

Understanding and Managing Challenging Behavior

Support Materials

This packet includes the following items:

- *Inventory of Practices for Promoting Children's Social Emotional Competence*, pages 1-7 and 15-20 (used with permission, The Center for Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning, csefel.uiuc.edu)
- *Building Positive Relationships with Young Children*, by Gail E. Joseph and Phillip S. Strain, (Used with permission, The Center for Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning, csefel.uiuc.edu)
- CD with presentation slides in PowerPoint format and pdf files for publications.

Inventory of Practices for Promoting Social Emotional Competence

Inventory of Practices for Promoting Children’s Social Emotional Competence Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning

Purpose of the Inventory: *The Inventory of Practices for Promoting Social Emotional Competence* is designed to be used by individuals and/or teams to identify training needs and plan a course of action to address those needs related to four general areas: (a) building positive relationships, (b) creating supportive environments, (c) social emotional teaching strategies, and (d) individualized intensive interventions. The *Inventory* encourages individual self-reflection, opportunities for teaming between classroom teachers, mentor coaches, supervisors, site directors, and other administrators, and promotes effective practices for direct service staff. There are two sections to this tool: the Inventory of Practices and the Action Plan.

Use of the Inventory: This tool is best utilized in a manner that encourages reflection and discussion. Each of the four general areas includes several *Skills and Indicators* reflective of practices that promote social emotional competence in young children. The Indicators are detailed phrases that enable the user to “dig a little deeper” in identifying and pinpointing skills that may or may not be present. A column entitled *Observations/Evidence* allows the user to write thoughts, suggestions, strengths, and needs concerning either the specific *Skills or Indicators*. Three levels of skill, *Consistently, Occasionally, and Seldom*, permit users to record their perceived skill level for each Indicator by checking the appropriate box. Users should be consistent in their appraisal of skills

across the three levels, *Consistently, Occasionally, and Seldom* (i.e., across all children in the classroom, target child or specific groups of children, environment of all classrooms, etc.). The final column allows the team to indicate whether or not an indicator should be a *Target for Training*. Following each section is a space for writing additional comments. The team or individual may wish to delineate specific training requests, professional development opportunities, or encouragement in the *Comments* box.

Use of the Action Plan: The *Action Plan* takes the users to the next step once they have determined what specific *Skills and Indicators* from the *Inventory* they want to target for training. In the first column of the *Action Plan*, users should check those Skills or Indicators they previously identified as targets for training. In the second column, teachers and support personnel (e.g., trainers, mentor coaches, administrators) should work together to identify what strategies they will each use to help the teaching team implement the new practices. The third column allows users to identify *Resources and Supports* that will be necessary to successfully complete the activities or strategies listed in the second column.

Completion Dates: Users may complete the *Inventory* and *Action Plan* at different times as a way of determining their progress toward addressing specific skills targeted for training. Different color inks corresponding to the dates completed can be used when completing the tool in order to highlight changes over time.



Inventory of Practices for Promoting Social Emotional Competence

Building Positive Relationships

Skills and Indicators	Consistently	Occasionally	Seldom	Target for training?		Observations/Evidence
				YES	NO	
1. Develops meaningful relationships with children and families	3	2	1	YES	NO	
<input type="checkbox"/> Greets children on arrival; calls by name						
<input type="checkbox"/> Communicates with children at eye level						
<input type="checkbox"/> Verbally interacts with individual children during routines and activities						
<input type="checkbox"/> Participates in children's play when appropriate						
<input type="checkbox"/> Shows respect, consideration, warmth to all children						
<input type="checkbox"/> Speaks calmly to children						
<input type="checkbox"/> Uses a variety of strategies for building relationships with all children						
<input type="checkbox"/> Attends to children in positive ways at times when the children are not engaging in challenging behavior						
<input type="checkbox"/> Uses a variety of strategies for building relationships with all families						
<input type="checkbox"/> Creates a classroom that is a place that children and families like to be (i.e., feel comfortable, welcome, and safe)						
Comments:						
2. Examines personal, family, and cultural views of child's challenging behavior	3	2	1	YES	NO	
<input type="checkbox"/> Considers personal beliefs regarding the acceptability and unacceptability of specific types of child behavior						
<input type="checkbox"/> Considers personal beliefs regarding the causes of specific types of unacceptable child behavior						
<input type="checkbox"/> Acknowledges contrasting or conflicting beliefs held by others regarding acceptable and unacceptable types of child behavior						
Comments:						

