The following excerpts are from pages 12-18 of

Curriculum

TeachingStrategies®

The Creative Curriculum®

for Preschool

Volume 5

Objectives for Development & Learning

Birth *Through* Kindergarten

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Objective 2

Establishes and sustains positive relationships

2

Being able to establish caring relationships and to enter successfully into ongoing social interactions are essential skills for school and for success in life. There are four dimensions to this objective: establishing and sustaining positive relationships with adults; making and keeping friends; relating to other children in groups; and interpreting the emotional cues of others and responding appropriately.

Relationships With Adults

The ability to establish caring relationships between a child and the important people in his or her life is called *attachment.* An infant squeals with laughter as a trusted adult plays with him. A toddler struggles to say good-bye to her mother at drop-off time. A 2-year-old runs into the room and hugs her teacher hello every morning. A preschool child works and plays with friends but knows when to ask an adult for help. A kindergartner engages a teacher in a conversation about their shared interest in horses.

Children's ability to form positive relationships with adults is important to their social development and academic success (Berk, 2006; Bronson, 2006; Howes, 2000; Howes et al., 2008; Palermo, Hanish, Martin, Fabes, & Reiser, 2007; Pianta, 1999). The model for all future relationships begins with the infant's early interactions with parents and other primary caregivers (Lamb, Bornstein, & Teti, 2002; Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 1998). Responding to infants' signals is critical to the development of a trusting, secure relationship with their primary caregivers (Peterson & Wittmer, 2008).

Various factors can interfere with a child's ability to form secure attachments with adults. Risk factors such as poverty, disabilities, or stress may influence the formation of secure attachments (Diamond, 2002; Ray, Bowman, & Brownell, 2006; Sigman & Ruskin, 1999; Trawick-Smith, 2006). Family socialization practices, such as encouraging dependence, may also affect how the child separates from the primary caregiver, how the child responds to other adults, and how other adults respond to the child (Chen, 1996; Harwood, Miller, & Irizarry, 1995; Trawick-Smith, 2006).

Objective 2 Establishes and sustains positive relationships

The classroom is an important setting for the development of positive relationships with adults outside the family (Pianta, 1999). Just as in the parent–child relationship, the quality of the teacher–child relationship can support or limit children's development and learning (Howes et al., 2008; Palermo et al., 2007; Schmidt, Burts, Durham, Charlesworth, & Hart, 2007). Teacher–child relationships may be close and affectionate, distant and formal, filled with conflict, or overly dependent (Coplan & Prakash, 2003; Howes & Matheson, 1992; Pianta, 1999). Overly dependent relationships and teacher–child relationships marked by lots of conflict can interfere with children's learning and academic achievement (Coplan & Prakash, 2003; Palermo et al., 2007; Ray et al., 2006). Teachers must build respectful and trusting relationships with children and their families. This is particularly true when the family's home culture and socioeconomic background differs from the teacher's (Ray et al., 2006). Supportive relationships with teachers can help children overcome the challenges associated with living in high-risk circumstances and help children whose early relationships have not been positive (Pianta, 1999). Children who have secure attachment relationships with primary caregivers and teachers have an easier time interacting with peers, forming positive relationships, and being a part of the group.

Interpreting the Emotional Cues of Others and Responding Appropriately

Learning to recognize and respond to the emotional cues of other people involves learning a set of skills that adults model. When an infant smiles back at a smiling face and a toddler moves near a crying child, they are beginning to recognize and respond to the emotions of others. Two-year-olds respond to others with empathy and understanding when they offer a crying child a special toy and tell the teacher, "He's sad." Preschoolers and kindergartners understand the reasons for people's emotions and begin to learn that feelings are complex, for example, that someone can be happy and disappointed at the same time.

