

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 toddler teachers that will focus on how they can enhance relationships and the use of conversational language with young 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 the use of conversational language with young 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 your toddlers questions about what they are looking at and/or playing with in the classroom. I think that's a great way to build relationships and get kids talking! How do your toddlers respond when you do this?"

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 videos 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 young children 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. While the interviews and information provided in the course focus on pre-K teachers, we know that teacher-child interactions are important for children of all ages, especially our toddlers. 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 enjoy developing relationships with the toddlers in your classroom?”



Week 2

Recommend: Warm Relationships during Guitar Time (2 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 in which 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 interacting with the children. Follow up by asking, “How do the children respond to the teacher in the video, and how does she encourage a warm and friendly atmosphere in the classroom?”



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 see how teachers support peer relationships among infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Please tell us how you encourage your children to connect with each other. How do they respond to each other?”

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



Week 4

Recommend: [Learn About Positive Climate](#) *(15 min. course. Be sure to recommend the Toddler resource.)*

Comment: “In the past 3 weeks we’ve studied the importance of relationships. Now we’ll discuss how relationships are an important part of creating a warm, respectful, and fun classroom environment. Check out this interactive 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 daily activities?”



Week 5

Recommend: [Peer Connections and Fun While Jumping](#) *(1 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 that she enjoys spending time with them. How does the teacher follow the children’s lead in deciding what to do? How does she encourage friendly connections between the children?”

In Your Discussion: Talk about how the teacher in the video followed the children’s lead and encouraged peer connections in both what she said and what she did. Encourage

teachers to try similar behaviors, like spending time 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 when you followed your children’s lead while playing with them and encouraged them to connect with each other. We can’t wait to hear about it!”



Week 6

Recommend: [Teacher Tips: Being "In the Moment" with Children](#) *(blog post)*

Comment: “This week, let’s enjoy a blog post that reminds us of the importance of being ‘in the moment’ as we engage with children. When we make time to genuinely connect to and enjoy interacting with children, we increase our ability to be ‘in the moment’ and truly listen to and respond to children’s thoughts, feelings and needs. I encourage you to plan one or two times in your busy day when you can dedicate yourself to simply being ‘in the moment’ and focus on having meaningful and enjoyable interactions with your children. Please follow through on your plan this week and share one of your favorite moments of connection with the group.”

In Your Discussion: Learn about your teachers’ favorite experiences of being “in the moment” with their children this week, and thank them for sharing. Encourage them to reflect on how these enjoyable moments spent interacting with children help to strengthen relationships. Follow up by saying, “Thank you for focusing on being ‘in the moment’ this week. How does being more present and engaged as you interact with children help to strengthen the positive climate in the classroom? Please share your thoughts with the group so we can learn from each other. Thank you!”



Week 7

Recommend: [Learn About Language Modeling](#) *(15 min. course—be sure to recommend the toddler resource)*

Comment: “We’ve already discussed ways that we can talk with and interact with children to help build relationships and create a positive climate. This week, let’s go even deeper in thinking about how our use of conversational language with toddlers can help them develop new language skills. Please watch this course on Language Modeling. After watching the course, tell us why you think it is important for toddler teachers to purposefully encourage, respond to, and expand upon children’s use of language? What are some ways you model and encourage language use in the classroom?”

In Your Discussion: Discuss the importance of both teacher-child and peer communication in the classroom. Encourage teachers to increase the frequency of back-and-forth exchanges with children throughout the day. Follow up by saying, “Please share some strategies teachers can use to encourage young children to use language in the classroom. Thank you!”



Week 8

Recommend: Supporting Language Development While Reading "Curious George" (2 min. video)

Comment: "Now let's listen to a teacher engaging in a back-and-forth exchange with a child about a book during morning arrival time. Notice how she persists in responding to the child's use of language while maintaining a natural flow of conversation. What do you see and hear the teacher do to encourage the child to continue talking during this back-and-forth exchange? Please describe a specific exchange you observed."

