

# *Building Relationships*

## **CHILD TO CHILD**



## **CAREGIVER TO CAREGIVER**



## **CAREGIVER TO CHILD**



## **PARENT TO PARENT**



## **CAREGIVER TO PARENT**

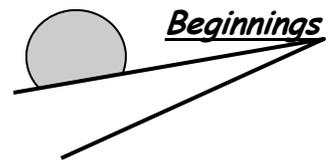


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Arkansas Department of Human Services

Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education, Little Rock, AR

School of Human Environmental Sciences, 1 U of A, Fayetteville, AR



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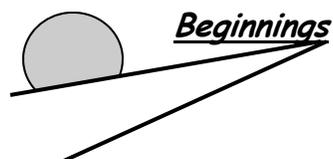
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### **About the Benchmarks**

Many of the activities in ***Beginnings*** address multiple benchmarks, which are not necessarily referenced. Check the *Arkansas Early Childhood Education Framework Handbook for Three & Four Year Old Children (2004)*.



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### **Cognitive Development and Social-Emotional Development**

Most early childhood theorists, including both Piaget and Vygotsky, believe that early social interaction helps to develop cognitive skills. Studies have shown that children perform better when tested following a positive social interaction.

Encourage children to chatter with each other.

Social problem solving is a great brain building activity.

Offer kind words to children. Social interaction is not only about child-to-child interaction, but also caregiver to child interaction.

### **Language of Emotions**

Give children the language of their emotions

When a child seems angry, you might say, "You are frowning, stomping your foot, and crossing your arms. I think you might feel angry. Would you like to tell me about your feelings?"

Soon the child will learn that those feelings mean that he is angry, and he can express himself verbally instead of physically.

Remember: Many adults are still trying to accomplish labeling their to emotions. It is not an easy skill to learn, so be patient and consistent with children.

## Creating Relationships CHILD TO CHILD

### Class Meetings

Class meetings are great for creating relationships in a classroom. Each person is given individual time to express his or her feelings to the whole class, including the teacher. All topics are open for discussion-home life, peer relationships, field trips, and general information about the day at school.

The goal is to...

- Empower children to express their feelings
- Help children gain one another's perspective
- Open communication in the classroom
- Turn-taking
- Build relationships and communities



### Drawing Pictures of Friends

One way to create a classroom community is to encourage the children to draw pictures of their friends. Write down what the child says about his or friend, and display them for children to see.



## Creating Relationships CAREGIVER TO CHILD

### Meet and Greet

Meet and greet every child and parent at the door when they come into the classroom.

### Welcome Song

(Sung to *If Your Happy and You Know It*)

Good morning, Good morning...How are you?  
 Good morning, Good morning...How are you?  
 How are you this special day.  
 We're glad you came to play.  
 Good morning, Good morning...How are you?



This is a picture of thank you notes from a teacher to her children. We should thank them often for the joy they give us.

### Play All Day

One of the best ways to create relationships with children is to PLAY!

Run on the playground!

Jump Hopscotch!

Play dress-up!

Draw



Note: Elaborate drawings by a teacher may make a child feel his or her drawing is inferior. Draw designs, not elaborate or realistic drawings.

## Creating Relationships CAREGIVER TO PARENT

### How Far We've Come...

Finding the time to communicate with parents can be difficult, however it is extremely important for children. Find the best way for you and your parents to communicate.

One caregiver in Northwest Arkansas creates an internet web journal for her parents. She writes a short message online for the parents to access. She includes classroom activities, anecdotes about children, and special events. The parents have a special login and password to obtain the website- Do not make the information public!

Another caregiver said she enjoys the old-fashioned handwritten note pinned to the back of the child's shirt. The parent is sure to see it, and the note is just as informative.

Fill out a daily report that will help parents be in touch with their children's day. Include news about food intake, sleep times, and social connections. No need to include negative information. Such concerns are better shared in a private conference.