Date 1 Completed: _____

Date 2 Completed: _____



Inventory of Practices for Promoting Social Emotional Competence

Building Positive Relationships

Skills and Indicators	Consistently	Occasionally	Seldom	Target for training?		Observations/Evidence
				YES	NO	
3. Examines own attitudes toward challenging behavior	3	2	1			
<input type="checkbox"/> Understands the relationship between children's social emotional development and challenging behaviors						
<input type="checkbox"/> Understands that children's challenging behaviors are conveying some type of message						
<input type="checkbox"/> Understands there are many things that can be done to prevent challenging behaviors						
<input type="checkbox"/> Identifies what behaviors "push my buttons"						
<input type="checkbox"/> Develops strategies for dealing with situations when children's behaviors "push my buttons"						
<input type="checkbox"/> Works together with a team to problem solve around issues related to challenging behaviors						
Comments:						

Date 1 Completed: _____

Date 2 Completed: _____



Inventory of Practices for Promoting Social Emotional Competence

Designing Supportive Environments

Skills and Indicators	Consistently	Occasionally	Seldom	Target for training?		Observations/Evidence
				YES	NO	
4. Designs the physical environment	3	2	1	YES	NO	
<input type="checkbox"/> Arranges traffic patterns in classroom so there are no wide open spaces						
<input type="checkbox"/> Removes obstacles that make it difficult for children with physical disabilities to move around the room						
<input type="checkbox"/> Clearly defines boundaries in learning centers						
<input type="checkbox"/> Arranges learning centers to allow room for multiple children						
<input type="checkbox"/> Provides a variety of materials in all learning centers						
<input type="checkbox"/> Designs learning centers so that children spend time evenly across centers						
<input type="checkbox"/> Considers children's interests when deciding what to put in learning centers						
<input type="checkbox"/> Makes changes and additions to learning centers on a regular basis						
<input type="checkbox"/> Visually closes learning centers when they are not an option for children to use						
Comments:						
5. Develops schedules and routines	3	2	1	YES	NO	
<input type="checkbox"/> Designs schedule to include a balance of large group and small group activities						
<input type="checkbox"/> Designs schedule to minimize the amount of time children spend making transitions between activities						
<input type="checkbox"/> Implements schedule consistently						
<input type="checkbox"/> Teaches children about the schedule						
<input type="checkbox"/> Provides explanations when changes in the schedule are necessary						
Comments:						

Date 1 Completed: _____

Date 2 Completed: _____



Inventory of Practices for Promoting Social Emotional Competence

Designing Supportive Environments

Skills and Indicators	Consistently	Occasionally	Seldom	Target for training?		Observations/Evidence
				YES	NO	
6. Ensures smooth transitions	3	2	1			
<input type="checkbox"/> Structures transitions so children do not have to spend excessive time waiting with nothing to do						
<input type="checkbox"/> Teaches children the expectations associated with transitions						
<input type="checkbox"/> Provides warnings to children prior to transitions						
<input type="checkbox"/> Individualizes the warnings prior to transitions so that all children understand them						
Comments:						
7. Designs activities to promote engagement	3	2	1	YES	NO	
<input type="checkbox"/> Plans and conducts large group activities with specific goals in mind for the children						
<input type="checkbox"/> Varies the topics and activities in the large group from day to day						
<input type="checkbox"/> Provides opportunities for children to be actively involved in large group activities						
<input type="checkbox"/> Varies speech and intonation to maintain the children's interests in the large group activity						
<input type="checkbox"/> Monitors children's behavior and modifies plans when children lose interest in large group activities						
<input type="checkbox"/> Plans and conducts small group activities with specific goals in mind for each child						
<input type="checkbox"/> Plans and conducts fun small group activities						
<input type="checkbox"/> Uses peers as models during small group activities						
<input type="checkbox"/> Monitors children's behavior and modifies plans when children lose interest in small group activities						
<input type="checkbox"/> Makes adaptations and modifications to ensure that all children can be involved in a meaningful way in any activity						
<input type="checkbox"/> Uses a variety of ways to teach the expectations of specific activities so that all children understand them						
Comments:						

