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Supporting self-regulation
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For more great resources on this topic, and to watch the Circle Time Magazine professional development talk show series, check us out at: http://cultivatelearning.uw.edu/circle-time-magazine/
RELATIONSHIPS ARE KEY
HIGHLIGHTS AND KEY IDEAS
ACROSS ALL AGES

Nurturing and responsive relationships with adults are the foundation for children’s social and emotional development. Children who develop trusting relationships with adults are better able to manage their thoughts, feelings, and actions. They build strong social skills, gain self-confidence, and are less likely to engage in challenging behavior.

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS AND TRUST
Responsive and nurturing adult-child interactions during daily activities and routines strengthen relationships. When children have positive relationships with adults, they develop a sense of security, feelings of attachment, and can engage more fully in exploring their environment.

RESPOND TO CHILDREN’S CUES
Behavior always communicates a message. When educators are close by and observe young children’s behaviors and nonverbal cues, they learn to understand what children are trying to communicate and respond before challenging behaviors occur.

SUPPORT SELF-REGULATION
Self-regulation is the ability to manage emotions, thoughts, and behavior. Consistent, responsive caregiving creates a safe and reassuring environment that supports children’s efforts to self-regulate. Educators who provide comfort and emotional guidance increase children’s ability to manage their own emotions (emotional self-regulation) and their attention to a task (cognitive self-regulation).
PBS TEACHING PRACTICES

A Continuum of Support

The Pyramid Model is an established PBS framework for addressing the social and emotional development and challenging behavior of young children. The framework offers a continuum of evidence-based teaching practices that are organized into four levels of support.

The first level of the foundation focuses on establishing nurturing and responsive caregiving relationships with all children.

Positive Behavior Support (PBS) is a positive approach to challenging behavior that focuses on building social and emotional skills. PBS recognizes that all behavior communicates a message or need. Once educators understand the meaning of a child’s behavior they can, together with the family, teach the child more effective ways to communicate their needs.

Responsive Relationships:

Nurturing and responsive relationships are key to supporting children’s healthy social and emotional development. Children who know that they can depend on trusted and caring adults are less likely to engage in challenging behavior and more likely to explore and learn with confidence. Enjoy children and their families. Spend time with them, listen to them, have fun and laugh with them.

INFANTS  EARLY ON

Children who are at an early stage of social and emotional development are ready to learn how to:

• Interact in predictable ways with familiar adults.
• Try to calm themselves with the support of familiar adults.
• Look for the caregiver’s response in uncertain situations.
• Express and respond to a variety of emotions.

TODDLERS  EMERGING SKILLS

Children who are at an emerging stage of social and emotional development are ready to learn how to:

• Show emotional connection and attachment to familiar adults.
• Look to others for help in coping with strong feelings and emotions.
• Stop an activity or avoid doing something if directed.
• Sometimes remember and cooperate in daily routines.

PRESCHOOLERS  INCREASING MASTERY

Children who are increasing their mastery of social and emotional development are ready to learn how to:

• Interact readily with trusted adults.
• Appropriately manage actions, words, and behaviors with increasing independence and consistency.
• Remember and frequently cooperate in daily routines.
• Behave differently in different settings.

For more guidance on building relationships and supporting self-regulation in the early stages of development, refer to the following resources:

INFANTS EARLY ON

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Build Relationships
Strong relationships with infants are established by consistently showing them warmth and respect, responding to their needs, and engaging with them throughout daily activities and routines.

Teaching Practices
✓ Use a warm voice and give lots of eye contact, smiles, laughter, and enthusiasm.
✓ Offer affection through kind words, encouragement, and touch.
✓ Show respect by communicating intentions before actions. For example: “Alejandro, I’m going to pick you up to give you a fresh diaper.”

Read Behavior Cues
Young children, especially infants, use their bodies in many ways to communicate. Adults who watch infants closely for verbal and nonverbal cues—sounds, facial expressions, gaze, and movements—can interpret their meaning and respond to the infant’s needs. When educators respond consistently to children’s cues infants learn that their needs will be met.

Teaching Practices
✓ Stay near infants to notice their cues. Interpret or make guesses about what they are trying to communicate.
✓ Respond to infants’ cues as soon as possible, and offer comfort in times of distress.
✓ Model new language by describing what you think the infant is trying to communicate.
✓ Adjust what you are doing to effectively address the infant’s need.

Support Co-Regulation
Early on, infants are not able to manage their own emotions and needs. They depend on adults to help them regulate by taking care of their needs and offering comfort. Over time, this helps infants learn they can tolerate initial feelings of distress when hungry, tired, or frustrated and begin to learn ways to soothe themselves.

