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## Teacher-Child Relationships During COVID-19

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### INSTRUCTIONS

This handout was designed for use with “Building Strong Relationships,” a professional development webinar from the University of Virginia. The questions and activities in this handout could be used in a work session (e.g., professional learning community, professional development session), individual coaching, or self-reflection.

### Goals

- ◆ Understand the power of relationships as essential to developing social and emotional skills and as foundational to opportunity and success.
- ◆ Explore potential barriers to building relationships with all children.
- ◆ Make a plan to use concrete strategies to develop and maintain strong connections with children during virtual, hybrid, or physically distant learning.

### Activity

- ◆ Listen to the webinar. This webinar is a production of the School of Education at the University of Virginia, narrated by Caitlin Powell, Early Childhood Project Associate, and Stephanie Adams, STREAMin<sup>3</sup> Curriculum Coach.
- ◆ After listening to the webinar, use the questions below to guide your reflection on the impact that teacher-child relationships have on learning and plan to build strong connections with children.

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**"It's that more human, more intimate interaction that's going to make all the difference this coming year."**

**Sal Khan, Khan Academy (NPR)**

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## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ◆ What caught your attention from the webinar? What made that fact, excerpt, or example meaningful to you?



- ◆ Go through your classroom roster and assess your relationship with each and every child. To do this, reflect on whether you have a strong (e.g., does that child come to you for help?) and/or conflictual relationship with that child (e.g., filled with tension, challenges, or indifference).
  1. Thinking about all children with whom you have a strong relationship, what have you done that has helped you build and maintain such positive relationships?
  2. For each child with whom you are not currently having a strong relationship, what may be some potential barriers?
  3. What did you learn by doing this exercise/reflection?



- ◆ In the webinar, Stephanie Adams points out that while teachers would never intentionally deny a child the chance to learn or connect, it's also true that we feel closer to some children than others. Sometimes that's because we can see some of ourselves in them or perhaps we're of the same race, from similar cultural backgrounds, live and socialize in the same areas, or speak the same languages.
  1. How do you think your differences and similarities with children related to culture, race, language spoken, background, or those with disabilities may be impacting your relationships, specifically with children with whom you feel less connected?



- ◆ Virtual, hybrid, and physically distant learning add a new barrier to building relationships with children. For children with disabilities, this may feel intensified. The webinar outlines three effective practices for **building** and **maintaining** positive teacher-child relationships:
  - ◆ Help children see you as a resource
  - ◆ Promote autonomy
  - ◆ Engage in social conversations
  1. Plan for specific ways to use each of these practices to connect with children in your virtual, hybrid, or physically distanced setting. *Examples provided on the following page.*
  2. Check in on your plan and assess its impact on children and readjust as needed. *Examples provided on the following page.*



## BE A RESOURCE

- ◆ **Be available for families** – Check in with families regularly and be consistent in your communication and routine (while staying flexible).
- ◆ **Demonstrate patience and empathy** - Take time to learn about and understand the strengths, resources, and stressors families and children might be facing. Focus on families you feel less connected with or ones that may have different needs because of a child with disabilities.
- ◆ **Support children with technology** - Make a sign that shows the “mute” button and help children find it when it is their turn to share.
- ◆ **Practice calming breaths together** - Model and encourage taking deep, calming breaths before transitioning to an activity or logging off of a virtual meeting.
- ◆ **Offer help** - Try to offer assistance without forcing your solution, such as, "I am here to help. Can we figure this out together?"



## PROMOTE AUTONOMY

- ◆ **Participate in their play** - Allow children to choose activities and join them as they play.
- ◆ **Follow their lead without taking over** - Join into an activity and allow the child to lead. For example, if they are rolling a ball of playdough, match their movements, and roll a playdough ball yourself.
- ◆ **Offer choice within planned activities** - Offer a choice between two books and let children decide which one to read, or set up painting stations and encourage children to paint what they want.
- ◆ **Incorporate children’s ideas** - Prompt children to share their favorite things during circle time, and use that information when planning. For example, write down children's favorite songs and then incorporate them into music and movement, or use picture cards to allow children to choose their favorite animals and then incorporate those animal movements into a music activity.



## ENGAGE IN SOCIAL CONVERSATION

- ◆ **Loosely structure small groups or one-on-one time** - Encourage a small group to join a virtual meeting with paper and crayons, and they can make open-ended art while engaging in social conversations.
- ◆ **Help the conversations feel natural** - Conversations can feel more natural to children if they can engage in an activity while talking, so consider planning a virtual meeting while children eat a snack or engage in unstructured playtime.
- ◆ **Share your life and ask about theirs** - Share details about your own life, such as talking about a pet, child, or interests you have. Show genuine interest in a child's life. For example, if you notice they have a cat walking around in their virtual background, you could ask them to share about it.

## CHECK-IN ON YOUR PLAN

- ◆ **Set a reminder** - Build in time bi-weekly to check in on your relationships with each child and consider how you’ve been using these practices. If they aren’t working, consider why and ways to adapt.
- ◆ **Find a buddy** - Sharing goals with a co-worker and checking in with each other can help keep us all on track.
- ◆ **Keep a journal** and make a quick entry when you try out a new practice. Note how the children react.
- ◆ **Record yourself** (live or video) and observe your interactions with children. Take note of how often you use these practices and how children react.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

To learn more about how COVID-19 adaptations may be affecting teacher-child relationships:

- ◆ **Source:** National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
- ◆ **Resource:** “Using Technology to Enhance Children’s Learning at Home and at School: Building Relationships is Key.”
- ◆ **Link:** <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/blog/using-technology-enhance-childrens-learning-home-and-school>
- ◆ **Description:** This blog post provides a variety of ideas and resources teachers can use to prioritize building strong, supportive relationships with children and families during this time of virtual, hybrid, and limited in-person learning.



- ◆ **Source:** National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations
- ◆ **Interview:** “Connecting with Families”
- ◆ **Link:** [https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/Connecting-with-Families\\_tipsheet.pdf](https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/Connecting-with-Families_tipsheet.pdf)
- ◆ **Description:** Now more than ever, ongoing communication is a strategy that teachers can use to build positive relationships with every family and their children. This guide provides a framework for responsively and effectively connecting with families.