

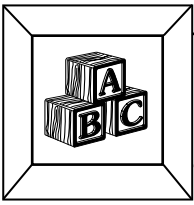
What Are Children Really Learning?

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INQUIRY QUESTIONS

- How do early relationships influence learning?
- What are children learning during this time?
- Do differences in the way parents teach affect this learning?
- Why is it important to learn socialization from parents?





Conceptual Overview

PLAY TOPIC 4

1. *The first relationships are the foundation for all learning.* An incredible amount of learning occurs in the first three years of life. Babies go from awkward sucking motions to peanut butter sandwiches, from coos and smiles to books and songs, from jerky movements to climbing and jumping. Much of this is biologically programmed. Parents do not teach their babies to reach, sit, or crawl; these skills happen because of brain maturation. Developmental milestones are similar and predictable for most babies. If babies are so similar, why are adults so different?

Parents plan and interpret most of their baby's experiences. Through relationships with their parents, babies are really learning how to control their nervous systems and emotions, how to organize and focus their minds and how to behave so as to "fit in" and enjoy other humans. These are lessons of stabilization and socialization. These lessons will be different for every baby.

2. *Parents influence the uniqueness of their child.* Parents provide the genetic makeup that determines differences in skin color, hair color, stature, and temperament. These genes may also play a role in what babies will be good at, such as throwing a ball, writing a book, or being a musician. Parents contribute to the differences between babies by the nutrition they provide and by the routines they establish. Babies' and toddlers' schedules and surroundings influence their health and play a role in what they learn.

More importantly, parents provide the cocoon that surrounds, nurtures, and guides the child's maturation and learning. In the first three years, the relationship with parents gives babies and toddlers feelings of safety and protection, while also giving shape and structure to their lives. Parents regulate their child's temperament and emotion. They calm and comfort. Parents focus and engage. They model and share feelings and actions. Through emotional sharing, parents help interpret their child's experiences as "good" or "bad." For example, a parent's emotional reaction when a bee or spider is in the house tells the child if this is interesting or fearful. Positive relationships give stability, which organizes a child's brain. This maximizes development and opens the doors to possibility.

3. *In the first year, parents establish their child's foundation for learning.* Parents who provide a safe nurturing place for babies to survive teach confidence and trust. Parents who share positive, calm emotions steady their babies' sensitive nervous systems. They teach self-control and balance. Parents who set patterns and schedules give babies a sense of focus and structure. Parents who provide the human model for babies to copy teach the baby how to manage new people and new experiences. By guiding babies with appropriate toys and experiences, parents set small, reachable goals that give their babies feel-

PLAY

TOPIC 4

ings of mastery. Parents who provide praise and love help their babies feel valued. This gives babies stability or balance.

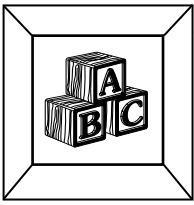
4. In the second and third year, parents teach and model social skills. As the child matures, learning becomes more complex. By the end of the first year, most babies are trying to walk and beginning to say words. There is a strong spurt in initiative. “What can I do? How far can I go? What are all of these things in my world?” The toddler is experimenting with power. “How do I affect others? How do I get what I want?” “What if I say ‘NO’?”

The lessons of the second year are about social skills. Parents are teaching their toddlers how to “fit in” and belong with other humans. When parents regulate their toddlers’ emotional swings, they are teaching self-control. When parents allow their toddlers to feel independent and powerful, they are teaching competence and problem solving. When parents know *how* and *when* to limit toddlers, they are teaching respect.

As toddlers begin learning words, parents are teaching meanings. They teach their toddlers how to clearly express their needs and how to negotiate their wants. Parents teach their toddlers how to use others as helpers. They teach their toddlers how to cooperate and to share. Parents show toddlers how to be patient and how to understand about others’ feelings. In this way they are helping their children develop empathy and conscience. In the first three years, parents define their child’s basic sense of values — the “do’s” and “don’ts” of living together.

