

Creating a Caring Community

Tips for Educators

D.R.O.P. to Create a Caring Community

Caring behavior is like a drop of water that ripples out as education staff establish positive relationships with every child in their care. The children begin to feel safe and secure knowing adults have their best interests at heart, and the ripple continues.

Below, you'll find examples of caregiving and learning activities and practices that can create a sense of community and belonging for all children and families in your program. Add to or change these activities and practices in ways that honor and celebrate the cultural, language, and individual identities of children and their families.

D: Design a Caring and Equitable Environment

Here are some ways you can design a caring and equitable environment:

- Model kindness and respect and use positive language — like please and thank you — with each other and the children. Show interest in what children do and say.
- Incorporate objects, images, books, and learning materials that honor and affirm children's cultural, linguistic, and individual identities.
- Learn and use keywords — like hello, goodbye, eat, drink, and bathroom as well as phrases like "How are you?" and "Do you need help?" — in the children's home languages. Add labels in their home languages to materials in the physical environment.
- Discuss caregiving practices and cultural traditions with families and be open to varying methods. Add practices from home to daily routines, such as meals and nap-time rituals, so children feel more comfortable and respected. In center-based and family child care settings, adopt individual home practices as best as possible in the program day.
- Encourage families to share their knowledge and experiences and be involved in program activities at their own level of comfort.

R: Respond to Individual Needs

Here are some ways you can respond to individual needs:

- Personally welcome each child and family member upon arrival and say goodbye upon departure.
- Allow time for playful and joyful interactions with each child. Smile, use the child's name, notice, and build on what the child is interested in.
- Acknowledge children's feelings and encourage them to notice the feelings of one another.
- Be present to provide scaffolding when a child is struggling.
- Allow for diversity in ways children engage and participate in activities. Encourage children to use multiple spoken, signed, gestural, and physical ways to communicate and learn.

O: Organize Awareness Activities

Here are some ways you can organize awareness activities:

- Promote empathy skills by teaching children to recognize and express their feelings and to name and respect the feelings of their peers.
- Plan activities that encourage children to reflect on how their actions impact others.
- Discuss with children how play scripts, books, and materials may reflect implicit biases.
 - ▶ Ask how well a story reflects their own personal experience. For example, ask, “Have you ever done something like this?” or “How would you tell the story?”
 - ▶ Help children think about what they like or dislike and other ways of telling a story or doing things. For example, ask, “Is anything missing?”, “What could the characters do differently?”, or “Can you think of another ending for the story?”
- Help children practice fairness as well as identify and stand up to unfair behaviors toward themselves and other children.
 - ▶ Show children how to seek help from an adult.
 - ▶ Ask questions like, “Is this fair?”, “Does this hurt anyone?”, or “How can we make it better?”
- Teach children ways to solve problems fairly.
 - ▶ Create visual examples of strategies to help children find solutions to common social problems.
 - ▶ Display photos of the outcome: children working together successfully.

P: Promote and Encourage a Sense of Community

Here are some ways you can promote and encourage a sense of community:

- Introduce children to each other. Positive introductions can lay the foundation for future interactions. Establish routines, songs, and activities that help children learn one another’s names, and encourage them to address one another by name.
- Plan activities where children learn about each other’s cultural, language, and personal experiences. Encourage children to share books, stories, and family photos, and talk about favorite foods and other things they like.
- Invite children to take on meaningful roles to help the whole learning community, such as cleaning tables at mealtimes, watering plants, or helping pass out materials.
- Create community rules together with the children (e.g., share toys, gentle touches, be kind). Model and refer to them often throughout the day.
- Use toys and plan activities that require children to interact and cooperate with each other. Examples of interactive and cooperative toys include putting together large floor puzzles, painting on a large piece of paper together, and sharing playdough and tools.



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