



FIGURE 8.1 Teaching Pyramid Model for Promoting Social and Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children The Teaching Pyramid is a research-based, effective framework to help teachers support children's social-emotional learning and reduce challenging behaviors in the classroom. Reprinted with permission from *Promoting Social and Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children*. Developed by the center on social emotional foundations for early learning at Vanderbilt University, www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel.

When teachers encounter children who exhibit negative behaviors such as aggression or hostility, their first inclination is to try to “fix” that child. As teachers, we naturally assume that if we could just quickly change that child’s behavior, everything would be well and our job would be so much easier. The truth is that there are no quick fixes; in fact, the more effective strategy is not to try to fix the child at first. It is always more difficult to change another person’s behavior, even if that person is only 3 years old, than to change our own behavior.

The Teaching Pyramid turns our prior assumptions on their head. Rather than trying to change children first, we begin by changing ourselves—that is, we examine our behavior to focus on establishing a positive relationship with each child. We recognize that more difficult children will take more effort, but we also acknowledge that the effort will pay off greatly. Next, we evaluate teaching environments and routines, and determine what changes need to be made to support children’s positive behavior. How can we support routines that help children do their best? How can we teach social skills and emotional self-regulation? By asking these questions and exploring solutions, we attempt to directly address individual children’s challenging behaviors.

The Pyramid’s Effectiveness Research demonstrates that when teachers consistently apply the strategies described in the Teaching Pyramid model, positive social interactions among children increase and behavior problems decrease (Hemmeter, Snyder, