



Relationships: Our Foundation, **THEIR** Foundation

MNAFEE Conference – 11/3/23

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Our Charge for Our Time Together

- **Sectional Description:** Relationships are foundational to everything else that we do with and for children and families. They qualify as first things first yet can be challenging to establish and maintain without intentional, responsive effort and time.
- **Objective:** Join a conversation and take away proactive ways to build and foster relationships with children, families, and coworkers that are part of building the foundations that young children need to thrive.

Opening Question 😊

- What makes you feel part of a group, that you belong?



Why Relationships Matter?

- “Young children experience their world as **an environment of relationships**, and these relationships affect **virtually all aspects of their development**—intellectual, social, emotional, physical, behavioral, and moral.”

(National Council on the Developing Child, 2004, p. 5)



Why Relationships Matter?

- Children learn and develop in the context of relationships that are *responsive*, *consistent*, and *nurturing*.



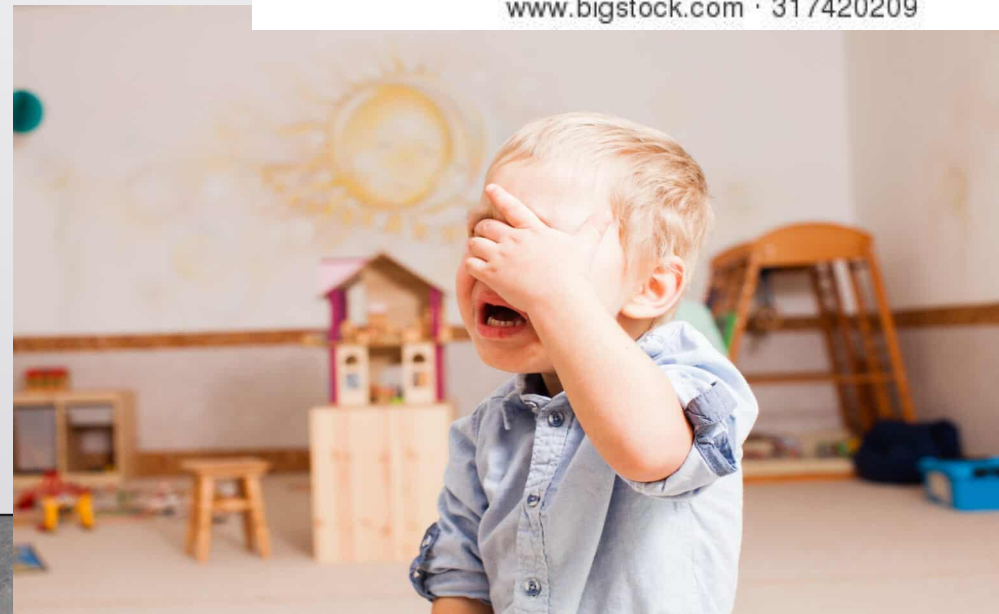
Why Relationships Matter?

- The relationships that we build with children, families, and colleagues are at **the foundation of everything we do**. It is important to build these relationships early on rather than waiting until there is a problem.



Why Relationships Matter from a Guidance Perspective

- Children with the most challenging behaviors especially need these relationships, and yet their behaviors often prevent them from benefiting from those relationships.



What Children Learn Via Relationships

- Their self-worth
- What relationships feel like
- What the world is like
- What adults expect of them
- What they can expect of others
- Extras – social skills, appropriate behaviors, self-regulation, positive attitudes, a growth mindset



Challenges When Relationships Are Not Intact

- Miscommunication
- Misunderstandings
- Assumptions & judgments
- Hurt feelings
- Lack of shared expectations
- Distance & disconnection
- Others?



These Things Matter

- Classroom & Program Community
- Environmental Messages
- **RELATIONSHIPS!**





Establishing Classroom & Program Community

Building Classroom Community



Building Classroom Community



Building Classroom Community



Shared Ownership – My Voice!