No matter how technically savvy you are, daily communication is essential for teacher to parent relationships. Find your way, and use it!

### Ask me about...

Here is an example of peel and stick label to report the day's events

Ask me about: cracking open a coconut

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## Creating Relationships CAREGIVER TO CAREGIVER

Getting-to-know-you activities will help teacher to teacher relationships. Understanding one another's strengths and weaknesses helps the cohesion of the classroom. Co-teaching isn't always easy, but the teacher to teacher relationship is one of the most important aspects of a working environment. As a teacher, you model kindness, empathy, sharing, and much more, when you interact with a colleague.

### Adult Play Date

Host a staff meeting outside of school. Build bridges with co-workers by:



- Playing board games
- Playing video games (pictured)
- Having a book club
- Having a get-away retreat
- Enjoying dinner together

## Creating Relationships PARENT TO PARENT

### Communication Center

Create a small area for parents. Something as simple as a bulletin board with pushpins would be a great start.

Parents can post:

- After-school gatherings at the park.
- Open invitations for play dates at individual homes.
- Public get togethers- farmers market, library story time, botanical garden, or an outdoor hike.
- Helpful sign-up sheets  
When a family has an illness, death, or other personal crisis, a sign-up sheet to provide help is wonderful. Creating a caring community!

### Class Potluck

Get families together by having a class potluck. Every family can provide a dish to share. Encourage parents to bring a traditional dish that their family eats.  
Yummy Yummy!



A decorative banner with a central rectangular box containing the text "Language Arts". The banner has pointed ends on both sides, resembling a ribbon or a stylized banner.

## Language Arts

*When a social or emotional issue arises in the classroom, create a story about it. Social stories are stories typically about concerns in the classroom or about individual children. They are wonderful ways to tackle children's personal needs in an unobtrusive way and promotes literacy. Social stories can be simple story presented to children or some teachers enjoy making elaborate social books to help children. Relatable the story to the child directly by using pictures of the child in a book, or indirectly by changing names and situations slightly for the story line. Happy storytelling!*

### **Helpful Hints for Social Stories**

- Begin with observation.
- Write down steps to promote appropriate behavior.
- Keep the story positive.
- Keep the story short.
- Present the story during a reading group.
- Practice the social skill during group as the book is presented.

For further direction on creating social stories, please refer to page 30- Social Stories by Mardi Crandall

**Catalina Magdalena Hoopensteiner Waliendiner Hogan Logan Bogan  
Was Her Name**  
By Tedd Arnold

This sing-song book is great fun! *Catalina Magdalena...* is the name of the main character in this children's book. And when I say character...I mean character. *Catalina Magdalena...* has two hairs on her head one black, one red; she has two eyes one looks left, one looks right, and so on-with her teeth, her feet, and much more. The children will have a great time singing this tune, and relating to all the eccentric characteristics of *Catalina Magdalena Hoopersteiner Waliendiner Hogan Logan Bogan!*

Arnold, T. (2004). *Catalina Magdalena Hoopersteiner Waliendiner Hogan Logan Bogan was her name*. New York, NY: Scholastic Inc.

**Activity:** Ask children what their whole names are. Find out who has the longest/shortest name in the classroom by counting the letters in each name.

**Benchmark 3.15:** Demonstrates an understanding of number (how many) and numeral (3 is a numeral) relationship (numerations)

**Make Way For Ducklings**

By Robert McCloskey  
\*Caldecott Medal Winner

*Make Way For Ducklings* is a sweet story about a family of ducks living in Boston, MA. Mother duck searches far and wide for a safe place to raise her little ducklings, and they finally find one in downtown Boston. One day Mother duck and her ducklings go on an adventure throughout town to meet up with Father duck. The whole town watches and assists them safely to their destination. *Make Way for Ducklings* is a wonderful story about a caring community!

