



Australian Children's
Education & Care
Quality Authority

QUALITY AREA 5

RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHILDREN



Research shows relationships are central to children developing acceptance, self-esteem and higher functioning thinking skills that contribute to positive learning and life outcomes (KidsMatter Early Childhood).

Educators can take an active role in nurturing, supporting and promoting children's relationships and social skills.

Things to consider:

- How do you build close, secure relationships with children of all ages, abilities, genders and backgrounds?
- How do you enable children to form and maintain positive relationships with others?
- How is a culture of respect, equity and fairness encouraged and communicated to educators, children and families?

LINKS TO THE NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD

The importance of developing relationships with children is reflected under Quality Area 5 of the National Quality Standard (NQS), in particular:

Standard 5.1: Respectful and equitable relationships are maintained with each child.

Element 5.1.1: Responsive and meaningful interactions build trusting relationships which engage and support each child to feel secure, confident and included.

Standard 5.2: Each child is supported to build and maintain sensitive and responsive relationships.

Element 5.2.2: Each child is supported to regulate their own behaviour, respond appropriately to the behaviour of others and communicate effectively to resolve conflicts.

Early Childhood Australia's Code of Ethics and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child can also guide the way in which educators build relationships with children.

WHY RELATIONSHIPS ARE IMPORTANT

Good relationships early in life help children to connect with others, build positive friendships and support children to self-regulate their emotions.

Meaningful interactions

For relationships to be meaningful, interactions need to be warm, caring and responsive. When attention is given to building connections and maintaining them over time, children are more likely to feel a sense of security, well-being and belonging.

Social competence

To build positive relationships with others, children need to develop 'social competence' and the ability to interact with others with care, empathy and respect. Social competence is the foundation that allows children to understand and self-regulate their own emotions and negotiate their interactions with others.

Building quality relationships

Building positive relationships between educators and children:

- help children feel secure, freeing them to explore, play and learn
- offer opportunities for children to learn how to interact with others, respect others' rights, be appropriately assertive and caring.

EDUCATORS SHOULD BE AWARE THAT CHILDREN WHO STAND OUT AS DIFFERENT IN SOME WAY, SUCH AS CHILDREN WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS OR CHALLENGING BEHAVIOURS, MAY NEED EXTRA SUPPORT IN BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS.

PERSONALITY AND ABILITY

Children's individual ability to connect with others and build relationships will vary greatly. The range of children's personalities and social skills plays an important part in the way they relate to others.

Some things you may expect to see:

Children under three:

- use nonverbal gestures such as body movements, facial expressions and vocal sounds to make contact such as reaching out, cooing and crying
- show the first signs of kindness and empathy with both adults and other children
- begin to respond to the feelings and needs of others.
- begin to explore relationships while developing a strong sense of identity and agency
- explore and develop language skills for a variety of social functions.

Preschool children:

- generally show more interest in playing with others than by themselves
- start to engage in structured games and play involving rules negotiated with others
- form friendships with children of a similar age
- develop social skills and competence via understanding the perspectives of others and rights and responsibilities within groups.

School age children:

- continue to develop their social skills to further build and sustain relationships with adults, educators and other children
- are increasingly aware of peer differences and are more empathetic and aware of their personal responsibilities towards others
- value acceptance while developing an understanding that group interactions can create challenges and conflicts
- bring existing relationship dynamics to the education and care setting.

OBSERVATIONS, STRATEGIES AND SUPPORT

It is important educators observe how individual children approach and interact with peers and adults. Educators can develop strategies to assist children to form healthy attachments, relationships and friendships.

These observations and strategies can also be discussed and shared with colleagues, families and children.

Challenging times

Certain times of the day can be challenging and emotional for some children as they separate from their families, make the transition from home or school to care, and settle into playing with their peers. By ensuring you are available and receptive to children's needs, you can help children to ease into interactions with others.

Signs and signals

It is important to be responsive and watch for signs that children are becoming isolated or withdrawn, or finding it difficult to interact positively and participate in groups. Educators who acknowledge children as individuals with a range of capabilities, temperaments and behaviours, respond by providing tailored support for children.

Children who appear to be independent and do not seek adult help may also need support in building positive relationships with others.

Being available

Educators also need to be 'emotionally available' to assist children. Being aware of and clear about your feelings and relationships with children and others shows empathy and can help children recognise and manage their feelings.

Making sense of feelings

Children often need help to make sense of and to organise intense and confusing feelings such as anger, sadness, disappointment and jealousy. By helping children understand and manage their own feelings and recognise these same feelings in others, you can assist them to build friendships and participate and express themselves appropriately with individuals and in groups.

From birth, children begin to develop relationships; first with their parents and families and then with educators and other children (EYLF).

INTENTIONAL AND INCLUSIVE STRATEGIES

Educators can support children by:

- being aware of children's abilities, challenges and unique needs, as well as supporting transitions
- creating physical environments, programs and routines that allow children the time and resources needed for positive interactions with their peers
- supporting children to explore reciprocal rights and active community participation, as well as fostering resilience and agency through activities that recognise children as capable and competent learners
- considering the pace and flow of the program that allows a balance of play experiences such as individual and group, quiet and noisy, active and passive experiences
- being intentional in planning and support to scaffold learning
- promoting a range of social skills such as group entry skills and negotiation as a way of considering expectations, diversity and democracy
- implementing flexible arrangements centred around children's routines, interests and offering extended periods of uninterrupted play
- encouraging children to take on different roles within groups
- inviting children to collaborate with educators.

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

Visit the ACECQA website at www.acecqa.gov.au to download:

[Guide to the National Quality Framework](#)

[Belonging, Being & Becoming – The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia](#)

[My Time Our Place – Framework for School Age Care in Australia](#)

Find other useful resources:

[NQS PLP eNewsletter No.36: Relationships with children](#)

[Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics](#)

[KidsMatter Early Childhood](#)



More information is available on the ACECQA website acecqa.gov.au

Acknowledgment

The information in this publication was adapted from a National Childcare Accreditation Council resource.