

Making Connections With Each Child

The phrase “early care and education programs” is often being used to refer to the many different types of early childhood programs in the world today, such as child care, Head Start, and public school kindergartens. This powerful phrase offers wisdom to guide your decisions in daily practices—**caring comes first**. This is especially true for children with disabilities; for true connection it is necessary to see the child first rather than the disability.



Positive human relationships are an essential component of early childhood programs for many reasons, including the following three:

- **Making positive connections with each child in your group forms the foundation children need to thrive and learn in group settings.** Children develop a sense of trust in a consistent, loving relationship that motivates them to explore and learn about the world around them.
- **Strong connections with each child also support your professional practice.** Knowing each child and what supports his or her success is fundamental to selecting toys and arranging the environment. Understanding the child, his or her temperament, strengths, and needs keeps you tuned in as you guide behavior. Building partnerships with parents becomes more natural as you work together to support the child’s success.
- **When you have developed meaningful relationships with the children in your care, you are more likely to have a stronger commitment to the important work you are doing.** You will also feel a greater sense of satisfaction with the outcomes of your work as you watch children grow and learn. When professionals lose sight of human connections in their everyday practice, they often leave the field or find themselves just “going through the motions” and counting the minutes until closing time.

Although the ongoing process of building and sustaining connections with each child is somewhat unique and directly related to children’s individual characteristics, the following beliefs and skills can guide your efforts:

- **An overall sense of optimism about children and the belief that each child is competent.** That is, believing that each child has the desire as well as the right to be successful in your program.
- **A desire to discover each child’s unique strengths, interests, and needs.**
- **The ability to use an understanding of each child to guide everyday actions—from how you greet a child each morning to the kinds of play materials and activities you plan each day.**
- **The extension of the preceding principles to the child’s family.** Knowing and valuing each family and individualizing your interactions with them according to their culture, interests, and needs is essential to the development of a positive relationships with children as well as with families.

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Personal qualities also play a role in the development of positive relationships with children. Of course, early childhood professionals are unique individuals with differing personalities, temperaments, and habits. However, any professional is capable of developing and strengthening the following characteristics and become more:

- Consistent: Uses same voice tone, response to problems, and degree of warmth from one day to the next.
- Self-reflective: Aware of tone of voice, body language, facial expressions, and emotional triggers.
- Effective as a communicator: Listening more than speaking.
- Curious: Desires to learn about each child.
- Caring: Sees the child first, even on trying days and during challenging events.

The rewards for putting time, energy, and heart into connecting with each child come back to you in many ways. When children are immersed in a caring environment, they learn to treat one another with care. You can develop a classroom community that children, families, and YOU look forward to being part of every day.

RESOURCES

- Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations of Early Learning <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/>
- Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards <http://www.collaboratingpartners.com/wmels/>
- Division for Early Childhood Recommended Practices <http://www.dec-sped.org/recommendedpractices>

TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

- The Registry Training Calendar <https://www.the-registry.org>
- WI Early Care Association (WECA) Training Calendar <http://wisconsinearlychildhood.org/>
- MECA Special Needs Support Program (SNSP) <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/meca/specialneeds>



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