

Relationship Equity Tip Sheet

Trauma can undermine children's ability to form strong connections. But with the right focus and techniques, you can create strong attachments even with children who you may find it challenging to build relationships with. These connections can buffer children from the negative impacts of stress and serve as a rewarding reminder of why we choose to support children as educators.



Use this tip sheet to begin building connections with the children who have the most to gain from a healthy relationship with you.

Set your focus on relationship *equity* rather than relationship equality.

Relationship equity is when an educator provides each child with the specific relationship-building opportunities they need to build healthy connections. This focus on equity is different from a focus on equality. Relationship equality is when an educator provides the same relationship-building opportunities for all children, disregarding their specific needs as individuals. Children who have experienced trauma may need additional support from educators to build healthy attachments, so a focus on relationship equity is an essential part of being a trauma-informed educator.

Assess how connected you are to children.

Which children approach you to seek comfort? Which children openly share stories from their lives with you? Are there more withdrawn children who tend not to do these things? Are there other children who struggle to meet classroom expectations, leading to corrective interactions with you? Consider what children's behavior may indicate about your connections with them. You don't need to know why you lack connection with the child. If you know that the child is not yet connected to you, you have enough information to decide to take action to build a relationship with them through Banking Time sessions.

Organize dedicated one-on-one Banking Time sessions.

Banking Time is a set of techniques designed to strengthen educator-child relationships through short but somewhat frequent one-on-one sessions. Banking Time can be used to promote relationship equity when you intentionally hold sessions for children with whom you have yet to build a strong relationship. This benefits children who are experiencing psychological stress due to trauma and children who may struggle to form connections for other reasons.

A Banking Time session is a brief period of time for an educator and one child to connect, where building connection is the primary goal. Aim for 10–15 minutes three times a week, but don't let these goals limit the length or frequency of your sessions.

Observe the child.

During Banking Time sessions, sit back and carefully watch the child. The session will be quieter, with less talk compared to your other interactions. This helps you notice the behavior, words, and feelings of children. It's easy to want to jump in and start a conversation or immediately start to narrate what a child is doing. Teachers sometimes report that being quiet and watching feels weird or uncomfortable initially—but once they try it and really watch how the child approaches their play, they often learn a great deal.

Narrate what the child does.

During Banking Time sessions, describe what the child is doing. By narrating what the child is doing, you convey to the child that you are interested in them and accept them unconditionally. You also let the child know that they are leading the session.

One way to do this is by saying out loud what the child is doing in an interested tone of voice. This is called the **sportscaster technique**. If the child is stacking blocks, you can say, “You are stacking blocks one on top of the other.”

You can also narrate by **reflection**, or repeating the words that a child says but with a slight modification. For example, if the child points to a blue marker and says “that one!” you can reflect back by saying, “You want the blue marker.”

Finally, you can narrate through **imitation**—which is simply doing what the child is doing. If a child is drawing a picture of a tree, you can also draw a tree. When you imitate, be sure that your performance does not outdo the child's. If they are drawing a simple figure, don't draw a masterpiece.

Label the child's emotions.

During Banking Time sessions, label the child's emotions by saying out loud the child's emotional state. As you observe, you are paying attention to not only the child's behaviors but also their feelings. In Banking Time, we want you to reflect back to the child what you think they are feeling—and to do this for positive, neutral, and negative emotions.

When you label the child's feelings, you communicate that you understand and accept them. You help them pair words with feelings. You let the child know that it's okay to experience a range of emotions and that you accept them even when they are mad, sad, or frustrated.

Establish a relational theme.

A relational theme is a message you convey to a child about the importance of your relationship with them. In deciding upon a relational theme, think about what the child needs from your relationship with them to thrive in the classroom. Examples of relational themes include:

“I can be a helper”

“I am safe”

“I am interested in you”

“I am consistent”

“I understand you”

“You do things well”

“I accept you”

Relational themes help define your relationship for both you and the child. They also provide a bridge between Banking Time sessions and life back in the classroom.