

## **Strategies for Building Positive Teacher-Child Relationships**

In early childhood settings, each interaction between a teacher and a child holds the potential to develop positive relationships. Here are quick and easy ideas and strategies to help you form closer relationships with the children in your care.

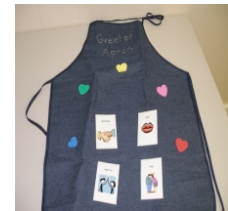
- Get to know each child by having the parents fill out interest surveys about their child;
- Join a child's conversations and play, remembering to follow the child's lead;
- Listen to a child's ideas and stories and be an appreciative audience;
- Provide lots of encouragement and acknowledge a child's efforts;
- Share information about yourself and find something in common with each child;
- Ask children to bring in family photos to share and remember to send positive notes home;
- Create *All About Me* books and share them at circle time;
- Learn at least basic words in a child's home language;
- When a child displays distress, respond with warmth and kindness;
- Tell a child how much he/she was missed when they are out of school and celebrate their return.

Some additional classroom strategies that build positive relationships include:



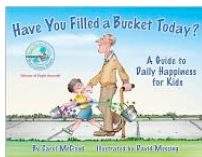
**Making Relationship Deposits:** Try to think about building positive relationships in terms of a piggy bank. Whenever you engage in strategies to build positive relationships, you are making a deposit in a child's 'relationship piggy bank.' On the other hand, when adults make demands, scold, or criticize children they are making a relationship withdrawal. It may be helpful to reflect on the interactions you have with an individual child and think to yourself, 'Am I making a deposit or a withdrawal?' or, 'Have I made any deposits in Renee's piggy bank today?'

**Greeter Apron:** A greeter apron allows children to individually select the way they want to be greeted each morning. Using fabric paints, draw symbols on the front of an apron (either full size or a tool apron) that represent different types of greetings. For example, you might select a heart for a hug, a hand for shaking hands, a happy face for a smile and a #5 for a high-five. When children come to your class each morning, they tap the symbol indicating how they want to be welcomed. You could also create a greeting mat or poster, instead of an apron, for children to touch with their foot or hand upon arrival. If you aren't an artist, you can use picture cards attached with velcro to the apron, mat or poster.



**Birthday Chart:** Have a birthday chart in your classroom with each child's birthday listed and acknowledge that day when it occurs. Think about unique ways you can make the birthday a special day that builds relationships between children as well. One idea is to have each child dictate to you one thing they appreciate about the birthday child. These can be written on strips and glued to a poster board decorated by the other children and sent home with the birthday child at the end of the day.

**Book Suggestions:** A lovely book about teacher-child relationships is *Mrs. Spitzer's Garden* by Edith Pattou. The book jacket describes this book as, 'Mrs. Spitzer is a wise teacher who knows many things. She knows about gardens. She knows about children. She knows how similar they are and how they will flourish if tended lovingly.'



Another book about building relationships is *Have You Filled a Bucket Today?* by Carol McCloud. In this book, bucket filling and dipping are metaphors, similar to the relationship piggy bank, for understanding the effects of our actions and words on the well being of others and ourselves. This heartwarming book encourages positive behavior and relationship building.

Compiled by *Promoting Healthy Social Behaviors in Child Care Centers*, 2011  
Additional strategies can be found at <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/>