McCloskey, R. (1969). *Make way for ducklings*. New York, NY: The Viking Press

**Activity:** Act out the story! You will need a police officer, 8 ducklings, one Mother duck, and one Father duck. Provide a badge, police wand, and a suit for the police officer. The ducks will need feathers and duck bills. The children can practice walking safely behind mother, all in a row.

**Benchmark 2.3:** Assumes various roles in dramatic play situations

## Dramatic Play

*Dramatic Play is the hub for creating relationships between children. All the "important" skills we want children to be able to accomplish happen in dramatic play- sharing, compromising, self regulation, conflict resolution, and much more. So, pretend, pretend, pretend!*

### Baby Play

Baby dolls are one of the most important items to place in dramatic play. Here are some baby play ideas.

- Place plastic babies in the sensory table with a little soapy water, washcloths, and some dry towels handy.
- Place babies in the reading area. Children will probably "read" to the babies.
- Turn the dramatic play area into a baby nursery by adding a small bassinet, baby clothes with hangers, diapers, wipes, baby blankets, and other baby items.
- Add babies to doctor's office dramatic play.  
One year at the U of A Nursery School, a mommy was having twins. The big sister was very interested in the delivery of the babies. During that nine months many babies were delivered right there in the dramatic play area.

## Creating a Stage

### You will need:

Some kind of platform- a simple one built of blocks works well

Performance costumes- tutus, ties, fancy shoes, tap shoes, leotards, leg warmers, costumes

Pretend microphones- wooden cylinder blocks can be used

Mirror

Makeup area- small table, chair, mirror, empty makeup cases, hair bows, brushes/combs

Watch children act out their favorite songs and stories. Many children will make up their own performance that will blow your socks off!

**Benchmark 2.1:** Shows creativity and imagination in play with materials and props

### Annie

One teacher at the U of A Nursery School went to see the performance Annie at the Walton Art Center in Fayetteville.

When she sat in her seat, she saw that one of the children from the Nursery School had a seat a row behind her.



They both enjoyed the play so much that they brought the performance back to the school (pretending, of course).

The teacher checked out the musically CD from the library, and the children and teachers sang and acted the play for many weeks

**Benchmark 2.4:** Participates freely in music activities

## Creative Arts

*Art is more than an individual activity. The art studio can be a great place for creating relationships. Often when children are drawing, painting, or just exploring, they will talk "art talk." Children will talk about anything from what was for dinner last night to the scary monster under their beds. The best action for caregivers in the art studio is to listen to children when they are "art talking".*

### **Our Special Mural Has Four Sides**

Children learn to work cooperatively on joint projects such as murals. Sharing, discussing and making decisions are important skills to learn. This "mural" is created by painting, pasting and designing for the four sides of a large box.

#### **You will need:**

- A large box
- Paints
- Collage items
- Scissors and glue

Involve the children in a discussion to determine what kind of mural they want to make. It can be related to a special topic of interest (pets, family or community). Let them list things they will need to complete the mural. Should it be all paint? Can they add items (such as cotton for clouds) ? Who will work on which side? As they work, help them talk out issues and reach decisions cooperatively.

Note: The mural may not turn out according to plans. Ideas change as work progresses, so be flexible. Mainly enjoy working together.

**Benchmark 2.12:** Preplans art project and then works with care

**Pass it Along—**

Some art activities are meant to be totally fun! This one usually ends up being pretty silly (that's what makes it a favorite).

**You will need:**

Large sheet of paper

Markers

- Fold the piece of paper into the number of children you have in the group (3 or 4 works best for younger children)
- Invite one child make a drawing on the top fold
- Turn it over so it can't be seen and pass it to the next child.
- As each child completes a drawing, fold it so it can't be seen.
- When the drawing is finished, unfold it! Laugh and enjoy what each child has made.

\*Note: This works great for older children to draw people or animals. The first one draws the head, next the torso, next from hips to knees, next to legs and feet, etc.

