

How To Use myTeachstone to Build Relationships & Get Kids Talking

Overview

For the next 12 weeks, we're going to help you set up and lead professional learning communities for your pre-K teachers that will focus on how they can enhance relationships and conversations with children.

To get started, we recommend that you

- (1) Create teacher groups of 4–6 teachers
- (2) Recommend one resource each week to each of these groups
- (3) Write a comment when you recommend each resource to spark interest and focus teachers' attention (for your convenience, we've included sample comments that can be cut and pasted)

To lead these groups, we recommend that you

- (1) Encourage teachers to complete the recommended resources and respond to comments and questions each week
- (2) Actively facilitate group online and/or face-to-face conversations each week about the resources and encourage teachers to practice what they are learning in the classroom

Below are more detailed ideas on how you can effectively lead online learning groups with myTeachstone. Pages 2–6 list the weekly recommendations with comments and guidance on how to discuss each resource.

Encourage teachers to complete the recommended resources

- **Set expectations. Tell teachers**
 - **The goal of the next 12 weeks is to enhance relationships and have more meaningful conversations with children**
 - **You'll recommend one online resource each week**
 - **You'll include a comment to spark interest and a question to focus attention**
 - **They'll review the resource that same week**
 - **They'll respond to the question that same week**
 - **Additionally, encourage them to respond to follow-up questions designed to enhance learning each week**

Engage in conversations about resources

- Affirm teachers' participation:
 - "My heart is warmed when I think of you all taking the time and energy to discuss this resource to better help your children. Bravo!"
- Ask follow-up questions that are open-ended and build on the interests of your teachers:
 - "Yari, you said that you often ask children questions about their siblings to get them talking. I think that's a great way to build relationships and start conversations! What other topics do children seem eager to talk about?"

Recommended Resources

Want to know why we're recommending these resources in this order? Check out the resource "Supporting Behavior Change with the *Know, See, Do Approach*" on myTeachstone. Notice how we applied the *Know, See, Do* approach over the course of multiple recommendations:



Know: The courses in weeks 1, 4, & 7 will primarily support teachers' development of CLASS knowledge.



See: The videos in weeks 2, 5, 8, & 10 will primarily support teachers' ability to identify effective interactions, noticing teacher behavior and children's responses both in videos and in their own classrooms.



Do: The blog posts and courses in weeks 3, 6, 9, 11, & 12 will focus on supporting what teachers do, helping them try out new behaviors in the classroom.

To best support teachers as they develop knowledge, increase awareness, and practice new and enhanced teaching behaviors in their classrooms, we suggest that these resources be recommended in the order provided. With that said, we do encourage coaches to modify this unit and the sample comments within to better meet teacher and/or organizational needs and interests. Please note that aligning content is included with each resource on myTeachstone, along with a list of reflective questions for your use in conversations. We anticipate each week's activities taking roughly 30 minutes (depending on the length of the resource and depth of conversations); although this guide offers one resource per week, please modify frequency of recommendations as needed.



Week 1

Recommend: Your Favorite Teacher and CLASS (15 min. course)

Comment: “Hello wonderful teachers! I’m excited to join you in learning how to build relationships and get kids talking in your classrooms. I want to start with an interactive experience that I think you will enjoy. The course is 15 minutes and you can watch it all at once or start and stop as your schedule allows. This week, please complete the course and tell the group about your favorite teacher and why he/she is special. Please type your answer in the comment box below. I look forward to hearing from each of you this week.”

In Your Discussion: Discuss the traits that favorite teachers share, focusing on behaviors that build meaningful teacher-child relationships. Talk about the importance of teachers developing caring relationships with the children they teach. Follow up by asking, “What are some ways in which you develop relationships with the children in your classroom?”



Week 2

Recommend: Encouraging Warm Relationships While Talking about a Child’s Shoes (1 min. video)

Comment: “Hello! This week let’s focus on how to develop meaningful relationships with children. I found a short video to get us thinking about how we support relationships throughout the day in the ways we talk with and interact with children. How do you see the teacher responding to the children in this video? What are some things she does and says to encourage warm and friendly relationships in the classroom? I encourage you to watch videos more than once to help you notice all of the interactions.”