Date 1 Completed: _____

Date 2 Completed: _____



Inventory of Practices for Promoting Social Emotional Competence

Designing Supportive Environments

Skills and Indicators	Consistently	Occasionally	Seldom	Target for training?		Observations/Evidence
				YES	NO	
8. Giving Directions	3	2	1	YES	NO	
<input type="checkbox"/> Gains child's attention before giving directions						
<input type="checkbox"/> Minimizes the number of directions						
<input type="checkbox"/> Individualizes the way directions are given						
<input type="checkbox"/> Gives clear directions						
<input type="checkbox"/> Gives directions that are positive						
<input type="checkbox"/> Gives children time to respond to directions						
<input type="checkbox"/> Gives children choices and options when appropriate						
<input type="checkbox"/> Follows through with positive acknowledgments of children's behavior						
Comments:						
9. Establishes and enforces clear rules, limits, and consequences for behavior	3	2	1	YES	NO	
<input type="checkbox"/> Identifies appropriate classroom rules with children						
<input type="checkbox"/> Teaches rules in developmentally appropriate ways						
<input type="checkbox"/> Provides opportunities for children to practice classroom rules						
<input type="checkbox"/> States rules positively and specifically (avoids words "no" and "don t" as much as possible)						
<input type="checkbox"/> Keeps rules to manageable number (3-6)						
<input type="checkbox"/> Frequently reinforces children for appropriate behavior						
<input type="checkbox"/> Identifies consequences for both following and not following rules						
<input type="checkbox"/> Makes sure all adults in classroom know rules and consequences						
<input type="checkbox"/> Enforces rules and consequences consistently and fairly						
Comments:						

Date 1 Completed: _____

Date 2 Completed: _____



Inventory of Practices for Promoting Social Emotional Competence

Designing Supportive Environments

Skills and Indicators	Consistently	Occasionally	Seldom	Target for training?		Observations/Evidence
				YES	NO	
10. Engages in ongoing monitoring and positive attention	3	2	1			
<input type="checkbox"/> Gives children time and attention when engaging in appropriate behavior						
<input type="checkbox"/> Monitors adults' interactions with children throughout the day						
Comments:						
11. Uses positive feedback and encouragement	3	2	1	YES	NO	
<input type="checkbox"/> Uses positive feedback and encouragement contingent on appropriate behavior						
<input type="checkbox"/> Provides descriptive feedback and encouragement						
<input type="checkbox"/> Conveys enthusiasm while giving positive feedback and encouragement						
<input type="checkbox"/> Uses positive feedback and encouragement contingent on child's efforts.						
<input type="checkbox"/> Provides nonverbal cues of appreciation						
<input type="checkbox"/> Recognizes that there are individual variations in what forms of acknowledgment are interpreted as positive by children						
<input type="checkbox"/> Involves other adults in acknowledging children						
<input type="checkbox"/> Models positive feedback and encouragement frequently						
Comments:						

Date 1 Completed: _____

Date 2 Completed: _____



Action Plan for Promoting Social Emotional Competence

Building Positive Relationships

Skills and Indicators	Strategies I will use to implement new practices or support others in implementing new practices	Supports and resources needed to accomplish these activities
<p>1. Develops meaningful relationships with children and families</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Greets children on arrival; calls by name <input type="checkbox"/> Communicates with children at eye level <input type="checkbox"/> Verbally interacts with individual children during routines and activities <input type="checkbox"/> Participates in children's play when appropriate <input type="checkbox"/> Shows respect, consideration, warmth to all children <input type="checkbox"/> Speaks calmly to children <input type="checkbox"/> Uses a variety of strategies for building relationships with all children <input type="checkbox"/> Attends to children in positive ways at times when children are not engaging in challenging behavior <input type="checkbox"/> Uses a variety of strategies for building relationships with all families <input type="checkbox"/> Creates a classroom that is a place that children and families like to be (i.e., feel comfortable, welcome, and safe) 		
<p>2. Examines personal, family, and cultural views of child's challenging behavior</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Considers personal beliefs regarding the acceptability and unacceptability of specific types of child behavior <input type="checkbox"/> Considers personal beliefs regarding the causes of specific types of unacceptable child behavior <input type="checkbox"/> Acknowledges contrasting or conflicting beliefs held by others regarding acceptable and unacceptable types of child behavior 		

