Child Care Technical Assistance Network

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FOR FAMILIES (/for-families)

Infant/Toddler Resource Guide

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Supporting the Important Relationships in the Lives of Infants and Toddlers

Download the article, *Supporting the Important Relationships in the Lives of Infants and Toddlers*.

Article – Supporting Relationships (/resource/supporting-important-relationships-lives-infants-and-toddlers)

Download the activity, *Questions to Help You Develop Strong Relationships with Families*.

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Download the reflective exercise, *Learning from Families to Support Your Relationships with Children*.

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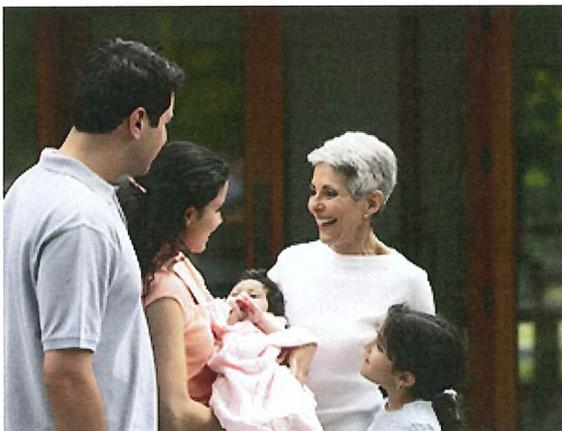
As you support relationships between children and their families and nurture strong relationships with the children in your care, it is important to recognize that other relationships influence the lives of infants and toddlers.

Family-Caregiver Relationships

Young children feel secure, supported, and happy when they see the important adults in their lives connecting with each other in positive ways. Responsive caregivers make conscious efforts to develop respectful and responsive relationships with the members of children's families (National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement, n.d.). Strong relationships with families can help you get to know children within their family cultures, and by working together with families, you can better support each child.

By establishing a strong relationship with a child's family, you learn about the child. Family members truly are their child's first teachers, and no one knows their child better. Families can give you important information about the child's experiences, development, accomplishments, and interests. In your partnership with families, you can create a welcoming environment for their ideas, support their competence, and reinforce their expertise; not all families realize that they know their child better than anyone. Together with families, you can set meaningful and realistic goals for children.

Strong relationships with a child's family also connect home with child care. It is important that you partner with families to give care that is as consistent as possible between home and the child care program. Although both the home and the child care environment are unique, the adults in children's lives can share information with each other in an effort to minimize the adjustments that children have to make as they move between home and child care. By learning from families about their daily care and interactions, you can try out some of these same things. For example, using the same words a parent uses for sleeping, eating, or using the toilet can help build the connection between home and the program. In turn, if families ask for support or it comes up in conversation, you may offer suggestions for caregiving that families might find useful at home. For example, offering limited choices to a toddler can help the child cooperate while still having a chance to make decisions, such as, "Would you like to walk or be carried?"

Become culturally sensitive. When you show cultural sensitivity, children benefit in many ways. Within their family's culture, infants and toddlers learn who they are and develop a sense of security, belonging, and personal history. Cultural sensitivity requires caregivers to understand and support families' values, cultures, and languages, even if those values, cultures, and languages are different from their own (Institute of Medicine & National Research Council, 2015). You can consider how to build relationships in which each family feels comfortable sharing personal rituals, routines, and beliefs. While some families may feel comfortable sharing right away, others may need time to develop a trusting relationship with you.

As you learn more about each family, you may find ways to adapt your environment to reflect the cultures of the children in your care. For instance, you might alter a nap-time routine to include a certain activity the parents use at home; learn key words in the child's home language; or add fabrics, photographs, text, foods, and music to your environment that are familiar to families and children. Each of these efforts communicates your respect for families and children, and creates an environment and interactions that support a sense of belonging.

Caregiver-Caregiver Relationships

Infants and toddlers are also influenced by the interactions they observe between people around them, including caregivers in their child care program. Very young children notice and learn from the ways caregivers interact with each other. They can sense positive, supportive adult interactions as well as when there is tension between adults, which may make them feel anxious or uncomfortable. You have the opportunity to make a difference as you model respect and kindness and create an environment that is harmonious for all who are in the room.

Child-Child Relationships

From birth, babies are social beings, interested in the people who care for them. For instance, young infants smile more frequently when approached by a caregiver than when approached by a stranger (California Department of Education, 2009; Marvin & Britner, 1999). Infants' and toddlers' interest in their peers develop over time. You may have noticed young infants showing interest in peers through staring at each other or touching a peer's face or body. Young toddlers may have simple interactions with peers, such as offering another child a book, and older toddlers may begin to engage in more cooperative play, such as working with peers to build a tower (California Department of Education, 2009, Meisels, Dombro, Marsden, Weston, & Jewkes, 2003). You play an important role in helping infants and toddlers develop skills for successful relationships with other children.

