

## ***Promoting Healthy Social Behaviors by Building Positive Teacher-Child Relationships***

### **What are positive teacher-child relationships?**

Each moment that teachers and children have together is an opportunity to develop or strengthen positive relationships. Teachers can use a variety of strategies to build positive relationships with children such as listening, making eye contact and engaging in one-to-one, face-to-face interactions. It is important to use strategies that take into account the different needs, interests, styles and abilities of the children in the class. Teachers can let the children know they are each a valued, important member of the classroom community through warm, responsive interactions and physical contact such as a hug or a pat on the back. Children who have a positive relationship with their teachers are less likely to misbehave!

### **Why is it important to build positive teacher-child relationships?**

Research suggests that teacher-child relationships play a large role in influencing young children's social and emotional development. Children who have a secure relationship with their teachers tend to get along well with classmates and have positive relationships with teachers. On the other hand, children who have an insecure relationship with their teachers have more difficulty playing with other children and engage in more conflict with their teachers. In other words, the use of affectionate words, smiles and hugs helps promote children's positive relationships with teachers...and with the other children. Children who have secure, loving relationships with their teachers use fewer challenging behaviors to get their needs met.

### **What can you do in your classroom?**

You can establish secure relationships with your children through basic daily activities, like talking to them using pleasant, calm voices, greeting them warmly when they arrive each day, and noticing and commenting on their activities during the day. You can add relationship building rituals into your day, such as a Morning Greeter Apron. This apron, with pictures to represent different ways to welcome a child, allows each child to choose how he/she wants to be greeted, such as a handshake, hug, high-five, etc. This simple technique lets you start each day with warm, responsive, individualized contacts and pleasant, engaging, one-to-one interactions. This special moment of bonding between you and each child helps create positive relationships and will quickly become a favorite morning ritual. It sets the tone for you and the children each day.

The teacher behaviors listed below help develop positive relationships with young children. Think for a moment about your classroom practices. Do you...

- engage in one-to-one interactions with children (on the child's level)?
- use a pleasant, calm voice and simple language?
- provide warm, responsive physical contact?
- follow the child's lead and interest during play?
- help children understand classroom expectations?
- redirect children when they use challenging behavior?
- listen to children and encourage them to listen to others?
- acknowledge children for their accomplishments and effort?

If not, give it a try; you will be amazed at how the children respond and the effect these simple practices will have on your classroom atmosphere.

### **Research on this topic:**

Research has shown that your relationship with the children in your care can influence their success or failure in future school environments. For example, research has been able to predict which preschool children will be aggressive and disruptive when they are in second-grade. Those children typically come from preschool classrooms where the social climate and relationships were full of conflict and they had teachers who were often in conflict with them. (Howes, 2002)

### **Food for thought:**

*'Some people come into our lives and quickly go. Some stay for a while, leave footprints on our hearts, and we are never, ever the same.'* ~ Flavia Weedn Each child in your care will carry your footprints on his/her heart forever, for better or worse. Begin each day with a commitment to make a positive impression on each child's life.

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