Shared Ownership – Taking Care of My Classroom



Shared Ownership – Daily Greetings

Greetings | Saludos



smile
sonríe



put hands on your heart
pon las manos
sobre tu corazón



give an air hug
da un abrazo de aire



give a superhero salute
da una saludo
de superhéroe



give a thumbs up
da un pulgar hacia arriba



blow a kiss
sopla un beso



elbow bump
choca los codos



wave hello
saluda con la mano

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Shared Ownership – Solution Helpers

Ask for help



Use kind words



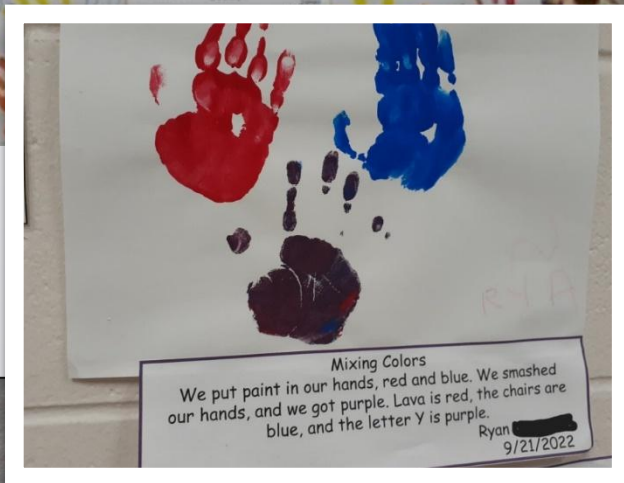
Play together





Environmental Messages – I Spy ME!

I Spy Me!

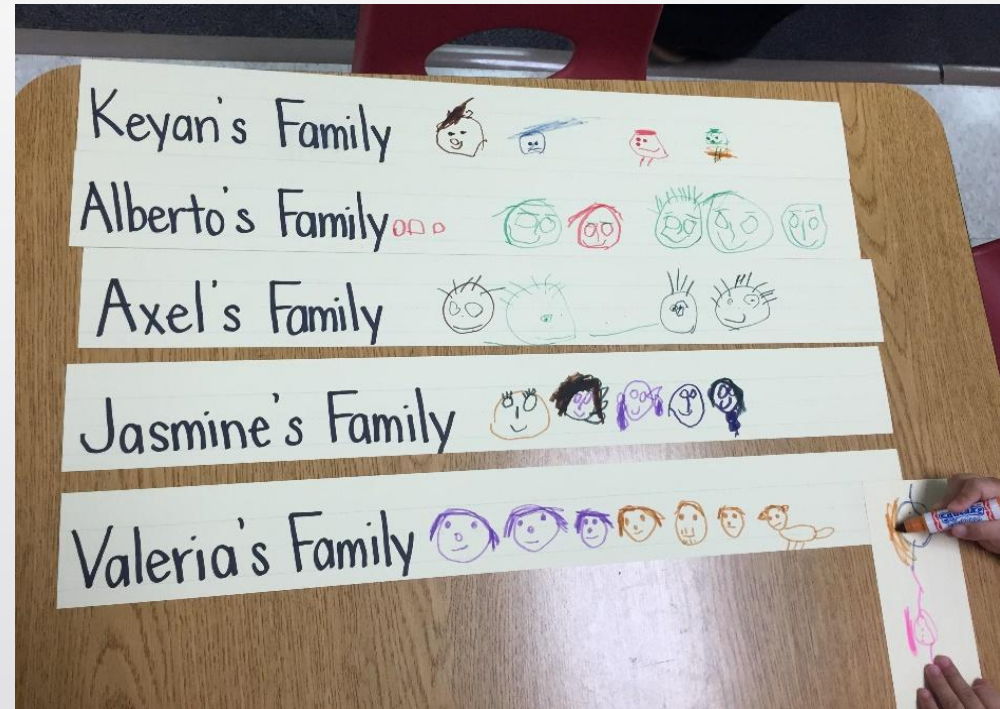


I Spy ME!

- Play materials that reflect the lives of children and their families
- Diversity in racial identity, ability, skin tones, gender
- Art materials that support a range of skin tones
- Diversity in dolls and figures
- Books that reflect the languages, race, ethnicities, and communities of the program
- Visuals that reflect all children and their families and unique family membership



I Spy ME!



I Spy ME!