5. How parents teach defines how babies and toddlers will learn. The differences in how parents teach and model behavior will make a lasting difference in how the child continues to learn. Teaching styles can give confidence and make learning exciting, or they can confuse and inhibit learning. Differences in motivation to learn, ability to focus, and persistence are initiated within the relationships of the first three years.

Often parents have learned their teaching styles from their own parents. Some have copied grandparents; some have watched teachers and mentors they like. Today we know much more about how babies and toddlers learn in these early years. We can offer parents new information and different styles to use. The mentoring styles (scaffolding, supporting, and instructing) are the best ways to encourage learning. Changing a parent’s teaching style is not easy. It takes commitment and practice.



Terms to Understand

- **Appropriate**
especially suitable or fitting for the baby's developmental or emotional level
- **Assurance**
a guarantee; feeling sure and safe; being confident of parents' protection and guidance
- **Commitment**
generally, a pledge to do something; *specifically*, a promise to be there as the baby's base of safety
- **Empathy**
ability to put oneself in another's place and feel what that person feels
- **Initiative**
ability or desire to plan and carry out activities without being prompted by others
- **Interpret**
explain the meaning of
- **Nurturance**
warm and affectionate physical and emotional support and care
- **Perfectionistic**
in general, holding the highest of expectations, not accepting less than the best; *specific to parenting*, wanting a baby to be without fault, expecting too much of a child too soon
- **Resiliency**
ability to find balance, regain equilibrium, recover, or adjust easily
- **Socialization**
learning to fit into a group; understanding the rules and patterns of a group; being able to share emotions and ideas with others
- **Stability**
a feeling of balance (parents help a baby to learn balance)
- **Structure**
generally, arrange in a definite pattern or organization; *specifically*, provide pathways and guidelines for a baby
- **Uniqueness**
quality of being the only one; quality of being very special or unusual

Suggested Activities

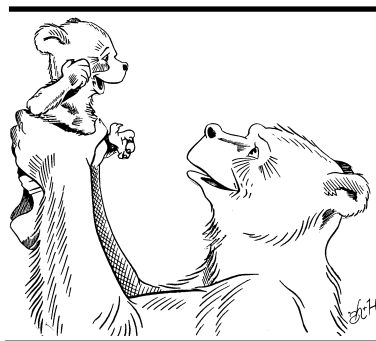
- *PIPE Activity Cards:*
19, 20, 30, 31, 32, 53, 117, 129

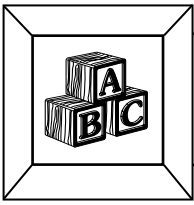
Other Materials & Supplies

- Clay or Play-Doh[®] for each parent
- Peg board game, either homemade or purchased

Master Pages in *Parent Handouts* Notebook

- #219 ▪ Topic Animal Artwork
- #220 ▪ Inquiry Questions
[also see page 413]
- #221 ▪ The First Year: Relationships Give Stability
[also see page 424]
- #222 ▪ The First Year: Providing Stability
[also see page 425]
- #223 ▪ The Second and Third Years: Relationships Teach Socialization
[also see page 426]
- #224 ▪ The Second and Third Years: Socialization
[also see page 427]
- #225 ▪ Teaching Styles
[also see page 428]
- #226 ▪ Which Style Is This?
- #227 ▪ Scaffolding Technique
[also see page 429]
- #228 ▪ Checking What I Learned
- #229 ▪ “DOOZYS”: What Are Children Really Learning?





Instructional Plan

PLAY
TOPIC 4

Outcomes

- Parents will be able to describe what babies and toddlers are learning from the parent-infant relationship during the first three years.
- Parents will demonstrate a teaching style that fosters learning.

FOUR-STEP INSTRUCTIONAL PROCESS



PRESENTATION OF CONCEPTS

INTRODUCTION OF TOPIC

■ We learn through relationships.

- When we share with another person, we are learning about ...
 - his or her feelings,
 - his or her likes and dislikes,
 - his or her motivations and goals,
 - his or her opinions and habits, and
 - his or her attitudes and values [see *Conceptual Overview #1*].