Teaching Practices
✓ Adjust levels of stimulation (e.g., noise, lighting, approach) to match the infant’s needs.
✓ Engage in songs, movement, and activities that are calming.
✓ Observe and encourage infant’s self-soothing attempts such as cooing, babbling, clutching, sucking, or snuggling with a comfort item.

Putting these strategies into practice helps infants learn to:
- Interact in predictable ways with familiar adults.
- Try to calm self with support of familiar adults.
- Look for caregiver’s response in uncertain situations.
- Express and respond to a variety of emotions.
TRY IT OUT

Try out these materials and activities to promote trusting relationships with infants.

**BOOKS**

Sharing stories and books with children can be a special time to strengthen relationships. Pull these books out for a cuddle or to share in a back-and-forth interaction.

**Owl Babies**

By Martin Waddell

In this story, three baby owls wake up one night to find their mother gone. They share their feelings and learn to trust that their mother will return.

Explore the book together. Talk about the relationships in the story between the owl siblings and their mother. Add words to the feelings that the owls are experiencing and reassurance that the owls' needs will be met.

**CONNECTION TRACKER**

Notice and offer the amount of care and support that each child needs in order to feel safe and secure. Create a system for tracking how you are connecting with each child in your care. This can be a simple tracking sheet or a piggy bank like container that you can fill with a deposit each time you connect with a child. Check out our Positive Attention Tracking Form and Fostering Connections: Teacher Tips handout for ways to connect with children on the the Cultivate Learning: Circle Time Magazine, Season 2 web page.

**PHOTO ALBUM**

Invite families to bring in family photos. Take pictures of children and family members in your program as they interact and play. Cuddle and look at the photos together. Make comments about the pictures children are interested in. Focus on pictures of each child’s own family, especially when they need comforting.

**SOOTHING MUSIC**

Music communicates emotions and strengthens relationships. Listen to the songs together to create a soothing environment and help children self-regulate. Hold and cuddle infants, sing softly and gently rock or move to the music.
TALK ABOUT IT

Meaningful back-and-forth conversations create positive interactions and build strong relationships between adults and children. Make comments, ask open-ended questions, and use novel words as you interact with infants during daily caregiving activities.

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<thead>
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<td>I love snuggling with you. Look at that beautiful smile!</td>
<td>So good to see you. How are you feeling today?</td>
<td>Cuddle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You are rubbing your eyes. It looks like you’re telling me you’re sleepy.</td>
<td>What are you trying to tell me with those fists?</td>
<td>Hug</td>
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<tr>
<td>Let’s get your favorite blanket, you seem sad right now.</td>
<td>What can I do to help you calm down?</td>
<td>More</td>
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PARTNER WITH FAMILIES

Families have the greatest impact on their child’s emotional well-being and development. Build solid, trusting, and reciprocal relationships with families. Talk with families to learn more about their child and work together to support their child’s learning. Be sure to validate each family’s perspective, though it may be different from your own.

- Talk with families to identify ways to blend family preferences into your daily caregiving practices.
- Ask families to share examples of successful ways that they respond to their infants’ cues.
- Encourage families to practice self-care: nutrition, sleep, exercise, positive self-talk, and supportive adult relationships. Explain how taking care of themselves helps them take better care of their infant.
TODDLERS EMERGING SKILLS

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Build Relationships
For toddlers, relationships continue to develop through consistent and responsive interactions in the context of daily activities and routines. They look to the adults in their world to support them in challenging times, new experiences, and in their interactions with others.

Teaching Practices
✓ Be a secure base that young children can explore and come back to for safety and comfort.
✓ Share affection and use words that communicate respect (e.g., please, thank you, hugs).
✓ Join in and participate in the child’s play with smiles and encouragement.
✓ Show interest in children’s experiences and ideas through parallel-talk, back-and-forth interactions, and conversations.

Understand Children’s Behavior
Toddlers use gestures and simple words to communicate their needs and emotions, but not always in ways that adults can understand. Adults may still need to make a good guess and help toddlers communicate with words or behaviors that will help them get their needs met more successfully.

Teaching Practices
✓ Acknowledge and accept the child’s emotions.
✓ Model language for the children to express themselves.
✓ Match the child’s level of energy, volume, and emotional expression.
✓ Adjust plans to follow children’s needs for movement, talking, and autonomy.

Support Co-Regulation
Predictable and consistent responses are critical in helping children learn to regulate emotions and behavior. Toddlers are still learning to connect emotions with behavior. Adults need to allow enough time for toddlers to understand how their emotions may influence their actions.

Teaching Practices
✓ Stay close and attentive to provide comfort and reassurance to all children, as needed.
✓ Notice and comment on children’s efforts to manage their behavior.
✓ Use language to describe conflicts and help children connect emotions to actions.
✓ Help children find solutions to a concern.

