

# Responsive, Caring Relationships

In Early Learning and Child Care Settings

**Learning Module for Supply/Enhanced and Non-ECE Staff in Early Learning Settings**

Investing in Quality Peterborough

Module 2

Updated July 2021



**Investing in Quality**  
*Early Learning & Childcare Peterborough*



# *Purpose of these Learning Modules*

---

*Responsive, Caring Relationships is part of a series of training modules for supply and non-ECE staff working in Early Learning and Care in Peterborough City and County. Training for these important staff has been identified as a priority for our Quality Initiative program, as 55% of our workforce does not have their Early Childhood Education designation.*

Along with ***Responsive, Caring Relationships***, this online series also consists of three additional modules on the following topics:

How Does  
Learning  
Happen?

Child Led  
Approaches to  
Learning

Child  
Development

As part of the orientation and training process we encourage you to complete the survey monkey evaluation found on the last page of this presentation and share the reflection questions with your supervisor.

## Legend

*Throughout this presentation you will find symbols to indicate how to engage with the material.*

---



Click the link to read the required material



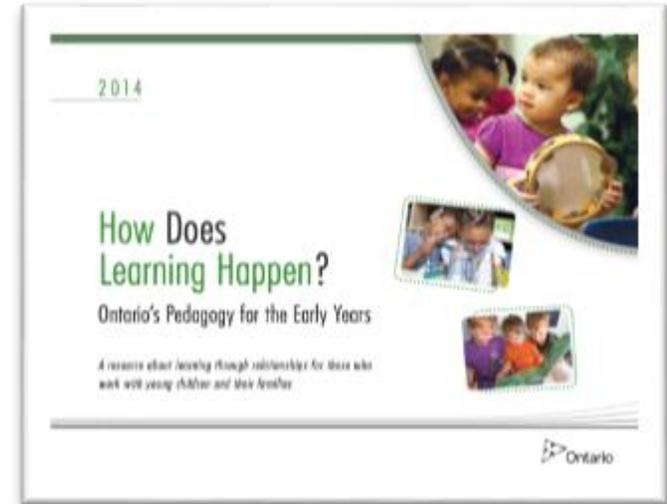
Click the link provided to watch the video



Reflect on the reading or video materials and take notes about your reflections to share with your supervisor

# Agenda

- Cultivating Authentic Relationships –Connecting to *How Does Learning Happen?* [HDLH Document](#)
- Understanding and Responding to Children’s Cues
- Understanding Children’s Stress and Self-Regulation
- Tips for Setting Respectful Limits
- Where to go for help...Resources



*Take time to write your thoughts and responses to some of the questions. This will help you understand the material better.*

*Along with these slides, you will find links for articles to read and videos to watch.*

# Cultivating Authentic Relationships and Connections

*How Does Learning Happen?, Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years* states that:

*"Young children experience their world as an environment of relationships which affect virtually all aspects of their development."*

"Every child has a sense of belonging when he or she is connected to others and contributes to their world."

"Early childhood programs cultivate authentic, caring relationships and connections."

*HDLH pg. 24*

Connection is the key:  
How emotional connections within the  
family can have a buffering effect on  
the social determinants of health



DR JEAN CLINTON



watch

# Connections are Key

*“Research demonstrates that positive, caring, and respectful relationships are the foundations for optimal learning, development, health and well-being”. HDLH? pg. 24*

## **Reflect:**

Take a moment to think about the following questions:

- What does a positive, caring and respectful relationship mean to you?
- What do you see, hear, feel?
- In what ways do you see authentic relationships contributing to healthy child development (social-emotional-physical-cognitive-language)?



# Building Connections



**Read:** *The Power of Positive Adult-Child Relationships: Connection is the Key* by Dr. Jean Clinton  
[The Power of Positive Relationships](#)



**Reflect:**

- Think about an adult who was important in your life as a child. How did they build connections with you?
- Did you experience instances where they worked hard to ‘connect’ with you more than ‘correcting or directing?’ C:D:C ratio [Brain Development in the Early Years – Connecting with Children vs. Directing their Behavior - YouTube](#)
- How did their efforts to connect with you strengthen your relationship with them?
- How does this same concept transfer to your daily practice with children?

