

# Strategies for building teacher-child relationships

Establishing secure, respectful and reciprocal teacher-child relationships is a key aspect of quality early childhood education and care. Research shows that teacher-child relationships help children feel secure, confident and included and have a significant impact on children's behaviour, social interactions, academic performance and wellbeing. These factsheets will help you embed practices related to the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* focus areas 1.5 and 1.6 - Differentiate teaching to meet the specific learning needs of students across the full range of abilities and Strategies to support full participation of students with disability.

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## Incorporating child-led interests into your teaching

It is important to recognise that teachers have a legal responsibility to support the inclusion of children with a disability in education (see Article 23 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the [Disability Standards for Education](#) (2005)). With these legal requirements in mind, look for ways in which children with disabilities can actively take part in your classroom. Ensure that all children's experiences are recognised and valued and that all children have equitable access to resources and participation.

There are frameworks out there that can support you to unpack what including child-led interests in your teaching looks like. These include the [Early Years Learning Framework](#), Early Childhood Australia [Code of Ethics](#), and the [Australian Professional Standards for Teachers](#). [National Quality Standard](#) Quality Area 5 can also guide you on how to build responsive, respectful and inclusive relationships with children. Take a moment to read through these documents and reflect on what they mean for your teaching practice.

# There are many teaching strategies that you can use to help you know the child and build a secure, respectful and reciprocal relationship.

## 1. Self-reflection

Reflecting on your attitudes and behaviours regarding inclusion can help you begin to understand the reasons behind often taken-for-granted and unquestioned practices. Examine the biases you may have by focusing on some of the barriers that children with disabilities may encounter.

## 2. Understanding the child's disability

Learning about the child's disability as much as possible will help you better understand their physical, intellectual, sensory and learning strengths and abilities. You can also draw on the expertise of other professionals who have worked with the child. Some suggestions to enhance your understanding include:

- reading contemporary research and literature
- undertaking evidence-based professional learning
- talking with allied health professionals
- asking families for information.

## 3. Get to know the child

This involves seeking knowledge about the child's background, family life, interests, and abilities. The [Getting to know the child Factsheet](#) provides practical ideas to learn about the child from the child, the family/caregivers and allied health professionals. You should take the family's lead in their level of comfort discussing their child's disability with children in the room and other families in your centre.

## 4. Consider language

The language you use with the children in your classroom can have a big impact on the relationship that develops. People with Disability Australia advise learning about the differences between *person first* (i.e. child with a disability) and *identity first* (i.e. disabled child) language and finding out about individual/family preferences. You may find this [guide](#) helpful.

## 5. Make time

Reflect on your daily routine and ensure you have time for one-to-one interactions with the child to establish trust. Through shared connection and observation, you will learn to cater to their strengths, interests and to be aware of any challenges they may encounter in the learning environment.

Peak bodies can also provide information through their websites including:



[ADHD Australia](#)



[Amaze](#)



[Autism Awareness Australia](#)



[Blind Citizens Australia](#)



[Cerebral Palsy Australia](#)



[Deaf Australia](#)



[Down Syndrome Australia](#)



[First Peoples Disability Network Australia](#)

And consider these evidence-based online courses: [AllPlay Learn](#) and [InclusionED](#).

## Reflection Task

### Consider the following scenario:

*Sarah is a graduate teacher in her second year of teaching in an early childhood centre. This year she is teaching Leonardo, a 4-year-old child with limited expressive language who often pushes other children in the room while trying to communicate with the other children. Leonardo and his family are going through the process of a formal diagnosis for him.*

*Sarah and the rest of the team at the early childhood centre were unsure about how to support Leonardo. Sarah felt like a security guard, closely monitoring Leonardo, ready to intervene to avoid him pushing the other children in the group.*

*After speaking with her mentor about some of her concerns about Leonardo's communications skills and language development Sarah undertook some professional learning to learn more about evidence-based teaching strategies that would be helpful for Leonardo. She was introduced to the strategy of supporting children through one-to-one attention and using more visual resources for communication and decided to try these with Leonardo.*

*Sarah worked collaboratively with her team over the next few weeks to make time between 10-10:20am each day Leonardo attended, to engage in one-on-one relationship-building with him. Through making time, she learned more about his strong interest in frogs and his ability to draw a range of frog species in detail. She also incorporated the use of visual resources in her teaching by obtaining books about frogs and other amphibians and getting a pet frog for the classroom.*

*She notices that Leonardo is now starting to interact with her and the other children and staff members in the room in more positive ways. She supports Leonardo to interact with other children in the room who are also interested in amphibians and animal habitats by using his (and other children's) pictures to create short stories, and by encouraging him to share about frogs with other children when caring for the pet frog. Sarah facilitates this by engaging in their play in meaningful ways, encouraging Leonardo to engage in socio dramatic play, acting out being frogs when other children show this interest.*

### Reflection Questions:

1. What do you think was the most beneficial practice that Sarah engaged in to strengthen her relationship with Leonardo?
2. In which ways can Sarah engage with Leonardo's family and past educators to strengthen her understanding of Leonardo?
3. How can Sarah include her new insights about Leonardo in her planning and documentation of his learning and development?

### Further information

- AITSL Spotlight [Inclusive education: Supporting students with disability](#)
- [AllPlay Learn](#)
- [Early Childhood Australia](#)

### References

Rouse, L 2012, Family Centered Practice: Empowerment, self-efficacy, and challenges for practitioners in early childhood education and care. Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, 13(1), 17-26

Shonkoff, JP 2006, 'A promising opportunity for developmental and behavioural paediatrics at the interface of neuroscience, psychology, and social policy: remarks on receiving the 2005 C Anderson Aldrich Award', Paediatrics, vol. 118, no. 5, pp. 2187-91