In Your Discussion: Encourage teachers to provide specific examples, rather than general statements. Guide them in noticing how the teacher in the video asked questions and responded contingently based on what the child said and/or did. Follow up by saying, "When teachers use conversational language with young children and respond specifically to what a child says or does 'in the moment,' they support and encourage children's continued use of language. This week I encourage you to become aware of when and how do you do this in your classroom."



Week 9

Recommend: Teacher Tips: Engaging Children in Conversation (blog post—while this is a pre-K resource, the ideas are also applicable for toddlers)

Comment: "Conversations with children are important, no matter the child's age. This week we are going to look at a pre-K resource and discuss how it can help us find ways to engage more frequently in conversational exchanges with our toddlers. While reading the blog post this week, please select one strategy you'd like to try out. After trying the conversational strategy a few times, please let the group know about your experiences talking with the children. Thank you!"

In Your Discussion: Find out about the types of back-and-forth exchanges your teachers are having with their toddlers and encourage their efforts. Guide your teachers in writing about the children's responses to their conversational efforts. Follow up by saying, "Reflect on your recent back-and-forth exchanges with children. How would you explain the difference between teacher-led question and answer sessions and true conversations between teachers and young children?"



Week 10

Recommend: Infant-Toddler Caregiving: Observing Children's Cues (15 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 learn about and practice detecting young children's cues. By observing what we see and hear in the classroom, we can become more

aware of the messages and/or signals our young children use daily to communicate their thoughts, needs, and wants. What are some things you see and hear children doing in your classroom to communicate? When and where can you practice observing children's cues more regularly in your classroom?"

In Your Discussion: Encourage teachers to share their observations. Acknowledge their efforts and support them in practicing the important skill of observing children. Follow up by saying, "We can learn a great deal by observing our children. How does focusing on what our children say and do 'in the moment' help us know how to interact with our children in more meaningful ways?"



Week 11

Recommend: Dinosaur House (5 min. "classroom snapshot" video)

Comment: "Now that we've discovered more about observing children, it's time to practice all that we've learned during this unit of study. As you watch this week's 'classroom snapshot' video, notice how the teacher supports relationships and uses conversational language with the children. Carefully observe the children's responses, paying attention to what you see and hear. How do the boys and girls respond to the teacher's continued efforts to support and encourage their use of language while playing? Please describe a specific moment you observed."

In Your Discussion: Thank your teachers for sharing their observations. Request specific details about teachers' observations when general statements are written. Follow up by saying, "This week let's plan to join our children while they play, observe them 'in the moment,' and try our best to engage them in back-and-forth conversations based on what they say and do."



Week 12

Recommend: Repeating and Extending Children's Language during Lunch (2 min. video)

Comment: "This is our last week in our study about building relationships and getting kids to talk. I'd like to honor all that you have learned by asking you to think of additional ways the teacher in this week's video might engage children in conversations during lunch. As you watch the teacher talk with a group of five children, what do you see and hear her do to encourage and support children's use of language? While the teacher has several back-and-forth exchanges with some of the children, how do you think the teacher might get her kids talking even more in this moment?"

In Your Discussion: React in positive ways to the suggestions your teachers offer to help get kids talking. Acknowledge all that they have learned, as reflected in the meaningful advice they are likely able to provide at this point. Follow up by saying, "I encourage you to apply all that you have learned to enhance how you interact with your

children. Thank you for learning with us about building relationships and encouraging children to use language. Happy teaching!"

Want More?

Making progress? Want to keep working on conversations? Consider recommending additional resources. Encourage teachers to explore myTeachstone's resource collection freely and pursue self study on topics of 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

- Fostering Relationships While Talking about Justin Bieber
- Fostering Warm Relationships While Singing "Row, Row, Row Your Boat"
- Warmth and Calm Communication during Diapering
- Respect and Affection during Mealtime
- Building Relationships through Musical Games
- Asking Open-Ended Questions about a Child's Book
- Supporting Language Use While Talking about a Picture
- Encouraging Language While Coloring
- Modeling Language at Lunchtime

Blog Posts / PDFs

- Getting to the Heart of Quality Teaching
- Expanding High-Quality Interactions into Infant and Toddler Settings
- Importance of Play
- Why We Love Kids: Part 2