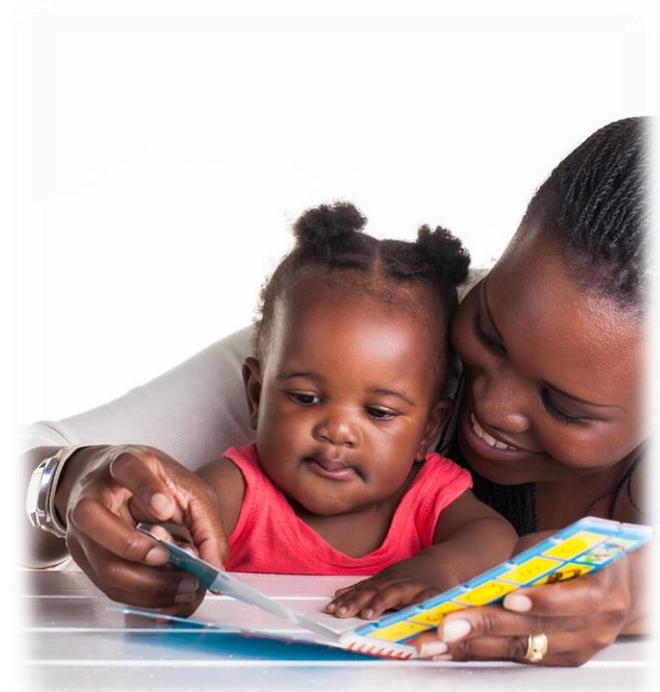
# Making Connections

---

*How can we build connections each day?*

- Be at child's level/ face to face/ eye contact
- Use a pleasant, calm voice and provide warm physical contact
- Follow the child's lead and engage in their play when appropriate
- Provide simple and clear expectations ("It's time to put your boots on now.")
- Engage children in the process of resolving problems and conflicts
- Listen to children
- Be genuine in acknowledging children

The Power of Positive Adult-Child Relationships: Connection is the Key, Dr. Jean Clinton  
pg. 4 (from the previous slide)





## *Responding Sensitively to Children's Cues Builds Trust*

---

*An important part of building positive caring relationships is understanding children's cues.*

*Many of the infants and children we work with do not have language or the ability to express their needs verbally and use physical cues to indicate their needs. Some of these cues might be:*

- Crying
- Temper Tantrums (throwing self on the floor, biting)
- Yawning
- Disengaging (looking or pulling away from others)
- Pointing, grunting
- Yelling

**These behaviours are a form of communication.** They need to be responded to in a caring manner. There is a reason for this communication, and it is our job to understand their cues.

# *Dispelling Myths*

- Some people believe that if you respond to an infant or young child every time they cry or have a tantrum, they will become spoiled or misbehave.
- Brain research has demonstrated that when we respond to children when they cry or show other stress cues, we are helping them to learn how to deal with stress. Eventually they will learn to soothe themselves on their own after we have modeled this over time.
- Children who are comforted learn to trust themselves and others.
- When we respond to children's stress cues, we are helping them to regulate their emotions and learn how to manage stress in a positive manner.



## *Responding to Cues:* It is important that we respond to these cues in a positive manner.

---

Start by calming yourself first.

Stay close by when children are overwhelmed

Pick up the child and comfort them if they will allow

For older children-stay close by, rub their back, put a gentle hand on their shoulder if they will allow

Get down to the child's level and make eye contact, using a calm voice

State what you are noticing... "You sound very sad right now".

Meet their physical needs (hunger, thirst, sleepiness)

Respond to cues in a consistent manner



What are some other ways you respond to children's cues in a positive manner?

# *Understanding Cues*

---



- Sometimes reading and understanding children's cues feels like detective work.
- Every child has individual cues and behaviours that you will begin to understand and be better able to anticipate and respond to as you get to know them.
- Cues/behaviours are a message of stress which is causing a child discomfort (physical or emotional).
- Stress cues that are unmet make it difficult for children to cope.
- To help us understand children's stress cues we will explore the work of Dr. Stuart Shanker from the MEHRIT Centre on Self-Regulation.



Let's watch the following video by Dr. Stuart Shanker to better understand this topic.