Date 1 Completed: _____

Date 2 Completed: _____



Action Plan for Promoting Social Emotional Competence

Building Positive Relationships

Skills and Indicators	Strategies I will use to implement new practices or support others in implementing new practices	Supports and resources needed to accomplish these activities
<p>3. Examines own attitudes toward challenging behavior</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Understands the relationship between children's social emotional development and challenging behaviors <input type="checkbox"/> Understands that children's challenging behaviors are conveying some type of message <input type="checkbox"/> Understands there are many things that can be done to prevent challenging behaviors <input type="checkbox"/> Identifies what children's behaviors "push my buttons" <input type="checkbox"/> Develops strategies for dealing with situations when children's behaviors "push my buttons" <input type="checkbox"/> Works together with a team to problem solve around issues related to challenging behaviors 		

Date 1 Completed: _____

Date 2 Completed: _____



Action Plan for Promoting Social Emotional Competence

Designing Supportive Environments

Skills and Indicators	Strategies I will use to implement new practices or support others in implementing new practices	Supports and resources needed to accomplish these activities
<p>4. Designs the physical environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Arranges traffic patterns in classroom so that there are not wide open spaces that allow children to run <input type="checkbox"/> Removes obstacles that make it difficult for children with physical disabilities to move around the room <input type="checkbox"/> Clearly defines boundaries in learning centers <input type="checkbox"/> Arranges learning centers to allow room for multiple children <input type="checkbox"/> Provides a variety of materials in all learning centers <input type="checkbox"/> Designs learning centers so that children spend time evenly across centers <input type="checkbox"/> Considers children's interests when deciding what to put in learning centers <input type="checkbox"/> Makes changes and additions to learning centers on a regular basis <input type="checkbox"/> Visually closes learning centers when they are not an option 		
<p>5. Develops schedules and routines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Designs schedule to include a balance of large group and small group activities <input type="checkbox"/> Designs schedule to minimize the amount of time children spend making transitions between activities <input type="checkbox"/> Implements schedule consistently <input type="checkbox"/> Teaches children about the schedule <input type="checkbox"/> Provides explanations when changes in the schedule are necessary 		

Date 1 Completed: _____

Date 2 Completed: _____



Action Plan for Promoting Social Emotional Competence

Designing Supportive Environments

Skills and Indicators	Strategies I will use to implement new practices or support others in implementing new practices	Supports and resources needed to accomplish these activities
<p>6. Ensures smooth transitions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Structures transitions so children do not have to spend excessive time waiting with nothing to do <input type="checkbox"/> Teaches children the expectations associated with transitions <input type="checkbox"/> Provides warnings to children prior to transitions <input type="checkbox"/> Individualizes the warnings prior to transitions so that all children understand them 		
<p>7. Designs activities to promote engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Plans and conducts large group activities with specific goals in mind for the children <input type="checkbox"/> Varies the topics and activities in the large group from day to day <input type="checkbox"/> Provides opportunities for children to be actively involved in large group activities <input type="checkbox"/> Varies speech and intonation to maintain the children's interests in the large group activity <input type="checkbox"/> Monitors children's behavior and modifies plans when children lose interest in large group activities <input type="checkbox"/> Plans and conducts small group activities with specific goals in mind for each child <input type="checkbox"/> Plans and conducts fun small group activities <input type="checkbox"/> Uses peers as models during small group activities <input type="checkbox"/> Monitors children's behavior and modifies plans when children lose interest in small group activities <input type="checkbox"/> Makes adaptations and modifications to ensure that all children can be involved in a meaningful way in any activity <input type="checkbox"/> Uses a variety of ways to teach the expectations of specific activities so that all children understand them 		