Families decorated a leaf
-some colored & designed it
while others added family
photographs or memories.

I Spy ME!



Families filled the wheel with their child, & then it was hung up in the classroom.

Home Language Connections



A Community of Kindness

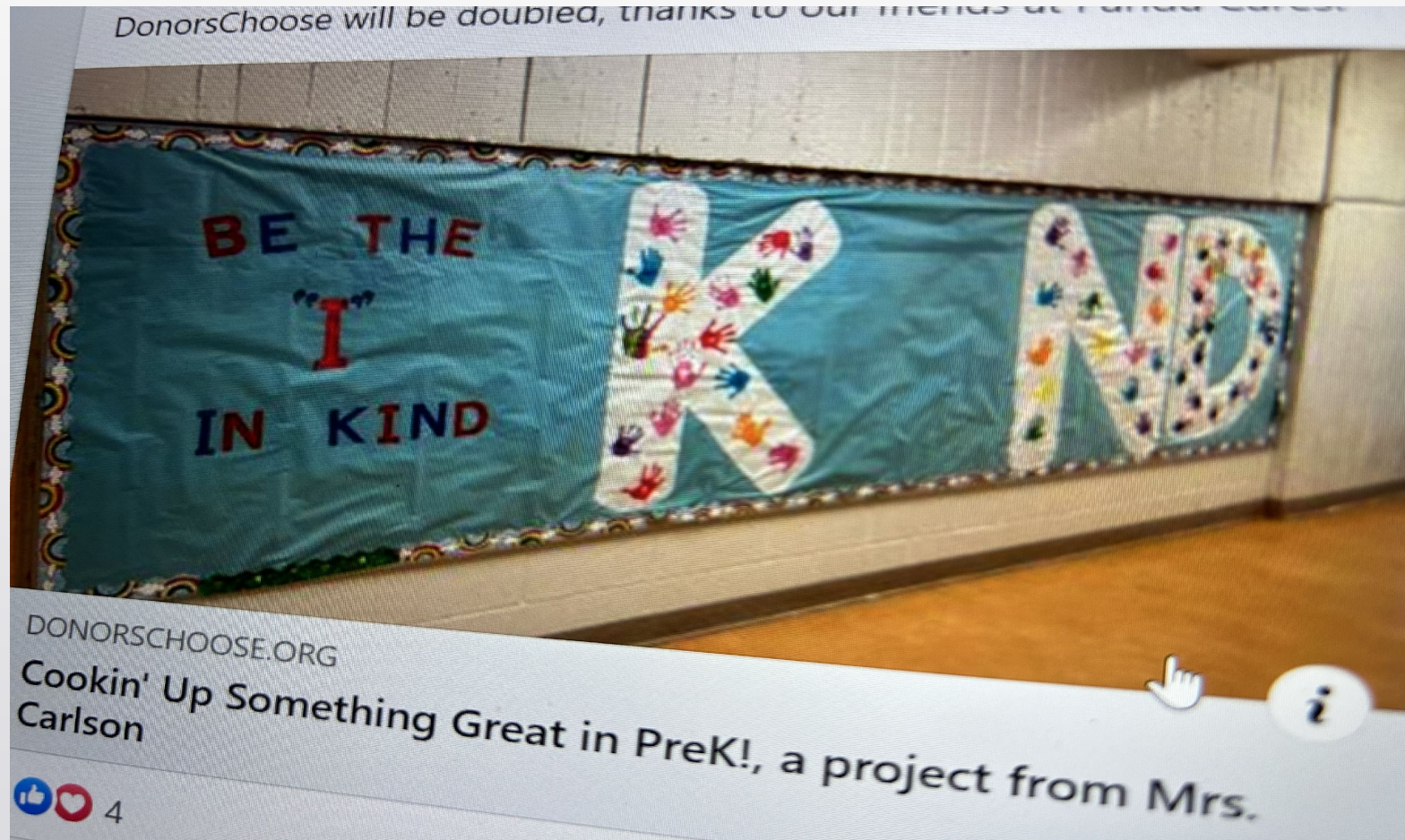
- **Kindness expectations**
 - shared language
 - unpacking kindness
- **Kindness opportunities** – classroom helpers, buddy play, think-pair-share
- **Recognize acts of kindness**
- **Involve families**



Celebrating Kindness



Celebrating Kindness



Reflecting on Kindness to Instill Kindness

- What did you do to be kind today?
- Who was kind to you today?
- Who did you see being kind today?
- Who else in our school was kind to our class today?



