Teachable Moments

The development of social and emotional skills is crucial to the success and confidence of young learners. Children's social and emotional skills are essential for school readiness and are central building blocks for cognitive development and gaining knowledge.

Therefore, in conjunction with WePlaySmart™ experiences and the Beyond the Table activities, we wanted to provide you with Teachable Moments. Teachable Moments are intentional strategies that enable educators to integrate techniques and cues into their daily interactions. These techniques are essential for scaffolding children's development of social and emotional skills. As you review the WePlaySmart Progress Monitoring Tool (and as you observe the children in your class on a day-to-day basis), you should reference Teachable Moments to find support, training, 'things to say' and other intentional strategies that will increase the children's experiences and successes with all of the social and emotional skills provided through WePlaySmart.

As early childhood educators, you already know that every day in your classroom provides endless teachable moments. For example, suppose that Jacob is playing at the water table and you notice he has arranged the rubber ducks in order from largest to smallest. Taking a minute or two to ask Jacob open-ended questions about his work creates a teachable moment during which you also enable him to talk about seriating, among other math skills.

Teachable scenarios can extend beyond cognitive development to address social and emotional development. For example, Jacob is at the water table and his classmate Lucy wants to join him, but will not ask him whether she can help with the ducks. The teacher observes Lucy's hesitation and quietly asks Jacob whether she can watch him work. Jacob agrees and makes room. The teacher looks up and signals to Lucy to come closer. She says to Lucy, "Would you like to help too?" Lucy nods. "Can you ask Jacob the same way that I did? He is really good at working here and he can help you." Lucy shrugs and quietly asks Jacob whether she can play too. He readily agrees and as Lucy steps to the table, the teacher backs away saying, "You two have fun! I cannot wait to see what you do next. If you need me, I'll be at the next center."

Although there are a number of ways this interaction could have gone, the teacher noticed Lucy's hesitation and due to other interactions the teacher has observed, the teachable moment became one of modeling and guidance.

Within this document, you will find the social and emotional skills from WePlaySmart and the Beyond the Table activities integrated within the Teachable Moments content.

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT:

Teachable Moments provide a brief description of the social/ emotional skill that needs attention in early childhood settings.

Tipping Points provide you with an example of what it might look or sound like when a child (children) is struggling with the skill in question.

Teacher Trainings provide you with more information about why the social/emotional skill in question is important to the overall development of young children.

Intentional Strategies are the techniques, cues, modeling tips and hints that are the bulk of Teachable Moments. These are the strategies to integrate into your daily life as an educator to increase the success of social and emotional development of your young learners.

Executive Function

Teachable Moments for <u>children who are unable to control their attention and focus</u> regardless of the setting or situation. (A.EF.1)

Tipping Points: A child who is unable to control attention may choose to go to his 'favorite' learning center, but upon arriving there, notices something elsewhere in the classroom and quickly abandons this activity for another.

Teacher Training: Children need to pay attention in order to learn. Anything that distracts a child's attention from learning can have many negative effects. It is important to note that, as an educator, it is your responsibility to maintain age-appropriate opportunities and experiences in order to accurately facilitate a child's success within this social and emotional skill. For example, if a teacher in a 3-year-old classroom expects her children to sit quietly and without gross motor movement or engagement for 20 minutes, she should not expect success with this skill (and/or many other social-emotional and cognitive skills).When expectations are not appropriate, it is not fair to say that the children in question lack control or focus, but rather the teacher lacks understanding of age and developmentally appropriate expectations.

Intentional Strategies

- Utilize **consistent transitions** and phrases as you shift from one activity to the next in the classroom. Children who struggle to control their attention and focus may have more positive results if they know that a particular action (e.g. lights flipping off and on), phrase (e.g. "Hands up, times up,","Moving right along," etc.) or song (clean-up song or other rhymes, chants, or poems the children enjoy) leads to a particular activity or routine.

- Some children will respond well to **physical prompts** as a cue for refocusing (such as a touch on the shoulder or a pat on the back). If you work with children who are uncomfortable with such prompts, agree on something that is more suitable (for example, a thumbs-up/thumbs-down gesture).