Putting these strategies into practice helps toddlers learn to:
- Show emotional connection and attachment to familiar adults.
- Stop an activity or avoid doing something if directed.
- Look to others for help in coping with strong feelings and emotions.
- Sometimes remember and cooperate in daily routines.
TRY IT OUT

Try out these materials and activities to promote trusting relationships with toddlers. Be creative and explore all the ways you can help them learn to manage their emotions and behavior more independently.

BOOKS

Sharing stories and books with children strengthens relationships. Build storybook reading into your regular daily routines.

Owl Babies

By Martin Waddell

In this story, three baby owls wake up one night to find their mother gone. They share their feelings and learn to trust that their mother will return.

Ask children to make comments about the pictures. Expand on what they show interest in. Talk about the baby owls’ feelings. Make connections between the mother owl returning to the nest and the child’s own parent returning to take the child home. Promote language by rewording the child’s comments into complete sentences or using varied vocabulary.

PHOTO ALBUM

Invite families to bring in family photos. Take pictures of children in your program and add photos of yourself and loved ones. Look at the photos together and have the photo books accessible other times of the day. Make comments about the pictures children are interested in. Focus on pictures of each child’s own family, especially when a child seems sad or distressed, as a way to provide comfort and familiarity.

SOOTHING MUSIC

Music communicates emotions and strengthens relationships. Play and sing soothing songs to create a calming environment and help toddlers regulate their behaviors. Try to incorporate music that reflects the different languages and cultures of the children in your care. Dance, sing, cuddle, and listen to songs together.

CONNECTION TRACKER

Notice and offer the amount of care and support that each child needs in order to feel safe and secure. Create a system for tracking how you are connecting with each child in your care. This can be a simple tracking sheet or a piggy bank like container that you can fill with a deposit each time you connect with a child. Check out our Positive Attention Tracking Form and Fostering Connections: Teacher Tips handout for ways to connect with children on the Cultivate Learning: Circle Time Magazine, Season 2 web page.
### TALK ABOUT IT

Meaningful back-and-forth conversations create positive interactions and build strong relationships between adults and children. Make comments, ask open-ended questions, and use novel words as you interact with toddlers during everyday activities and routines.

### COMMENTS

- I notice you alone over there Jeevin, I'm coming to visit you.
- I see you are hungry. You can say, “food please!”
- I know it’s hard to wait. You can take some deep breaths and look at a book until it’s your turn.

### OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

- We missed you yesterday. Why didn’t we see you?
- What should we play?
- How are you feeling?
- I wonder what else we can try?

### NOVEL WORDS

- Enjoy
- Together
- Kind
- Share
- Thank you
- Miss
- Want
- Need
- Help
- More
- Hug
- Hold
- Pick up
- Put down
- Hurt
- Yes
- No
- Problem
- Want
- Family names
- Sad
- Happy
- Lonely

### PARTNER WITH FAMILIES

Families have the greatest impact on their child’s emotional well-being and development. Build solid, trusting, and reciprocal relationships with families. Talk with families to learn more about their child and work together to support their child’s learning. Be sure to validate each family’s perspective, though it may be different from your own.

- Talk with families to identify ways to blend family preferences into your daily activities and routines.
- Invite families to set aside a time each day to relax and engage in playful interactions with their child.
- Ask families to describe how they respond when their toddler expresses frustration.
- Encourage families to practice self-care: nutrition, sleep, exercise, positive self-talk, and supportive adult relationships. Explain how taking care of themselves helps them take better care of their toddler.
Preschoolers who have established strong relationships with adults are able to deal with more complex emotions and relationships. They become more independent in managing emotions, directing and sustaining their attention, and learning how to behave with peers and adults in different social settings.

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Build Relationships
Educators and preschoolers continue to create and maintain positive connections. Consistent and predictable responses support a strong educator-child relationship.

Preschoolers who have established strong relationships with adults are able to deal with more complex emotions and relationships. They become more independent in managing emotions, directing and sustaining their attention, and learning how to behave with peers and adults in different social settings.

Teaching Practices
✓ Model positive and respectful words and body language.
✓ Have personal social conversations with each child to let them know that you care.
✓ Plan activities based on the children’s interests.
✓ Play with children and celebrate their successes.

Understand Children’s Behavior
Preschoolers are still learning how to appropriately communicate their emotions and needs. By understanding the underlying messages children are trying to communicate with their behavior, adults can help children express their thoughts and feelings.

Teaching Practices
✓ Acknowledge children’s feelings positively.
✓ Describe what you think they are trying to say.
✓ Reassure the child you are there to help.
✓ Ask questions and provide language to help children express themselves.