Cause for Pause – Consider These ?s for a Moment & Jot Down Possible *To Dos* for You

- What messages does the environment send about who belongs and what is done there?
- How does the environment foster a sense of community?
- How are families represented in your classroom?
- What strategies can you use to make sure families are included and represented in the classroom in an authentic way?





***RELATIONSHIPS!* Children, Families, &
Colleagues**

Let's focus on children first!

Establishing & Nurturing Relationships with Children – Making Deposits

- Metaphor of “Emotional Bank” used in counseling literature (Gottman, 1998) and business psychology (Covey, 1989)
- Invest in the relationship by making “deposits”
- **Deposits are strategies we use to build connections with children**



Cause for Pause – Shout Out! 😊

- How do you intentionally make deposits with children?
- Shout out your examples or add them to the chat box...



Establishing & Nurturing Relationships with Children – Bids for Connection

- Children reaching out for connections=**their bids**
- Direct & indirect
- **Caution** – your current relationship may impact your response to their bids





Responsive Relationship Practices: Bids for Connection

**Turn Toward
Children's
Bids for
Connection**

**Follow the
Child's Lead**

**Have
Supportive
Conversations**

**Provide
Positive
Attention &
Descriptive
Feedback**



Cause for Pause: How do children bid for connection? How do **YOU** turn toward children's bids for connection?



Following the Child's Lead

- How and when do you do it?
- What is the message to children?
- What do you need to know about the child to be able to follow their lead?
- How do you learn this?





Using Positive Descriptive Feedback and Encouragement: 4 Principles

1. Focus on positive/appropriate behavior
2. Acknowledge effort
3. Descriptive—Say what you see
4. Convey with enthusiasm

“Wow! Diego shared his cars with Logan! He is being a kind friend!”

“Layla, you put the toys in the bin! You are being such a helper!”

“You are really focused on that puzzle! You are a problem solver!”



Building Relationships with Children Whose Behavior is Challenging

What happens when I am implementing the relationship practices but do not feel connected to an individual child?



Banking Time



- **Banking Time** (BT) focuses on building the teacher-child relationship through supportive interactions (Pianta & Hamre, 2001)
- Set aside time for a one-on-one interaction with the child 2-3 times per week
- Spend 10-15 minutes Banking Time

Resources for implementing Banking Time:

<https://eceresourcehub.org/ece-resource-hub/strategy-library/banking-time/>

Establishing & Nurturing Relationships with Children – Promoting Peer Relationships

- Materials
- Daily routines
- Opportunities in play
- Opportunities for conversations
- Working together
- Promoting anti-bias practice



Opportunities for Relationship Building

Cooperative
art

Buddy center
activities

Carrying cots
together

Clean up
partners

Walking
partners



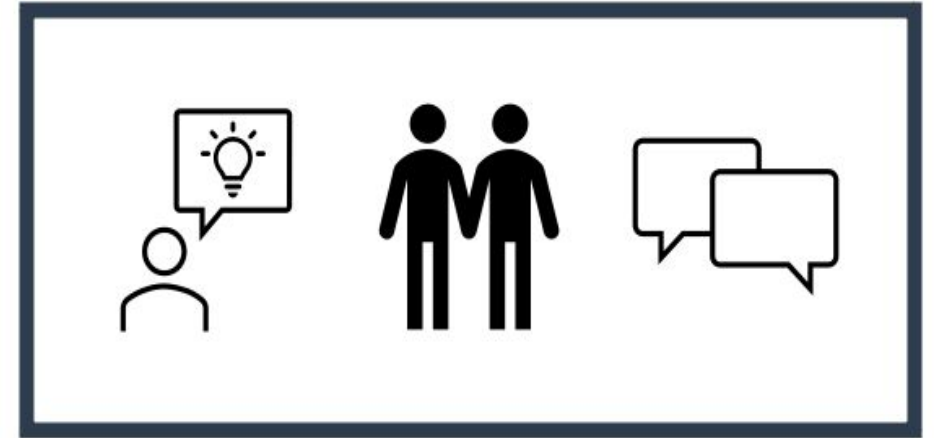
Promoting Interactions with Think, Pair, Share

Prepare questions

Teach during group

Practice throughout the day

Provide extra support when needed



Opportunities in Play: Buddy Time

At the beginning of learning centers...