**Benchmark 2.12:** Preplans art project and then works with care

## Poems & Fingerplays

*Sometimes a dependable poem or fingerplay can help a child throughout the day. Simple words can create a relationship between a child and his or her parent, teacher, sibling, grandparent. Many families use simple phrases from popular books or songs to convey love and affection for the child to carry throughout the day.*

### Do You Know This Friend Of Mine? (Sung to the tune of "The Muffin Man")

Do you know this friend of mine,  
This friend of mine,  
This friend of mine?  
Do you know this friend of mine?  
His (or her) name is Micah?

Yes, we know this friend of yours,  
This friend of yours,  
This friend of yours,  
Yes, we know this friend of yours.  
His (or her) name is Micah.



This child drew her teacher as her friend

A modification to this song makes it little more challenging. Change the last line of the first verse from *His (or her) name is Micah* to:

*He's (or she's) wearing...black boots, a yellow shirt, or shiny shoes*

*He (or she) has...short brown hair, or two long braids*

Be creative. Children love searching through the room to find the friend that matches the characteristic. They are solving a problem using verbal clues and matching clues to physical evidence.

Benchmark 3.11: Classifies objects conceptually (things that go together)

## Five Little Ducks

Five little ducks went out to play,  
Over the hills and far away.  
Mother duck said, "Quack, quack, quack."  
Four little ducks can waddling back.

Four little ducks went out to play,  
Over the hills and far away.  
Mother duck said, "Quack, quack, quack."  
Three little ducks came waddling back.

Three little ducks went out to play,  
Over the hills and far away.  
Mother duck said, "Quack, quack, quack."  
Two little ducks came waddling back.

Two little ducks went out to play,  
Over the hills and far away.  
Mother duck said, "Quack, quack, quack."  
One little duck came waddling back.

One little duck went out to play,  
Over the hills and far away.  
Mother duck said, "Quack, quack, quack."  
But not little ducks came waddling back!

Sad mother duck went out to play,  
Over the hills and far away.  
Mother duck said, "Quack, quack, quack."  
All her little ducks came waddling back!

### Ideas:

Make ducks out of felt for children to manipulate while singing the song.

Change the mother duck to teacher duck and act out the song

**Benchmark 3.16:** Demonstrates an understanding of addition and subtraction, using manipulatives

## Music & Movement

*Music can shape the emotional tone of the classroom. It can be used to intentionally create social bonds between children who may not have occurred without the assistance of music. Playing and dancing together to music can create lasting bonds for anyone. Music is a language all it's own that can be used to create community in a classroom.*

### Family Music Night

Invite families to a night of music and fun:

- Have music playing as families arrive. Children's classics that everyone can sing are fun for all.
- Create a karaoke area for parents and children to sing some of their favorites, or even teach others.
- Play musical chairs. Remember, we all want to be winners. Provide a chair for everyone. Elimination musical chairs is not suitable for preschoolers.
- Play freeze using music- when the music stops everyone freezes. Watch children will try to freeze into the funniest positions possible.
- Use *Family Music Night* as a great time to educate parents on the importance of music in the classroom.

**Benchmark 2.5:** Enjoys singing games, dramatizing songs and moving to music

### **Musical Hula Hoops**

#### **You will need:**

Music

Hula Hoops

Music

A Fairly Large Space

Place some hula hoops on the floor. Play some music. When the music stops, the children must find a hula hoop to stand inside (with other friends). To make it even more challenging, remove a hula hoop each time the music stops. The children will begin to be creative, trying to fit all their friends in the hula hoop. They will work together to include everyone!

**Benchmark 3.24:** Finds more than one solution to a problem

### **Musical Hugs**

Play some of the children's favorite music.

Tell the children that when the music stops, they can hug a friend.

*Note:* Most children enjoy getting hugs, but some do not. Offer a stuffed animal for some children to hug or suggest giving "high fives" instead.