Date 1 Completed: _____

Date 2 Completed: _____



Action Plan for Promoting Social Emotional Competence

Designing Supportive Environments

Skills and Indicators	Strategies I will use to implement new practices or support others in implementing new practices	Supports and resources needed to accomplish these activities
<p>8. Giving Directions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Gains child's attention before giving directions <input type="checkbox"/> Minimizes the number of directions <input type="checkbox"/> Individualizes the way directions are given <input type="checkbox"/> Gives clear directions <input type="checkbox"/> Gives directions that are positive <input type="checkbox"/> Gives children time to respond to directions <input type="checkbox"/> Gives children choices and options when appropriate <input type="checkbox"/> Follows through with positive acknowledgments of children's behavior 		
<p>9. Establishes and enforces clear rules, limits, and consequences for behavior</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Identifies appropriate classroom rules with children <input type="checkbox"/> Teaches rules in developmentally appropriate ways <input type="checkbox"/> Provides opportunities for children to practice classroom rules <input type="checkbox"/> States rules positively and specifically (avoids words "no" and "don't" as much as possible) <input type="checkbox"/> Keeps rules to manageable number (3-6) <input type="checkbox"/> Frequently reinforces children for appropriate behavior <input type="checkbox"/> Identifies consequences for both following and not following rules <input type="checkbox"/> Makes sure all adults in classroom know rules and consequences <input type="checkbox"/> Enforces rules and consequences consistently and fairly 		

Date 1 Completed: _____

Date 2 Completed: _____



Action Plan for Promoting Social Emotional Competence

Designing Supportive Environments

Skills and Indicators	Strategies I will use to implement new practices or support others in implementing new practices	Supports and resources needed to accomplish these activities
<p>10. Engages in ongoing monitoring and positive attention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Gives children time and attention when engaging in appropriate behavior <input type="checkbox"/> Monitors adults' interactions with children throughout the day 		
<p>11. Uses positive feedback and encouragement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Uses positive feedback and encouragement contingent on appropriate behavior <input type="checkbox"/> Provides descriptive feedback and encouragement <input type="checkbox"/> Conveys enthusiasm while giving positive feedback and encouragement <input type="checkbox"/> Uses positive feedback and encouragement contingent on child's efforts. <input type="checkbox"/> Provides nonverbal cues of appreciation <input type="checkbox"/> Recognizes that there are individual variations in what forms of acknowledgment are interpreted as positive by children <input type="checkbox"/> Involves other adults in acknowledging children <input type="checkbox"/> Models positive feedback and encouragement frequently 		

Date 1 Completed: _____

Date 2 Completed: _____



Building Positive Relationships with Young Children

Gail E. Joseph, Ph.D., & Phillip S. Strain, Ph.D.
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The fundamental importance of building positive relationships with children can be best illustrated by the following scenarios.

Helen and her 30-month-old daughter, Lucy, have a long-standing morning tradition of going to a neighborhood park and playing with other parents and children. They spend anywhere from 1 to 2 hours each day at the park. This day, however, Helen receives an emergency call and needs to return to their home immediately. She and Lucy have been at the park for about 10 minutes, and Lucy is playing “cooks” with her best friend Tito. Helen says to Lucy, “Honey, I’m sorry, but you and Mommy have to go home right now. Everything is O.K., but we have to go.” Lucy begins to whimper and says, “But, I was playing with Tito.” Helen reaches down and hugs Lucy, saying, “I know. Let’s call Tito’s mommy when we get home and invite him over to play later.” Lucy says, “O.K.,” and she and her mom hurry home.

Eric has been a Head Start teacher for 10 years. In that time, he has built a reputation as the teacher for the tough kids. This year, Bill is assigned to Eric’s class because of Bill’s long history of hyperactivity, negativity, and aggression toward adults and peers. Two months into the year, the Center’s administrator sheepishly asks Eric how things are going with Bill. Eric replies, “Great, boy were folks wrong about

Bill.” Somewhat flabbergasted, the administrator decides to see for himself. What he observes in less than 10 minutes is as follows. Eric says to everyone, “Look at Bill, he is sitting so quietly in circle; too cool Bill!” When Bill answers a question about the story, Eric says, “Bill, that’s right, you are really concentrating today.” When transition is about to occur, Eric says, “Bill, can you show everyone good walking feet to snack?” At snack, a peer asks Bill for juice, and he passes the container. Eric, being vigilant, says, “Bill, thanks for sharing so nicely.”

