

Creating a Caring Community

Tip Sheet



What is the practice?

Caring refers to a set of prosocial skills and behaviors like being helpful, respectful, kind, thoughtful, understanding, and comforting. It also includes more complex behaviors such as cooperation, generosity, and empathy. Children need prosocial skills to fully take part in the many daily group activities in early learning environments.

A caring community of learners refers to learning environments where children and educators engage in warm, positive relationships, treat each other with respect, and learn from and with each other. These environments include center-based classrooms, family child care settings, socialization spaces, and homes.

Caring behavior is like a drop of water that ripples out as education staff establish positive relationships with every child in their care. In a caring, equitable community of learners, educators intentionally make it a priority to:

- **Design** a caring environment.
- **Respond** to individual needs.
- **Organize** awareness activities.
- **Promote** and encourage a sense of community.

Why is the practice important?

Caring communities help both educators and children by providing them with equitable, supportive, and welcoming learning environments.

Caring creates a ripple effect. The children begin to feel safe and secure knowing adults have their best interests at heart, and the ripple continues. This sense of security allows the children to look beyond their own immediate needs to the needs of others. Children who are taught and encouraged to show caring behaviors early on are more likely to continue these behaviors in later years. Prosocial behaviors also predict children's strengths in other developmental areas, such as academic and social and emotional skills.

Sustaining Children’s Cultural, Ethnic, and Language Identities

In a caring, equitable community, educators view all children as valued members of the learning community. They know that learning caring behaviors may be influenced by various caregiving practices and values like, for example, a family environment that emphasizes interdependence rather than independence.

Here are some ways educators can sustain children’s cultural, ethnic, and language identities:

- Work closely with families and community members to learn about children’s cultural and language experiences and create meaningful learning activities that affirm children’s familial and cultural backgrounds.
- Design environments that reflect and celebrate children’s diverse cultures and languages.
- Teach children pride in their cultural, linguistic, and individual identities.
- Show children ways to help a peer feel fully included in their learning community.
- Plan activities where children share and learn about each other’s cultural and language backgrounds and experiences.

Practices for Children with Disabilities or Suspected Delays

In a caring and equitable community, educators model appreciation for children’s diverse abilities. They display pictures and use books that portray people with disabilities in positive ways. They support the success of all children and offer individualized support when children experience difficulties in social situations.

Educators provide varying levels and types of support, depending on a child’s learning needs. Here are some effective practices and examples:

- Modify the physical environment to ensure access and participation of every child.
 - ▶ Arrange the physical environment so that a child using a wheelchair or walker can independently move around.
 - ▶ Post a visual of classroom rules to help a child with a language delay better understand expected social behavior.
- Increase learning opportunities.
 - ▶ To provide more support for a child who struggles to participate in social interactions with peers, educators can invite a more socially competent peer to model a social behavior or directly invite the child to join in an activity.
 - ▶ Educators can use an activity matrix to plan when and how to do this teaching practice during daily activities and routines.
- Provide intensive instruction to teach a child who struggles with social interactions important skills, like asking a peer to play, offering to help a peer who is struggling with a task, or consoling a peer in distress.

Infants – Early On

Children at an early stage of developing caring behaviors are ready to learn how to:

- Show interest in other children by smiling, touching, reaching, or making sounds directed to the child.
- Engage in simple back-and-forth interactions with another child by vocalizing, imitating each other's sounds, using gestures, or sharing or exchanging a toy or object.
- Vocalize, gesture, or cry to seek adult help, or offer a toy or object to comfort another child who is crying or upset.
- Interact with children who have diverse physical, language, and ability characteristics.

Toddlers – Emerging Skills

Children at an emerging stage of developing caring behaviors are ready to learn how to:

- Actively move near other children to play or engage in simple conversations.
- Show a preference for a playmate, such as greeting friends by name or seeking a friend to play with and moving toward them.
- Use words or actions to comfort another child who is hurt or crying.
- Engage in conversations about biases and injustices. Adults can support when they see instances of unfair behavior, such as when a child grabs another child's toy, or when a group of children reject a peer who does not yet speak English.

Preschoolers – Increasing Mastery

Children who are increasing their proficiency in caring behaviors are ready to learn how to:

- Use a variety of skills to enter social situations with other children, such as suggesting something to do together, joining an existing activity, or sharing a toy.
- Play cooperatively with other children by communicating with each other and working toward a common goal.
- Recognize biases and injustices and speak up or offer support when another child is being treated unfairly.
- Describe their own cultural, language, and ability identities and how they are similar and different from those of other children.



National Center on
Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning

This resource was supported by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) of the United States (U.S.) Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$10,200,000 with 100% funded by ACF. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by ACF/HHS, or the U.S. Government. This resource may be duplicated for noncommercial uses without permission.

Summer 2023