

Healthy Connections for You & Your Child

An Early Relational Health Mini Guide For Caregivers



Early Relational Health



Early Relational Health means children have warm, consistent, loving relationships with the adults who care for them. When a child feels safe, stable, and nurtured, everything grows, their brain, their body, and their ability to love and learn for life.

Three Building Blocks:

1. Safe: Trusted to protect
2. Stable: Dependably there
3. Nurturing: Responds with warmth

This works both ways. Strong relationships with a child also build a caregiver's sense of confidence and connection.

Want to learn more?



Mr. Rogers "It's You I Like"
misterrogers.org/videos/its-you-i-like/



Circle of Security Animation
tinyurl.com/security-animation

Brain Development



In the first five years, about 90% of brain development happens—faster than at any other time in life. Every smile, cuddle, word, and playful moment helps build strong brain connections that lay the foundation for learning, focus, and getting along with others.

Caregivers do not need special tools. Responding to needs, showing delight, and offering warmth in everyday routines is exactly what a child's brain needs most.

Children who feel safe and connected are more likely to play, explore, and develop a love of learning.

Want to learn more?



Video: Dan Siegel Hand Model
tinyurl.com/siegel-model



Video: The Baby Brain
tinyurl.com/the-baby-brain

Temperaments



Temperament is a child's natural way of experiencing the world, how active they are, how intensely they feel, and how they respond to change or new people. Every temperament has its strengths. Rather than trying to change your child, focus on understanding what makes them who they are. One type of temperament is not better or worse than another.

Every caregiver has their own temperament too. "Goodness of fit" is how well your style matches your child's. You do not have to change who you are—small adjustments in approach can create a stronger connection and create a supportive environment.

Want to learn more?



Center for Early Childhood Mental Health
Consultation Infant Temperaments
tinyurl.com/cecmhc-infant



Center for Early Childhood Mental Health
Consultation Toddler Temperaments
tinyurl.com/cecmhc-toddler

Responsive Relationships



Responsive relationships happen when caregivers notice what a child is communicating through sounds, looks, and movement and respond with warmth and consistency. Each time you notice and show up, your child learns they matter. That becomes the foundation for everything. You do not have to be perfect, just keep coming back.

Try this today: 5 minutes of following a child's lead.

- Put away distractions, be present and let the child choose what to do.
- Watch without directing and notice what catches the child's attention.
- Comment on what they see, such as, "You are jumping up!"

Staying curious is key—no teaching, just being present together.

Want to learn more?



Video from Zero to Three,
Nurturing a Strong Attachment
vimeo.com/136542836



Serve & Return



Serve and return is the back-and-forth connection between a caregiver and a child. Think of it like a turn taking game! When a child “serves” (through sounds, looks, or actions) and the caregiver “returns” with a response, the child feels seen and understood.

These small, everyday moments help build the child’s brain, support language development, and grow social skills.

Want to learn more?



Short, powerful talk by Molly Wright:
How Every Child Can Thrive by Five
tinyurl.com/TedTalk-Wright

Simple tips from the Center on the
Developing Child at Harvard University
tinyurl.com/Harvard-brain-building



Routines



Routines help young children feel safe, calm, and ready to learn. When children know what to expect, their days feel more predictable and less stressful.

Routines do not mean you have to have a rigid schedule. Everyday routines become special when small rituals grow inside them. The same song at bathtime, a special handshake, the way you always say goodnight. These moments tell a child: This is ours, and you belong here.

Simple, consistent moments build confidence, healthy habits, and memories that last.

Want to learn more?



Daily Routines Are Learning Times
tinyurl.com/eic-routines

Article Zero to Thrive:
The Importance of Routine
zerotothrive.org/routines-for-kids/s



Hand Breathing Activity



Breathing strategies can help caregivers and children relax when experiencing strong feelings.

How to use:

1. Place one hand up and hold the other hand with the pointer finger ready.
2. Trace each finger while breathing in as the finger moves up, then breathe out as it moves down.



Watch the Video
tinyurl.com/5breathing



Rupture & Repair



Caring for a young child does not always go as planned, and that is okay. Sometimes caregivers guess wrong and try again until the child feels better.

This is called rupture and repair. A “rupture” is when a cue is missed. “Repair” is when caregivers notice, try again, and reconnect.

With toddlers, repair can be as simple as pausing, getting close, and saying, “I see you’re upset.”

What matters most is coming back together so the child feels safe, loved, and connected.

Want to learn more?



Article: A Practice for Parents
tinyurl.com/4s-reflect



Video: Focus from a Parent Perspective
tinyurl.com/rupture-repair

Video on Repair
tinyurl.com/repair-parenting



Regulation



Regulation is the ability to manage emotions and behavior to fit the situation. It is a learned skill that continues to grow over time. Children learn these skills from trusted adults.

Caregivers have feelings, too. During strong emotions, adults use their own ways to manage ups and downs. How an adult responds is how a child learns to respond. Through modeling, a child can learn to self-regulate or express when they are having big feelings.

When a person is regulated, they can shift between different feelings and experiences without getting stuck or overwhelmed.

Want to learn more?

