

CORE SKILL: RELATE

Sense of Self



What You Need to Know

Young children are just beginning to develop a sense of who they are and an awareness that their bodies, thoughts, and actions are separate from others. They are noticing and commenting on how they are alike and different from others. Children with more positive views of themselves tend to be more motivated and engaged, so it's important for children to start developing positive feelings about themselves and their skills from an early age. Young children learn about themselves when they explore their own interests and how they are similar and different from other people in a nurturing environment filled with acceptance and respect.

Things to Consider

- ◆ Toddlers can notice similarities and differences between themselves and others when the characteristics are very concrete, such as, "I have two hands and you have two hands," or, "I have long hair and they have short hair." Drawing their attention to these concrete examples helps young children develop self-awareness.
- ◆ Build upon children's natural curiosity about similarities and differences and use this as an opportunity to acknowledge and encourage appreciation of diversity. Draw attention to and embrace differences or similarities in ethnic background, sociocultural background, and family structure.
- ◆ Each child has their individual personality and characteristics which should be celebrated. While it might be easier to identify and acknowledge a child with more visible personality traits, like being daring and energetic, it is also important to notice and celebrate children's more "behind the scenes" characteristics, such as being careful and patient.

Development of Sense of Self

Between 9 and 18 months, children may:	Between 16 and 36 months, children may:
Show awareness about self and how to connect with others – experiments with use of hands and body, discovering new capacities and how movement and gestures can be used to relate to others.	Show awareness of own thoughts, feelings, and preferences as well as those of others. Use different words or signs to refer to self and others.
Understand some characteristics of self and others (e.g., responds by looking or coming when called by name). Pay attention when others notice what they are able to do.	Understand some characteristics of self and others and identify obvious physical similarities and difference between self and others.
Show confidence in own abilities through relationships with others – expresses desires and preferences. Seek to draw adults to objects of interest or new physical skills and attends to adults' responses.	Show confidence in own abilities through relationships with others – contribute own ideas, skills, and abilities to activities and experiences with adults and other children.

Setting the Stage

Activities and materials that support the development of sense of self:

- ◆ Child-directed activities that include or follow children's interests and ideas.
- ◆ Art activities that promote free expression. Incorporate a variety of colors and art materials for children to use to represent diverse physical characteristics (e.g., skin, hair, and eye color).
- ◆ Photos or materials from home to compare and discuss similarities and differences regarding "who we are."
- ◆ Introduce books, pictures, music, toys, and materials that incorporate diversity.
- ◆ Activities where children get to indicate their likes/dislikes or ideas, for example through graphs or charts (e.g., tasting different foods and the teacher records if they like or dislike).
- ◆ Games or songs that involve children's names and/or one-at-a-time movements by individuals (e.g., rolling a ball to each peer and saying their name, or each child has a chance to dance/sing in the middle of the circle).



Intentional Teaching Practices to Support Sense of Self

Monday OBSERVE	OBSERVE Carefully observe children and how each child handles themselves in different situations. Pay attention to how children approach tasks and activities differently. Toddlers are actively developing their self-awareness, which may vary a lot from child to child – even when close in age. Consider information you’ve learned about them and their families through the Initial Family Meetings and other informal conversations. As you watch each child, try to determine the amount of self-awareness that each one demonstrates. Are children comfortable describing who they are, their family, and where they come from? Are there things you can do to promote acceptance and respect?
Tuesday FOCUS	Acknowledge and Affirm Physical Attributes and Interests Acknowledge and affirm children as they notice and comment on the physical attributes of themselves and others. Promote children’s interests by making comments about what they choose to do and their affect (i.e., their facial expressions and body language). This lets children know that you’ve noticed their unique identities and value their interests. <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ “Yes, your eyes are blue. What about my eyes? Mine are dark brown.”◆ “You are smiling and laughing as you play with those scarves. You must like the scarves.”◆ “You were excited when we played with that new doll. You wanted to feed and rock the baby. That was fun for you.”
Wednesday SCAFFOLD I	Promote Child Autonomy (value their identities/interests/ideas/opinions) Let children have a say in what happens in the classroom to let them know that you value their individual ideas and interests. Narrate equity and provide opportunities for children to make choices that benefit everyone. Expand opportunities for children to experience a variety of roles and play with a broad array of toys. <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Narrate equity and offer choices: “Everyone can care for the babies in dramatic play. Do we have enough for each person to have their own or can we think of a way to play altogether?” or, “Would you like the blue or yellow paint?”◆ Imitate their play: “Oh, you like dancing with the scarves – let me try with you!” or “I see you lined up those toys perfectly in a row. Can I line my toys up next to yours?”◆ Be flexible: “You really do not like these blocks. You would rather play with those. Okay, I’ll come with you to get those.” Offer modifications for children when appropriate to support them to participate in desired activities. For example, if a child enjoys kicking balls but the gym is too loud, offer headphones so the child can still engage in the activity.
Thursday SCAFFOLD II	Embrace Similarities and Differences Make comments that embrace children’s similarities and differences. Balance activities and materials that reflect children’s lives and others that expand their worldview. <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Point out concrete examples: “Look, you both have brown eyes, but your hair is different. (Child)’s hair is curly and (Child)’s is straight.”◆ Interests, lives, or ideas: “We don’t all love pineapple. People like different things and that’s okay!”◆ Reflect and expand: “Let’s listen to two versions of this song: one performed by an American musician and another performed by a Jamaican musician. After, we can talk about the ways they sound similar and different.”
Friday KEEP IT GOING	Consider what you learned from observing children on Monday as well as their reaction to your Focus and Scaffolds. Find ways to build the activities from Setting the Stage into your regular routines.

From the STREAMin³ Curriculum – Toddler Version: <http://streamin3.org>

Copyright 2018 by the Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia