



What Matters Most to Teachers, Matters Most to Us

Tools, Resources, and Guidance
to Support Early Childhood Teachers





Our Commitment to You

A teacher's job isn't easy, but it can—and should—be joyful and rewarding. Here at Teaching Strategies, we create tools, resources, and guidance to help you feel knowledgeable, confident, and prepared so that you are free to focus on the important work that matters most and that only you can do: being responsive to the children in your classroom.

This is our commitment to you.

Tools, Resources, and Guidance for the Things That Matter Most

We know that teachers have experienced a great deal of change over the last few years—and that the changes keep coming. The circumstances and conditions in which you work may change. The requirements may change. The expectations may change. The demands may change.

What hasn't changed is that, through it all, teachers keep working to ensure that children keep learning and growing, feel safe and cared for, and see themselves as capable learners and good friends. It's what matters most to you, so helping you achieve these goals is what matters most to us.



Here are four things that teachers have told us are most meaningful, both for themselves and for the children in their care.



Relationships



Growth



Wellness



Joy

We have included some ideas and resources to help you get started. Finally, we have included a reflection prompt for each of these topics to help you frame the important work of achieving what matters most.

1

Relationships

Building positive relationships with children, families, and other educators

Decades of research on both academic achievement and mental health has proven what early childhood educators already know to be true—that the positive relationships you build with children and their families will be more powerful and have a more lasting effect than anything else you do as a teacher.



How can you establish and maintain positive relationships and help children do so as well?



Create an environment that intentionally conveys positive, welcoming messages to children and families.



Engage in ongoing, culturally responsive, respectful two-way communication with children, their families, and your colleagues



Establish and maintain a safe and predictable classroom environment and schedule.



Remember that, in addition to words, behavior is also communication.



Leverage a network of support. Technology makes it easier than ever before to connect with and lean on colleagues, whether they are down the hall or across the globe.



Here are resources that can help.

- ☐ eBook: An Early Childhood Educator's Guide to a Whole-Child Approach
- ☐ Ready. Set. Go! Teacher Toolkit
- ☐ Blog: The Hub, an Early Childhood Education Professional Learning Community
- ☐ eBook: 7 Essentials for Transformative Family Partnerships



Scan for
Resources

You can also visit: TeachingStrategies.com/WhatMattersMost to access all resources.

“What matters most to me is that families are seen first and foremost as the leading expert on their child. At school, their child is respected, cared for, and loved in a genuine environment of support. When families and educators create a relationship built on trust and communication, it results in the best possible outcomes for the child.”

Renee Wilkinson

Early Childhood Specialist, Genesee ISD, Michigan



Reflection

Think about a positive relationship in your life. What are three words that describe how this relationship makes you feel?

A young boy with dark, curly hair is shown from the chest up, looking upwards and to the right with a thoughtful expression. He is resting his chin on his right hand. The background is white with faint, horizontal dotted lines.

2

Growth

Acknowledging and celebrating development and learning

When a child does something they couldn't before, when you see that "light bulb" come on, when you see a smile overtake a child's face—these are the achievements worth acknowledging and celebrating. So, too, are all of the little moments that lead the child to these big moments.

The same is true for you as a teacher guiding children's development and learning. You, too, are capable of doing so many things you couldn't do before. Each day, you listen and learn, and you develop and grow. Even on days when it doesn't feel like it, each of you is busy becoming what you will and can be as you guide children to do the same.



How can you acknowledge and celebrate development and learning—both children’s and your own?



Help children document their work and use the documentation (e.g., shared writings, observational drawings, photographs, artwork, charts, graphs, tallies) as both classroom decoration and as the foundation for a celebration of learning.



Write your own professional development and learning plan with both a long-term “big” goal and shorter-term “small” goals that can help set you on the right path.



Keep a journal to document your feelings and achievements. Even one sentence, one photograph, or one audio note per day can quickly add up to evidence of your own development and learning.



Ask families about their hopes and dreams for their children.



Here are resources that can help.

- ☐ Blog: Making Good on the Promise of Whole-Child Assessment
- ☐ Video: Creating a Mission Statement
- ☐ Video: Hearing Families' Hopes and Dreams for Their Children
- ☐ eBook: 6 Positive Messages to Guide a Year of Teaching and Learning



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“What matters most for me is that children are seen as people. They deserve our respect (We often demand it from them!); their voices deserve to be heard; and their ideas, feelings, and input should be considered. We all want them to grow up to be valuable and contributing members of our community and society, so they need to feel that they are a part of that now.”

