



Pathways to Nurturing Children

Professional Development for Caregivers of Infants
& Young Children: The Relationship Connection

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The Relationship Connection



One of the most basic human needs, beginning at birth, is to be gazed on by another. To be seen is to be real. – Jeree Pawl (1995)

An Understanding of Infant and Childhood Social and Emotional Development:

- Forms a foundation for understanding all other areas of human development.
- Within the context of relationships, provides a context with which to view organizations and their professional development efforts.

A “relationship-based lens” focuses professional development content and practices in support of the emotional well-being of babies, children, staff and families.

Memory, learning and feelings are strongly linked.



- All learning is fueled by emotion and relationships—the social context.
- The learning process in children and adults is either supported through positive social and emotional feedback or potentially undermined through negative, unpleasant or stressful feedback.

Professional Practices that Support a Relationship-Based Approach



Principles that support this practice, e.g. “ways of being” within programs, form the building blocks... for successfully promoting infant and toddler mental health, preventing serious emotional disturbances, and intervening when disorders are present.

- Pathways to Prevention
(2002)

What are relationship-based professional practices?

- Keep child and family at center of services and/or intervention.
- Observe children and caregivers in multiple settings—home, child care, etc.
- Hold (in mind) the many and often interacting origins of children's behavior.
- Promote the art of listening to parents and caregivers.
- Provide opportunities to share observations of individual strengths as well as strengths of relationships.
- Provide opportunities for staff to form supportive relationships with supervisors and peers.
- Develop leaders within your agency/program who will shepherd practice changes.

Staff members who have supportive, ongoing relationships with supervisors and peers are better able to give effective support to children and families.

- Successful “practice” implementation methods:
 - Are not a single event, activity or workshop.
 - Involve multiple actions, corrections and redirections.



Content of Professional Development in Child and Family-focused Organizations; Knowledge and Understanding of the Importance of Human Relationships at the Center

Deep and critical emotional bonds develop between a baby and a variety of people who have a regular role in his/her life. Most problems in the early years, although manifest poignantly in child behavior, are best conceptualized as relational problems.

- Alan Sroufe (1989)

Humans are social beings, motivated by social interactions and the deep feelings these engender:

- Relationships strongly influence the course of development.
- Babies from birth, and even before birth, exist and develop in relationship to others.
- Babies, at about 28 weeks gestation in utero, recognize the sound of their parents' voices.



- Babies from birth engage in reciprocal communication with their caregivers.
- Reciprocal communication between babies and their caregiver(s) is called “attunement”—it is a reflection of the baby’s inner (feelings) state. (Trevarthen, Stern)

From birth, human beings are “hard-wired” to communicate and learn through relationships.

- Infants and young children are biologically designed to form relationships that support the regulation of emotions.
- Infants and young children have an innate capacity to convey needs, desires, pleasures as well as what is distressing, in multiple ways (behavior).
- Adults are “hard-wired” to nurture and respond to infants’ needs.
- Ways of being with infants and children are learned through families, cultures and communities.
- Innate capacities (the “hard-wiring”) and learned strengths, as well as difficulties, come together to influence adults’ and children’s ability to successfully form relationships and nurture children’s development and learning.

“Leaders know the way, show the way, go the way...” Ginsberg & Hochman

- The 4 “Ps”:
 - Policies
 - Program policies that support program mission
 - Professionals
 - Training and professional development efforts that extend practitioners’ knowledge and support their practice over time
 - Practices
 - Program practices that are reflective and keep the child and family at the center of services/intervention
 - Processes
 - Supporting a program climate where “best program practices” between professionals, children and families are mirrored or parallel to practices between supervisors and staff and between staff.

References

- Ginsberg, S. and Hochman, J.D. (2006), Mental Health in Early Intervention; Achieving Unity in Principles, Practice and Policy, Implementation and Leadership, pgs. 297-311.
- Pawl, J.H. (1995), The Therapeutic Relationship as Human Connectedness: Being Held in Another's Mind, Zero To Three Journal, 15(4), 3-5.
- Sroufe, L. Alan (1989), Early Childhood Antecedents of Aggression and Passive Withdrawal in Early Elementary School, Journal of Personality, 58, 257-281
- Head Start Bureau, US Department of Health and Human Services. Pathways to Prevention: A comprehensive Guide for Supporting Infant and Toddler Mental Health.



Connected Beginnings Training Institute

- Links practitioners to research-based professional development activities in the area of infants and young children's social emotional development.
- Promotes awareness of the central importance of relationships in the lives of infants and young children.
- Extends the capacity of infant and early childhood practitioners and programs to understand and apply current knowledge on the effects of relationships on social emotional well-being, evolving brain architecture, and capacity to learn.
- For additional information visit www.connectedbeginnings.org or phone 617-345-0545