- **Deliver information in a variety of ways.** For example, some children are more likely to interpret visual cues (such as, "Boys and girls. I need everyone to sit like this." **Show the children** how you want them to sit.). Other children may be more apt to respond when you **provide simple verbal instructions** (such as, "Boys and girls. Please sit in a spot on the carpet so that you are not touching any of your friends. I appreciate the way you are doing this so quietly.").

- When children feel a **personal connection with their teachers**, they are more likely to experience a happy and relaxed state of mind. Additionally, children who **receive more praise and positive feedback** than criticism and redirection will feel more confident in their learning environment.

- As you work to **maintain positive teacher-child relationships**, it is important to remember these tips (throughout this document you will find many additional Intentional Strategies that relate to positive teacher-child relationships):

  o Engage in one-to-one interactions with all of the children in your care

  o Interact with children face-to-face; rather than 'top-down'

  o Maintain a pleasant & calm voice

  o LESS IS MORE! It is not necessary to fill every quiet moment with chatter

  o Follow the child's lead and interest during play and learning experiences

  o Listen to children and encourage them to listen to others

  o Acknowledge and praise children for their accomplishments and effort

- **Continually strive to provide an environment that feels safe and in which routines and expectations are consistent.**

- Help children control impulses with a frequent modified 'freeze' game (this game makes for a great transitions activity). In the modified version, the music plays and you will hold up a picture of a stick figure holding a certain pose. Upon observing the position of the figure, children wait until the music stops and then mimic the pose. Once the music resumes, children resume moving and the game continues until interest wanes.

- Provide your class with opportunities to hold a variety of simple **yoga poses** (if you are unfamiliar with yoga poses, resources are available via the Internet and in libraries). Share poses through pictures and then ask children to hold the pose for a designated amount of time (20 seconds is very reasonable).

- Ask children to **'plan'** what they are going to do when they arrive at a learning center, enter the playground, or begin activities throughout the day. Due to the age of the children you work with, this suggestion does not work as well if you ask children to plan an entire day upon arriving at school. You will find this strategy to be more successful with younger children if you **ask the children to plan quickly and simply** what they will do as they head into a learning center (with the immediate possibility of putting their plan into process). Ask questions such as, "What do you want to do? How do you want to do it?" When children struggle with appropriate responses, take time to model and provide guidance.

Teachable Moments for <u>children who struggle to maintain positive approaches to learning</u> where a child may be deficient in curiosity, flexible thinking &/or persistence. (A.EF.2)

Tipping Points: It is important for children to develop positive approaches to learning. This example came from a teacher who works with 3-5-year-olds. She said, "Picture a child working to put a puzzle together. This child places pieces onto the puzzle board and as the pieces do not properly fit, she tosses them aside saying something such as, 'I can't do this. It is too hard.', 'I hate puzzles.' Or, 'This puzzle is broken.' The child does not turn the pieces into different positions, nor does she attempt to fit a piece into place more than once."

Teacher Training: Positive approaches to learning are critical because they facilitate engagement in learning which is necessary for cognitive growth. In early childhood, we have a chance to teach attitudes towards learning that can last a lifetime and we can help children learn to use reasoning and problem-solving skills, to be flexible, to take healthy risks, to take responsibility for their own learning, to develop imagination, and to use their creativity and inventiveness. When we encourage these important learning attitudes, we help children develop ways of learning they will use now and as they progress through their academic careers.

Intentional Strategies

- **Listen attentively.** Young children are full of laughter, stories, anecdotes, and simple tales of their lives. When a child chooses to share with you, lean forward and make eye contact, and ask open-ended questions, such as, "WOW! That is interesting! What else can you tell me?"

- **Display genuine compassion.** Let the children know you are happy to be their teacher! Create a classroom community where every child and family feels respected and welcome.

- **Do not underestimate the importance of a smile!** Although children will not always hear you, remember to share gestures from across the room or playground. A thumbs-up or a SMILE as you observe children working and playing can say more than words do. Keep in mind that you are a role model; even when it comes down to facial expressions and body language.

