

Early

Learning & Education
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Learning from Relationships

Throughout their lives, children learn from relationships. Infants and toddlers learn to feel valued and safe by the positive relationships they develop with parents and caregivers. Preschoolers begin forming friendships with peers, while relying on the example and guidance of adults to help them manage emotions, communicate effectively, and resolve conflicts. Even school-age children still need the continued support and guidance of adults in order to master their social skills, develop empathy, and learn conflict resolution strategies.

Educators can support children's identity and self-esteem by acknowledging their strengths, giving them specific praise when appropriate, helping them develop

perseverance, and encouraging them to participate in group projects that create a sense of community. Children need to explore the identities they have at home and school. Perhaps they are "the big sister" at home or "Jenny's friend" at school. Experimenting with different roles, developing friendships, and trying new activities all help children form an identity for themselves and build their self-esteem.

Empathy allows us to intuitively understand another person's emotions and perspective. It allows us to be more tolerant and compassionate towards people who are different from us. Adults can build a foundation for developing empathy by setting an example of how to



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SUPPORTING NEGOTIATIONS

Children learn about negotiating conflicts through the interactions they have with adults and peers. Think about the conflicts you have witnessed between children and reflect on the following:

- Are there materials or activities that seem to cause conflicts? What guidelines are in place for using the materials or participating in the activities?
- How do you help children manage their emotions?
- What method do you use to facilitate negotiation between children?
- What tools or materials are available to support children in negotiating conflicts?

Source: *California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume 1*, by the California Department of Education (Sacramento, 2010).



Move that Body!

The development of fine, gross, and perceptual-motor skills supports children's physical and cognitive growth. Fine motor skills, also referred to as small motor skills, involve children using their hands and fingers to grasp an object, tear paper, button shirts, lace shoes, hold a pencil, cut with scissors, and eat with utensils. Gross, or large, motor skills involve children moving their arms, legs, and whole bodies by rolling, walking, running, jumping, bending, and twisting.

Perceptual-motor skills are more complex. They involve children gathering information from their senses, and then based upon that information, they decide how to move. For example, when a child is going through an obstacle course, she has to use her eyes to estimate the distance, height, and width of obstacles, and then maneuver herself through them. These activities help children develop problem solving skills and spatial awareness. The following are ideas for supporting the motor development of preschool children.

- Create a writing center that includes pencils, crayons, safety scissors, tracing cards, rulers, envelopes, stickers, and stamp pads.
- Include art supplies that promote the use of fine motor skills like pipe cleaners, yarn, eye droppers, masking tape, playdough with rolling pins, cookie cutters, and craft sticks.
- Design obstacle courses that require a variety of movements such as hoops to jump in, tunnels to crawl through, short ladders to climb, a beam to balance on, and balls to kick or throw. Once they have done the obstacle course a couple of times, challenge them to do it with a bean bag on their head or arms.
- Encourage children to play musical instruments and dance with scarves or streamers.
- Play games like hopscotch, jump rope, basketball, soccer, or Simon Says.
- Offer children manipulatives like puzzles, looms, lacing cards, or beads to string.
- Play bean bag toss games or use a parachute to bounce balls and practice coordinated movement skills.

Source: *California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume 2*, by the California Department of Education (Sacramento, 2011).



Children and Stress

Stress is a normal part of life, but when children experience high levels of stress on a regular basis, it can affect their cognitive development and physical health. Hank Pellissier describes how stress can influence a child's brain development in the article "Stress and Your Child's Brain." Pellissier explains that when the body experiences stress, adrenaline and cortisol hormones are released, causing a fight or flight reaction. This response usually only happens in emergencies, but frequent stress can also trigger it, causing possible damage to the brain.

Some of the experiences that may cause stress for children include: losing a family member or pet, divorce, academic or social pressures, and hearing news stories. Children may also experience more toxic stress such as violence in the home, chronic poverty, a depressed parent, or a parent with a substance abuse problem. Symptoms that a child is experiencing stress can include mood swings, behavior

changes, stomach aches, headaches, nightmares, bed wetting, thumb sucking, and lack of concentration.