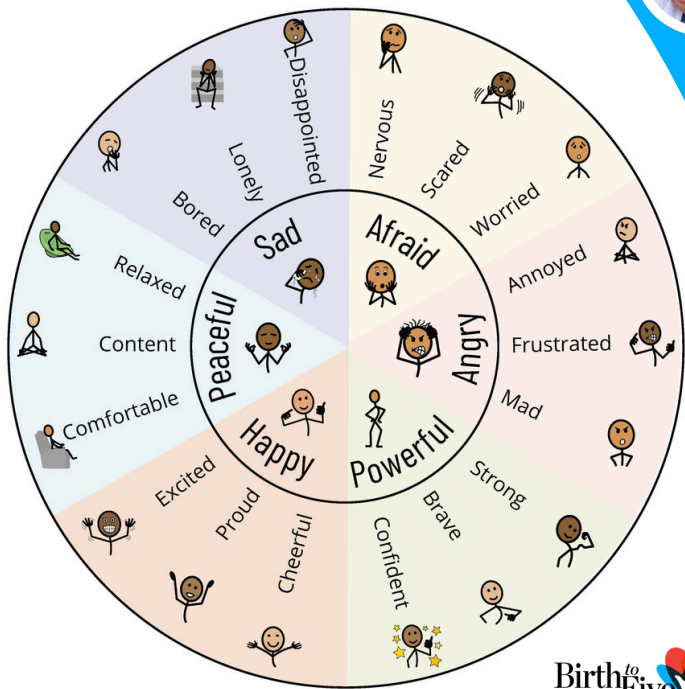


Activity: How I like to Regulate
tinyurl.com/activity-regulate



10 Strategies to Help Kids Self-Regulate
tinyurl.com/kids-strategies

The Feelings Compass



Use the compass to identify emotions.

Find more ways to identify feelings from the
Center for Intensive Behavioral Supports
tinyurl.com/zc3f3wvf



Co-Regulation



Co-regulation is when your calm presence helps your child manage their emotions and body. A steady voice, relaxed body language, and getting on their level all signal: it is safe to settle down. Sometimes, quiet closeness helps more than words. And when you are feeling overwhelmed, pause and breathe first. They regulate best when you are regulated, too.

- Birth to 12 months: Tone matters more than words.
"I've got you. I'm right here."
- 12 to 24 months: Short, warm, repetitive.
"Big feelings. I've got you."
- 2 to 3 years: Name the feeling, stay close.
"That was really hard. I'm right here."
- 3 to 5 years: More language, model the process
"Let's take a breath together and figure this out."

Want to learn more?



Childmind Institute Article
childmind.org/article/what-is-co-regulation/



What is Co-Regulation
tinyurl.com/is-co-regulation

Ways to Co-Regulate



**Pause, Breathe, Validate,
Observe, Adjust, Repeat**



**Relate: Connections Come
Before Correction!**

Notice and name what child is experiencing.

- I can see this is very difficult for you.
- I understand you are disappointed, I get it.



Relax: Create Calm

Deep pressure, rhythmic activities, deep breathing, five senses, temperature change.



Reason: Teach after Calm

Problem-solve, reinforce coping strategies, support reflection to make different choices next time.

Social-Emotional Basics



Social-Emotional Basics



What are social-emotional skills?



Essential skills for connecting with others



Help us manage emotions

When do we use social-emotional skills?

They begin developing at birth and we use them throughout daily life



What do social-emotional skills help us with?



Make and keep friendships



Resolve conflicts



Gain confidence



Manage stress and anxiety



Feel empathy

How can you encourage social-emotional skills?



Serve as a model for healthy behaviors



Interact through stories, play, and learning

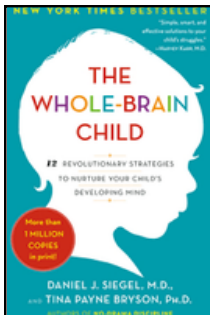
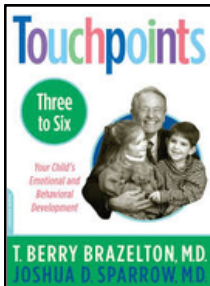
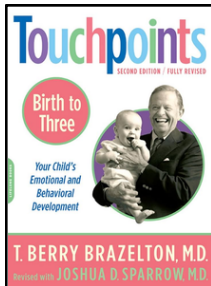
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More Resources: Books



"There's usually an 'inside' story to every 'outside' behavior. Though we may not be able to know that 'inside story,' there's generally some inner reason for what children do." – Fred Rogers



Children's Book List
canva.link/zw6eufv6hzzq3zgc



More Resources: Online



“Children who are healthy in mind, body, and heart can thrive in every way. Mental health IS health!” – Sesame Workshop



Sesame Workshop: Healthy Minds & Bodies
sesameworkshop.org/healthy-minds-and-bodies/



Sesame Workshop: Social-Emotional Skills
sesameworkshop.org/topics/social-emotional-skills/



Love Your Mind Maternal Mental Health
loveyourmindtoday.org/life-challenges

Stay Connected

Birth to Five Illinois: Region 1-B-B
www.birthtofiveil.com/region1bb

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www.birthtofiveil.com/newsletters

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