Emotional understanding is critical to positive social relationships and peer acceptance (Denham, von Salisch, Olthof, Kochanoff, & Caverly, 2002; Eisenberg et al., 1997; Hubbard & Coie, 1994; Hyson, 2004). Social acceptance depends on a child's ability to understand, predict, and interpret the emotions of others (Mostow, Izard, Fine, & Trentacosta, 2002). Children who can accurately interpret emotional signals are more likely to respond appropriately to others and less likely to become angry or aggressive. Children who exhibit challenging behaviors may not recognize what others are feeling (Webster-Stratton & Herbert, 1994). But some children who bully others may "read" emotions correctly, but respond inappropriately. Adults must combat bullying behavior by being proactive and taking preventive actions.

Families introduce young children to cultural rules about ways of feeling and displaying emotions (Denham et al., 2002). Some children are taught to openly express their emotions, while others are encouraged to avoid outward expressions (Day, 2006; Trawick-Smith, 2006). Children who have suffered abuse or witnessed abuse often have difficulty managing their own emotions (Beland, 1996; Ontai & Thompson, 2002).

Some disabilities may affect children's sensitivity to emotions. For example, some children with autism spectrum disorders have difficulty reading the emotions of others (Baron-Cohen, 1995). They may not recognize the meaning of basic emotional signals such as facial expressions, tone of voice, or words (Ayoub & Fischer, 2006). The more adults acknowledge children's emotional reactions and describe emotional signals, the better children become at interpreting them (Berk, 2006; Denham & Kochanoff, 2002).

Objective 2 Establishes and sustains positive relationships

Interacting With Peers and Making Friends

The ability to enter successfully into ongoing social interactions is an important social skill. This ability begins with an infant's early interactions with a primary caregiver and quickly grows into an interest in watching other children at play. A toddler who laughs with another child as they both finger paint with their own materials becomes a 2-year-old who takes turns dipping his fingers in a shared pot of paint. The preschooler who talks about friendships becomes a kindergartner who establishes and maintains relationships over time with special friends.

Children's ability to build positive relationships with peers affects their social competence, school adjustment, academic success, and mental health in adulthood (Berk, 2006; Katz, Kramer, & Gottman, 1992; Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999; Ladd, Buhs, & Seid, 2000; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 1999; Raver & Zigler, 1997; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Wentzel & Asher, 1995). Some children's interactions put them at risk for developing negative relationships with peers. Once children develop negative reputations, they are likely to be rejected by their peers unless adults intervene (Black & Hazen, 1990; Kaiser & Rasminsky, 2003). Children who are not well liked often exhibit expressions of anger, hostility, or aggression (Cillessen & Bellmore, 2002; Denham, McKinley, Couchoud, & Holt, 1990; Hartup & Abecassis, 2002). Aggressive behaviors are not only physical. Aggression also may be verbal, e.g., name calling; nonverbal, e.g., mean faces; or relational, e.g., excluding children from an activity (Ostrov, Woods, Jansen, Casas, & Crick, 2004). Both the aggressor and the victim need adult intervention and support to develop positive peer relationships.