- Pair with your buddy
- Choose a learning center
- Play with your buddy
 - set a timer for 10-15 minutes
- When the timer goes off, stay with your buddy or play with other friends





***RELATIONSHIPS!* Children, Families, &
Colleagues**

Let's focus on families next!



The Benefits of Building Relationships with Families

When there is a focus on **safety**, **caring**, **respect**, **encouragement**, and **trust**, we...

- Focus on the family's capacity to support their children
- Support children's social-emotional growth and development
- Create a partnership that provides a context for addressing challenges that might arise
- Build a foundation for families to have positive experiences with school

National Center on Parent, Family, and Communication Engagement

Focus on Engagement



“Strong family engagement in early childhood systems and programs is central—not supplemental—to promoting children’s healthy intellectual, physical, and social-emotional development.”

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education, 2016

Embrace a Strength-Based Approach



- Acknowledge strength of families first
- Approach families as equal and reciprocal partners
- Respect and learn from families
- Demonstrate openness to family preferences
- Share in decision-making

Division for Early Childhood, 2014; NAEYC, 2009



Strategies for Developing Relationships

- Create a welcoming and supportive environment where families are represented in the classroom
- Offer informal and formal opportunities to participate in the classroom
- Provide information about what's occurring in the classroom
- Establish and maintain frequent, two-way communication with families
- Share celebrations and successes with families
- Partner with families:
 - Develop strategies to support children at home
 - Provide resources, including community resources

