



Infant-Toddler Specialist Network (ITSN)



Proactive Strategies to Support Classroom Routines and Schedules: Understanding Relationships, Interaction Techniques, and Teaching Strategies

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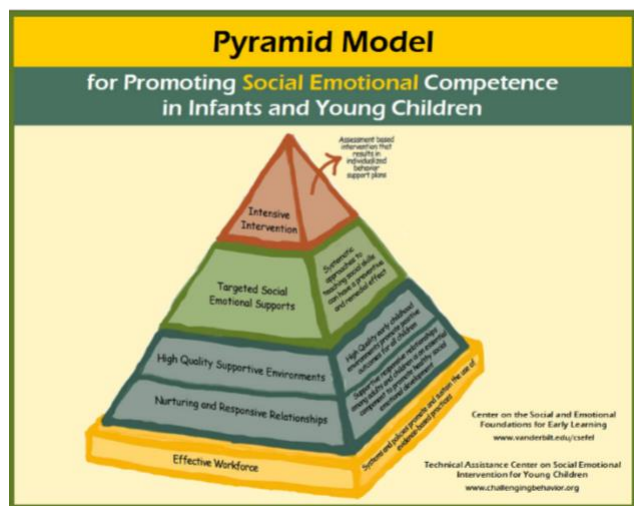


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UNDERSTANDING RELATIONSHIPS, INTERACTION TECHNIQUES, AND TEACHING STRATEGIES

REFLECTION: Take a moment to think back on your childhood and about a positive relationship you had with an adult. It could be a teacher, a coach, a relative, etc. What do you remember most about that person? How did you feel when you were with that person? What things (actions, traits, strategies, etc.) did they utilize to build and maintain that relationship with you?

In addition to understanding developmental milestones and brain development, professionals must recognize and value the importance of relationships, interactions techniques, and teaching strategies when working with young children. When viewing the Pyramid Model, developed by the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL), one sees that nurturing and supportive relationships form the foundation for building strong social-emotional competencies in young children. Children rely on positive adult and peer relationships to guide positive social interactions throughout their lifetime. The development of



positive, stable, committed relationships with adults who provide consistent, nurturing care helps children to: understand they are important and can count on others, develop a positive sense of self, and gradually acquire an understanding of theirs and others emotions, leading to the development of positive social skills.

Below, you will discover specific interaction techniques and teaching strategies that will aid you in building positive adult-child and peer-peer relationships in your classroom.

Stay calm AND Approach the Situation with Positive Intent

You are the only person in control of your emotions. No other person can make you feel sad, happy, angry, etc. If you meet big emotions like anger and upset in kind, the end result is often more anger and upset. However, when you meet big emotions with calm, empathy, and understanding, the end result is problem solving, self-discipline, emotional regulation, and relationship building. We are feeling creatures and think, not thinking creatures that feel. 80% of what we communicate is done through body language. If your body shows that you are angry or upset, others will read that, make assumptions, and act based upon those assumptions. A child with an activated stress response does not hear words, they look to body language, posture, and tone of voice to gather information. When a child is exhibiting big emotions, model calm for them by taking a deep breath, counting to 10, smiling, and projecting calm and positive body language, because breath and movement are the two most effective ways to dampen the stress response. You are teaching children the important skill of empathy through your use of positive body language that mirrors the words you are using. Teaching them to “read” others by scanning for the feelings behind the words. People who are able to watch, listen, and observe the actions and emotions of those around them are often the most successful in life.

“Our intention as we approach a situation will influence the outcome in profound ways. If a person approaches with the intention of attack, we can sense it and become guarded. If a person approaches us with an open heart and mind, we feel that too! Intention has the invisible power to bond us together, enhance honest communication and foster goal achievement.”

Conscious Discipline

Be Consistent AND Follow Through

As noted in Section Two, when we provide high quality environments that include opportunities for practice and making mistakes along with consistent, predictable routines and schedules, we support and encourage children’s development of executive function and self-regulation. Children are trying to make sense of their world – when you respond differently in a situation or from child-to-child – you change the rules of the game each time! When everyone understands the expectations, and those expectations are taught and reinforced consistently by all teachers in the room, children and adults learn and grow. An additional aspect of consistency is the concept of follow through. Basically, when you say you are going to do something, DO! Children learn to trust your guidance when they can expect that you “say what you mean and mean what you say”. As adults, we want to ensure that we don’t inadvertently send a message to a child that a misbehavior is okay simply because we didn’t take the time or effort to follow through. This aspect of consistency is vital to building a trusting relationship grounded in understanding expectations of one another.