**Benchmark 2.5:** Enjoys singing games, dramatizing songs and moving to music

## Math & Science

*According to Bess-Gene Holt, author of *Science with Young Children*, social and emotional concepts like-balance, harmony, and cooperation children can explore in nature. Think about a nature study that explores ways in which all forms of life coexist on earth (or even better in your backyard).*

### Graphing Similarities

#### **You will need:**

Graph (see below)

Graphing objects-small toys, construction squares, name tags

Pose a question to the children such as, "What color is your hair?"

On your graph sheet make column to represent different categories-brown, blonde, red, white, or grey (teachers can graph too!)

Have the children place the graphing object under the category they think best fits the question. Watch as children begin to quickly identify with each other using the graph.

**Benchmark 3.22:** Makes comparisons (scientific process: comparing)

### How To Make A Graph

#### **You will need:**

White shower curtain

Colored tape-blue, purple, red

Create a grid using the colored tape on the shower curtain. Remember to leave a little room on the bottom or top to display to graphing categories. Graph from the bottom up. The height of the bars on the graph will show which one has the most.

## Say Cheese!

Take pictures of children individually and in groups of 2,3,4,5...

- Children can count the number of children in each picture.
- Put the pictures in order from the least number of children in the picture to the most.

Hint: The children will love to point at themselves and their friends. Consider laminating the photographs to extend their handling.

**Benchmark 3.15:** Demonstrates an understanding of number (how many) and numeral (3 is a numeral relationship (numeration))



## Food & Nutrition

*One of the best times for creating relationships is during meal time. When children eat at school "family style," they share all sorts of information. Just like eating at the table increases family cohesion at home, it also creates cohesion at school. So teachers should always sit down and enjoy the meal too- it builds relationships!*

### **We Work Together - A Special Tablecloth**

A paper tablecloth becomes really special when everyone makes his or her own "Mark."

**You will need:**

Paper table cloth (or large piece of kraft paper)

Markers

- Seat children around table. If you don't have a large table, then place the tablecloth on the floor. Children are young and flexible, they can handle it!
- Let them create their "special spaces" by decorating a portion of the table cloth with markers.
- Let each child "make his or her mark" for a signature.

**Benchmark 2.10:** Explores and manipulates art media

### Friendship Salad

- Have children, teachers, director, custodian, and parents all bring a piece of fruit to create "friendship salad."
- Provide plastic knives, aprons, and cutting boards for children to cut up the fruit. Remember lots of hand washing!
- The friendship salad not only becomes a relationship building activity but also a taste-testing activity. Children are able to try all different types of fruit.
- This could also work for a traditional lettuce salad. Think about all the fun veggies you could add-radishes, mushrooms, or even bok choy.
- Of course, invite all the school community who helped create the salad eat it as well.

**Benchmark 4.4:** Recognizes different types of food

### Fresh Lemonade

- 1 Lemon
- 2 Tablespoons Sugar
- 1 1/4 Cups Water
- 2 Ice Cubes

You will need:

- Cups
- Spoons
- Citrus Juicer

Squeeze lemon juice from one lemon. Add the sugar and water. Stir until the sugar dissolves. This should make one serving. Adjust the recipe to match class size.

## Blocks

*Building with blocks builds relationships! A child to child relationship is built when children work together (or even near) each other on block structures. They are balancing friendships and blocks at the same time.*

### A Classroom Structure

Encourage a classroom block structure by beginning a structure at the first of the week. Keep adding (or subtracting) blocks to the structure throughout the week.



### Helpful Hints:

- Keep a log of the children's ideas. The structure may begin as a boat and, be a castle or boat (or both) by the end of the week.
- Encourage children who typically do not play in the block area to contribute to the classroom creation. You might say, "It's your turn now."
- Rotate children in and out. Some will stay for an extended time and not allow time for others to contribute to the structure.
- Limit the amount of builders; two at a time will work well.
- Take pictures of the progress of the structure. Date them and discuss how the structures changed. Put these pictures and comments on a poster for children to review.
- Take pictures of the final creation and enjoy prideful smiles of the builders.