After completing a functional behavior assessment, Erin, an ECSE teacher, determines that Jessie’s long-standing tantrum behaviors in the class are designed to acquire adult attention. Erin institutes a plan to ignore Jessie’s tantrums and to spend as much time and attention when Jessie is not having a tantrum. After four days of increased tantrums, Jessie’s behavior has improved dramatically.

In each of the foregoing scenarios, adults were successful in achieving improved behavior change in contexts that many individuals might predict would lead to continuing, even escalating challenging behavior. However, in each case, children were obviously attuned to adults, focused on their communication, and prone to value and seek-out adult approval.

In each case, the adults had invested time and effort prior to the events in question, communicating their noncontingent affection and unquestioned valuing of these children. We submit that this prior history of positive relationship building is a prerequisite to effective intervention practices for challenging behavior and thus goal one for adults and caregivers

wishing to prevent challenging behavior and enhance children’s sense of well-being and social competence. How does one go about the task of relationship building?

Building Positive Relationships

Building positive relationships with young children is an essential task and a foundational component of good teaching. All children grow and thrive in the context of close and dependable relationships that provide love and nurturance, security, and responsive interactions. A positive adult-child relationship built on trust, understanding, and caring will foster children’s cooperation and motivation and increase their positive outcomes at school (Webster-Stratton, 1999). In a review of empirically derived risk and protective factors associated with academic and behavioral problems at the beginning of school, Huffman et al. (2000) identified that having a positive preschool experience and a warm and open relationship with their teacher or child care provider are important protective factors for young children. These protective factors operate to produce direct, ameliorative effects for children in at-risk situations (Luthar, 1993). Next, we describe some of the key ingredients for relationship building.

First Things First

Utilizing a relationship-building model, proper sequencing of adult behavior is critical. Simply put, adults need to invest time and attention with children as a precedent to the optimum use of sound behavior change strategies. There are two reasons that this sequence is so important. First, it

should be noted that the protective factors promoted during relationship building can and do function to reduce many challenging behaviors. As such, taking the time to do relationship building may save time that would be spent implementing more elaborate and time-consuming assessment and intervention strategies. Second, as adults build positive relationships with children, their potential influence on children's behavior grows exponentially. That is, children cue in on the presence of meaningful and caring adults, they attend differentially and selectively to what adults say and do, and they seek out ways to ensure even more positive attention from adults (Lally, Mangione, & Honig, 1988). It is this positive relationship foundation that allowed Helen with minimal effort to leave the park early with Lucy, for Eric to experience Bill in a much more positive way than prior teachers, and for Erin to alter Jessie's tantrums in such short order.

Getting to Know You

In order for adults to build meaningful positive relationships with children, it is essential to gain a thorough understanding of children's preferences, interests, background, and culture. For very young children and children with special needs, this information is most often accessed by observing what children do and by speaking directly to parents and other caregivers. With this information, adults can ensure that their play with children is fun, that the content of their conversations is relevant, and that they communicate respect for children's origins. Whenever possible, this kind of information exchange should be as reciprocal as possible. That is, adults should be sharing their own interests, likes, backgrounds, and origins with children as well.

It Takes a Lot of Love

For many children, developing positive relationships with adults is a difficult task. Prior negative history and interfering behavior often conspire to make the task of relationship development long and arduous. On occasion then, adults should consider that they will need to devote extensive effort to relationship building. The easiest, most straightforward way to achieve a high level of intervention intensity in the relationship-building domain is to think about embedding opportunities throughout the day (see list below for specific suggestions). While there is no magic number that we know of, we have seen teachers who can easily provide several dozen positive, affirming statements to children each day. For children who have mostly heard criticism, it takes, we feel, a lot of messages to the contrary.

Making Deposits

A metaphor for building positive relationships that we find particularly helpful is that of a piggy bank. Whenever teachers and caregivers engage in strategies to build positive relationships, it is as if they are "making a deposit" in a child's relationship piggy bank. Conversely, when adults make demands, nag, or criticize children, it is as if they are making a relationship withdrawal. For some children, because there has been no prior effort to make deposits in their relationship piggy bank, nagging, criticism, and demands may be more akin to writing bad checks! 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 Bill's piggy bank today?" Figures 1 and 2 represent example deposits (Figure 1) in the relationship bank or withdrawals (Figure 2) from the bank.



