

ATTACHMENT: Making relationships

What it is: The capacity to form and maintain healthy emotional bonds with another person. It is first acquired in infancy, as a child interacts with a loving, responsive and attentive caregiver.

Why it's important: This core strength is the cornerstone of all the others. An infant's interactions with the primary caregiver create his or her first relationship. Healthy attachments allow a child to love, to become a good friend, and to have a positive model for future relationships. As a child grows, other consistent and nurturing adults such as teachers, family friends, and relatives will shape his or her ability for attachment. The attached child will be a better friend, student, and classmate, which promotes all kinds of learning.

SELF-REGULATION: Containing impulses

What it is: The ability to notice and control primary urges such as hunger and sleep, as well as feelings such as frustration, anger, and fear. Developing and maintaining this strength is a lifelong process. Its roots begin with external regulation from a caring parent, and its healthy growth depends on a child's experience and the maturation of the brain.

Why it's important: Putting a moment between an impulse and an action is an essential skill. Acquiring this strength helps a child physiologically and emotionally. But it's a strength that must be learned--we are not born with it.

AFFILIATION: Being part of a group

What it is: The capacity to join others and contribute to a group. This strength springs from our ability to form attachments. Affiliation is the glue for healthy human functioning: it allows us to form and maintain relationships with others to create something stronger, more adaptive, and more creative than the individual.

Why it's important: Human beings are social creatures. We are biologically designed to live, play, grow, and work in groups. A family is a child's first and most important group, glued together by the strong emotional bonds of attachment. In other groups, such as those in school, children will have thousands of brief emotional, social, and cognitive experiences that can help shape their development. It is in these groups that children make their first friendships. Affiliation helps children feel included, connected and valued.

ATTUNEMENT: Being aware of others

What it is: Recognizing the needs, interests, strengths, and values of others. Infants begin life self-absorbed, and slowly develop awareness--the ability to see beyond themselves, and to sense and categorize the other people in their world. At first this process is simplistic: "I am a boy and she is a girl. Her skin is brown and mine is white." As a child grows, his awareness of differences and similarities becomes more complex.

Why it's important: The ability to be attuned, to read and respond to the needs of others, is an essential element of human communication. An aware child learns about the needs and complexities of others by watching, listening, and forming relationships with a variety of children. She becomes part of a group (which the core strength of affiliation allows her to do), and sees ways in which we are all alike and different. With experience, a child can learn to reject "labels" used to categorize people such as skin color or language. The aware child will also be much less likely to exclude others from a group, less likely to tease, and less likely to act in a violent way.

TOLERANCE: Accept Differences

What it is: The capacity to understand and accept how others are different from you. This core strength builds upon awareness: once aware, how do you respond to the differences you observe?

Why it's important: It's natural and human to be afraid of the new and the different. To become tolerant, a child must first face the fear of difference. This can be a challenge because children tend to affiliate based on similarities--in age, interests, families, or cultures. But they also learn to reach out and be more sensitive to others by watching how the adults in their lives relate. With active modeling, you can build on your students' tolerance. When a child learns to accept difference in others, he is able to value what makes each of us special and unique.

RESPECT: Finding value in differences

What it is: Appreciating the worth in yourself and in others. Respect grows from the foundation of the other five strengths. An aware, tolerant child with good affiliation, attachment, and self-regulation strengths acquires respect naturally. The development of respect is a lifelong process, yet its roots are in childhood.

Why it's important: Your students will belong to many groups, meet many kinds of people, and will need to be able to listen, negotiate, compromise, and cooperate. Having respect enables a child to accept others and to see the value in diversity. She can see that every group needs many styles and strengths to succeed. He will value each person in the group for the talents he or she brings to the group. When children respect--and even celebrate--diversity in others, they find the world to be a more interesting, complex, and safer place. Just as understanding replaces ignorance, respect replaces fear.

Ref: Dr Bruce D Perry

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