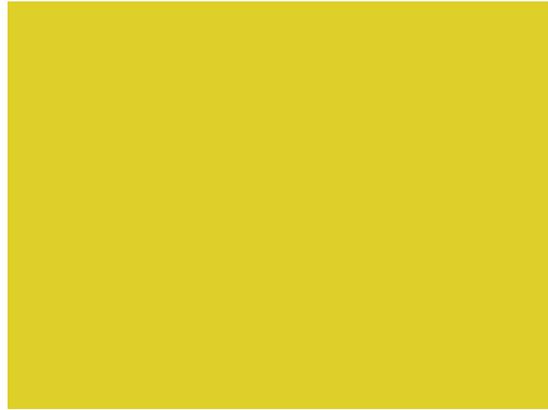
[Self-Regulation](#)



## *Self-Regulation...* *What is it?*

*Self-regulation is understanding brain-body stress and managing energy and tension*

- Children, especially infants and toddlers, need adults to help them co-regulate because they cannot always regulate themselves.
- Self-regulation is not the same thing as self-control. Self-control assumes we have control over our emotions and actions.
- Self-regulation skills can be modelled and taught. It takes time to learn these skills.



## *Reflect:*

---

1. How do you recognize brain-body stress in yourself?
2. What do you feel?
3. How do you manage your own energy and tension?
4. What strategies do you have in place?

*Did you find answering these questions difficult? We first need to understand our own stressors and how we manage them before we can help children understand and learn strategies.*



## *Why is Self-Regulation Important to Understand?*

---

- Children are not born with the ability to self-regulate and manage stress. They need our help to learn these skills.
- Children's inability to self-regulate can be mistaken for misbehaviour and therefore our response to the behaviour may be inappropriate.
- Our response to children's behaviours is key in building healthy brains and relationships

*Let's now look at some brain physiology to understand self-regulation...*

# *Understanding Brain Physiology*

---

## **BLUE BRAIN**

- The neocortex is our thinking brain. Dr. Stuart Shanker calls this blue brain.
- It is the last part of our brain to develop (25 years of age).
- Our best learning takes place when we are using this part of the brain.
- When children are in this state, they are calm, alert and ready for learning.

## **RED BRAIN**

- The reptilian brain is the area of our brain that is built for survival. It helps us to anticipate and react to threats. Dr. Stuart Shanker calls this our red brain.
- This is the part of the brain we use when we are overloaded with stress. It regulates our heart rate, blood pressure, etc.
- We cannot think logically when we go into a red brain state and children often need our help to become calm again.