- Using clay or Play-Doh® have parents sculpt an object. Each parent shares why she made her object. Discuss how parents learned about each other from this activity.

OR

- Take turns with the parent sharing your dreams for a vacation.
 - How are your ideas and dreams the same or different?
 - What did you learn about each other from sharing in this way?

KEY CONCEPTS

■ The first relationship is the foundation for learning.

- Babies learn from relationships with their parents.
- Parents provide protection, nurturance, structure, and a model for learning.
 - Use the topic animal artwork to open the discussion of a parent's relationship with his child.
 - Use the idea of chairs as metaphor to explore how different relationships, like different chairs, support different feelings.

PLAY TOPIC 4

Ask parents to imagine an overstuffed chair.

- Ask how they might feel in this chair (e.g., relaxed, invited, supported).

Now ask them to imagine a hard, straight-backed chair.

- Ask how they might feel in this chair (e.g., alert or focused).

When might they want an overstuffed chair vs. a straight-backed chair?

How is a parent's relationship with her child like these chairs?

- Parents provide the emotional connection that maximizes learning [see *Conceptual Overview #2*].
 - Using clay or Play-Doh® each parent molds her favorite chair and explains why this chair became her favorite.
 - How is the chair like a parent?
 - How does the parent feel in this chair?
 - Does she feel protected, focused, relaxed, alert, or social?
 - Can she read or learn there?
 - Can she express anger or joy there?

Explore with the parent(s) how their relationship with their child/children can maximize learning.

■ In the first year, babies learn stability.

- Balance: *"I need you."*
- Trust: *"I can count on you."*
- Confidence: *"I am safe."*
- Belonging: *"I will copy you."*
- Continuity: *"I remember this!"*
- Love: *"I am valued"* [see *Conceptual Overview #3*].

- Discuss key concepts in "The First Year: Relationships Give Stability" [see pg. 424]. Explore with parents the experiences they provide that help create stability and allow learning to happen. Use the handout "The First Year: Providing Stability" [see pg. 425] to illustrate what children feel when their parents provide stability.

■ In the second year and third year, toddlers learn socialization.

- Relationships provide models and support:
 - Behavior regulation: *"I know the rules."*
 - Emotional control: *"I can find balance."*
 - Independence: *"I can do it. I am in control."*
 - Social skills: *"I can take turns, share, join."*
 - Communication: *"I can use words."*
 - Belonging: *"I'm valued."* and *"I belong."* [see *Conceptual Overview #4*].

- Using “The Second and Third Years: Relationships Teach Socialization” [see pg. 426], prepare a presentation and discuss how socialization is accomplished through the parent-child relationship.

Define socialization as “learning to connect and ‘fit in’ to a group.”

Ask the parents to reflect on ways in which their parents (or surrogates) provided a model for making friends. Were these good experiences?

- Give to parents “The Second and Third Years: Socialization” [see pg. 427]. Discuss each block, answering these questions:
 - How do parents help babies learn these skills?
 - Why do these blocks lead to balance and resiliency?
 - How does socialization advance learning?

■ Teaching styles can help or hinder learning.

- Have each parent recall his worst and best teacher.
 - Make a list of “why” for each teacher.
- Using the information sheet “Teaching Styles” [see pg. 428], discuss:
 - How this teacher might be categorized.
 - What was learned from this teacher on a “relationships” level (e.g., “I’m a smart person.” “I’m a poor student.”)
 - How the parent felt in this teacher’s classroom.

- Parents guide and model learning; they use patterns and set limits.
- They teach through shared emotions and give meaning to developmental change [see *Conceptual Overview #5*].
 - Have parents identify the behaviors they want to use with their child.

■ Parents can use many teaching styles.

- They might use many styles within a day’s time and can mix techniques.
 - Explore the worksheet “Which Style Is This?”

Discuss how although the mentoring styles are the *most* effective, parents sometimes use other styles with their babies. Particularly analyze the Mentoring Styles category.

Role play “Which Style Is This?” and answer the set of questions for each of the examples:

- What is the message?
- What would the child learn?
- What emotion might be shown in the parent’s voice?
- What might the child be feeling?
- What might the child do?

What teaching style might it be (Mentoring: *Learning Lots*; Confusing: *Learning Little*; or Hurtful: *Learning Least*)? Why?

Note: More than one subcategory of the Mentoring, Confusing, or Hurtful Styles may apply to a situation.

- Practicing new styles gives parents more choice in teaching and regulating their babies' behavior.
- The mentoring styles, through practice, become habits.
 - Present the "Scaffolding Technique" [see pg. 429].

Discuss with the parent what she would do if she were using scaffolding techniques in an age-appropriate activity with her child.

2

DEMONSTRATION

Demonstrate scaffolding techniques for a child of 9 to 20 months of age, using a peg board game [see pg. 390] or another age-appropriate activity. As you are playing, discuss how you are scaffolding for success [see pg. 429].

3

SUPERVISED PARENT-CHILD INTERACTION

WHAT?

- Parent practices scaffolding techniques with her child, using several age-appropriate activities.

WHY?

- The goal of this activity is for the parent to experience a sense of teaching by supporting her child's exploration and interest areas.

HOW?

- Suggest appropriate activities her baby could enjoy. Help the parent plan ahead for success, considering her baby's state and stage of development.
- Remind the parent to let her child make choices during the session, scaffold her baby's choice of activities, and use emotions to focus her child.
- Parent selects age-appropriate activities to do with her child and practices sharing positive emotions during one or more of these activities.

4

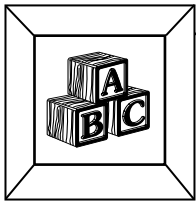
EVALUATION

EVALUATING THE PARENT-CHILD INTERACTION

- Discuss the interactive experience.
 - What did the parent think her child learned and/or enjoyed?

TOPIC EVALUATION AND CLOSURE

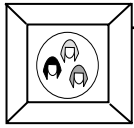
- Parent completes "Checking What I Learned."



Topic Enhancers & Instructional Aids

Topic Enhancers

The ideas below are optional topic extenders. Parents may like to try them (as time and interest in a concept allow), or the parenting educator may use selected activities to help a parent explore a specific concept in greater depth.

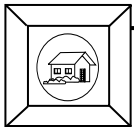


For a parent group:

- Parents make a mobile of Stabilization Blocks to hang at home.
- Parents have a “meet ’n greet” party. Invite grandparents or another childcare group in for group play. Model how to meet strangers and share toys. Stay focused on the children, *not* on parent-to-parent conversations.
- Parents keep a “Reporter’s Notebook” for two days, taking notes about “Teaching Styles” they observe in classes, the childcare center, shopping center, or at home. Have the parent group discuss these notes. Which style did they observe most often?

Suggestions for the parent educator:

- Make a poster for the childcare center about “Stabilization” and “Socialization.”
- Using “DOOZYS: What Are Children Really Learning?” discuss how sometimes when children feel unsure or are learning the rules of a group, they may do things that annoy their parents. Discuss examples/solutions. [[Answer Key](#): 2, 3, 1, 6, 4, 5].

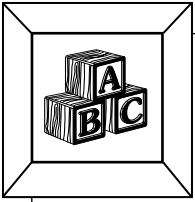


For parents at home:

- Parent makes a poster about stabilization and places it where it will be a reminder.
- Parent discusses with the home visitor and other family members how babies and toddlers learn to get along in a family. What are some family rules and limits?
- Parent practices sharing positive comments with others when she and her child are out with others (even strangers). Parent observes how her child watches interactions.
- Parent plans a family party (e.g., cookies and apple juice before bed). Have everyone show celebration by modeling sharing, courtesy, helping, waiting to eat, etc.

Suggestions for the home visitor:

- Using “DOOZYS: What Are Children Really Learning?” discuss how sometimes when a child feels unsure or is learning the rules of a group, she may do things that annoy her parents. Discuss examples and solutions. [[Answer Key](#): 2, 3, 1, 6, 4, 5].



