

Relationships are central to child development during the first years of life. Moreover, not only do relationships set the tone for early development, but they are found to impact children's growth, learning, achievement, and relationships throughout the lifespan. Reciprocal interactions, sometimes referred to as "serve and return", create space for children to learn how they affect others while also learning how others affect them. When a caregiving adult consistently responds to a child's emotions and behaviors with love, empathy, and safety, children come to see the caregiver as a secure base who they can experience love and comfort with. As they continue developing in the context of a stable and positive relationship, children's sense of trust, autonomy, and initiative is encouraged. They can feel safe and able to explore themselves, others, and their environments with a belief that they can handle failure and stress and seek the help of the caregiver as needed. In the short- and long-term, such relationships promote children's identity development, healthy peer relationships, academic and professional achievement, and life satisfaction.¹² In this month's newsletter, we will be encouraged to reflect on ways we show up in relationships as we learn specific skills and tips that help foster positive caregiver-child relationships.



¹ McLeod, S. (2018). Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development. *Simply Psychology*.
*****.simplypsychology.org/Erik-Erikson.html

²U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child Care Administration for Children and Families. (2010). *Relationships: The heart of development and learning*. National Infant & Toddler Child Care Initiative.
*****.zerotothree.org/resources/73-relationships-the-heart-of-development-and-learning

Praise. Reflect. Imitate. Describe. Enthusiastic.

PRIDE is an acronym derived from parent child interactional therapy. It is a set of five communication skills that promote child directed interactions during play. The goals of these skills are to increase positive relationships between caregivers and children and to connect with children on a deeper level. Each of these five skills can be used simultaneously in different settings and at different times of the day, however it was originally intended to be used during play time. While using these skills, keep in mind that unless you need to set a safety limit or maintain a boundary, try to avoid questions, commands, and criticisms. Questions and commands put you as dominant and undermines the child leading the play.³

Praise

It is important to praise a child's good behavior in specific ways. This can help increase good behavior and lets the child know what you like! Praising increases children's self-esteem, making you and your child feel good.

Reflect

Reflect appropriate talk. This lets the child lead the conversation while showing them that you are listening. It shows that you accept and understand the child, improves speech, and increases the amount of talking you do with your child. An example of this in play might be: Child, "The doggy has a black nose." Caregiver: "The dog's nose is black."

Imitate

Imitate appropriate play. By imitating appropriate play, it allows the child lead. In addition, it shows them you approve of the activity and that you are involved. This teaches children how to play with others and take turns. For example, child: "I put a nose on the Potato Head." Caregiver: "I'm putting a nose on Mr. Potato Head too."

Describe

Describe appropriate behavior. Again, this allows for the child to lead the play and continues to show them you are present and interested. It also teaches children concepts or ideas, models speech for them and holds your child's attention on the task. This can often look like narrating the play. For example, if the child is building a tower the caregiver might say, "you are building a tall red tower, it is really high."

Enthusiastic

Be enthusiastic! Being genuinely enthusiastic lets the child know you are enjoying the time you spend together. This innately increases the warmth of the play and reinforces a positive relationship with the child. A simple "I love playing with you" goes a long way!

³ Galbraith, Patricia, LCSW, Taryn Nicksic-Springer M.Ed. & Stephanie O'Brien M.S. *Building Blocks of Behavior*. (2008). Retrieved from:

*****static1.1.sqspcdn.com/static/f/1057879/14796377/1319510543780/PRIDE+handout.pdf?token=dSvmxNkvOUYwU%2FWGww0ljhdkiTI%3D



Tips for Supporting Caregiver-Child Attachment and Relationships⁴

When children have healthy attachments to caregivers, it creates trust and safety, knowing that their needs will be met and that they are cared for. A sense of safety and trust then allows for children to further explore, learn and grow within their environment. Below are some ideas for connecting with the children in your classroom and strengthening caregiver-child relationships.

1. **Use open-ended questions to learn more about children's thoughts and experiences.** Try to connect with every child every day. "Stephanie, what is it like having a new baby brother?"
2. **Get down on the children's level and engage in play to learn more about their interests.** "Ashton, I'm going to sit with you at the table for a few minutes. I see you are feeding your farm animals. What do they like to eat?"
3. **Acknowledge and narrate a child's strengths within small group time.** "Cleo, I notice you chose to start your pipe cleaners by their length and told Max about some being short and some being long. You used the words we discussed in large group today."
4. **Check in with children throughout the day and let them know you are paying attention.** "Troy, you let me know you wanted to play on the computer. Kayla looks like she is finished."
5. **Walk together through a transition until they are able to do it on their own.** "Remember Kadija, first we wash our hands and then we get our snack. Let's go over to the sink together."
6. **Follow children's lead during conversations.** "Javier, what would you like to chat about today?" "Gia, can you tell me what books you like to read at home?"
7. **If children are open to touch, use it to relay children's success or offer encouragement.** For example, pat a child gently on the back to thank him for helping another child or hug a child who completes part of the routine.
8. **Model the use of kind respectful communication as you engage in play with children.** "Kendra, I liked it when you shared your doll with me. That made me feel special."

⁴ Cairone B., Karen. Mackrain, Mary. *Promoting Resilience in Preschoolers: A Strategy Guide for Early Childhood Professionals Second Edition.* Devereux Center for Resilient Children. (2012).

Reflection Questions

“No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship.” – James Comer

Reflecting on the relationships in our classrooms provides valuable insight. When we take the time to observe and reflect about our relationships with students, we gain information about the children in our care and how we relate to them. How we respond assists in building strong healthy relationships. “The goal is to increase capacity and flexibility within ourselves, and our students.” We model that in how we foster relationships in our classrooms.

As you observe your classroom, consider the following reflection questions with a non-judgmental lens.

- How do I feel in the room? Can I identify a feeling or sensation happening within me?
- What do I see? What do I hear? What do I notice? And what do I want to do?
- What areas of the classroom am I drawn toward? What areas of the classroom do I resist engagement? Blocks, dramatic play, literacy, sensory, art, etc.
- How do I connect with myself first, then connect with other students?
- What relationships am I drawn toward? What relationships do I retreat from?
- What children do I easily connect to and why? And what children do I struggle to connect to and why?”
- What strategies do I have to build relationships with students? Play? Read? Sing? Laugh?
- What ways of connecting do I resist? Play? Read? Sing? Listening?
- How do I let children know verbally and non-verbally that I see them, hear them, value them, and understand them?
- What ways do you notice other teachers building relationships? Observe other teachers and see what you notice.

**Excerpts of reflective questions taken from staff meeting focused on social emotion curriculum by Stacey Bromberg, PhD, Licensed Clinical Psychologist, and Stacy Nolan, PsyD, Paddington Station Preschool, November 7, 2016.*

FOR ADDITIONAL SUPPORT:

Contact our warm line at,
(303) 245-4418, to talk directly
to an Early Childhood Mental
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