**Benchmark 1.19:** Works cooperatively with others on completing a task

## Your Turn, My Turn

The child puts a block down, then the teacher adds a block, then the child, and so on. As you take turns, you chant, "Your turn, my turn."

### This will be helpful for children who are:

Having trouble turn taking.  
 Needing a little individual attention.  
 Leary of the block center.

### This will be helpful for teachers who are:

Learning how to *play* with children.

**Benchmark 3.10:** Classifies objects by physical features such as shape or color



### Recycling Blocks

Ask parents to bring clean durable cardboard boxes to school- macaroni and cheese boxes, cereal boxes, computer boxes, etc...

Stuff boxes with newspaper. Then tape them together to strengthen the new blocks.

Add the boxes to the block center for additional building materials.

## Outdoor Play

*Running, jumping, and screaming on the playground may seem like chaos, but many times it is about creating friendships. Children will create relationships within the simplest forms of play. Maria may notice that she likes to slide, and Beth likes to slide; so that could mean they could be friends. Encourage that wonderful physical development that coincides with the social/ emotional development.*

### Setting the Scene for Creative Outdoor Play

The outdoor play area does not have to feature elaborate play structures and equipment. With a little creativity, an area can be established that will challenge children to explore and investigate. Here are some elements that can be added.

**Loose parts**— This is a term that can include a variety of items. Suggestions are: Scraps of lumber, twigs, building blocks, sticks, stones, logs, cloth, chalk, sand and water toys.

**Digging area**—Designate an area where children can dig. If possible have the soil tilled so it will be easier to shape and scoop the dirt. Provide cans for the worms. Have books available to answer worm questions.

**Add a little water**—a couple of watering cans filled with water will make really good mud. (Keep old towels handy for clean-up)

**Consider planting a garden.** Half flowers, half vegetables. Read the book *The Carrot Seed*.

**Keep one area clear** so that child can run, jump or kick a ball.

**Create shady areas**—if there is no natural shade. add a canopy to an adjacent wall or look for a camping-type canopy.

### **Outdoor Car Wash**

Line up the tricycles and riding cars and get into the car wash business.

**You will need:**

- Vehicles or toys to wash
- Two or three pans of soapy water
- Sponges
- Hose for rinsing (optional)
- Dry towels for drying and polishing (optional)

Idea: Give rain checks, take pretend money, etc. just like a real car wash.

**Benchmark 4.9:** Freely participates in gross motor activities

### **Sandbox Volcanoes**

If you have a sandbox, take this science experiment outside.

**You will need:**

- Measuring spoons
- Red food coloring or liquid water colors (optional)
- Vinegar (1/2 cup)
- Baking soda (2 Tablespoons)

Build a "volcano" in the sand

Make a hole in the middle.

Add red food coloring or liquid water color to the vinegar.

Place the baking soda in the hole.

Add the vinegar.

Oops. . . Here it comes!

**Benchmark 3.23:** Shows awareness of cause-effect relationships

**INFANT CARE**  
**A Loving Web: Respectful Relationships**  
 By Kim Kearney

Our perception of a loving relationship comes from our own experiences throughout life- most importantly throughout childhood. Children learn about loving relationships from the adults in their lives- relatives, friends, and caregivers. Relationship understanding is learned through actions *and* observations.

There are several relationships that children in child care experience throughout the day. First, of course, is the relationship between the members of the child's own family. Additional relationships include caregiver/parent, caregiver/caregiver, child/caregiver, and infant/infant.

**Caregiver to Parent**

- Make eye-contact.
- Say, "Good Morning. I'm so glad to see you."
- Visit the child's home.
- Have an open house at school.
- Plan a class picnic.

**Caregiver to Caregiver**

- Use kind words.
- Model comments like, "Thank you" or "Please."
- Show that you care- give hugs and compliments.

**Caregiver to Infant**

- Every moment is a teaching moment, so make them all count!
- Model respect to the child.
- Give the child power by giving choices and responsibilities.