The First Year: Relationships Give Stability

The first year is a time of survival and rapid change. Babies are learning about how their bodies work. Every day a new nerve connection is made and a new ability is gained. Imagine how confusing it would be if everything you knew and did was different every day!

**Babies need a sense of stability in their changing world.
Who will help them find equilibrium or balance?**

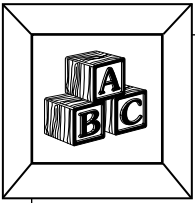
- Parents provide the stable base that surrounds and nurtures babies through the first year.
- Parents are the emotional connection that will organize or disorganize baby's learning.
- Parents are the guide, providing experiences and setting patterns for learning.
- Parents give meaning to their baby's experiences.

Parents provide protection, warmth and nutrition, which gives babies feelings of safety and trust. When parents provide food and comfort to their newborn in a patterned way, they allow their baby's body to become regulated - and trust to develop. This gives their baby physical stability. This stability gives babies the confidence that will allow development and learning to begin.

Parents regulate emotional extremes and open pathways for learning. When parents hold their babies close, their babies calm to their body rhythms. This helps to stabilize a baby's exploding nervous system. Babies share the emotional rhythms of their parents. A positive emotional "shared space" teaches babies self-confidence and emotional stability. This gives babies feelings of balance and belonging.

Parents give babies feelings of identity and value. When parents return an infant's smile, a connection is made. Babies practice smiling and learn how others respond. A playful pattern is established. The baby is feeling powerful. The baby feels valued and loved.

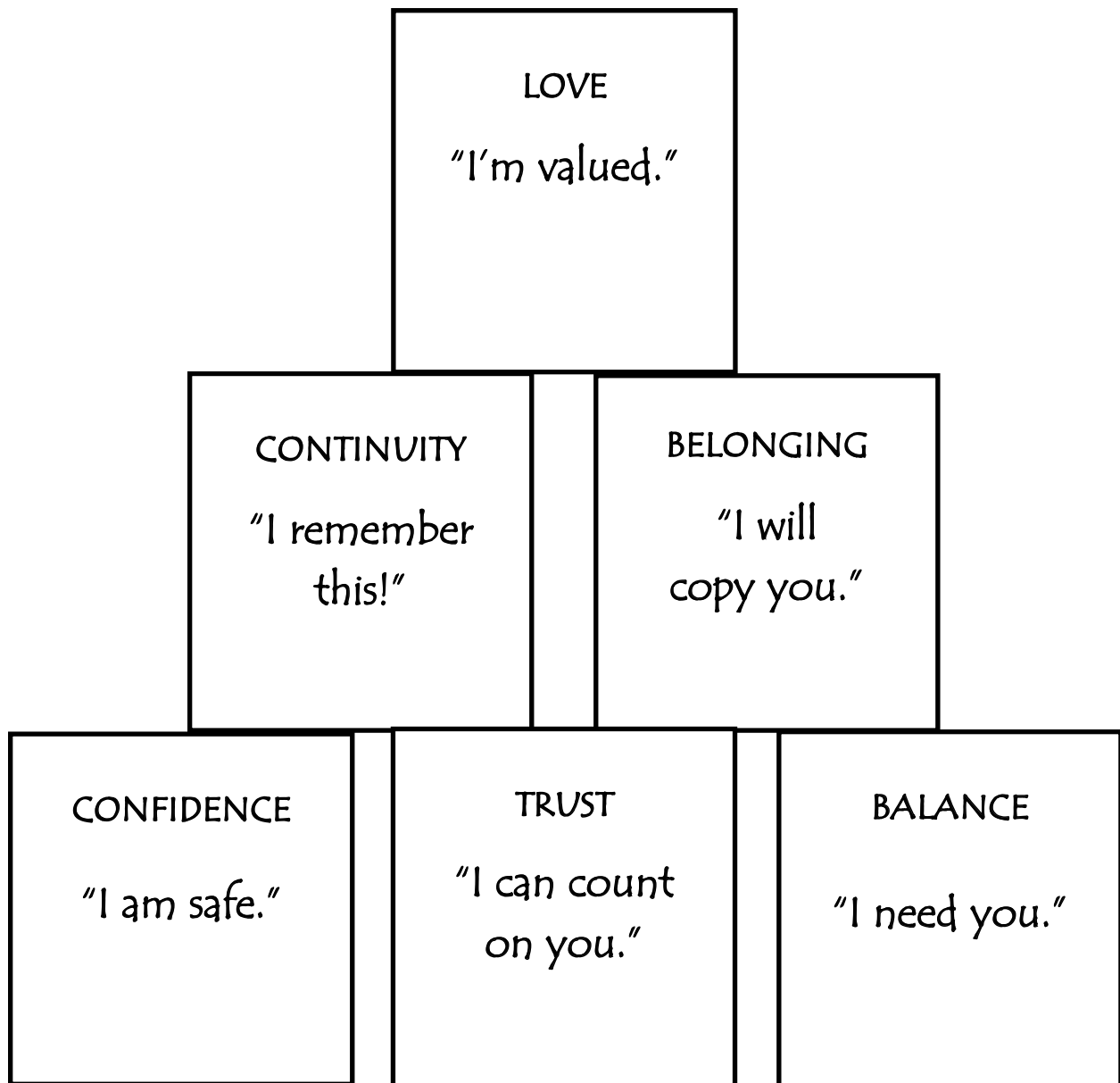
Parents guide and structure babies' learning, which gives babies feelings of continuity. For example, parents give meaning to their baby's experiences. They plan ahead, set the stage, and define the structure for babies. "We always take a bath before dinner." "We always play the music box before bed." Parents set routines that become expected patterns in their baby's memory. Routines give babies a sense of constancy and continuity.