Making Connections with EACH Family



Options for family members to engage



Family has opportunity to share goals



Family culture and identity is affirmed



Communicate using preferred modes of the family

Families are Visible in the Classroom



Families Are Connected to Classroom Routines

Arrival Routine

Departure Routine

Sign-out

Temperature check

Wash hands

Walk to your classroom

Meet parents at the classroom door

Say good-bye to teacher

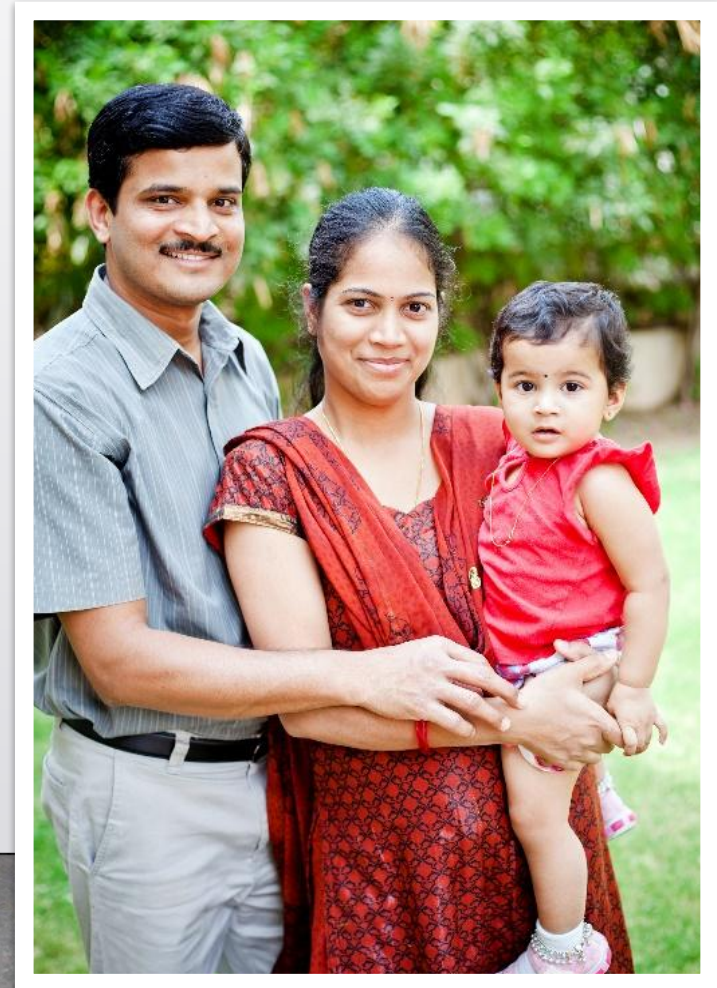
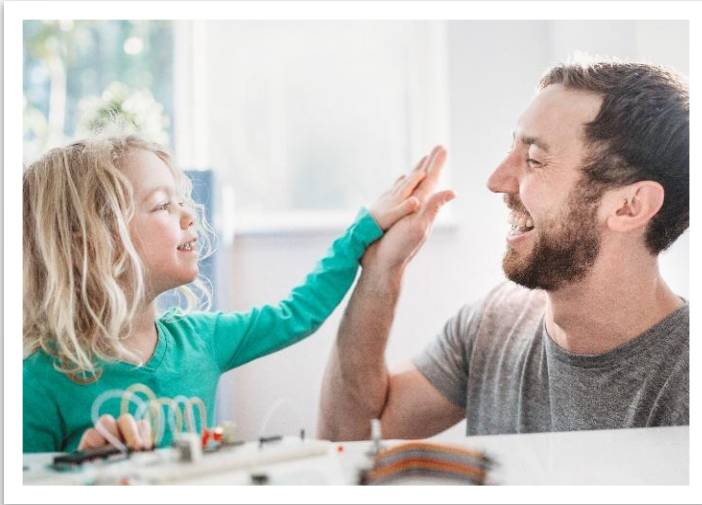


All Families



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Intentionally Reach Out to Families to Gather Information



Turn Towards Families

- **Honor** how families want to connect
- **Notice** how families make bids:
 - How do they initiate interactions?
 - Are they reaching out in ways we don't notice?
 - Which families receive more of your time and attention?



Ongoing Communication



Cause for Pause: Making Deposits with Families Reflect & Goal Set



- How do you make deposits with each and every family?
- Are you connected to each family?
- Is each family represented in your classroom?
- How do families know what is happening in the classroom each day?
- How do you know what is happening at home and how it might affect the child you teach?
- Do families have information from you for promoting their child's social-emotional development at home?
Behavior?

The Power of Relationships

“I’ve never seen a case where a child was expelled or suspended from a childcare or preschool setting when the parents and teachers knew and liked each other. Not once.”

Walter Gilliam, 2016





***RELATIONSHIPS!* Children, Families, &
Colleagues**

To conclude, let's focus on colleagues!



Why Are Collaborative Relationships with Colleagues Important?

- Leads to the development of and agreement on a **shared purpose**
- Each team member commits to **personal responsibility**
- Strong partnerships, built through relationship building and effective, respectful communication methods are nourished
- **Trust** is earned and becomes a foundation for how the team operates

We can accomplish so much more for the children in our classroom when we work together!



Making Connections with Colleagues

Plan ways for team to get to know each other

Show kindness towards team members

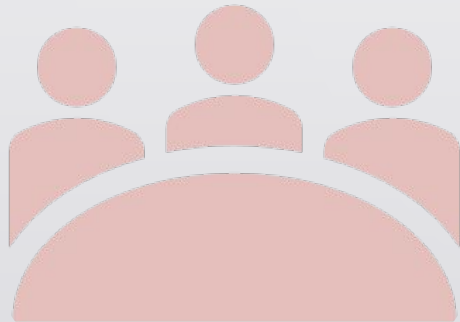
Develop shared child guidance principles

Define roles, responsibilities, & efficient classroom procedures

Actively work to understand how culture & experience shape relationships & communication styles

Establish a Collective Team Mindset

Who is part of your “team”?



