

**Relationships Matter:
Reach Children with Challenging
Behaviors and Build Their Prosocial Skills**

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***Wingspan's Mission: Building
Children's Skills for Life***

- ❖ Foster resilience in young children
- ❖ Practical, evidence-based programs and approaches for early childhood
- ❖ Equip adults to nurture children's positive development



Goals

- ❖ Understand the importance of relationships for positive child development
- ❖ Acquire approaches and strategies that promote positive relationships and reduce challenging behavior
- ❖ Learn practices that foster children's positive behavioral and social-emotional skills



Toxic Stress and Children

- ❖ A disruption in brain architecture and other developing organ systems that occur when a child is exposed to strong, frequent or prolonged adversity
- ❖ Younger brains have greater plasticity so are more affected by experiences in early life



Relationships Matter!

- ❖ Because responsive relationships are both expected and essential, their absence is a serious threat to a child's development and well-being.



You Make a Difference!

- ❖ Research also indicates that supportive, responsive relationships with caring adults as early in life as possible can *prevent* or *reverse* the damaging effects of toxic stress response.



Positive Adult/Child Relationships Tell Children:

- ❖ I care about you.
- ❖ I am interested in you.
- ❖ I accept you.
- ❖ I will keep you safe.
- ❖ I know you have competencies.
- ❖ I can read your signals and will respond to them.



adapted from "Student-Teacher Relationships" by Bridget Hamre & Robert C. Planta

Children Who Have Positive Relationships with Teachers...

- ❖ Know more letters, have higher math scores, demonstrate advanced language skills
- ❖ Take advantage of learning opportunities
- ❖ Make friends
- ❖ Have less challenging behavior
- ❖ Enjoy school
- ❖ Benefit from early positive relationships well after moving on



NAEYC 2006, 13

Children Need Adults Who...

- ❖ Listen
- ❖ Validate feelings and experiences
- ❖ Facilitate brainstorming
- ❖ Communicate clear norms
- ❖ Respond to sensitive issues
- ❖ Role model
- ❖ Guide problem-solving



20,000 Chances a Day

Each moment that a child and adult interact is an opportunity to develop a positive relationship.



The Bucket and the Dipper

- ❖ We all have buckets that need to be filled
- ❖ When we are negative towards others, we dip from their bucket
- ❖ When we treat others in a positive manner, we fill their buckets – *and* ours



How Full is Your Bucket, Donald O. Clifton and Tom Rath

Strategies to Handle Personal Triggers

- ❖ Manage your own feelings
- ❖ Remain calm and caring
- ❖ Role model respectful communication
- ❖ Guide problem-solving
- ❖ Attend to present, not past behavior
- ❖ Be proactive



Show Delight – Keep the Joy!

- ❖ Make a fuss over each child when they come into the classroom – be happy to see them (especially that one)!
- ❖ Sing with the children often – sing loud! Make up songs or rhymes with the children about friendship, feelings, or solving problems
- ❖ Shake it up! Have a celebration for no reason, take an unexpected outside time, show up in a costume, tell some jokes.



A Wink, a Pat, an Extra Chat...

- | | |
|---------------|---------------------------------------|
| ❖ Wink | ❖ “Thank you” |
| ❖ Pat | ❖ “Atta boy/girl” |
| ❖ Extra chat | ❖ Compliment |
| ❖ Eye contact | ❖ Include them |
| ❖ Hug | ❖ Call on them |
| ❖ Squeeze | ❖ Ask for their help |
| ❖ Smile | ❖ Tap for leadership |
| ❖ Silly face | ❖ Talk about them positively to group |
| ❖ High-five | ❖ Thumbs up |
| ❖ Handshake | |



Connecting with Children

- ❖ Tell them what they are doing right
- ❖ Find out a child’s favorite book and read it to the group
- ❖ Follow up – ask about the soccer game she was excited about over the weekend
- ❖ Find out what a child loves and talk together about it
- ❖ Make “All About Me” books and take turns sharing them
- ❖ Share information about yourself



Finish the Sentence

- ❖ If a child doesn't know how to read, we teach.
- ❖ If a child doesn't know how to tie, we teach.
- ❖ If a child doesn't know how to swim, we teach.
- ❖ If a child doesn't know how to add, we teach.
- ❖ If a child doesn't know how to behave, we...



