunities that require social interaction and following group directives.

## IEP Goals

Given the observed needs and their educational impact, the following are IEP goals focusing on Leo's social-emotional learning. These goals would be supported by specific services, accommodations and/or modifications, and would inform individualized instructional design as needed.

Identify measurements that could be used for monitoring this goal and connect the goal to SEL standards from the resources provided.

**Goal 1: Sharing and Turn-Taking**

* Need Addressed: Challenges with sharing and turn-taking.
* Goal: By the end of the IEP period, Leo will share a preferred toy or material with a peer or take turns during a peer-directed activity (e.g., board game, passing a ball) with adult prompting, in 3 out of 5 observed opportunities, as measured by teacher observation.
* Measurement:
* SEL Standard:

**Goal 2: Emotional Regulation & Coping**

* Need Addressed: Difficulty with intense and prolonged emotional regulation.
* Goal: By the end of the IEP period, when experiencing strong emotions (e.g., frustration, anger), Leo will use a pre-taught calming strategy (e.g., deep breath, asking for a break, going to a quiet corner) with no more than one adult prompt, resulting in de-escalation of the outburst within 2 minutes, in 75% of observed opportunities, as measured by teacher anecdotal records and behavior logs.
* Measurement:
* SEL Standard:

**Goal 3: Expressing Needs and Feelings Verbally**

* Need Addressed: Limited use of words to express needs and feelings.
* Goal: By the end of the IEP period, when expressing a desire for an item or a feeling of frustration/sadness, Leo will use at least 2-3 words (e.g., "my turn, please," "I'm mad," "I want blue one") to articulate his need/feeling to a peer or adult, with no more than one adult prompt, in 4 out of 5 observed opportunities, as measured by teacher observation and communication logs.
* Measurement:
* SEL Standard:

**Goal 4: Following Directions & Transitions**

* Need Addressed: Challenges with following multi-step directions and transitions.
* Goal: By the end of the IEP period, Leo will successfully follow 2-step verbal directions (e.g., "Put the blocks away and come to circle time") with a visual cue (e.g., picture schedule, gesture) and no more than one verbal prompt, in 4 out of 5 observed transitions or activity changes, as measured by teacher observation.
* Measurement:
* SEL Standard: