

Strategies for Expressing Warmth and Affection to Children

Children who feel appreciated and enjoyed by the adults in their lives are more likely to try to please those adults. In your classroom, this means that you have a very easy behavior management tool literally at your fingertips. By expressing warmth and affection to the children in your care you are showing them that they are liked and valued as members of your classroom community. They learn this from you when you take time to have fun with them, get to know their likes and dislikes, enjoy being with them, etc. Warm and affectionate actions are intentional, genuine, personal and timely and foster a feeling of safety and acceptance. Set the goal for yourself, as a teacher, to connect with each child...your challenging children need this most of all! When children leave your care, they may not remember anything you said or anything you did, but they will always remember how you made them feel.

Classroom Rituals: Most teachers understand the importance of classroom routines, which guide the day and give children a sense of security. However, many teachers do not understand the power of classroom rituals, which give children a sense of belonging. Rituals are repeated actions that facilitate positive interactions and generate a feeling of community. Giving your classroom a special name (i.e., Ms. Betsy's Bumblebees) or writing a class song that you sing each day at circle make children feel they are part of something special.

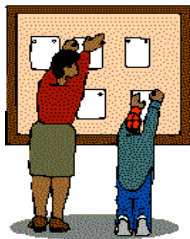


Rituals evolve from within the group and may change from year to year. Often it's a little thing you did once or twice and the children continue to ask, *'Can we do that again?'* For example, you might tuck the children in at nap and say, *'Show me your best sleepy face'* and a week later you realize a ritual has been born! Children begin to anticipate nap and are eager for that small moment of your attention and affection.

Be a Cheerleader: You can express your attention to children by trying to catch them being good. When you notice and comment on appropriate behaviors, they are more likely to repeat those teacher-approved actions. Be descriptive and precise so they know what you are approving of; *'That was helpful of you to wait your turn. I saw you stop and think about it. You are making smart choices.'* To cheer for a child without using words, give them a thumbs-up or an across-the-room high-five. You can turn this into a classroom ritual by telling the children you are hunting for good behavior. When you notice a desired behavior, shout out a playful, *'Caught 'ya!'*



Intentional One-on-One: One way for children to have some special time with you is to include 'teacher helper' as a job on your job chart. This child will be your side-kick for the day and help you with chores around the classroom. For instance, when you get supplies from the storage closet, deliver papers to the office or create a new bulletin board, ask the teacher helper to do this with you. Asking them to carry something for you or allowing them to make choices (i.e. *'Should we get the inch cubes or the bristle blocks from the closet?'*) will make them feel valued and important. Take these brief moments alone to talk about things of interest to them, such as their pet, new shoes, or the block structure they made that morning. Time spent together is the best way to create a natural, genuine feeling of affection.



SMILE! A study of teachers' affectionate responses to children found that smiles are the most effective and most reciprocated response. Researchers collected data in toddler classrooms and compared teacher smiles, gentle touches and affectionate words of praise and found that the children responded most often and most positively to teacher smiles. For busy teachers, the best thing about a smile is that it can be sent and received across the room. A smile says, *'I noticed you; I like you; I'm glad you are here today!'* More often than not, children will smile back sending you a message of *'Thanks...I like you, too.'*

