

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 for 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, useful phrases, 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 if 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. 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) struggles 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.



Behavior Control

Teachable Moments for children who have difficulty with self-control and who choose inappropriate actions over appropriate actions i.e. a child who often does not follow rules or directions. (A.BS.1)

Tippling Points: Children who do not exhibit self-control may not have regulation of their own behavior. For example, if you say your class will not have outdoor playtime until the classroom is clean, a child who lacks self-control may cry or scream in hopes that you will change your mind. Children who possess self-control may understand that a temper tantrum could result in losing outdoor playtime or good and that it is therefore wiser to wait patiently.

Teacher Training: Children who have developed self-control find it easier to follow rules and obey the teacher, but self-control is more than being compliant. Self-control involves the capacity to inhibit impulsive behaviors and engage in thoughtful, interpersonally sensitive, and goal-oriented behavior (Diamond, 2007). It is important to note that a child's self-control should increase with age.

Intentional Strategies

- Encourage children to **take a break or step away from a situation** that makes them feel angry or upset. You may find this technique to be more effective if you use it sparingly rather than every time a child wiggles during Circle Time. When over-used, it is not likely to change the behavior.
- Encourage children to **take a deep breath**. Model what it looks like to take a deep breath, as some children will hold their breath. Taking a deep breath is another way of asking children to take 10 seconds to relax and work through the situation and can be very effective.
- **Model appropriate conversation cues.** Refrain from interrupting children when they are talking. Interruptions may lead children to believe that interrupting others is OK. Additionally, when children are provided with consistent and genuine attention, they are less likely to be "starved" for attention, which can lead to interruptions.
- **Use appropriate rewards.** Children need consistent, positive feedback as they are learning appropriate behavior. Genuinely **provide praise and attention** as both are highly rewarding to young children.
- Young children often struggle with wanting what they cannot have and this struggle frequently relates to a lack of self-control. Teach children to use the following steps:
 1. **SAY**, "I would like to (have) _____, but I can't right now."
 2. Ask children to **THINK** about these options:
 - a. ask again later
 - b. find something else to do
 - c. ask to borrow (if feasible)
 - d. ask to share
 - e. wait their turn
 - f. accept, saying, "I would like it, but I will be okay without it"

3. Teach children to **ACT** out their best choice with a role-playing activity (role-playing with puppets can be effective too).

Additionally, **ask children questions** such as, "How do you feel when another child has what you want? How would it feel if someone took one of your things without permission? What are our choices when someone takes our things? What can we do when someone else is doing something that we want to do? What choices do we have?"

- In order for children to gain control of their behavior when they are experiencing strong feelings and emotions, they need to know how to **identify their feelings**. It is never too early to talk to children their feelings. The identification of feelings (naming them and recognizing them as they occur) can help to improve a child's self-control (see **Emotional Control** for additional Intentional Strategies).

Teachable Moments for children who are unable to plan, participate, monitor and/or evaluate self-progress such as not strategizing during play and/or learning experiences. (A.BS.2)

Tippling Points: This skill addresses a child's ability to **self-regulate**. A child who does not self-regulate does not recognize or acknowledge the statement, "Your turn is coming" (or "your turn is next"). The child may grab what he or she wants immediately due to an inability to monitor the urge to do so.

Teacher Training: The term self-regulation refers to a person's ability to manage emotions. When children are unable to regulate uncomfortable emotions, they have a more difficult time focusing on learning other important skills, as they are not in a relaxed state of mind. Children who exhibit self-regulation are more likely to use thoughts such as, "This is difficult, but I can do it if I keep trying," rather than, "I can't do this."

Intentional Strategies

- When you **use simple directions, gestures, and touch** (a gentle touch on the back or hand), you provide young children with valuable cues about how and when to regulate their emotions, attention, and behavior. For example, suppose that Max becomes very upset as the paper airplane he folded crashes to the ground. Provide him with a light touch on the shoulder and say in a calm voice, "Max, I know this is difficult, but you have worked so hard and I know you can make a plane fly if you keep trying! I am going to show you how my brother used to make planes. His looked a lot like yours does and I bet we can make it fly if we work together."
- Keep in mind that young **children work best when asked to follow 1-3 simple and concise directions at a time** (such as, "Boys and girls, please stand up, push your chairs under the table and join me on the carpet." Rather than, "Boys wearing

red, stand up, push in your chairs and then tell your friends who are girls wearing red to do the same before they join us at the carpet.”). Furthermore, studies support the fact that children (and adults) are more likely to remember steps when the person giving directions is standing still (rather than gathering materials as you talk to Max about making airplanes, stand in one spot and speak. This can be particularly difficult for teachers, who are often busy, but this simple step can make a great difference for many children).

- Help children **identify what they can use to help them** as they work and ‘live’ in your classroom. These skills will follow them into their everyday life. For example, let the children know that they can ask you (or other adults) for guidance when they are working on an activity. Model appropriate ways to initiate asking for help such as, “I’ll be in the next learning center, but if you need my help, please come over and tap my hand to let me know what you need.”
- Some children may need very **explicit hints and cues**. Cuing children to clasp their hands together or to keep them tucked into their pockets may help them regulate impulses to grab or hit.
- **Phrases such as, “look at me”, “look where I am pointing”, or, “LOOK here”** are explicit cues that, when provided in a calm but firm tone, may help young children refocus their emotions and attention.
- Provide **language to help children understand what they are feeling**. For example, “You sound angry” or “It seems that you are frustrated.” When consistently provided, these cues signal children to self-calm. Once children have recognized a negative emotion, provide cues to help them relax. For example, “Let’s take a deep breath together to help us relax.” These cues can help children develop alternative strategies to situations they find frustrating or overwhelming.
- **Acknowledge** the moments during which **children are implementing self-regulation**. You might say, “Joy and Liu have been waiting so patiently for Ben to finish working on the computer. I appreciate your patience, girls!”
- When the time is right, **speak to children individually when they do not exhibit self-regulation** (i.e. after circle time, talk quietly to a child who did not regulate appropriately). Children are not typically aware of the importance of self-regulation. Those who do not exhibit self-regulation skills are likely uncomfortable and unhappy about those times during which they lose control of their emotions. Work patiently and consistently to provide all children opportunities to acknowledge that.

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