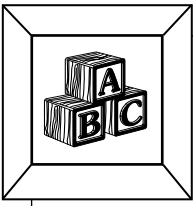


The First Year: Providing Stability

The first relationships are the foundation for learning. What you do and say with your baby will help him or her feel confidence, trust, balance, continuity, belonging, and love. These feelings give your child stability. When parents provide stability, learning can occur.

Children feel:





The Second and Third Years: Relationships Teach Socialization

The second year is *the age of initiative*. Babies become toddlers. They start to walk and talk. They meet more people. They are more assertive and strong willed. “How do I get what I want?” “How do I manage my fear and my anger?” “Can I influence the people around me?” They are experimenting with relationships. “What if I don’t do what I’m told?” “Where do I fit in with other people?” “Am I valued; am I loved?”

By the third year, toddlers begin to master social skills; they have learned some rules and limits; they know who smiles and who growls. They can talk and play. Keeping a memory image of their parents for confidence and guidance, they can feel safe being independent. The patterns they have learned will be their base for the future.

Who will show them how to behave, how to belong, how to value others?

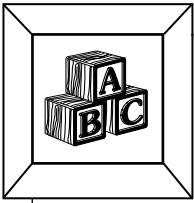
- Parents are the first model of how to live with and enjoy other people.
- Parents demonstrate how to manage emotions and deal with frustrations.
- Parents celebrate the positives, giving their children resiliency.

Parents demonstrate how to manage emotions. The second and third years are times of exploration for toddlers — who have little information in memory. They become quickly angry or frightened and cannot regain balance. Parents steady children’s emotions and teach them calm, clear alternatives and how to understand the feelings of others. They will learn emotional regulation.

Parents teach the do’s and don’ts of behavior. Toddlers really want to please their parents. Toddlers copy actions more than they listen to or understand words. When parents join in with toddlers, they show them what they want. Through their example, “This is what we do,” parents help their children master the rules and learn to fit in with others. They show toddlers how to eat, brush teeth, bathe, and dress. They show toddlers how to focus their attention, how to share a book, make a picture, or use a toy. Parents will shape what the toddler will like. They will learn behavioral control.

Parents show their children how to meet and enjoy other people. Children copy their parents’ faces, voice tones, and actions. They watch their parents intently to learn how to behave. When parents are friendly with others, their children learn to make friends. When parents use words with their actions, children begin to use words; they learn to express ideas and feelings. Children join into a “shared space” with parents to learn how to relate and connect with others. Communication and social skills develop.