Interacting During Play

We've often heard that play is the work of children. How does this statement influence your role as the teacher? Does it make you a supervisor? A mentor? An evaluator? A guide? Children look to adults for rules and expectations, how one should act in a given situation. As teachers, free-choice/free-play time provides you vast opportunities to teach children the expectations of the classroom and of them as individuals. During free-choice/free-play time, sit down and play! Be involved, ask questions, make suggestions, offer alternatives, listen to the children. Always be alert and ready for children that need help or guidance.

[Click here for Partner Role Plays – Interacting During Play](#)

Recognize, Name, and Accept Children's Emotions

"When *little people* are overwhelmed by *big emotions*, it's our job to share our calm, not join their chaos."

-L.R. Knost

The Gottman Institute

As adults, we often rush to make it better or tell children "you don't have to cry, don't be sad."

However, this method can lead children to be unsure of what they are feeling or even ashamed of how they feel and act.

"Emotional understanding is critical to positive social relationships and peer acceptance. Children who can interpret emotional signals accurately are more likely to respond appropriately to others and

are less likely to become angry and aggressive. The more adults acknowledge children's emotional reactions and explain emotional signals, the better children become at interpreting them." (Creative Curriculum, 2010)

For example, "It looks like you are feeling angry. Your hands are doing this (making fists), your face is doing this (clenched up, glaring), and you hit Seth. Are you feeling angry?"

It is important to note that no one can make you feel an emotion. Someone may do something that is hateful or hurtful, but we get to choose how we feel about it and the actions we take as a result of that feeling.

For example: Anna takes Sarah's toy, Sarah hits Anna, Anna starts to cry. You might be inclined to say, "Look Sarah, Anna is crying, you made her sad!"

Instead try, "Ouch Sarah, hitting hurts. Anna is crying, let's see if we can help her."

In Section Five, we will discuss environmental print and materials that will assist in recognizing and naming emotions for children.

Helping Children Manage Big Emotions

Once we help children recognize and name their emotions and actions, the next step is to teach them how to express them in a safe way.

As you continue to develop relationships with your children, you will get a feel for how to best approach and respond to their big emotions in an individually appropriate way. For some children the simple act of acknowledging how they feel, putting words to it, and offering a solution or release from the big emotion is what they need.

For example: “You are feeling mad? It’s okay to feel mad! I feel mad too sometimes. Our hands are for soft touches and playing with toys, not for hitting. Let’s get a squeeze ball for your hands to help them get calm.”

For other children asking them to calm down and talk about it before they are ready will likely result in their emotions to become bigger and their actions to become more unsafe. It is important you give them the time and space to regulate/take a break while you stay near them to ensure safety for all. Don’t forget to come back to them once they are calm and talk about it.

For example: “You are feeling mad? It’s okay to feel mad! I feel mad too sometimes. Our hands are for soft touches and playing with toys, not for hitting. I’m going to stay right here and keep you safe. When you are ready to talk, I’ll be right here to help you.”

Helping Children Take a Break

“Taking a break” can be a very powerful strategy for children to learn. It is of the greatest importance to note that “taking a break” does NOT mean “time out”! Time out (i.e., sending a child to sit alone and think about what they’ve done) is not a developmentally appropriate discipline strategy for children under the age of six, it is punishment. It is important that young children have an adult to coach them through the self-regulatory process of connecting what they did (action) to a consequence (result of the action).

Taking a break or helping a child to leave an area where she is playing unsafely (after you have tried redirection several times) or is having a difficult time controlling her emotions, can help her learn to soothe herself and regain control. Some children do calm more quickly when they can be by themselves in a safe, quiet place. However, sending a child to calm his/her body when they don’t yet have that skill, is like asking them to drive a car! Go with them and provide a safe place for them to decompress. Once the child has calmed her body, acknowledge and encourage her for doing so and then talk with her about what she could do differently next time.