Figure 1. Making relationship deposits



Figure 2. Making relationship withdrawals

Undoubtedly teachers and child care providers strive to build positive relationships with all of the children in their care. Typically, we have the best relationships with children who respond to us, seemingly like us, and go along with our plans. But as you know, it is more difficult to build positive relationships with some children than with others. We have all had experience with children who push our "hot buttons." Maybe they demand more attention than others, are disruptive, unmotivated, oppositional, aggressive, or do not give us the positive feedback we get from others. When our hot buttons get pushed, we may feel frustrated and discouraged, or bad about ourselves as teachers, causing us to get angry, raise our voices, criticize, or actively avoid these children. Yet, the very children we find the most difficult to build relationships with are the ones who need positive relationships with adults the most! It is a natural reaction to feel emotional when a hot button is pushed. However, rather than feeling frustrated, angry, or guilty about it, it is more productive to think of the emotional response as a warning sign that you will have to work extra hard to proactively build a positive relationship with this child. If the adult is simply reacting to a hot

button being pushed—he or she may consistently become frustrated and avoid the child. We recognize that building positive relationships is far from simple with some children. It takes a frequently renewed commitment and consistent effort. Because this is easier said than done, we have provided some practical strategies for building positive relationships with children throughout the preschool day.

Practical Strategies for Building Positive Relationships

- Distribute interest surveys that parents fill out about their child
- Greet every child at the door by name
- Follow a child's lead during play
- Have a conversation over snack
- Conduct home visits
- Listen to a child's ideas and stories and be an appreciative audience
- Send positive notes home
- Provide praise and encouragement
- Share information about yourself and find something in common with the child
- Ask children to bring in family photos and give them an opportunity to share it with you and their peers
- Post children's work
- Have a "Star" of the week who brings in special things from home and gets to share them during circle time
- Acknowledge a child's effort
- Give compliments liberally
- Call a child's parents to say what a great day she or he having in front of the child
- Find out what a child's favorite book is and read it to the whole class
- Have sharing days
- Make "all about me" books and share them at circle time
- Write all of the special things about a child on a T-shirt and let him or her wear it
- Play a game with a child
- Play outside with a child
- Ride the bus with a child
- Go to an extracurricular activity with the child
- Learn a child's home language
- Give hugs, high fives, and thumbs up for accomplishing tasks
- Hold a child's hand
- Call a child after a bad day and say "I'm sorry we had a bad day today – I know tomorrow is going to be better!"
- Tell a child how much he or she was missed when the child misses a day of school

Beyond the specific strategies enumerated above, we suggest that adults can speed the process of relationship building by:

- Carefully analyzing each compliance task (e.g., "time to go to paints") and, where possible, shifting that compliance task to a choice for children (e.g., "Do you want to paint or do puzzles?");
- Carefully considering if some forms of "challenging" behavior can be ignored (e.g., loud voice)—this is not planned ignoring for behavior designed to elicit attention but ignoring in the sense of making wise and limited choices about when to pick battles over behavior; and
- Self-monitoring one's own deposits and withdrawal behaviors and setting behavioral goals accordingly. Some teachers have easily done this by using wrist golf counters to self-record or by moving a plastic chip from one pocket to the next. A strategically posted visual reminder can help teachers remember to make numerous relationship deposits.

Conclusion

Most of this article has focused on what children get out of positive relationships with adults. However, we contend that adults get something valuable out of the time and attention they expend to build these meaningful relationships too. First, as was

mentioned earlier, the children we build relationships with will be easier to teach, more compliant, and less likely to engage in challenging behavior. Second, teachers will feel more positive about their skills, their effort – and we think may like their jobs even more. Third, adults will begin to see the "ripple effect" of relationship building. As children learn in the context of caring relationships with adults, they will become more skilled at building positive relationships with other children. Finally, providing a child with the opportunity to have a warm and responsive relationship with you means that you have the pleasure of getting to know the child as well.

References

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