Adapted from Tom Herner (NASDE President) Counterpoint 1998, p.2

Magic 8 Classroom Practices

- ❖ Reduce time spent in transition
- ❖ Improve level of instruction
- ❖ Create a positive climate
- ❖ Increase time teacher listen to children
- ❖ Plan sequential activities
- ❖ Promote cooperative interactions between children
- ❖ Foster high levels of child involvement
- ❖ Provide math opportunities





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Skills Children Need to Make It

- ❖ Express feelings appropriately
- ❖ Make and keep friends
- ❖ Use self-control
- ❖ Accept differences
- ❖ Solve problems peacefully
- ❖ Make safe and healthy choices
- ❖ Cope



What Helps Children use Feeling Words?

- ❖ Visible reminders – pictures, books, mirrors
- ❖ Learning a variety of words in a variety of ways Games like Feelings, Charades, Make that Face
- ❖ Role Model (try for once a day)
- ❖ Adults who ask about, listen, and validate



The Value of Listening

Listen earnestly to anything children want to tell you, no matter how trivial it may seem.

If you don't listen eagerly to the little stuff, they won't tell you the big stuff

...because to them, it has always been big stuff.



Adapted from Catherine M. Wallace

Validate Feelings

- ❖ **Stop what you are doing. Look at the child.**
- ❖ **Respond to the feeling. Show empathy.**
 - “I see how sad you are that your friend moved away. I miss my friends, too, when they move away.”
- ❖ **Pause for a moment – let the validation soak in.**
- ❖ **Don't always have to fix it or solve it.**



Managing Strong Feelings

- ❖ **Help children prepare for disappointment**
 - Anticipate and talk ahead of time
 - Only 1 fish feeder. How will you feel if it's not you?
 - What will you do?
- ❖ **Respond to sensitive issues and help children cope.**



Self-Regulation

- ❖ **Teach and model how to:**
 - Calm Down
 - A Quiet Place
 - Stop and Think
- ❖ **Give clear expectations and reinforce prosocial behavior – use kind words, include others, take turns**



A Quiet Place

- ❖ Simple – stuffed animal and pillow
- ❖ Not time out
- ❖ Children choose to go
- ❖ Reminders and modeling



Teaching Stop and Think

- ❖ Use a stop sign – or your hand – Stop! Think!
- ❖ Red Light – Green Light
 - Different Colors
 - Different Shapes
- ❖ Freeze Game
 - Cooperate Freeze Game
- ❖ Reverse Simon Says
- ❖ Mother May I?



The Importance of Friendship

- ❖ Studies show that if child has no friends, at risk for depression during adolescence
- ❖ One friend made a difference – also reduces risk for bullying



Friendship Building

- ❖ Read stories about friends
- ❖ Recognize good friendship acts
- ❖ Pair children differently
- ❖ 1 puzzle or book, 2 children
- ❖ Friendship paintings
- ❖ Buddy table
- ❖ Sing about it!



Problem-Solving Steps

1. Stop. Think about the problem.
2. Say how you feel.
3. Brainstorm ideas.
4. Try the best one.
5. What happened?



In Summary...

- ❖ Teach, talk about, model feelings
- ❖ Remember 20,000 moments, 5:1, bucket
- ❖ Listen and validate
- ❖ Help children manage their feelings
- ❖ Foster self-control
- ❖ Wink, pat, chat
- ❖ Show delight



Blog Topics on AcornDreams

- ❖ Being Truly Present with Children
- ❖ Preparing for Kindergarten
- ❖ The Importance of Play
- ❖ Teaching the Gift of Giving
- ❖ How to Praise Effectively
- ❖ Cultivating Kindness and Preventing Bullying





Thank You

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