Here are some ways to support relationships among children:

- **Help children communicate with each other, if needed.** Sometimes children need adults to help them understand and express their feelings and desires effectively. Be available and ready to give this support as needed. For example, you might recognize that a toddler is closely watching another child play and you might say, "You look very interested in what Khalil is doing. Would you like to ask him, 'Can I play with you?'"

- **Model kindness and respect.** Be sure that children see you showing kindness and respect as you interact with education staff, supervisors, program managers, and other adults.
- **Be sure that equipment and materials support positive relationships among children**. For example, make sure that you have multiples of favorite toys, so that children don't constantly find themselves in the position of having to deal with turn-taking. You may also find that even when there are enough duplicate materials for a few children, two children still want the exact same item. If this happens, you can support relationship building by helping toddlers figure out how to communicate, experience, and regulate their emotions and desires. You can also arrange the environment to support positive peer relationship building, including having a mirror wide enough for two toddlers to look at themselves together, providing a slide or ramp that is wide enough for more than one child, and creating play spaces for small groups of children.

Resources

Infant/Toddler Teacher Time, Episode 4—Can We Be Friends? Peer Interactions and Your Curriculum (https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/playlist/infanttoddler-teacher-time-coffee-break-episode-4-can-we-be-friends-peer-interactions-your) (2018) is an hour-long video about the importance of the early relationships infants and toddlers have with each other and the ways you can support this relationship development. This video is part of the Teacher Time series, which is a web-based professional development series for Head Start and Early Head Start staff, teachers, and family child care providers made available through the Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center. This video has a Viewers Guide (https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/tt-it-4-viewers-guide.pdf) that summarizes the content discussed in the video and provides additional teaching strategies and resources.

This website (https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/specific-strategies-support-dual-language-learners-dlls-when-adults-do-not) from the Office of Head Start includes tip sheets, strategies, and resources for caregivers to strengthen relationships when they do not speak a child's home language. It includes the following:

- *Language Modeling with Dual Language Learning Infants* (https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/dll-language-modeling-dll-infants.pdf);
- *Language Modeling with Dual Language Learning Toddlers*; (https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/dll-language-modeling-dll-toddlers.pdf)
- The tip sheet (https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/dll-childrens-home-languages.pdf) *Including Children's Home Languages and Cultures* (https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/dll-childrens-home-languages.pdf) includes suggestions, such as learning 10 to 20 words in the child's home language, inviting families into the classroom to use their home language, and incorporating families' values, practices, and traditions into the classroom environment.

Measuring the Quality of Caregiver-Child Interactions for Infants and Toddler (Q-CCIIT) (https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/measuring-quality-caregiver-child-interactions-infants-and-toddlers-q-cciit) (2015), by Sally Atkins-Burnett, Shannon Monahan, Louisa Tarullo, Yange Xue, Elizabeth Cavadel, Lizabeth Malone, and Lauren Akersis, is an assessment tool that explores how caregivers engage in high-quality, responsive relationships with children and support their learning across different areas of development.

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Questions to Help You Develop Strong Relationships with Families

The following questions can help you build relationships with children and families and learn about families' different cultures. Asking these questions as soon as the child enrolls in your program can help you to practice culturally sensitive care. You can let parents know that sharing this information will help you to provide more responsive and sensitive care to their child. To show respect for each family's level of comfort with responding to these questions, you can ask them if they would like to complete a questionnaire or schedule a time to meet with you in person.

1. What are your hopes and dreams for your child? What do you want life to be like for her or him?

2. Can you tell me one special thing about your child?

3. What do you and your child enjoy doing together at home?

4. When your child is upset, what things do you do to comfort her or him?

5. Tell me about the routines you and your child have throughout the day (for example, bedtime, mealtime, waking up in the morning, and so on) and some things that you may say and do during these times?

6. Does your child have a special object that gives her or him comfort, such as a blanket, stuffed animal, or favorite photo?

7. Are there languages other than English that you use at home? Can you teach me some words or phrases in those languages that I can use with your child during child care?

8. Do you have any concerns about your child's experiences while in my care?

9. How do you prefer to communicate for updates about your child (for example, phone calls, emails, or in-person check-ins at pick-up and drop-off times)? Is a certain time of day better than others to communicate?

10. Is there anything else you would like me to know about your child?

Reflective Exercise: Learning from Families to Support Your Relationships with Children

Think about an infant or toddler in your care. What have you learned from the child's family members that has influenced your ability to give sensitive, responsive care and helped you develop a stronger relationship with the child?

- Did a family member **share information about caregiving routine(s)** that happen at home? If so, how has that affected the way you care for the child?

- Has a family member **taught you some useful phrases from the child's home language** that you use while caring for the child?

- Has a **family member shared information about the unique ways the child communicates**? How does the child show that she is hungry, tired, or bored? Does she have nicknames for her favorite objects (for example, calling her blanket her "snuggle")?

- If the answer to any of the questions above was no, how might you get this information?

- Is there information you do not have from parents that you would like to have? What is the best way and time to learn that information from the parent?

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ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES
(https://www.acf.hhs.gov/)
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
330 C Street, SW
Washington DC 20201

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