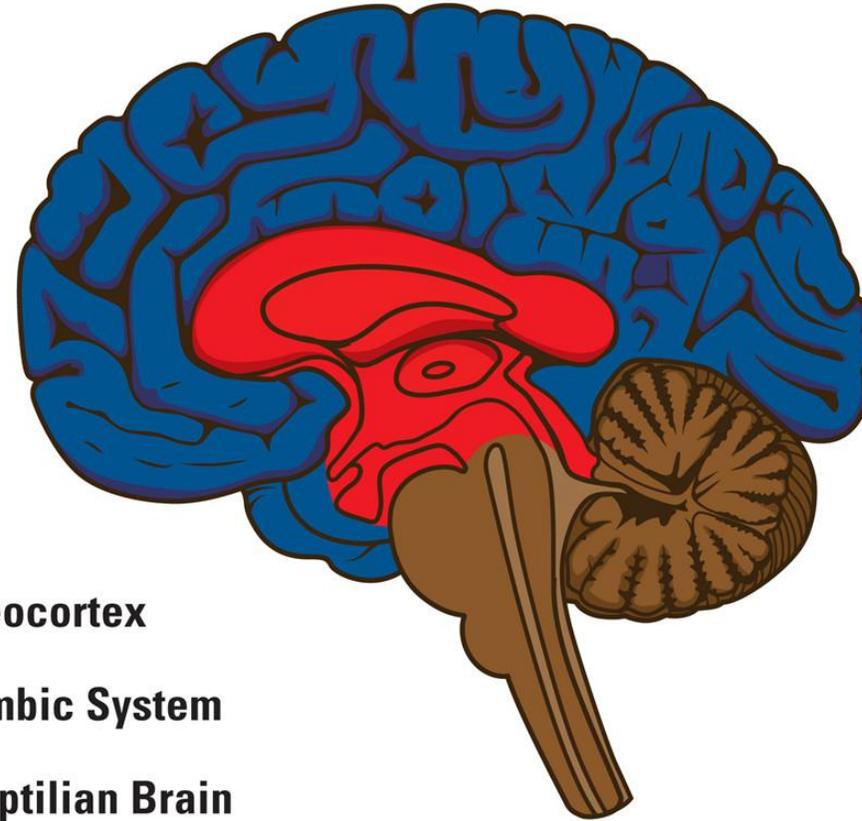
# SEEKS *Balance*, SEEKS *Safety*



**WE BRAIN**



**ME BRAIN**



- Neocortex
- Limbic System
- Reptilian Brain

# What Happens When We are in Red Brain State?

---

*When we are in 'red brain state', digestion gets turned off; immune system diminishes, muscles in middle ears change, cortisol (stress hormone goes up), blue brain (thinking brain) gets turned off.*

## **We go into one of three states:**

- Flight-we flee the stress/danger
- Fright-we become hyper aware and anxious
- Freeze-we become immobile

## **Reflect:**

1. Think about a time you have reacted to a stressful situation in one of these ways?
2. What was helpful to you when friends, family, co-workers responded to your stress?
3. Have you seen children who have reacted to a stressful situation in one of these ways?



# THE STRESS RESPONSE IN KIDS

## FIGHT

Yelling, Screaming,  
Using Mean Words

Hitting, Kicking, Biting,  
Throwing, Punching

Blaming, Deflecting  
Responsibility, Defensive

Demanding,  
Controlling

"Oppositional",  
"Defiant", "Noncompliant"

Moving Towards What  
Feels Threatening

Irritable, Angry,  
Furious, Offended  
Aggressive

## FLIGHT

Wanting to Escape,  
Running Away

Unfocused, Hard  
to Pay Attention

Fidgeting, Restlessness,  
Hyperactive

Preoccupied, Busy with  
Everything But the Thing

Procrastinating, Avoidant,  
Ignores the Situation

Moving Away From What  
Feel Threatening

Anxious, Panicked  
Scared, Worried,  
Overwhelmed

## FREEZE

Shutting Down,  
Mind Goes Blank

Urge to Hide,  
Isolates Self

Verbally Unresponsive,  
Says, "I don't know" a lot

Difficulty with  
Completing Tasks

Zoned Out,  
Daydreaming

Unable to Move,  
Feeling Stuck

Depressed, Numb,  
Bored/Apathetic,  
Helpless

# Educator's Role in Co-regulation

*When a child is in a red brain state, it is not the time for an educator to try to reason with them. The child does not have the ability to control their emotions. (You might notice these suggestions align with responding to your child's cues. This is because behaviours are cues!)*

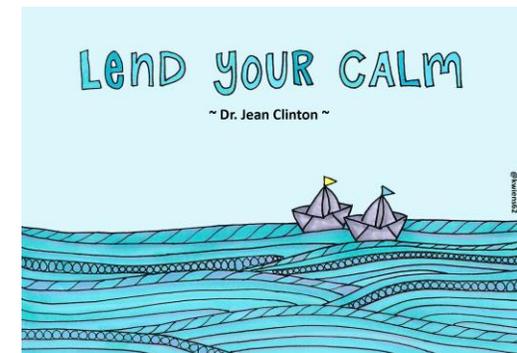
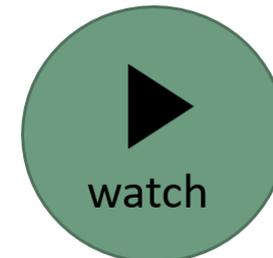
At these times, children need an adult to help them co-regulate. The role of the educator is:

- to stay close by the child until they settle
- to physically comfort them if the child will allow
- to verbally soothe a child (label feelings)
- to have an age-appropriate conversation about what was upsetting the child, after the child is brought back to calm
- create calming environments



Watch this short video by Dr. Jean Clinton on how to be a co-regulator.