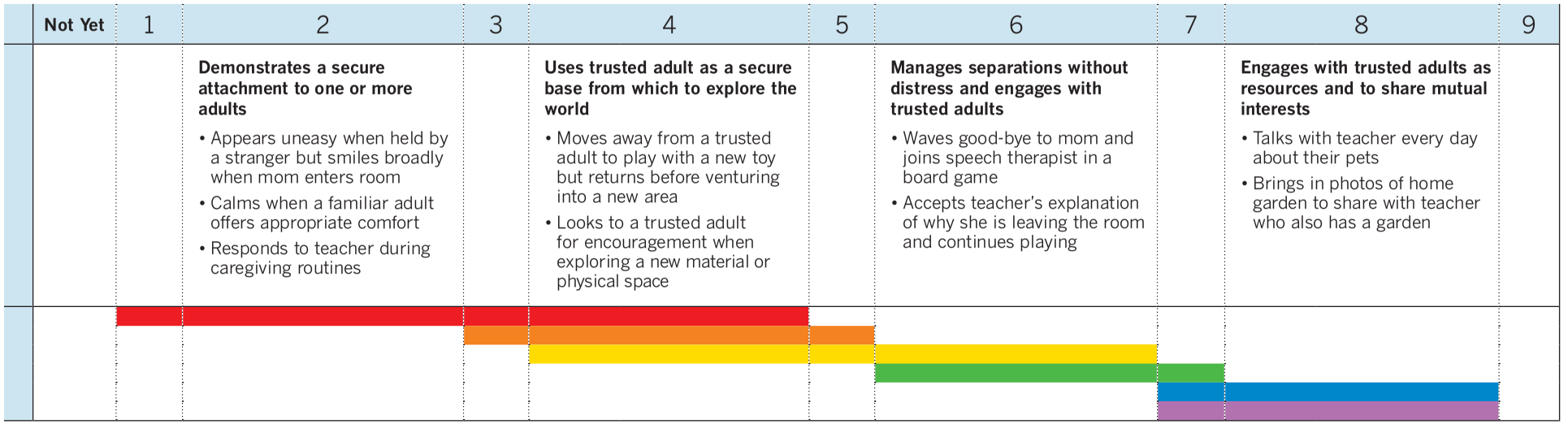
Children who are successful in their peer relationships use strategies such as making comments that are appropriate to the ongoing interaction. Children who are not well liked use behaviors such as calling attention to themselves or trying to control the interaction (Cillessen & Bellmore, 2002; Dodge, Schlundt, Schocken, & Delugach, 1983; Putallaz & Gottman, 1981). Many children need adult assistance to learn how to enter group play successfully. Children with disabilities may need help to enter the group or to initiate social contacts with potential social partners (Buysse, Goldman, & Skinner, 2003; Hart, McGee, & Hernandez, 1993; Kantor, Elgas, & Fernie, 1993; Pettit & Harrist, 1993; Robinson, Anderson, Porter, Hart, & Wouden-Miller, 2003).

Through interactions with peers over time, children begin to form friendships. These friendships can help children acquire positive social skills and develop more complex social competence (Katz, Kramer, & Gottman, 1992; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Friend relationships are different from other relationships that children have with peers. Friends are more likely to be the same sex, ethnicity, and have similar behaviors, both positive and negative. They spend more time with one another (Hartup & Abecassis, 2002). Most children with disabilities who are in programs with typically developing peers have at least one friend (Buysse, 1993).

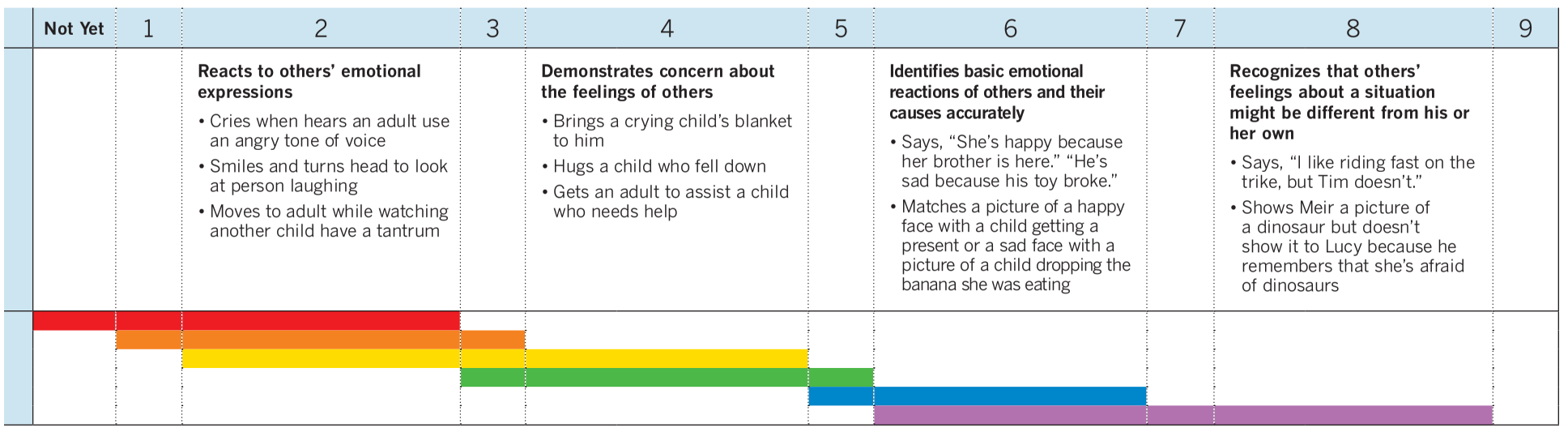
Play is an important context for developing close relationships. Creative learning activities such as fantasy play, block play, and open-ended art activities provide opportunities for children to build positive relationships with peers (Wishard, Shivers, Howes, & Ritchie, 2003).