**Infant to Infant**

- Infants learn about each other through touching, tasting, smelling, seeing, and hearing.
- Provide time for children to interact with each other and children of other age groups.
- Infants will learn to have loving, respectful relationships when good role models are present, little guidance is used and lots of practice time is given.

## SOCIAL STORIES

By Mardi Crandall

Children come to us needing to learn many important things. Some of those are social—how to make friends, how to enter a group, how to get along with others, how to follow a routine. The list is almost endless.

Social stories are a good way to help children with their social learning. In fact, social stories provide such good support that teachers have used them for years. Check out Aesop's Fables, for example, and you will find stories that have been shared with children for decades.

You can find all sorts of helpful book titles at your local library. Enlist help from the children's librarian, colleagues, and the internet to connect with suitable titles.

Or—an even more helpful plan—may be *making* a book to use as a tool to teach positive behavior about a specific issue. These teacher-made social stories, introduced by therapists working with autistic children in the 1990s, have proven helpful for *all* children who are dealing with social deficits.

Why are social books helpful to so many children? Every child is learning to negotiate social situations. Lynch and Simpson (2005) have called social books "hidden curriculum." The best social books directly link the child to the book by using the child's name and his or her picture in the classroom environment. You can simply picture the child doing what needs to be done. Or you can do as therapists do, using a formula such as the following one.

Begin with observation. Look for social situations that pose a challenge, and watch for how other children successfully deal with this issue. Jot down the steps that lead to success for these children.

Then begin writing the social story. Write two to five sentences to describe what children and adults do in this situation. Do not refer to any negative behavior. Keep it totally positive. Also be sure that the words you use are simple to understand.

Then write a single sentence that appropriately directs the child's action. What is the way to act in this situation? Make it short and positive so that it can't be missed.

Next add one perspective sentence that tells how other people react positively when the child reacts appropriately. This helps a child gain perspective, a need in social situations.

## SOCIAL STORIES CONT...

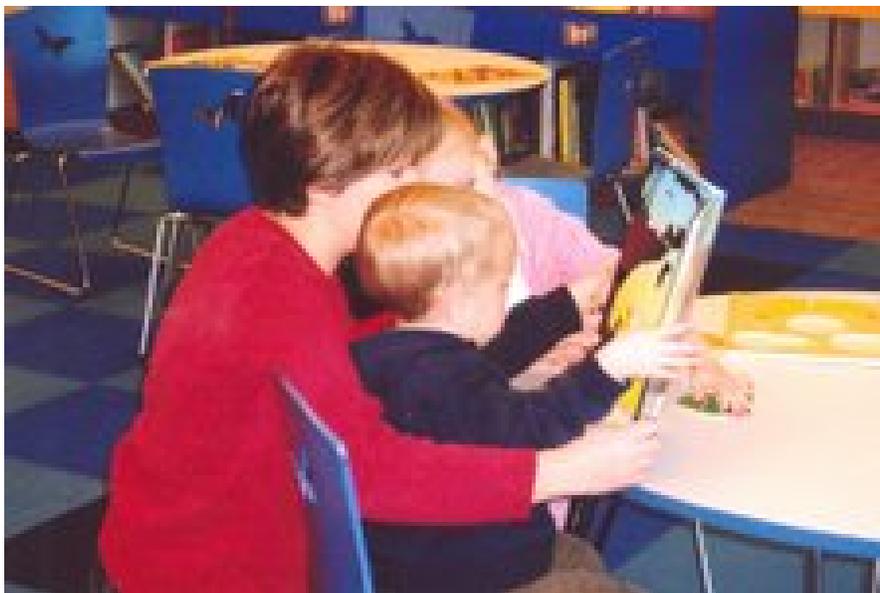
Write one affirmative sentence. It can be very general, such as, "This is very important."

Finally, end with a single "control" sentence. It typically says, "I will try to remember to..." Note it does not say, "I must remember to..." Sometimes teachers ask a child to help them write this sentence.