In Your Discussion: Encourage teachers to find the many ways in which the teacher responds with relationship-building behavior, such as physical closeness, gentle touches, smiles, warm voice, and enthusiasm for talking with the children. Follow up by asking, “How do the children respond to the teacher in the video, and how does she encourage friendly relationships among the children?”



Week 3

Recommend: Teacher Tips: Fostering Peer Relationships (blog post with videos)

Comment: “This week we’ll continue our discussion by considering how teachers can help children develop relationships with each other. Here is a blog post that features videos to help us identify how teachers support peer relationships among infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Please tell us how you encourage peer relationships in your classroom. How do your children respond?”

In Your Discussion: Learn about the many different ways teachers foster peer relationships. Encourage discussion about children’s responses to teachers’ efforts to help them build friendships. Follow up by asking, “When and how can you encourage children to develop friendships with their peers during daily activities? Why is this important?”



Week 4

Recommend: Learn About Positive Climate *(15 min. course)*

Comment: “In the past 3 weeks we’ve studied the importance of relationships. Now we’ll discover how we can support relationships in the way we talk to and interact with children. Check out this engaging resource on Positive Climate this week. How can you tell that teachers and children enjoy spending time together? Describe what you might see or hear in the classroom.”

In Your Discussion: Discuss the common elements of classrooms with a positive climate. Encourage the group to think about why it is important for teachers and children to genuinely enjoy spending time together and talking with each other. Follow up by asking, “How might you integrate the things that encourage you and your children to talk and have fun together into everyday activities?”



Week 5

Recommend: Warm Connections Over Toy Cookies *(2 min. video)*

Comment: “Thank you for the work you are doing on myTeachstone. I’m excited to find out what you think about this week’s video. It highlights a teacher joining children in their play, listening to them, and responding in ways that show how interested she is in what they are doing. How does the teacher follow the children’s lead when joining in their activity? How does she respond to what the children say in order to keep the child-centered conversation going?”

In Your Discussion: Talk about how the teacher in the video followed the children’s lead and engaged in a child-centered conversation with them about their play. Encourage teachers to try similar behaviors, like being “in the moment” while talking with children and responding in ways that show interest in what the children are saying and doing (this is called “contingent responding”). Follow up by saying, “Tell us about a time this week when you followed your children’s lead and engaged in conversation with them about what they were saying and doing. We can’t wait to hear about it!”



Week 6

Recommend: [Teacher Tips: Engaging Children in Conversations](#) (*blog post*)

Comment: “Have you had any trouble getting quieter children talking? This week, let’s check out a blog post with tips on how to get *every* child talking. Do any of these tips sound like something you might try? Please share some of your own tips with the group about engaging quieter children in conversations.”

In Your Discussion: Learn about your teachers’ experiences with getting quiet kids to talk. Encourage them to try out one of the five tips in the post. Follow up by saying, “Tell us about a conversation you’ve recently had with one of your quieter children. What did you do to start and continue the conversation? Thanks for sharing!”



Week 7

Recommend: [Learn About Language Modeling](#) (*15 min. course*)

Comment: “We’ve already talked a lot about how the conversations we have with children can help build relationships and create a positive climate. Let’s go even deeper in our thinking about conversations this week and take a look at this course on Language Modeling. After watching the course, please tell us some strategies teachers can use to support language development by engaging children in meaningful back-and-forth conversations, rather than just asking and answering questions. Thank you for responding this week.”

In Your Discussion: Discuss the importance of both teacher-child and peer conversations in the classroom. Encourage teachers to increase the frequency of back-and-forth conversations with children throughout the day. Follow up by asking, “When in your daily schedule do you think you can make more time for children to talk with you and with one another? How will making time for conversations help support essential language development in the classroom?”



Week 8

Recommend: [Stimulating Children’s Language While Making Fire Art](#) (*2 min. video*)

Comment: “This week, let’s listen to a teacher talking with children during an art activity. Notice how she persists in encouraging each child at the table to use language, even the quieter ones. What do you see and hear her doing to encourage the children to continue talking beyond simple responses? Please describe a specific exchange between the teacher and one of the children.”