You can support children in times of stress and teach them techniques for coping. You can make sure children are getting adequate food, rest, and exercise, provide a consistent routine, and spend time talking with each child during the day. Allow children to draw or write about their feelings in journals. Create cozy spaces for reading and share books that teach children to identify feelings, relax, and practice deep breathing. Some books to try are *Peaceful Piggy Meditation* by Kerry Maclean, *Sea Otter Cove* by Lori Lite, and *Breathe and Be* by Kate Coombs. You can also build relationships with parents and have honest conversations about changes or problems in the home.

Source: <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/stress.html> and <https://www.greatschools.org/gk/articles/how-stress-affects-your-child/> were accessed in April 2018.



Learning from Relationships

speak, listen, and interact with people. By modeling a helpful attitude, treating people with courtesy and respect, and showing appreciation for uniqueness, you can create a positive role model for children.

School-age children can identify their own emotions, but they may still need practice identifying the emotions of others. They can play games where one child makes a face or gesture, and the other guesses the emotion. Children can also practice putting themselves in another person's position by discussing "What If" questions such as: What if your friend was crying at school. How would you feel? Asking children to help care for and nurture a class pet or garden can also help develop empathy.

School-age children need to be able to negotiate and resolve conflicts in order to develop friendships and work on group projects. Teach children techniques for resolving conflicts on their own. They may still need some mediation help from adults, but they should be able to solve minor problems independently. Simple issues like who will go first in a game can be solved by rolling dice, drawing straws, or by playing games like Rock-Paper-Scissors.

For more serious conflicts, ask children to use a five finger method. Children each hold out their thumbs and take three deep breaths to cool down. They touch their index finger to their thumb, and one person tells their side. Then they touch their middle finger and the other person tells his side. They touch their ring finger and brainstorm different solutions, and finally they touch their pinky finger and decide on a solution. For group decisions, a teacher can hold a class meeting where children can vote on a decision. Continuing to support school-age children as they learn from their relationships will allow them to master the social skills they need to be successful in life.

Source: *Desired Results Developmental Profile: School Age (Complete Version)* by The Child Development Division of the California Department of Education (Sacramento, 2011).

NATURE KNOWLEDGE

Children can build their knowledge of the natural world by reading a variety of books about nature. Look for these books in your public library:

- *Commotion in the Ocean* by Giles Andreae
- *Discovering Nature's Alphabet* by Krystina Castella and Brian Boyl
- *Follow the Moon* by Sarah Weeks
- *In the Small, Small, Pond* by Denise Fleming
- *In The Tall, Tall, Grass* by Denise Fleming
- *Little Cloud* by Eric Carle
- *National Geographic Little Kids First Big Book of Space* by Catherine D. Hughes
- *Planting a Rainbow* by Lois Ehlert
- *Swirl by Swirl: Spirals in Nature* by Joyce Sidman
- *Thank You, Earth: A Love Letter to Our Planet* by April Pulley Sayre
- *The Bug Book* by Sue Fliess
- *The Honeybee Man* by Lela Nargi
- *Tree* by Britta Teckentrup
- *Water Dance* by Thomas Locker
- *Who is the Beast?* by Keith Baker
- *Who Took the Farmer's Hat?* by Joan L Nodset



Source: Adapted from <https://www.superhealthykids.com/whole-wheat-strawberry-beet-muffins-recipe/> in April 2018.

RECIPES

Strawberry-Beet Muffins

These fruit and vegetable muffins are a fun, healthy treat. Wear aprons to protect clothing from beet and strawberry juice. Allow children to help prepare and mix ingredients. The recipe below makes about 30 muffins.

Ingredients

- 3 cups strawberries (diced)
- 1 cup beets (grated)
- 3 1/2 cups whole wheat flour
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 2 teaspoons baking soda
- 2 teaspoons cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 3 cups unsweetened applesauce
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 2 large eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract



Directions

Preheat the oven to 350° F and grease or line a standard muffin tin. Rinse and dice the strawberries. Then rinse, peel, and grate the beets. Mix the flour, baking powder, baking soda, cinnamon, and salt. In a separate bowl, combine the applesauce, sugar, eggs, and vanilla. Stir in the beets and 2 1/4 cups of the strawberries. Smash the strawberries as you mix. Slowly add the bowl of dry ingredients into the applesauce mixture.

Spoon the mixture into the muffin tin, filling each about 3/4 full. Top with the leftover strawberries. Bake for 20-25 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean. Allow them to cool to room temperature before serving.

Stretch that Story!

