

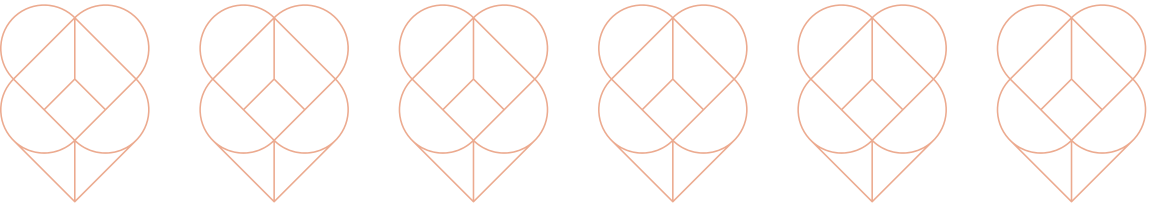
Blowing Up a Balloon

What to do:

Tell children that you are going to blow up an imaginary balloon. When you blow up your balloon, breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose and then exhale through your mouth to push all of the air out. You can hold your hands in front of you as though you're holding the imaginary balloon, making your hands spread wider and wider with each exhale (so you eventually look like you're holding a big ball in front of your face).

Why it is worth doing:

- These kinds of deep, circular breaths (in through the nose, out through the mouth) are a great strategy for reducing stress and slowing the heart rate.
- This practice can help children focus on their body and their breath, an important part of mindfulness.
- Taking deep breaths can help some children regain a regulated state.



Have more time? Extend your practice.

Talk to children about what they notice about how their bodies feel after they blow up their balloons.

Encourage children to pretend to hold their imaginary balloons out in front of themselves and “float” around the room. Explain that there is a gentle breeze, and the balloons are moving slowly and gently through the air. Challenge them to move without bumping into others so we don’t pop each other’s balloons.

Use this exercise as a way to end group meetings to help children calmly transition to the next activity. After children have practiced this as a group, they will be better able to use this skill individually when they need to calm down.

Like it? Share it!

This is an easy deep breathing practice to share with families. Share the practice the week you introduce it to the children, as a general strategy to use at home for deep breathing. You also can specifically share it with families whose children benefit from using the strategy to calm themselves. Invite children to share the practice with their families by modeling it for them at home.



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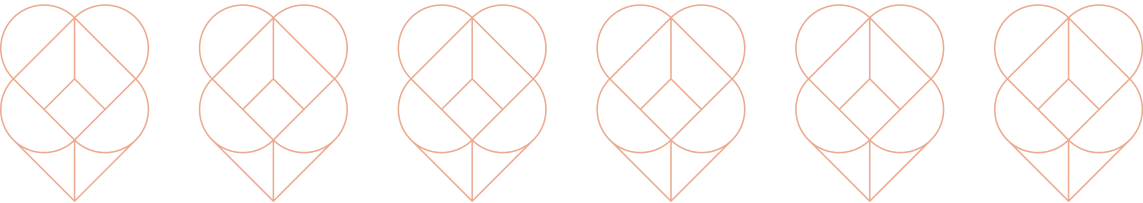
Comments of Care

What to do:

This one is simple. It's about intentionally using "I care about you" statements. "Thank you for telling me about the park you went to this weekend. *I care about you* and love knowing more about your life!" "I enjoyed listening to you talk about your painting. *I care about you* and like hearing what you think."

Why it is worth doing:

- This is a piece of strong emotional glue to support the bond between you and the child.
- Empathy begins with caring about someone else. The more you express your care for others, the more children will respond by showing they care about you, too. This builds an empathetic classroom community.
- When children know you care, they will be more willing to accept your help during times of frustration and hurt.



Have more time? Extend your practice.

Make a “Comments of Care” box or spot on the wall for children to post their own comments. Leave out post-it notes and demonstrate how to write or draw a picture of someone you care about. Give an example such as, “It was fun listening to Mrs. Carney read her favorite story today. So, I drew a picture of her face and put it in the box. I care about Mrs. Carney and I like hearing a story she enjoys.” Then, toward the end of the day, give a few children the chance to share their Comments of Care from the box or the wall. Encourage children to make these notes every day. You will soon see children treating each other in ways that earn a Comment of Care from friends.

Like it? Share it!

Every time you share a Comment of Care with a child, share it with the family at the end of the day. Let caregivers hear how much you care about their child. Also, use Comments of Care with family members. “Arlene, how are you feeling today? I know your allergies were bothering you yesterday. I care about you and want to make sure you are okay.” This will build empathy and compassion between you and the families, helping you to be partners in supporting the children.



