

# Little Connections: Building Relationships to Support Infant and Toddler Learning Highlights

## RELATIONSHIP-BASED CARE

Relationship-based care optimizes learning through the following:

- It creates a safe and responsive environment that encourages the following:
  - **Positive Interactions:** A meeting of two people that gives a safe or comfortable feeling
  - **Positive Relationships:** An accumulation of numerous positive interactions
- It encourages positive brain growth, which develops more connections.

## Why It Matters

Past experiences can influence, shape, and assist in forming our current relationships. Relationships take time to establish, and once established, strengthen over time.

## Healing From Trauma

Relationship-based care benefits every child, but especially children who have experienced trauma or an adverse childhood reaction. Environments and relationships that promote safety and trust help young children heal from these traumatic experiences by restoring a feeling of control and predictability.

Children who have experienced significant adversity or trauma are NOT irreparably damaged.

## Implementing Care

There are four common ways to implement relationship-based care practices in your program.

<b>Primary Caregiving</b>	One educator focuses on establishing relationships with a few children (and their families) within a larger group by providing intentional and individual care for those children's routine needs.
<b>Small Group Sizes</b>	One educator works and interacts responsively with a small group of children, typically smaller than state ratios.
<b>Continuity of Care (Same-Age or Multi-Age Grouping)</b>	Children and their educators are kept together for an extended time, typically six weeks to three years old, instead of moving children to a new group or a new caregiver based on age or the achievement of developmental milestones.
<b>Mindfulness in Interactions</b>	Mindfulness is pausing from reacting immediately to think, "What happened to this child that is causing him or her to act in this way?" instead of immediately responding by saying, "Stop doing that," or "Why did you do that?"

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## Actions Are Just as Important as Words

Physical actions, expressions, and voice tones show children that you care about them and their interests.

Build	Respond	Relate	Engage
Welcome them to the environment every day.	Talk with them using a calm voice.	Empathize with them.	Show excitement when they are proud of an accomplishment.
Smile at them.	Sing songs while changing their diapers.	Match their facial expressions.	Look at and talk about what they are looking at.
Get down on the floor so you are on the same level as them.	Use a low voice to soothe them when they cry.	Smile when they smile.	Ask prompting questions.
Send them off with a high five or hug.	Move slowly and quietly when they are sleeping.	Sit with them while eating.	Respond to their gestures, sounds, and words.
Tell them you look forward to seeing them again.	Hold infants close during feedings and other caregiving routines.	Make eye contact when talking with them.	Notice their interests and preferences.