- Teachers
- Assistants
- Floaters or substitute teachers
- Therapists
- Volunteers
- School staff (e.g., custodial staff, kitchen staff, bus driver)
- Administration

Getting to Know You



NCPMI Getting to Know You

Help your colleagues learn a bit about your likes and dislikes by completing this questionnaire. Collect and keep team forms in a shared place (e.g., binder, pictures on group text).

1. What are your favorite snack foods?
2. What is your favorite color?
3. What is your favorite hot beverage?
4. What is your favorite cold beverage?
5. What is your favorite scent?
6. What is your favorite flower?
7. What is your favorite thing to do in your free time?
8. What can you never have too much of?
9. What is something people think you like . . . but you don't?
10. Where do you like to go out to eat?
11. What do you collect?
12. What is your favorite television show (or type of television show)?
13. What is your favorite kind of music?
14. How do you relax?
15. What is your favorite dessert?
16. What are your hobbies?

Lightning round! Would you rather have . . .
(*neither or both* is also an option)

- Hot dogs or tacos?
- Chinese food or Mexican food?
- Cake or pie?
- Train or plane?
- Soup or sandwich?
- Beer or wine?
- Card game or board game?
- Dine in or delivery?
- Motorcycle or bicycle?
- Book or e-reader?
- Antique or brand new?
- TV or movies?
- Forest or beach?
- City or county?

Unpacking the Pyramid Model: A Practical Guide for Preschool Teachers edited by Mary Louise Hemmeter, Ph.D., Michaelene M. Ostrosky, Ph.D., and Lisa Fox, Ph.D. with invited contributors. Copyright © 2021 by Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., Inc. All rights reserved.



Valuing All Team Members

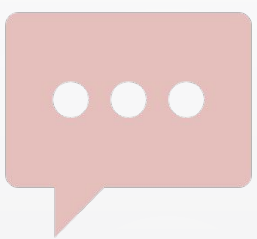
- Recognize effort and work
- Ask for input and support
- Acknowledge knowledge and experiences
- Communicate all team roles to children and families



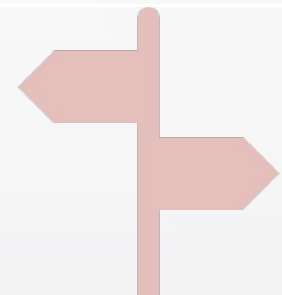
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Show Kindness: Model with your Team the Quality of Interactions You Want Children to Use with Each Other!