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Mindful Touch

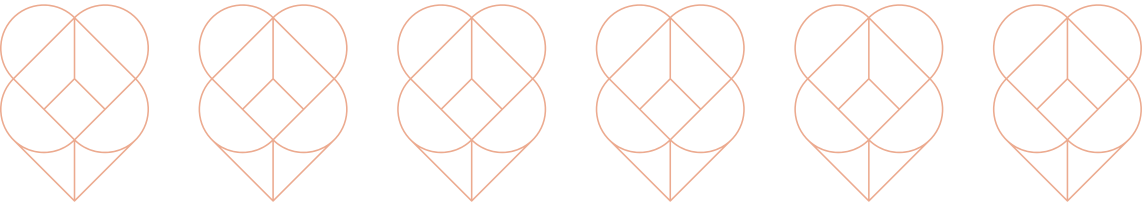
What to do:

Pay attention to your practices and the children's preferences for physical contact. Take note of how your physical proximity to children, whether closeness or distance, impacts your relationship with them. Is there a child who always likes to snuggle close? A child who always pulls away just slightly when someone sits too close? Children need nurturing touch to build a relationship with you, but it will look different for each child. For some children, that will mean big, deep hugs. For other children, that will mean smiling at each other with a gentle touch on the shoulder. Observe children's physical interactions with their families and seek to understand how each child's home culture has influenced their needs, likes, and dislikes related to touch.

Why it is worth doing:

- Nurturing touch is critical for children and their teachers and caregivers to build secure, trusting relationships.
- Physical contact builds and strengthens emotional bonds and is necessary for children to feel loved.
- Children who have a warm, respectful physical bond with caregivers have more complex cognitive development than children who receive little or only functional types of touch.
- Nurturing touch can help abused children trust caring adults again.

Teaching Practice Card



Have more time? Extend your practice.

When you can, watch how caregivers physically interact with their children. Is there a lot of hugging and snuggling? Maybe some pulling or pushing on the part of the adult to get the child in the classroom? Do the interactions look more matter-of-fact, just helping to get on a coat or doing a last minute hair brushing, or is it more affectionate—rubbing noses, lots of reciprocal smiling? How do these family interactions relate to the responses the child has to physical interactions in the classroom? How can you use touch in a way that respects a child’s preferences?

Like it? Share it!

Just as with Nurturing Touch, each child’s home culture influences their needs, likes, and dislikes related to touch. For some families, you may choose to share what a child enjoys at school to let families know it may be something they could do at home, too, e.g., “Jamal and I created a secret handshake where we bump elbows and high-five twice. We use it to celebrate every time he finishes an activity.” Simply sharing what you do at school may prompt a family to use similar practices at home.



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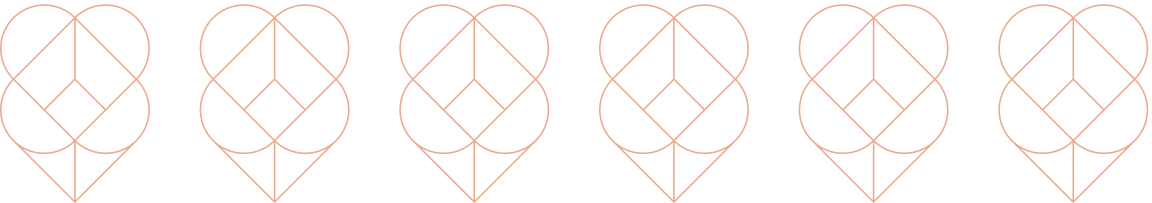
Model Asking for Help

What to do:

In front of the children, find opportunities to ask others for help. You might ask for emotional help: “I feel worried today because my dog is sick and I had to take him to the vet. I could really use a hug.” You might ask for physical help: “Oh, this is so heavy. Can I get some help to move this, please?” You might ask for some help with thinking: “Hmmm... I can’t seem to figure out what letter should come next. Can someone help me find it?”

Why it is worth doing:

- Everyone needs help sometimes, and doing this models for children how to get help in healthy ways.
- This establishes a classroom dynamic of interdependence, rather than one of power and control from teacher to student. In this environment, children are more likely to comply with classroom expectations because they know people are relying on them and they want to be seen as someone able to help the classroom community.
- It strengthens relationships between all classroom members as people learn to rely on each other and act responsively to another’s needs.



