

## Nurturing a Positive Approach to Learning

Children who have strong social–emotional skills and a positive attitude toward learning enter school ready and motivated to learn. The ways children feel about themselves and the ways they relate to others influence what and how they learn.

For young children, learning depends on the trusting relationships they build with the important adults in their lives. The research on relationships, especially the importance of secure attachments, finds that young children develop strong social–emotional skills when their needs are met consistently by trusted adults and when they have positive interactions. Children who know that they are safe, loved, and cared for are eager to venture out to explore everything around them. When adults encourage these explorations and share children’s excitement about new discoveries, children gain confidence in themselves as learners. This research is explained in greater detail in the “Applying Research and Theory to Practice” section of this book.

ZERO TO THREE, a nonprofit organization that works on behalf of very young children and families, identifies seven social–emotional characteristics that are essential for school readiness. These traits are more fundamental to children’s school readiness than knowing letters and numbers. Here are ZERO TO THREE’s definitions of the characteristics:<sup>1</sup>

*confidence*—a sense of control and mastery of one’s body, behavior, and world; the child’s sense that he is more likely than not to succeed at what he undertakes and that adults will be helpful

*curiosity*—the sense that finding out about things is positive and leads to pleasure

*intentionality*—the wish and capacity to have an impact, and to act upon that with persistence

*self-control*—the ability to modulate and control one’s own actions in age-appropriate ways; a sense of inner control

*relatedness*—the ability to engage with others based on the sense of being understood by and understanding others

*capacity to communicate*—the wish and ability to verbally exchange ideas, feelings, and concepts with others

*cooperativeness*—the ability to balance one’s own needs with those of others in a group activity

As you observe the children in your family child care program, notice how they demonstrate these characteristics. Encourage their efforts and keep the characteristics in mind as you plan ways to support their development and learning. Here are general examples of what you would expect to see each child doing in ways that are appropriate for his or her age:

confidence—the child tries new things; shows pleasure when he or she makes a discovery or completes a task; asks for help when needed; uses words like *my* or asserts, “I can do it.”

curiosity—the child explores and investigates objects and materials by using all senses; notices new things in the environment; asks questions about what, why, when, where, and how things happen

intentionality—the child chooses what to play with, has ideas about how to use things, stays with an activity for a period of time, tries different ways to solve a problem

self-control—the child responds to redirection, increasingly behaves in ways that are expected by adults, uses words to express feelings

relatedness—the child trusts familiar adults and has secure attachments, enjoys playing games such as peek-a-boo, takes an interest in what other children are doing, is increasingly aware of the emotions of others, enjoys playing with other children, makes and keeps friends

capacity to communicate—the child uses vocal sounds, gestures, facial expressions, and eventually words or signs to express ideas and feelings, ask and answer questions, and have conversations

cooperativeness—the child imitates others and participates in small-group activities, begins to follow simple rules, helps put away toys or wipe a table, contributes ideas, and respects the ideas and efforts of others

The children in your family child care home will be more likely to develop these seven characteristics when you show them every day that you genuinely care about them. Talk with them in calm and respectful ways, take joy in their discoveries, have appropriate expectations about what they can do, and guide their behavior in positive ways. Every interaction you have with a child is an opportunity to nurture a positive approach to learning and to build a strong foundation for skills in literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, and the arts.

## Objective for Positive Approaches

Objective 11. Demonstrates positive approaches to learning

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