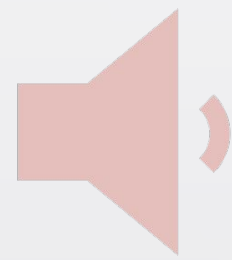
Use warm and caring language



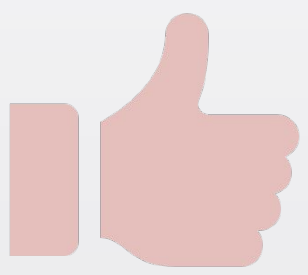
Use each other's names



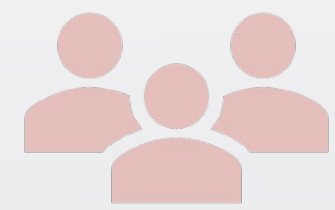
Provide directions in a friendly tone



Maintain low and calm voice

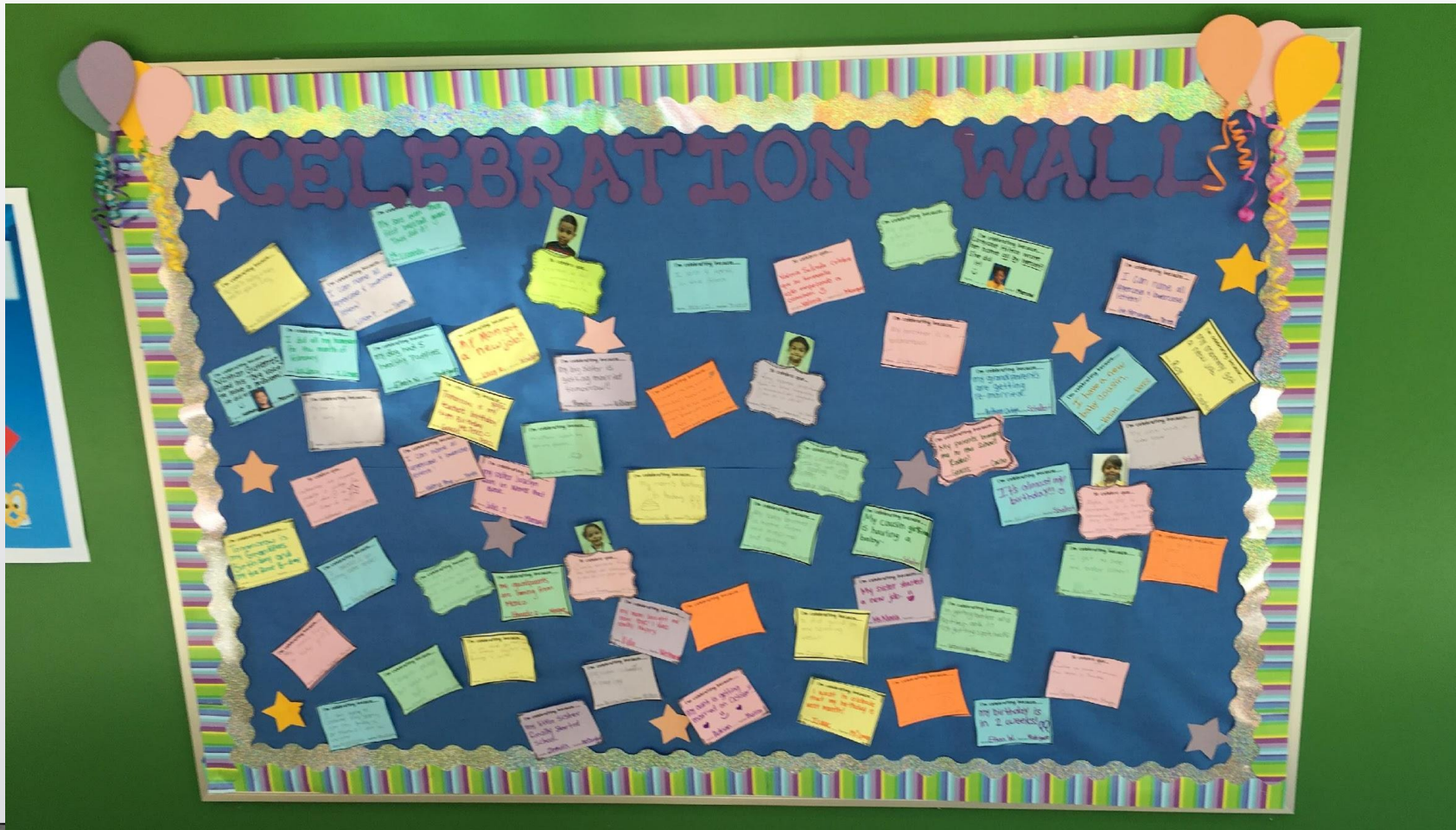


Give encouragement



Use language that implies teamwork

Encouragement: Celebration Boards



Encouragement: Celebration Tree



Enhancing Team Communication



Consider cultural and communication norms

Survey the team



Establish norms

Follow through on norms



Cause for Pause:



What happens when classroom staff members are not on the same page about how to prevent or respond to challenging behavior?



Articulated Child Guidance Principles

When challenging behavior occurs in our classroom, what do we agree to do?

Ideas to Include:

- Core values that guide classroom approach
- How team members can:
 - Interact with each other
 - Respect one another
 - Work together and offer support (e.g., release roles when feeling stressed)
- Reminders to stay calm
- Reminders of plans in place (individual or classroom plans)



Cause for Pause: How do YOU Make Deposits with Your Team?



Taking the information from our time together, how will you:

- make deposits with your classroom team?
- acknowledge their efforts?
- share in decision-making?
- celebrate things that are going well?

Culturally Humility – Be Curious! 😊

Cultural Humility challenges us to become the student, learning about those with whom we interact more personally, within a cultural context, suspending judgment.



Thank you!

Blessings to you as you continue playing your significant role in working with & supporting children & families (& colleagues)!

Dr. Sue Starks

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