

Ideas Into Practice

Segment 1: Fostering Trusting Relationships

Option A: Nurturing a Bond

Step 1: Select one child who exhibits challenging behaviors in your classroom. This might be a child who is aggressive or who disrupts classroom routines. It might be a child who throws tantrums or shows anger in other inappropriate ways. It could even be a child who is withdrawn, displays sadness, or is lethargic.

Step 2: Observe this child for two days. Write down classroom notes (anecdotal records) about her/his behaviors.

Step 3: After this observation period, try the following attachment strategy, relying on ideas from this segment:

- Find times during the day when you can spend brief periods alone with the child. You might invite the child to help you with snacks or to look at a book in your lap during free play. You might take walks with the child on the playground.
- Provide extra warmth and encouragement to the child whenever you can. (Remember not to overwhelm the child with physical warmth if this is not comfortable or culturally appropriate.)
- Respond as quickly as you can to this child's accomplishments during the day. Try using authentic responses. Ask questions and engage the child in conversations about her/his work or play, rather than using empty praise.

Step 4: After a few days, observe the child's behavior again, writing anecdotal records. Compare the child's behavior now to the behavior you first observed. Write a brief report describing any differences you see:

- Did the child's behavior become more positive?
- Did the child show signs of bonding to you as a caregiver?
- Did your strategy have any effect on the child's relationships with peers?

Option B: Practicing Authentic Responses

Responding to children in authentic ways can be challenging. It is difficult to think of comments or questions that show children you are interested in what they are doing, without using empty praise. In this activity, you will practice authentic responses with a partner—another teacher in your classroom.

Step 1: Begin by discussing with your partner what authentic responses are and how they differ from empty praise. (Remember that authentic responses initiate and further a conversation with a child. For example, you might say: "Tell me about what you're

building with the blocks.” “What do you like best about the book you're reading?” or “Tell me about the colors you decided to use in your painting.”)

Step 2: Now, with your partner, take turns moving in and out of learning centers during free play, responding authentically. On one day, one of you will practice, while the other observes. Position yourself close to children and respond authentically each time a child approaches you, shows you her/his work, or makes a comment. Your partner should observe and jot down notes on what you and children are saying and doing. On a different day, switch roles, so that each of you gets a chance to try responding.

Step 3: Study the notes you both have written about your partner and make a list of the most authentic responses the two of you made during this practice session. Discuss why you think these were effective and the impact they had on children.

Step 4: Together, write a brief report on your findings.

Option C: Creating an Attachment Caregiver System

With other professionals in your classroom, set up and test out an attachment caregiver system, as discussed in this segment.

Step 1: Begin by studying the class roster and assigning each child in the group to a special caregiver—one of the staff members in the room. In making these decisions, you should consider the existing relationships between each child and each caregiver, as well as interests, social styles, and other factors. Each staff member in the classroom should be assigned an equal number of children. This caregiver will serve as a “secure home base” for the children she/he has been assigned.

Step 2: The caregiver will “check in” with children on his/her list several times a day to see if they are feeling happy, healthy, challenged, and are interacting with peers. These check-ins, though brief, should involve warmth, conversation, and playful interactions. When a child has difficulties or a strong emotional response to peers, the attachment caregiver should be the one to intervene, if possible.

Step 3: After trying the system for a few days, discuss how it worked with your colleagues. Write a brief report on its effects on children:

- What were the strengths and challenges of the system?
- What was its impact on children?
- Did children appear to form a bond with their attachment caregivers?