Remember that social stories are simply tools. You will need to present them during regularly scheduled reading periods so the children are not singled out or see the books as punishment. Discuss the story and practice the social skill the book presents.

If the child's social deficit is significant, you can use the book individually.

Either way, you are likely to find that children respond positively to social books—and they can become your ally as you seek to help children learn social rules in the classroom and/or home environments.



**The Art of Creating Relationships between  
Early Childhood Educators and Children with Special Needs  
Part I**

Julie Minkel, M.S., M. Ed, LPC,

"Come and play with me," the Little Prince proposed. "I'm feeling so sad."

"I can't play with you," the fox said, "I'm not tamed."

"Ah! Excuse me," said the Little Prince. But upon reflection he added,

"What does tamed mean?"...

"It's something that's been too often neglected, it means, 'to create ties.'" (p.58)

Antoine de Saint-Exupery (1943)

**"Creating ties"** lies at the heart of the work we do. Developing this art of relationship requires intention.

As adults, we live in hurried times wrought with distraction. Time has become a commodity to be bartered, sold, hoarded, and lost. Expediency has become the goal. Life "recipes" are sought to give us the illusion that we can "have it all" and compromise nothing.

While we adults hasten the pace of our lives, **children maintain a "timeless" world**...nurturing their sense of wonder. Parents juggle careers, children, and personal lives in their waking hours. Children are expected to fit the schedule.

It is often with you, as this family's caregiver, that this precious time to foster the child's sense of wonder exists. It is both an honor and a daunting responsibility.

**"Process, not product"** must remain the mantra of Early Childhood Education. To build genuine relationships with children, we must enjoy the journey, not focus on the destination. Typically developing children *prefer* that we do this--children with special needs often *demand* this.

Preschool children with special needs often experience **the world as toddlers**. We must have realistic developmental expectations of them as their educators. Inflexible temperaments in strong bodies can be deceptive. Remember there is a toddler within—emerging in his ability to develop impulse control, symbolic play skills, self help skills, and autonomy.

**The Art of Creating Relationships between  
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Part I  
Cont...**

**Behavior is communicative.** What is the child trying to communicate to you? Is he sad, overwhelmed, hungry, tired? Does he have an overwhelming desire to define where his body is in space, thus constantly pushing children and objects, but never in anger? Perhaps it is a sensory need for deep pressure that can be met appropriately through proprioceptive activities. There are many excellent resources on Sensory Integration, two of which are the books of Carol Kranowitz—*The Out of Sync Child* and *The Out of Sync Child Has Fun*.

Special needs children are often equipped with hyper-vigilant processing systems. **Self-regulation is difficult, yet critical.** This is accomplished in two ways—through the sensory-based classroom environment you provide and through your relationship with the child... Your calm voice, your touch... You develop an invisible "tie" between the two of you...the child soaring and plummeting **as the kite, you holding the string—always adjusting, monitoring, and supporting** the child through the ever-changing winds of the preschool day.

Child-led play between an adult and child is an effective, enjoyable, and developmentally appropriate way to **build strong relationships** with children.

To "de-activate" these hyper-vigilant processing systems which place children in the "fight or flight" mode, we must be disarming when we relate to them—as though we have happened upon a startled fawn in the forest. **We must immediately communicate to them that we are safe.** Their decision to remain with us or "bolt" will be determined in the first moment of each encounter.

For the avoidant child with autism, it is through this joining, that the child will feel secure enough to **step out of his isolated world** to enter into the bigger, busier world, holding our trusted hand.

As you work to build strong relationships with your children with special needs, always remember to nurture yourself. The analogy of the oxygen masks on airplanes is helpful..." If you are traveling with a small child, *always* place the mask on yourself first, and then the child." **We have nothing to offer, if we aren't receiving sustenance ourselves.**

Additional ideas will be provided in future articles to support you as you develop the art of building relationships with children and families in the classroom setting.



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