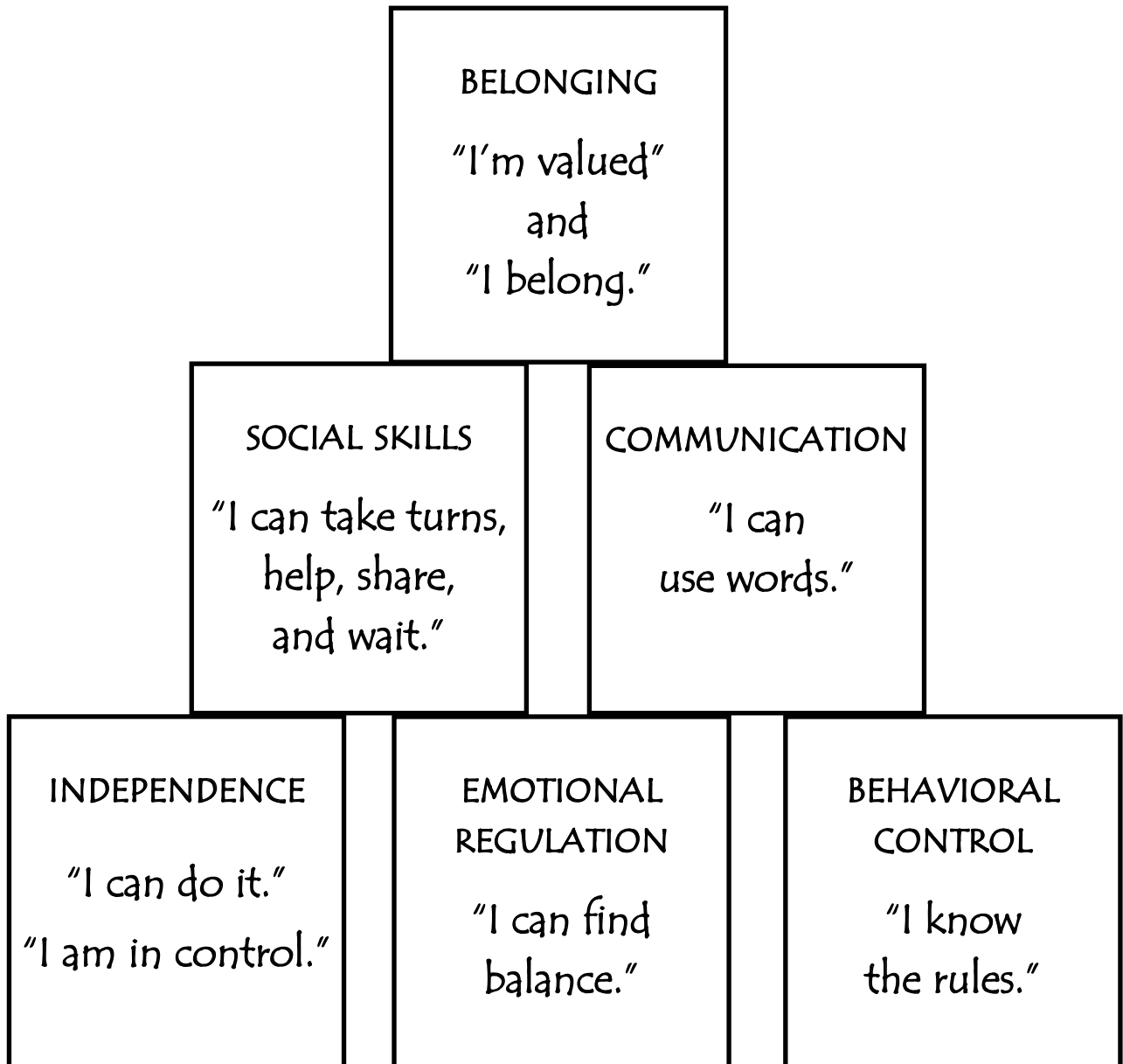
Parents support the development of independence. They allow their child to explore, experiment, and practice new skills, which encourages mastery. Parents can structure for a toddler’s success. They teach problem solving and self-confidence grows.