Support Self-Regulation
Preschoolers are increasingly able to use coping strategies to control their impulses, follow rules, and sustain their attention to tasks. Educators can offer support and guidance, especially when children need help managing more intense emotions and dealing with more challenging tasks.

Teaching Practices
✓ Watch for moments of concern and move closer to the child when needed.
✓ Offer encouragement to help children persist in completing a task or finding a solution.
✓ Provide choices to deal with a challenging situation.
✓ Ensure that expectations for behavior are consistent and predictable.

Putting these strategies into practice helps infants learn to:

- Interact readily with trusted adults.
- Manage actions, words, and behaviors with increasing independence.
- Remember and cooperate in daily routines.
- Adapt behavior to different settings.
TRY IT OUT

Try out these materials and activities to promote trusting relationships with preschoolers. Be creative and explore all the ways you can help them learn to manage their emotions and behavior with independence.

**BOOKS**

Sharing stories and books with children strengthens relationships. Build storybook reading into your regular daily routines. With preschoolers, have rich conversations with multiple back-and-forth exchanges.

**Owl Babies**

By Martin Waddell

In this story, three baby owls wake up one night to find their mother gone. They share their feelings and learn to trust that their mother will return.

Invite older children to expand on the story by relating their own experiences. For example, share stories with positive outcomes of situations where you or the child felt worried or anxious. Reword and model new language to help them communicate more successfully.

**PHOTO ALBUM**

Invite families to bring in family photos. Take pictures of children in your program and add photos of yourself and loved ones. Find a quiet, comfortable area and look at the photos together. Make comments about the pictures children are interested in. Ask questions and encourage children to share personal stories about themselves and their family. Share stories about yourself. Write out some of the stories the children tell and share them with their families.
SOOTHING MUSIC

Music builds connections between people in a special way. Use the songs to create a soothing environment and help children regulate their behaviors. Listen, dance, and sing together to strengthen connections with children. Try to incorporate music that reflects the different languages and cultures of the children in your care. Ask children to sing or share some of the songs they hear at home.

CONNECTION TRACKER

Notice and offer the amount of care and support that each child needs in order to feel safe and secure. Create a system for tracking how you are connecting with each child in your care. This can be a simple tracking sheet or a piggy bank like container that you can fill with a deposit each time you connect with a child. Check out our Positive Attention Tracking Form and Fostering Connections: Teacher Tips handout for ways to connect with children on the Cultivate Learning: Circle Time Magazine, Season 2 web page.
TALK ABOUT IT

Meaningful back-and-forth conversations create positive interactions and build strong relationships between adults and children. Make comments, ask open-ended questions, and use novel words as you engage in conversations with preschoolers throughout the day.

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<tr>
<td>You like hugs, don’t you? I really like hugging you.</td>
<td>I’d like to know how you’re doing. What did you do this morning?</td>
<td>Comfort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You stayed so calm during that problem. You can say “I’m proud of myself!”</td>
<td>Why are your eyes so bright and happy right now?</td>
<td>Caring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I see you are finding the picture of your mom. You are thinking of ways to feel better until she returns.</td>
<td>Your head is hanging. How can I help you?</td>
<td>Thoughtful</td>
</tr>
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PARTNER WITH FAMILIES

Families have the greatest impact on their child’s emotional well-being and development. Build solid, trusting, and reciprocal relationships with families. Talk with families to learn more about their child and work together to support their child’s learning. Be sure to validate each family’s perspective, though it may be different from your own.

- Exchange information with families about their child’s preferences and interests at home and what you observe in the early learning environment.
- Invite families to set aside a time each day to relax and engage in playful interactions with their child.
- Learn about ways the family fosters connections and encourages positive behaviors with their child at home.
EXPRESSION GRATITUDE

Expressing gratitude is one approach to building resilience. Below are some ways to practice a sense of wonder, thankfulness, and appreciation for the small and big things in life.

• Write thank you notes to someone who has made a positive difference in your life.
• Keep a journal and write down things you are grateful for.
• Take deep thank you breaths and think about what you are grateful for. As you exhale, express thanks.

Caring for and educating young children is physically and emotionally demanding work. By taking time to learn resiliency practices and care for yourself, you can increase feelings of happiness and satisfaction. These positive emotions improve your ability to face daily stressors, such as challenging behaviors, with empathy, patience, and intention. The good news is that you can start learning resilience at any time; it develops with practice.

IDEAS TO TRY

Set a personal goal or note the strategies you are excited to try.

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HOW DID IT WORK?

Jot down what worked well and how you felt about trying it. Is there something you’d like to do differently? Note that, too!

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IT’S ALL ABOUT YOU

BUILDING RESILIENCE