Objective 2 Establishes and sustains positive relationships

a. Forms relationships with adults



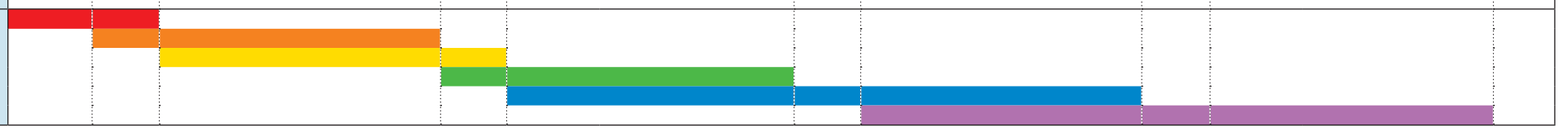
b. Responds to emotional cues



Objective 2 Establishes and sustains positive relationships

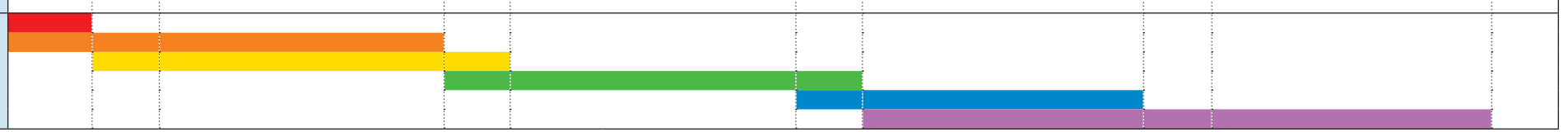
c. Interacts with peers

Not Yet	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
		Plays near other children; uses similar materials or actions • Sits next to child playing an instrument • Imitates other children building with blocks • Looks at other child's painting and chooses the same color		**Uses successful strategies for entering groups** • Watches what other children are doing for a few minutes and then contributes an idea • Asks, "Can I run with you?"		**Initiates, joins in, and sustains positive interactions with a small group of two to three children** • Sees group pretending to ride a bus and says, "Let's go to the zoo on the bus." • Enters easily into ongoing group play and plays cooperatively		**Interacts cooperatively in groups of four or five children** • Works on tasks with others toward a common goal • Plays and works together for extended periods of time	



d. Makes friends

Not Yet	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
		Seeks a preferred playmate; shows pleasure when seeing a friend • Leaves library area to greet another child upon his arrival • Seeks preferred child to sit next to at group time		**Plays with one or two preferred playmates** • Builds block tower with another child during choice time and then looks at books with same child later in the day • Joins same two friends for several days to play a running game outside		**Establishes a special friendship with one other child, but the friendship might only last a short while** • Talks about having friends and what friends do together • Seeks out particular friend for selected activities on a regular basis		**Maintains friendships for several months or more** • Finds her friend's favorite purple marker and gives it to her • Works through a conflict and remains friends after a disagreement	



