What’s So Important about Good Relationships?

Relationships are important throughout the life span. For very young children, they are critical to survival itself. Infants depend on adult caregivers to meet their physical as well as their emotional needs. As babies get older and become more self-sufficient, they continue to need physical care and to depend on the emotional nurturance of the important adults in their lives.

All children are born wired to form relationships. Establishing a close, nurturing bond with a primary caregiver is a major developmental task for infants and toddlers. The process of relationship building begins in pregnancy, continuing throughout the infants’ first 12 months and beyond.

Research shows that supportive relationships have a tangible, long-term influence on children’s healthy development, contributing to optimal social, emotional, and cognitive development for infants and toddlers (Zeanah & Doyle Zeanah, 2001). As a child grows, supportive relationships with parents and caregivers shape his or her self-image and provide the child with the resilience needed to face new challenges.

Nurturing, sensitive adult-child interactions are crucial for the development of trust, empathy, compassion, generosity, and conscience. These relationships are far-reaching; research has shown that they provide a context for supporting the development of curiosity, self-direction, persistence, cooperation, caring and conflict resolution skills (Greenough, et. al., 2001). Healthy maternal-child relationships are a precursor of school readiness for older children (Kaplan-Sanoff, 2000). Throughout the life span, nurturing and supportive relationship experiences provide a model for loving relationships.


References