In Your Discussion: Encourage teachers to provide specific examples, rather than general statements. Guide them in noticing how the teacher in the video asked open-ended questions and responded contingently to what the children said and did. Follow up by saying, “When teachers ask children open-ended questions such as, ‘Tell me about what you are doing,’ it stimulates children’s use of language. What types of open-ended questions spark the best child-centered conversations in your classrooms?”



Week 9

Recommend: Using IS: Frequent Conversation (10 min. course)

Comment: “I’m really excited to share this week’s course with you. As part of the interactive experience, you’ll get a chance to plan how you’ll begin and extend frequent conversations in your classroom. When you’re finished with the course, please share the when/then statement you created with the group. After practicing it with your children, let us know how it goes. We can learn so much from each other!”

In Your Discussion: Encourage teachers to share their when/then statements and practice applying them in the classroom. Acknowledge their efforts and thank them for sharing their experiences with the group. Follow up by saying, “We can improve our teaching practice when we intentionally plan for and try out new teaching behaviors at specific times of the day. I encourage you to reflect on how confident you feel as you practice new teaching behaviors and how your children respond. Thank you for your hard work this week!”



Week 10

Recommend: Promoting Conversation at the Lunch Table (3 min. video)

Comment: “Observing teachers talking with children helps us reflect on the ways in which we talk with children in our own classrooms. Here’s a video of a teacher facilitating an engaging mealtime conversation. How does he keep the conversation going and show his interest in hearing what all of the children have to say? Please reflect on similar strategies you’ve used while promoting conversations in the classroom and tell us how your children responded to your efforts.”

In Your Discussion: Encourage group members to respond to each other’s comments and ideas. If they make general statements, ask if they can provide more details or maybe a quote. Follow up by saying, “Thank you for reflecting on conversations this week and sharing your thoughts with us. I encourage you to create a few more when/then statements to help you practice new ways to promote meaningful conversations throughout the day.”



Week 11

Recommend: Using IS: Open-Ended Questions *(10 min. course)*

Comment: “Now that you’re becoming more intentional about planning for and creating opportunities for frequent conversations throughout the day, let’s focus on a strategy that will impact how your children respond. This week we’ll study open-ended questions and you’ll get support in planning ways to invite children to respond to questions with more than a one-word answer. Please share the when/then statement you create, practice it with your children, and let us know how it goes this week. Thanks for sharing!”

In Your Discussion: Encourage your teachers to share their when/then statements and some of their experiences practicing the strategy with children. Support teachers in responding to each other’s comments. Follow up by saying, “Here’s a tip: Brainstorm a list of open-ended questions and statements to use, such as ‘Why do you think...?’ and ‘Tell me more.’ Share your ideas with the group so that we can all expand upon our lists.”



Week 12

Recommend: Teacher Tips: Asking Open-Ended Questions *(blog post)*

Comment: “Want to challenge yourself to ask even more open-ended questions? Are you excited to spark more meaningful conversations in your classroom? Check out these specific and super helpful tips on how to do just that. Which of these tips would you like to try out? How can you use these strategies every day to increase the frequency and depth of your teacher-child conversations?”

In Your Discussion: Learn about the tips that stand out to your teachers. Encourage them to think about specific times when they’ll ask these questions. Follow up by saying, “I encourage you to ask several open-ended questions every day and try hard to respond contingently, based on what the children say and do in the moment. Thank you for learning with us about building relationships and engaging children in meaningful conversations. Happy teaching!”

Want More?

Making progress? Want to keep working on enhancing relationships and conversations? Consider recommending additional resources. Encourage teachers to explore myTeachstone's resource collection freely and pursue self study on topics of personal interest. Please note that aligning content is included with each resource on myTeachstone, along with a list of reflective questions for your use in conversations.

Videos

- Center Time Talk about Swimming
- Using Advanced Language When Discussing Bees
- Using Open-Ended Questions to Explore Children's Ideas
- Facilitating and Encouraging Language While Playing with Toy People
- Broccoli Makes You Strong
- Itsy Bitsy Dog

Courses

- Using IS: Repetition and Extension
- Using IS: Self- and Parallel Talk
- Using IS: Advanced Language

Blog Posts / PDFs

- The Value of Closed-Ended Questions
- Connecting with Pre-K Learners
- Teacher Tips: Being "In the Moment" with Children
- Exploring the Pre-K Age Level
- Getting to the Heart of Quality Teaching