

Relational Pedagogy

enhancing relationships in the early childhood program

- ✓ Enhance children's wellbeing, learning and development
- ✓ Reduce, prevent and improve challenging behaviour
- ✓ Build trusting, warm, respectful relationships
- ✓ Support connection, safety, belonging and security for all children



what

An educational approach that understands and prioritises the relationship between children and educators. It makes positive and meaningful interactions, connections and children's sense of belonging central to the program. Fundamental to the approach is there is no learning without a safe and secure relationship.

how

Attuned, responsive and respectful interactions that build relationships through connection, empathy, understanding, shared interest and respect. Reflection and intentionality is brought to all aspects of the program including the environment, transitions, interactions, play experiences and arrival and departures.

Why?

Children learn within the context of relationships¹. The higher quality, responsive and attuned the interactions within those relationships are, the more likely children are to have better self-worth, self-esteem, social-emotional skills, lower stress levels and well-being². Research shows the quality of caregiver relationships shapes the developing brain and influences development and learning³. Children with more insecure relationships with their educators experience increased conflicts and negative interactions with teachers and other children⁴.

Core values of the approach:

- Relationships are transformative and powerful. They are a core component of the early years curriculum.
- Educator-child relationships can have a profound impact on their learning, wellbeing and outcomes.
- Opportunities to strengthen relationships and connection are regularly reflected on and acted upon.
- High quality programs have high quality interactions and relationships.
- Meaningful learning happens within relationships.



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When

Every interaction we have with children is crucial in the process of building relationships. It is important to prioritise essential factors in relationship-building, which can be characterised as micro-skills. These everyday interactions provide the foundation of our program and are often overlooked.

In Practice:

- Demonstrate warmth and sincere interest.
- Utilise your tone of voice, facial expressions, and body language to communicate warmth, safety, empathy, and understanding.
- Allocate time to simply be present with children, seeking nothing from them other than the enjoyment of their company.
- Foster a positive emotional environment by being attuned to children's thinking and feelings.
- Encourage joint attention through games and play.
- Maintain consistency and predictability.
- Use the physical environment to support a sense of welcome, connection and belonging.
- Support children's agency, ideas and interests individually and in groups.
- Dedicate time to prioritising the development of relationships with every child through culturally safe and responsive interactions.
- Build respectful and supportive relationships with children's families.

References:

1. Bingham C, Sidorkin AM. No education without relation. New York: Peter Lang; 2004.
2. Department of Education and Training. Victorian early years learning and development framework : for all children from birth to eight years. [Internet]. Melbourne: Department Of Education And Training; 2016.
3. Jordan B, Kennedy A. Changing the Life Trajectories of Australia's Most Vulnerable Children. The Early Years Education Model, Report No. 3, 2019.
4. Perry, B. Examining child maltreatment through a neurodevelopmental lens: clinical application of the Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics. Journal of Loss and Trauma 14, 2009.

Reflective Questions:

- How do children know they are welcome every day to the program and that there is someone waiting for them who is looking forward to seeing them?
- How do children experience me in a relationship?
- How can children understand that all feelings can be shared and will be acknowledged and addressed in a calming way?
- Which children are harder/easier to connect with? Why? Which relationships could be strengthened? how?
- How could our routines and transitions better enhance connection and relationships?