- Help children find their strengths by **focusing on the things they do well** and by **focusing on effort** as well as end results. "Sarah, you worked so hard on that puzzle and now you are finished! How does that feel?" Share personal stories regarding tasks that you have accomplished and the feelings that those accomplishments inspired (for example, "I remember the first time I baked cookies without burning them! It took me 4 times to get them right, but I felt great when I did!").

- **Encourage explorations and share children's excitement about new discoveries** because as you do so, children will gain confidence in themselves. Look for and follow through with opportunities to encourage such explorations and discoveries. Your support and enthusiasm (even for things that seem mundane) can help to propel children's approaches to learning. For example, "Juan is very excited about the large leaf he found outside today! Juan, what would you like to do with the leaf? Can I get you anything so that you can make the leaf book you mentioned?"

- **Encourage children to take healthy learning risks.** Ideally, we want children to be comfortable trying new activities and to risk sharing their own ideas. For example, "Selena, I think your idea to measure the space between the sand table and the sink is fantastic! I love that you want to know how long it takes to wash your hands after you have your hands in the sand. What will you use to measure the distance?"

- **Involve children in problem-solving processes.** As problems arise in your classroom, invite the children to help you solve them. For example, a classroom plant is not growing; ask the children to help the plant blossom. Or, the blocks in the Block Center are always falling onto the floor; how can we organize them in a way that is neater?

- **Help children turn their ideas into achievements.** As the children stumble onto problems as they work through their ideas, encourage them to problem solve through the issues. For example, a group of children has decided to make paper boats to float in the water table. Even if the boats sink, invite the children to figure out what they can do to ensure their idea will be more successful!

- **Teach brainstorming.** Invite children to brainstorm lists of ideas as they assist you (and/or each other) in solving problems. As children learn that 'two heads are better than one,' they may be more likely to collaborate and work through problems with others. It is important to remember that the magic of brainstorming often resides in the fact that there are NO wrong answers or ideas (although, as children mature, brainstorming will likely be more on-topic).

- **Encourage children to make predictions!** Doing so can lead to, "what-if" thinking as well as positive thoughts about learning. Encourage the children to make predictions throughout the day; for example, rather than only predicting what will happen in a story, encourage the children to make predictions about what will happen after you cut open an orange, or what will happen if they slide down a wet slide.

- Keep in mind that some children will shy away from being **fully-active participants** in your classroom. It is important **not to put pressure on these children**. Instead, give them time to observe and explore in their own way. You may find it helpful to pair two cautious children together so that they can find strength in numbers; or to pair a cautious child with a more adventurous one!

Teachable Moments for <u>children who consistently do not show gains in basic school readiness cognitive skills</u> and struggle with the attainment & retention of cognitive skills (see examples below). (A.EF.3)

Tipping Points: Lack of **basic cognitive skills** (such as letter naming, counting or other age-appropriate skills) may include situations such as a child who seems to be an 'active' participant during large group time when other students name the letters of the alphabet, but is in actuality, mouthing the letters as she does not know them by sight or sound.

Teacher Training: Children who have strong social-emotional skills and a positive attitude towards learning are more likely to make cognitive gains and show self-efficacy skills (the belief that one can be successful at a task through fostering positive approaches to learning and attentional focus) can lead to an increased use of cognitive strategies and higher achievement (Pintrich and De Groot 1990). Simply put, the struggles children have with basic school readiness skills may stem from struggles with social & emotional skills.

Intentional Strategies

- When children are **verbally encouraged to set their own goals**, you are more likely see increases in confidence and commitment to attain those goals. As you work with your class**, encourage children to set goals for themselves** such as, "Eli, I see that you have your journal open. How many words do you want to write today? Yesterday you wrote three words, I like that you set a goal to write more words today than you did yesterday!"

- Provide **consistent and immediate feedback** as children work on a variety of tasks. For example, a child finishes writing her name and shows her work to you, at which point you respond with something like, "Jules! I am so proud of the persistence you showed in writing your whole name! You told me that you couldn't do it, but now you know that you can!"

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