In Section Five, we will discuss some tips and tricks for setting up and utilizing a safe space for your classroom/program.

[Click here for Partner Role Plays – Recognize, Name, and Accept Children’s Emotions and Helping Children Manage Big Emotions/Take a Break \(Page 2\).](#)

Providing Alternatives and Choices

Providing children with the ability to make choices throughout their day gives them a sense of control that promotes problem solving, self-discipline, emotional regulation, and relationship building. It is important that when you offer choices, that you are comfortable with the child choosing either of the options. In addition, ensure the

choices you give children are both desirable options. (i.e., “You can lay on your cot with your blanket or sit on the couch.” Not, “You can lay on your cot with your blanket, or you don’t get your blanket.”). For infants and non-verbal children, look for recognition that choices are being offered by watching their eyes, facial expressions, gestures, and movements.

Providing Redirection

Redirection offers children acceptable alternatives to unsafe behaviors and actions. Often, these unsafe behaviors and actions are the child’s way of telling you they are working through a developmental milestone and/or they don’t understand how to achieve a goal. When your redirection asks a child to get engaged in a different task, it is important that you go with them and ensure they know how to do what you’ve asked. When providing redirection, you might often hear the word “NO” from the child. This is a completely acceptable answer for a child to give you! No can be a very powerful word for a child. Children must be given the freedom to tell adults “no”, so they are comfortable doing so in situations where they need to say it to stop something from happening (being molested, being taken/lured away from their parents, offered drugs, etc.) You can practice “no” with children by asking them silly questions – which also stretches their cognitive capacity and skills.

[Click here for Partner Role Plays – Providing Alternatives, Choices, and Redirection \(Page 3\).](#)

Helping Children Manage Conflicts with Peers

Conflict between children will happen in your program – how you choose to react to it and guide children through it will greatly affect the routines and schedules that occur during your day. It is important that we help children begin to understand and take responsibility for unsafe or hurtful interactions. We’ve talked above about helping children identify big emotions and actions and giving them replacement phrases/strategies to use when unsafe or hurtful behaviors occur. You might note that making children apologize is not one of the suggested strategies. Making children apologize for an action made with an as yet undeveloped prefrontal cortex does not help them build a connection between what they did and why they did it. Instead, it teaches children that saying sorry absolves you of any wrong doing and keeps them from understanding their responsibility in and the consequences of the action. If we desire of children respect and empathy, we must first model it for them. Encouraging the child to ask what they can do to help the other child and/or modeling the apology are affective strategies that help children begin to understand the consequence of actions. (Butcher & Fletcher, 2012, Zero To Three, 2016).

Role modeling appropriate replacement language during peer conflict is a powerful tool to build a child’s capacity for self-regulation! Depending upon their age, the children may repeat you or say some of the words you model, or you might do all the talking. In

either situation, you are providing those children the language to reference in future situations.

Acknowledge and Encourage Positive Behaviors and Interactions Among Children

Acknowledging and meaningfully encouraging children’s positive interactions with their peers promotes problem solving, self-discipline, emotional regulation, and relationship building. When we name the positive behaviors that encourage positive peer relationships, we are providing the road map for future interactions and relationships. For example, “Thank you for helping Sarah pick up her coat! That was really helpful!” OR “Thank you for using your words and telling Adam you don’t like it when he hits you and to give you a soft touch. That helps him remember what to do next time.”

[Click here for Partner Role Plays – Helping Children Manage Conflict with Peers and Acknowledging and Encouraging Positive Behaviors and Interactions Among Children \(Page 5\).](#)

REFLECTION:

Now that you have learned more about the importance of relationships and some specific strategies to enhance your interactions, think about your role as an educator and the relationships you are building every day with the children in your care. Can you identify, within yourself, any of the actions, traits, strategies from the childhood relationship you listed at the beginning of this section? If yes, HOW do you use them in your everyday teaching interactions to build relationships? If not, how can you utilize the specific strategies listed above to build your everyday teaching interactions?

Now that you have some specific interaction techniques and teaching strategies in your tool box, let’s move to Section Four and learn about the Power of Observation!