Objective 2 Establishes and sustains positive relationships

Strategies

- Learn to distinguish an infant's cries so you can respond appropriately, e.g., know if he or she is hungry, tired, lonely, or needs a diaper changed.
- Exaggerate your response to an infant's behavior, e.g., widening your eyes and changing the pitch of your voice to show excitement over a new accomplishment.
- Engage in experiences that help infants and toddlers understand how to interact with others, e.g., play peek-a-boo.
- Acknowledge children's positive interactions, e.g., comment as two children interact, "You touched Omar's face very gently."
- Label and talk about emotions and their causes, e.g., "Christina is angry because you took her truck," and "Willard is sad because he dropped his sandwich."
- Read simple books showing different emotions. Discuss why the people look and feel the way they do, e.g., say, "She's smiling because she is happy. She's happy because her mommy is home."
- Discuss and read books about friendships, e.g., how friends treat one another, the things they do for each other.
- Build positive relationships with each child by making purposeful observations every day, talking to each child respectfully, being sensitive to the child's feelings, and validating accomplishments and progress.
- Assist parents or caregivers as they leave. Help them understand that separation may be more difficult for toddlers than it is for infants and preschoolers.
- Interact one-on-one with children daily, playing and talking with them.
- Display family pictures in the classroom to validate children's most important relationships.
- Respond promptly and consistently to children's needs.
- Show respect in handling children, e.g., say, "I'm washing your face to get the food off."
- Smile frequently at children as you interact with them. This helps to establish positive relationships.
- Show appropriate affection, e.g., rub backs at nap time, hold children's hands as you walk around the playground, give hugs as children arrive in the morning.
- Talk to children at their eye level.
- Make each child feel special. Make time for him or her to share special interests with you, e.g., show you a favorite book or tell you about a recent experience. Tell children about your interests, e.g., things you like to do, what you liked to do as a child.
- Model respectful relationships with other adults in the program, e.g., tell children how other adults help. Say, "Mr. Jonas keeps our play yard clean and safe," or, "Thank you, Ms. Kelly, for getting the trikes out for us."
- Provide duplicates of favorite toys.
- Model cooperative behavior.
- Make accommodations for children with disabilities. You may need to pair a child with a disability with a peer partner, hold a prop for the child to use during group play, or give guidance and language for entering a peer group.
- Pay close attention to a child who is likely to act aggressively. Help the child control his or her emotions and behavior before another child gets hurt.
- Help children detect and interpret cues about how someone feels, e.g., say, "He looks angry. His forehead is wrinkled, his mouth turns down, and his fists are tight."

Objective 2 Establishes and sustains positive relationships

Strategies, *continued*

- Read stories to preschool and older children about various emotions. Discuss why the characters in the story look, feel, and act the way they do.
- Observe children as they try to enter group activities both indoors and outdoors. Help children who need assistance find play partners. Teach them positive strategies for entering and participating in group activities.
- Address all types of aggressive behavior. With twos and older children, assist the victim and the aggressor to develop prosocial behaviors such as helping, sharing, and including others in group activities and play. Call attention to positive changes in the child's behavior. Guide the other children toward responding to the child in new, more positive ways.
- Create spaces in the room for two preschool children to work together.
- Help preschool children learn how to enter a group by
  1) waiting, watching, and listening without speaking;
  2) imitating the actions of the children in the group; and
  3) saying something positive that relates to what the group is doing such as suggesting roles they could play.
- Explain that people have a variety of emotional responses to particular events (loss, injury, pain, birthday, going home, etc.) and they do not always react the same way.
- Explain that people express the same emotion in different ways, e.g., sometimes when people are sad they cry; sometimes they turn the corners of their mouths down like this and furrow their brows like this, but they do not cry.
- Engage children in informal conversations about your life and theirs. Listen attentively while they speak.
- Label your own feelings as you share experiences from your life and how you felt. Talk about things that made you happy, sad, or excited. Explain and model some of the ways you expressed your emotions.
- Provide opportunities for kindergarten children to work together on group projects over time. Model how children can help each other and work through conflict situations.

Teaching Children to be Creative, Confident Thinkers.

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