Regina Garret

Teacher & Trainer, YWCA of St. Louis, Missouri

Reflection

What is one goal you can establish for your own learning? What is one step that can set you on the path toward achieving it?

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3

Wellness:

Prioritizing your own self-care and mental wellness

Teaching is a “caring profession.” Prioritizing the needs of children is what you do—but it can come at the expense of paying attention to your own health and wellness. Remember that you will always be best prepared to help children when you are intentional about taking care of yourself.



How can you start to prioritize your own self-care?



Food is fuel for your body and brain. Make a nutritious diet part of a self-care routine.



A single workout can improve your ability to focus and boost your mood. Even a quick walk around the block or through the halls at school during a short break can have a positive impact.



Make a plan for how you want to spend your “me time.” Create lists of your favorite rejuvenating, low-or-no-cost activities to use on the go so that if you have an hour, a half hour, or even ten minutes to yourself, you will already know how you want to spend the time—even if it’s just sitting alone for a few moments of quiet meditation.



Self-compassion is self-care’s best friend. Even as you hold yourself to high standards and work to achieve big goals, remember that practice makes progress; leave “perfect” for describing things like sunsets, ocean air, and baby giggles.



Here are resources that can help.

- ☐ Video: You're Amazing
- ☐ Self-Care Card: "Mindful Deliciousness"
- ☐ Self-Care Video: Cat-Cow Yoga Exercise
- ☐ Self-Care Video: Horse Punch Exercise



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Early childhood educators are experiencing high levels of stress and burnout. According to a survey conducted by Teaching Strategies in 2022 of over 2,300 early childhood educators,

- over 44% of early childhood educators struggle with mental health and burnout,
- nearly 43% of early childhood administrators report staffing shortages affecting their stress level,
- yet only 8% of educators say they're planning to leave in the next year.

Reflection

What is one practical step you can take to help you pay attention to and promote your own health and wellness?

A vibrant yellow sunflower with a dark brown center, positioned in the bottom right corner of the page. The sunflower has a green stem and leaves. The background is white with horizontal dotted lines for writing.

4

Joy

Sowing seeds of joy and reaping a bountiful harvest

Working with children offers you daily opportunities to see the world through their eyes and experience many important milestones alongside them. From celebrating the birth of a sibling to blowing seed spores from a dandelion, children have a way of embracing life that is both universal and uniquely personal. When teachers intentionally share in children's joy, they plant seeds that grow and multiply.



How can you promote joy for yourself and those around you?



The shortest route to a joyful moment is to sing, dance, or laugh. Go on—give it a try!



Define what *joy* is for you and ask others how they define it.



Never underestimate the power of a personal motto or mission statement. Whether it's on a coffee mug, a bumper sticker, or a sign you have crafted yourself, a visual reminder of your favorite empowering words can help restore your focus and recharge your batteries.



Remember what matters most: positive relationships, personal growth, and health and wellness are the keys to a joy-filled existence.



Here are resources that can help.

- ☐ Blog: Two Ways to Find (and Maintain) Your Joy as an Early Childhood Educator
- ☐ Try It: Joyful Activities to Try in Your Classroom
- ☐ Video: Learning Should Be a Joyful Experience
- ☐ Read-Aloud Video: Crazy Pizza Day



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"What matters most to me is creating secure, safe, and loving environments where children have access to unfettered support; family connection is a guiding force in curriculum, assessment, and school community; and teachers grow their practice by observing and celebrating the wonder, joy, and amazement children and families bring into the classroom community."

Lori Sabian

Early Childhood Expert & Trainer, Teaching Strategies, Colorado

Reflection

Who is the most joyful person you know? How do you think they got to be so joyful?

A young girl with dark skin and curly hair, wearing a green shirt, is cheering with her arms raised and a wide smile. She has yellow pom-poms in her hair. The background is white with horizontal dotted lines.

This resource was designed to support you in the work that matters most to both you and the children in your care.

As you continue on your journey to build a foundation of success for every child, we will continue to innovate across the only connected ecosystem for early childhood education to ensure you have all the tools, content, data, and support you need to achieve what matters most.

**At Teaching Strategies,
what matters most to teachers
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