Have more time? Extend your practice.

Make the benefits of children’s help very clear. This will encourage those who help to keep doing it, and give unsure children an example of what to do when they are ready to help. Children feel so valued when they hear you describe their important role in the class! “I am worried, but getting a hug from Samara helped my body relax a little bit. Now I feel better.” “Thank you for helping me move the easel. I am afraid I might have hurt myself if I didn’t have help.” “Raha, I appreciate that you found ‘M’ so quickly. I really couldn’t see it and you helped keep our ‘M’ lesson going smoothly!”

Like it? Share it!

Definitely describe any and all helpful acts a child completed during the day. Families love to hear how their children are growing into caring members of the classroom community! Be very direct about the benefits: “You know, the more I tell Jacob how he helped me, the more help he gives me. He was especially good at sorting letters today.” Say to the families, “I can’t wait to hear tomorrow all the ways that Jacob helped at home!” This gives families the chance to watch for and offer their children opportunities to help adults in the household. Be ready to respond to lots of “help” stories the next morning.



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Model Taking a Break

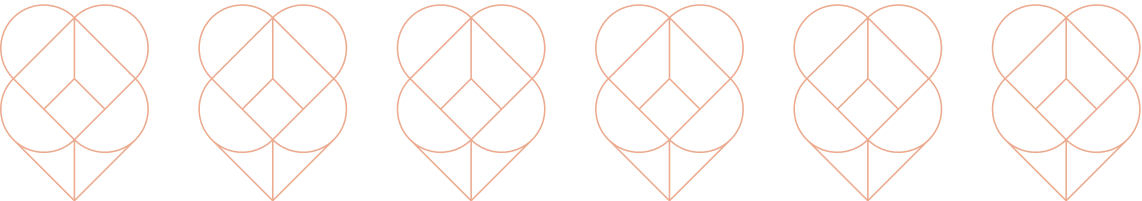
What to do:

Through your own actions, model for children what it looks like to take a break when you need it. When you are feeling frustrated (and there is another adult in the room), say, “Mrs. Firman, I am feeling frustrated. I don’t want to get angry, so I am going to take a few minutes by myself.” Then, go into the calming corner, squeeze some sensory toys, take some deep breaths, or do any calming activity that models regaining control and being safe.

Why it is worth doing:

- It is critical that children learn to give themselves a break before they lose control of themselves. By modeling this, you are helping them learn.
- Knowing how and when to take a break is a critical life skill. Giving yourself room to breathe prevents conflict and stress.
- Having the choice of when to take a break is an empowering option for a child who is trying to manage strong feelings.
- Giving a child a choice to take a break establishes respect between the adult and child, strengthening their bond.
- Being able to take breaks when you need them is a key component of resiliency. We all need to recharge our emotional tanks to make it through life’s challenges.

Teaching Practice Card



Have more time? Extend your practice.

Encourage children to follow your lead. When you see that someone is starting to get upset or frustrated, remind the child, “Do you remember when I went to the calming corner to have a few minutes by myself? I felt so much better after I took that break! I had a Feelings Rebound. Do you want to try that? I can walk over with you and help you pick out a squeeze toy to hug while you take some deep breaths.” Repeat this as often as necessary until children learn that they can take a break whenever they need one.

Like it? Share it!

If you helped a child take a break or if they did it on their own, tell caregivers about it! “Jaxon was getting frustrated with shape sticks that kept falling apart. I asked him if he wanted a break in the calming corner. He took a break in the rocking chair and felt better. Afterward, he went back to the shape sticks and put together a whole cube!” Show families your calming space and any sensory tools you have in the classroom. Ask parents if they have a calming space at home or if they want some suggestions for making one. Point out that it doesn’t have to be a physical location. Time with a beloved blanket or comforting object and a good book is enough to give a child a break.