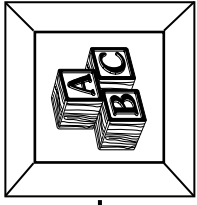
The Second and Third Years: Socialization

The first relationships set the pattern for all others. By modeling and teaching, parents show children how to belong and learn from others.

Children learn:



Teaching Styles



MENTORING STYLES

LEARNING LOTS —
Children feel
interest and mastery.

SCAFFOLDING

- Invests the child in tasks.
- Supports the child's ideas.
- Simplifies tasks and games.
- Keeps the child focused.
- Guides toward mastery.
- Praises small successes and builds self-confidence.

SUPPORTIVE

- Plans ahead, prepares the area.
- Lets the child choose the task.
- Joins the child's interest area.
- Takes turns with the child.
- Expands the task.
- Lets the child try to "get it."
- Waits for the child to feel pride.

INSTRUCTIVE

- Finds developmentally interesting tasks.
- Models the task.
- Makes tasks into a game.
- Uses interest, surprise, and joy to focus the child on the task.
- Lets the child explore the task on his or her own.

CONFUSING STYLES

LEARNING LITTLE —
Children feel
confused, anxious,
or bored.

MIXED MESSAGE

- Offers choices when no choice is intended:
"Do you want to go to bed?" instead of "It is time to go to bed."
- Sounds unconvincing.
- Has no single focus; suggests too many tasks.
- Promises to do something and then does not do it.
- Gives too many directions at one time.
- When talking, looks away from the child, instead of establishing eye contact.

PERMISSIVE

- Doesn't focus the child on the task.
- Distracts the child to a new task before he or she is finished.
- Asks the child to do a task, but then does it for the child.
- Has low expectations, for example, doesn't believe the child can solve problems or help clean up.

HURTFUL STYLES

LEARNING LEAST —
Children feel
afraid, angry,
and defeated.

PERFECTIONIST/CONTROLLING

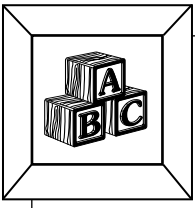
- Insists on a specific way of doing everything.
- Chooses the task; controls how materials and toys are used.
- Expects too much; is impatient.
- Criticizes imperfect attempts or results.
- Talks about own needs; puts them before the child's needs.
- Is serious and often demanding.

THREATENING

- Threatens the child but does not follow through.
- Gets angry quickly.
- Lets the child work alone.
- Expectations for the child are too high.
- Seems unaware of the child's developmental needs.
- Calls the child names:
"You dummy!"

NAGGING/BLAMING

- Gives constant verbal instruction. Watches. Does not model or join in.
- Gives orders; doesn't teach or support.
- Points out problems. Ignores successes.
- Sends too many messages at once.
- Allows frustration to be overwhelming.
- Blames the child if things don't work.



Scaffolding Technique

■ What is a scaffold?

- A scaffold is a superstructure around another structure that gives it temporary stability.
- A scaffold gives support during changes.
- A scaffold allows changes to be made easily and safely.

■ How are parents like a scaffold?

- They gently support the child to try something new.
- They do not take over, but add stability to the child's efforts.
- They offer praise for each step, giving confidence to the child.
- They give support or comfort when the child is unsure.

■ What are scaffolding techniques?

- Structure for success (safe place, good timing, right toys).
- Divide problems into doable tasks.
- Start the child with an easy, familiar task.
- Demonstrate (model) a new skill.
- Encourage: give little rewards often ("You did it!").
- Show the child the next best step for success.
- Allow the child to try and to experiment.
- Never scold. Ignore mistakes.
- Fix problems without pointing them out.
- Extend the task.
- If the child tunes out, *quit*.
- Do not finish the task for the child. Leave it undone.
- Reward the child for whatever he or she accomplishes. ("You stacked the blocks! Good job.")

■ Why use scaffolding?

- Scaffolding fosters learning. It is used by coaches, mentors, and support persons.