[Lend your calm](#)



There are many strategies educators use throughout the day to help children understand about their own body's stress cues.

The Resource Consultant (RC) for your program is a helpful source for information to help you learn some of these strategies.

Ask your supervisor how you can connect with your program's Resource Consultant.

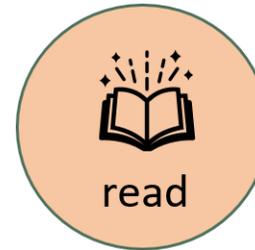
The most current information and research about self-regulation comes from the MEHRIT Centre.



# *The MEHRIT Centre*

---

- Dr. Stuart Shanker of the MEHRIT Centre (a self-regulation program based in Peterborough) has developed a response to support children who are having difficulty regulating.
- You can find a number of resources and professional learning opportunities at the MEHRIT Centre <https://self-reg.ca/resources/>
- The response Dr. Stuart Shanker has developed can be found on the next slide.
- This technique is helpful to consider when the child is having difficulty regulating but also after to reflect upon how to help the child for future.



Learn more about the MEHRIT Centre [here](#).



**The MEHRIT Centre**

# *The Shanker Method for Self-Regulation©*

*Sometimes we might make assumptions that angry, or sad behaviours are disobedience when they are in fact, a stress response.*

---

## ***When a child has lost control:***

- Ask yourself, *“Is this a stress response?”*
- Ask, *“Why is this behaviour happening and why now?”*
- Reflect on what the stressors might be? (hidden and obvious)
- Ask yourself, *“Is there a way I can reduce the stressor?”*  
(e.g., change the environment, alter the schedule of the day, give the child more connection time, etc.)
- How can we move forward to help the child to regulate in the future (anticipate/prevent)?



# *Who are My Partners in Understanding Children?*

---

- Discussing the Shanker Method with your team partners will help you to dig deeper to try to determine why dysregulating behaviours might be happening.
- Parents can also be a good source of information about their child. They may know about stressors a child might be experiencing at home that you are not aware of. We call these hidden stressors.
- Together, as a team, you can reflect on why a child may be dysregulated and determine solutions for moving forward.



## ***Clear and Consistent Messages Help Children Regulate***

*Sometimes children become dysregulated because they do not have clear or consistent limits. Limits help children feel safe and secure.*

---

<b>Set</b>	Set clear and simple limits and expectations
<b>Include</b>	Include children in limit setting and decision making as much as possible
<b>Restate</b>	Restate expectations when needed
<b>State</b>	State consequence if behaviours continue
<b>Follow through</b>	Follow through with consequences
<b>Be calm</b>	Be calm and matter of fact when guiding behaviour
<b>Say Yes</b>	Say yes whenever reasonably possible
<b>Notice</b>	Notice when children do things right
<b>Consistent</b>	Strategies need to be <b>CONSISTENT</b> among team members



# Consider the Unique Needs of Children

---

- Some children experience difficulties processing everyday sensory information, receptive and/or expressive language delays, social-communication difficulties, and/or a multitude of other differing abilities that may further impact their ability to self-regulate.
- Some children in your program will be on the case load of a Resource Consultant (RC). It will be important for you to review these children's Individual Support Plans (ISPs) with your supervisor and RC.
- Your program's RC can share tips and strategies to support building connections unique to each child's learning style and needs.



For more information go to: College of ECE, Practice Guidelines,  
[Inclusion of Children with Disabilities](#)

# *When You Are Feeling Overwhelmed*



## **Some things to Consider:**

- Review your agency's policies on guiding children's behaviour.
- Talk to your team members or supervisor. Chances are if you are feeling this way, they may be too.
- Reflecting together can often help you develop a strategy to help the child.
- Is this an issue the team can discuss with the program Resource Consultant?
- How can the family be involved in this discussion?
- Who is the person on your team who should take the lead in this discussion?

*When You Are  
Feeling  
Overwhelmed  
...Continued*

Ask yourself, how can I support more 'connection' time with the children?

- (C:D:C ratio- Correction, Direction and Connection)

Take advantage of the resources in our community listed on the final slide.