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My Safe Place

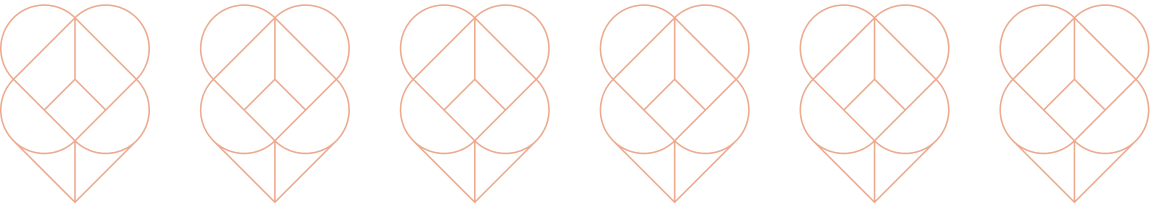
What to do:

Help children identify a place that feels safe to them in the classroom. It may be a quiet corner. It may be the art table. It may be in the dramatic play area. It might be sitting next to you. You can help create this space by providing movable calming items like squeeze toys, stuffed animals, drawing materials, etc. that children can use and bring to the place where they feel safe and comfortable. You can introduce this concept as part of a morning meeting by asking children where they want to go when they need to take a break. Tell them you want to help them each create their own safe place in the classroom. Give some examples and ask for their ideas. Have each child write or draw his/her preferred spot on a card for you.

Why it is worth doing:

- Having an established safe place gives children a designated place to go when they are upset, without having to make a decision in the moment.
- When you teach children how to take a break, they need to have a place to go that is safe. Giving them options empowers them to make choices that meet their own needs.
- Children form a stronger bond with you when they know you will respect their need for space and give them room to process their feelings on their own timeline.

Teaching Practice Card



Have more time? Extend your practice.

The cards the children make can be placed in a public place next to each child's name so that everyone in the room can refer to the cards and help children find their safe places. If you prefer, you also can keep the cards in a small container that you and the child refer to when they need help finding that safe place.

Like it? Share it!

If you have displayed the cards in the classroom, show them to families. If not, you can show children's individual cards to their caregivers. Explain that everyone in the classroom has a place they like to go to when a break is needed. Ask them if their child has a place outside of school that always feels safe. Is that somewhere the child can go when they need a break? If not, is there a quiet spot in their home where the child could go to take a break when necessary? Brainstorm with children and families to help establish safe places outside of school, too.



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Vulnerability

What to do:

Find a time to express your own feelings of worry, anxiety, sadness, embarrassment, or nervousness to children.

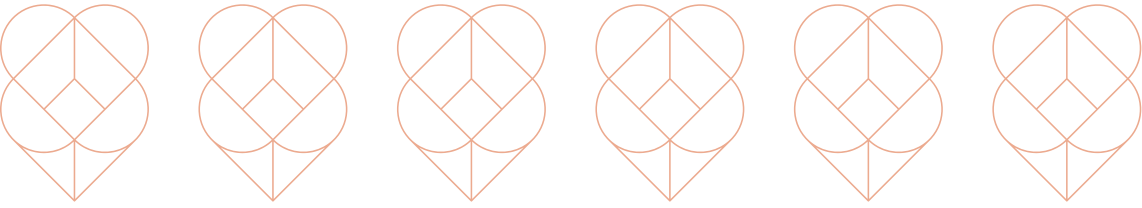
“I’m feeling really nervous today because my dad has an important doctor’s appointment to find out if his heart is healthy. I love him very much and it makes me nervous to think he could be sick.”

“I feel so sad today because Ms. Jennifer is moving away. I am happy that she will live closer to her mom and dad. But I’m also sad because I like seeing her every day and I will miss her very much.”

Why it is worth doing:

- It provides an opportunity for children to demonstrate empathy when they respond to your statement.
- Expressing vulnerability is naturally relationship building. It communicates, “I trust you, and I feel safe sharing this with you.”
- It shows children that adults can feel vulnerable, too, and that everyone can express it in healthy ways.
- Modeling this for children helps them know how to express their own vulnerability to you and over time, they may feel comfortable sharing their feelings with you.

Teaching Practice Card



Have more time? Extend your practice.

Share a story of a time when you felt worried, anxious, sad, embarrassed or nervous. Talk about it with children. Invite them to share their own stories. Help them use feeling words to express themselves and use active listening strategies as they share. Relate your feelings to their feelings.

Adults have the ability to normalize uncomfortable experiences and feelings for children. The younger the child, the more susceptible they are to cues from adults about what is acceptable (normal) and what is not.

Like it? Share it!

This is a good strategy to share with families when something sad happens in the world and it is prevalent in the media. Suggest to families that they talk with children about their own feelings, coupling it with reassurance that they will keep their children safe. Then, they can invite their children to talk about their own feelings related to the event. Give them a prompt to use, such as, “I know that I can keep us safe right now, but I am worried about _____ because _____. How are you feeling right now?”



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