Stories are a versatile tool for learning. They can introduce new subjects, reinforce learned concepts, and extend learning. Planning activities that are related to a story offers children a more in-depth exploration of concepts. Below are book selections for each age group, along with ideas for stretching those stories into more learning activities.

SIGNING SMART: MY FIRST SIGNS by Michelle Anthony and Reyna Lindert

Age group: Infants

What you need: Yourself and the book.



What you do: Read this book in advance and practice the American Sign Language (ASL) signs. Place an infant in your lap to read the book. Point to the vocabulary object and show the infant how to do the sign for it. Say the word out loud as you sign it. Continue practicing these signs whenever you have conversations with infants. Eventually they will begin to sign too!

What they learn: Infants explore the purpose of communication through interactions with an adult, see and hear new vocabulary words, and practice the social aspects of language such as eye contact and turn-taking.



NEST by Jorey Hurley



Age group: Toddlers

What you need: The book, bird stuffed animals, different textures of paper, plastic eggs, bird feeders, birdseed, bird finger puppets, four large pillows, and a camera.

What you do: Read the book to toddlers. Use the pillows to create a nest. Toddlers can sit in the middle and tear the textured paper to build their nest. Once they have explored and torn the paper, add the bird stuffed animals and plastic eggs to their nest. Attract birds that toddlers can observe in your outdoor area by hanging bird feeders. Take a walk to hunt for birds and try moving like birds. Take photos of the birds children see and hang the photos on the wall or place them in a photo album. Sing songs or rhymes about birds (*Two Little Blackbirds*, *One Little Bird*).

What they learn: Toddlers build their language and literacy skills, fine and gross motor skills, engage in pretend play, and build cognitive skills through observation and inquiry.

IT LOOKED LIKE SPILT MILK by Charles Shaw

Age group: Preschool

What you need: The book, cotton balls, chopsticks or tweezers, white streamers, vegetable oil, flour, mixing bowl, drawing materials, camera, white felt, a blue felt board, and *The Cloud Book* by Tomie de Paola.

What you do: Read *It Looked Like Spilt Milk* to children and go outside to observe clouds. Take pictures of clouds and encourage children to draw pictures of the shapes they see in the clouds. Use *The Cloud Book* to teach them the scientific names for clouds. Place cotton balls in a bowl and ask children to use chopsticks or tweezers to move them and create cloud sculptures. Create a book of cloud photos, sculpture photos, and children's drawings for the book area. Cut white felt into different shapes so children can create their own cloud stories on the blue felt board. Dance like clouds with white streamers. Make cloud dough by mixing 4 cups of flour with 1/2 cup of vegetable oil.

What they learn: Children develop critical thinking skills, language and literacy, fine motor skills, math and science concepts, and creative arts as they explore clouds.

Stretch that Story!

AROUND THE WORLD

by Matt Phelan

Age group: School Age

What you need: Reusable grocery bags, art materials for decorating the bags, notebooks, pencils, and supervised internet access.

What you do: The book has three stories about people who traveled around the world during the 1800s. Ask children to read one of the stories and plan their own trip around the world with just one bag. They will need to think about their mode of travel, what to pack, where to stay, how to pay for the trip, how long it will take, and what challenges they might face. They can spend several days decorating their bag and journaling about their trip. Children can use the internet to research maps, types of travel, and information about other countries. They can share their journey by pretending to be newscasters reporting on their travels.

What they learn: Children learn about the history of travel, practice critical thinking skills by setting a goal, and breaking down the tasks to complete that goal down into steps. They also build language and literacy skills, learn about other countries, and express themselves creatively.



ABOUT CHS

For over 125 years, Children's Home Society of California (CHS) has adapted to the changing needs of children and families. Since 1891, CHS has worked diligently to protect our community's children and strengthen their families through diverse programs and services.

At CHS, we view a child not in isolation, but in the context of each family's health, stability, and resources. We believe that families are fundamentally strong and resilient. The mission of CHS is to reach out to children and families at risk with a range of services to ensure every child the opportunity to develop within a safe, healthy, and secure environment.

Therefore, CHS provides a variety of services to children and families in California and nationwide, working to improve their quality of life by offering vital information, education and resource services, and child care assistance.

CHS also serves as an expert resource for childcare providers, other social service agencies, and government agencies at the local, state, and national level. To learn more about CHS and resources available to you, please visit our website at www.chs-ca.org.

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