



Build Relationships with Children

Positive relationships with caring adults are vital for children’s learning, growth, and well-being. As you and a child get to know each other, you build a sense of trust. This trust will enable the child to seek you out for comfort or to proudly show you her accomplishments. It is your responsive interactions to her needs and advances that will strengthen your relationship and help her begin to learn about the world.

- **Get to know each child.** Find relaxed time to spend together. Notice and react to what interests the child and what overwhelms him. Discover what you like to do together.
- **Minimize distractions.** Try to get chores out of the way before children arrive or while they are sleeping. Give each child your full attention as you play or talk together and listen to what a toddler wants to tell you.
- **Greet each child and family when they arrive.** Take time to really connect. Listen to any news or concerns that the child or parent wants to share. Let the child see how much you value his family. Let the family see how much you value their child.
- **Respect children’s individuality.** Some children are eager to interact and others take their time. Take your cues from the child. Get down to her level, play side by side, and let her come to you when she’s ready. Reach out to children who may need special attention.
- **Make each child feel special.** Call children by the names their families call them by. Use specific praise and terms of endearment (in their home languages) to encourage children’s efforts, celebrate accomplishments, and build the bond between you.
- **Find times for one-to-one bonding.** Feeding and changing times are a good time for one-to-one bonding. Sing a song that features the child’s name. Play a game of peek-a-boo or a counting game. Use the time for a little extra individual conversation.
- **Tune in to a child’s feelings.** Share a child’s enthusiasm and energy. Show her you understand when she seems sad or tired. Use words, gestures, eye contact, touch, or singing to let her know you are there for her and that you understand her needs.
- **Create comfortable spaces for private conversations.** Make a protected area where two babies can have tummy time together or a “fort” for toddler friends. Create a comfortable corner where you can talk with one or two children or a place to sit together and watch what is happening around you.
- **Help children bond with each other and with the group.** Use each child’s name. Help them get to know each other’s likes, interests, and abilities. Facilitate friendships between children who like using similar toys. Use circle times or other rituals to build a sense of group belonging. Use feeling words and help children notice each other’s expressions.