



Relationships as the active ingredient

10 Ways to Build Relationships

According to the "Toothpaste Theory", without the active ingredient (aka relationships), all the other things we do in early care and education won't have an impact.

[Click to watch FaceBook Live Broadcast About The Toothpaste Theory \(start at 1:32\)](#)

#1 Spark curiosity – Curiosity is the brain's natural reward system. Making sure we have "sparked" children's curiosity to us, to the materials, and to the planned activities, ensures learning will take place.

#2 Be responsive – Relationships could quite possibly be the only thing that matters. All relationships are strengthened through deep listening, mutual respect, and having patience when faced with challenges.

#3 Reduce stressors – Recognize, Reduce, and Restore. While we cannot control all of the things children are exposed to, there are many early childhood stressors that we can and should manage. One of the most important roles we play in children's development and learning is in creating the space and in providing the support they need to learn to self-regulate.

#4 Know what AND how – Intentional teaching is the "how" that supports the "what." While knowing "what" to teach is critical, it is equally critical to know "how" we are going to teach. It becomes the intention behind the instruction...the thoughtful and deliberate planning that allows us to meet the diverse learning needs of children.

#5 Pick different paths – The same destination can be reached by many different paths. Learners come in all different shapes and sizes, and an instructional approach that works for one child may not work for another, so when a child achieves a particular outcome might not correspond with the rate and pace of another child's learning.

#6 Scaffold and support – Plan to go with the flow. Carefully planning the scaffolds and supports a child will require to be successful is equally important to being able to respond to what a child may need in a given moment. By planning and "going with the flow", teachers are able to build upon children's interest and empower them to try and to fail. Children also benefit from the unintentional modeling of how to respond when things don't go as planned.

#7 Be consistent – Consistency builds trust and conserves mental energy. Clear and consistent routines free up the energy children would otherwise spend on planning and evaluating the situation. Instead of time and energy spent wondering "What will happen next?" or "What will happen if I do this?", children are able to relax into the boundaries and security of knowing what to expect.

#8 Be relevant – Allow and accept children to make meaning. Children will ask why, again and again. And while a general answer might satisfy some, how much more engaging and memorable will that answer be if it is tied to something relevant and meaningful to the learner? When children ask "why?" and, for that matter, what any of us are looking for is, "What is the meaning in this for me?". Teaching is more relevant when children are given the opportunity to arrive at a meaning that gives them purpose and joy.

#9 Make connections – Neurons that fire together, wire together. We all know, when we try something new, it can feel clumsy, and even frustrating. This is because new neurons are communicating with each other (creating new connections). It's a quick, tentative connection at first; however, the more we practice, the more the neural pathways begin to reinforce each other. And each time we engage in the task or the thought, the experience is repeated, and a stronger connection is created.

#10 Create calm – Calm begins with you. Calm is not an accident, but rather, an intentional state, which can be created and sometimes won't happen without effort. To create calm, it starts with you...meaning by calming yourself and reaching for that deep inner place of peace and stillness. This invites others nearby to join you in the calm. Even in the midst of an unwavering meltdown, calm communicates respect, models self-regulation and control, and creates a safe space for the child to feel held and supported.