6 Positive Messages
TO GUIDE A YEAR OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

by Teaching Strategies®
Sometimes, the most profound things in life are also the simplest.

Decades of research on both academic achievement and mental health has proven what early childhood educators already know to be true—that the positive relationships you build with children and their families will be more powerful and have a more lasting effect than anything else you do as a teacher.
Teaching and learning are complex processes, to be sure, shaped by myriad external influences. If you were to think of "a child's success at school" as a pie chart, that pie would include a great many pieces.

Learning is easier for children who are physically healthy, often read to, and frequent participants in interesting, age-appropriate experiences that build vocabulary and background knowledge.

On the other hand, it’s difficult for children to learn when they are worried, hungry, sleepy, sick, confused, anxious, lonely, or scared.
It can be overwhelming to try to consider all the potential hazards, roadblocks, and diversions on each child’s journey of development and learning. It’s even more overwhelming to try to forestall all of them along the way, particularly when so many are beyond your control.

But we can definitely know where to start.
Children begin to form attachments with adults at birth. As children grow, so do the number, variety, and quality of those attachments. The more secure those bonds are, the greater the child’s chances for development of other social-emotional life skills as well as for building other positive relationships, such as with siblings and peers.

Personal attachments with adults are rooted in the soil of the messages that children receive. The human brain is prewired to send and receive messages in a variety of ways, including through both words and actions.
Words, tone, body language and expressions

As a teacher, you send messages to children through the words you choose, through your tone of voice, through your body language, and through your facial expressions. When those elements align, your messages are made clear. Children notice and respond. For example, if you say the words that tell a child that you care, when your tone is warm, when your expression is kind, and when your body language is welcoming, your message is unmistakable, and it is both simple and profound.
There’s an old saying that you never get a second chance to make a first impression. But teaching isn’t about making a first impression; it’s about making a lasting impression. Those lasting impressions—founded in the relationships you build with children and their families—will be bolstered by consistent reinforcement of positive messages.

The Creative Curriculum® has long embraced six positive messages in particular. We encourage you to revisit these six messages repeatedly throughout the year and take the time to consider the purpose of each. We believe that your awareness of each message’s intent empowers you to become intentional in the ways that you convey them.
6 Positive Messages

to guide a year of teaching and learning
“This is a good place to be.”

The intent of this message is **reassurance** for children that they will enjoy being in your classroom and feel safe there. Your goal is to have them look forward to learning new things and spending time together.
“This is a good place to be.”

Turn the message into action:

Ask children to **think, talk, and draw** about things that make them happy.

Let children know it’s okay to **ask questions and share opinions**.

If you’re teaching in a distance learning setting, try to avoid the **mute button**, even when children talk out of turn. Instead, redirect them to focus on the topic or take turns speaking, just as you would in person.
“You belong here.”

This is a message of **acceptance**. By sending this message, you help children feel accepted for who they are and encourage them to build connections with others. Your messages can help children appreciate different types of people and learn to find similarities that form the foundation of friendships.
“You belong here.”

Turn the message into action:

**Have children share photos and drawings** of their families and themselves doing things they enjoy. Incorporate the materials children create into class discussions and ask them to talk about the people and activities in the pictures.

**Play variations of the game “Just Like Mine!”**
Select one child and point out something about him: “Juan’s shirt has stripes.” The other children wearing shirts with stripes can respond by saying, “Just like mine!”

If you’re teaching in a distance learning setting, you can continue to **help children build connections, talk together, and play games together via video chats**. Group children with common interests together for small-group time or set up virtual snack time for them to chat together.
This message is about **reliability**. Young children crave consistency, routine, and structure. Once children build trust in their environment, teachers, and classmates, they feel safe to unleash their creativity and big ideas. While your class schedule will depend on the length of your day and whether you’re teaching at a distance or in person, the fundamentals to building a consistent routine are the same.

“This is a place you can trust.”
“This is a place you can trust.”

Turn the message into action:

Offer a consistent schedule that includes both active, high-energy activities and quiet, focused experiences throughout the day.

Provide large blocks of uninterrupted time for play, both indoors and outdoors.

Make sure children are part of the process of creating rules for your classroom community. Ask them to share their ideas for being kind to each other; taking care of their toys and other belongings; and making sure everyone has a chance to learn, grow, and play.
“This is a place you can trust.”

**Group rules into “Little Rules” and “Big Rules.”** For example, “Big Rules” focus on just a few key, overarching ideas: being kind, being safe, and taking care of each other and classroom materials. “Little Rules,” such as determining how you wash hands after each game or stand apart when waiting in line, reinforce those “Big Rules.”

If you’re teaching in a distance learning setting, **provide a printable schedule for families to have at home.** Let families know that maintaining consistent timing is more important for mealtimes, snack times, and rest times than for other experiences.
“There are places you can be by yourself.”

The intent of this message is respect for children as individuals. Some children need more alone time than others. Let them know that this is okay and that you respect their needs.
“There are places you can be by yourself.”

Turn the message into action:

Provide a designated area in your classroom, such as a reading or relaxing nook, where children can be alone if they choose.

If you’re teaching in a distance learning setting, **build in breaks for children to step away from the screen**. Help children who may be shy or nervous to speak on camera get used to the new environment. Don’t force them to talk, but give them alternative ways to communicate, just as you would in person.
“You can do many things on your own here.”

This is a message about nurturing independence. During the early childhood years, children are learning that they are unique individuals with their own interests and agency. By sending this message and providing developmentally appropriate challenges, you’re building children’s confidence in their ability to achieve their goals.
“You can do many things on your own here.”

Turn the message into action:

Create a balance between **teacher-led and child-initiated** experiences.

Provide many opportunities for children to safely work out their thoughts, ideas, emotions, and developmental needs through **unstructured, imaginative play**.

Provide many opportunities to **practice low-risk decision-making**, such as by offering choice time when children can select from different activities.

If you’re teaching in a distance learning setting, provide and model **follow-up activities for families to try** with their children. These can be songs, stories, movements, or games they can continue at home.
“This is a safe place to explore.”

This is a message of confidence. To do their personal best, children need the freedom to try new things without fear. They should feel that it’s quite acceptable—even expected and encouraged—to make mistakes as they learn.
“This is a safe place to explore.”

**Turn the message into action:**

Let children know it’s okay to feel sad or scared at school and that adults are there to help them.

Together, **read books that have rich social-emotional themes**. Help children identify the problem in the story, empathize with the characters, and sort out their own feelings.

If you’re returning to in-person teaching, you may find that children have exaggerated versions of the typical classroom concerns. They may ask, “What will happen if I get sick at school? What will happen if school has to close?” Talk with them and their families about your plans to stay healthy and safe.
Get more ideas for building community and supporting your program’s children and families with positive messages

Explore The Creative Curriculum®

Learn more about Teaching Strategies
Teaching Strategies helps you ensure that each and every child receives a strong foundation for success in school and in life. The Creative Curriculum® is the only curriculum that integrates every aspect of a high-quality early education program and ties those aspects to research-based, developmentally appropriate objectives for learning.