How can I take time for 'me' to help my own self-regulation and well-being?

You cannot help a child to regulate if you are not regulated yourself.

# *The Child Care and Early Years Act: Prohibited Practices*

As an educator in an early learning and care program, it is important to know about and follow the *Child Care And Early Years Act (CCEYA)*. The purpose of this Act is to foster the learning, development, health and well-being of children and to enhance children's safety.



The Act describes practices that are prohibited with children and are important for you to be aware of.

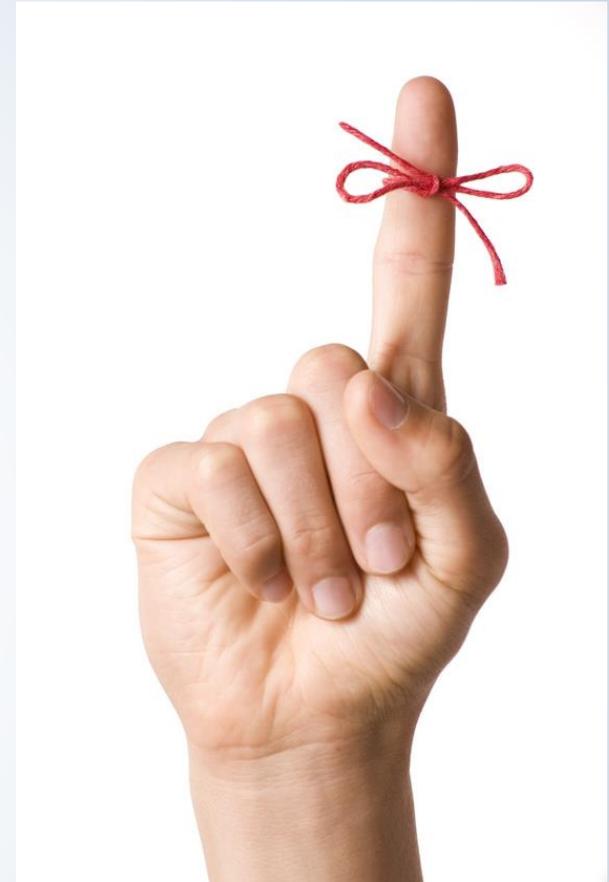
Click on the link below to learn more about the CCEYA and a link to the full document.

- [Child Care and Early Years Act](#)
- Section: Programs for Children
- Regulation 48: Prohibited Practices



Remember that without a positive and nurturing connection, it is difficult to build relationships.

When a child is having difficulty regulating, make the *connection* your priority.



# Where to Access Further Resources



- How Does Learning Happen? -Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years <https://files.ontario.ca/edu-how-does-learning-happen-en-2021-03-23.pdf>
- HDLH? In French <https://www.ontario.ca/fr/page/comment-apprend-pedagogie-de-lontario-pour-la-petite-enfance>
- Think, Feel, Act <https://files.ontario.ca/edu-think-feel-act-lessons-from-research-about-young-children-en-2021-01-29.pdf>
- The MEHIRT Centre <https://self-reg.ca/>
- The Flip It Method [https://learn.devereux.org/onlinelearning/Fliplt/FLIP\\_IT-SupplementalPacket.pdf](https://learn.devereux.org/onlinelearning/Fliplt/FLIP_IT-SupplementalPacket.pdf)
- Investing in Quality Peterborough-Resource Library @ Five Counties Children's Centre <https://www.fivecounties.on.ca/resource-library/>
- Peterborough Child and Family Centre-Resource Library @ 201 Antrim Street <http://ptbocfc.ca/>
- Child Care and Early Learning Act <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/14c11>
- The Healthy Families Collection is located in the Children's Section of the Peterborough Public Library. You can search their resources under many different categories. <https://www.ptbolibrary.ca/en/about-your-library/healthy-families.aspx>



# *Reflecting Forward*

---

- Please take the time to complete the survey monkey evaluation <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/DBZK7XS>
- Your feedback is important to us and helps us to improve future on-line learning modules.
- Share your writings and thoughts as a reflective practice exercise with your supervisor.
- Thank you for taking the time to complete this module. We hope that it helps you in your day-to-day practice with children, families and other educators.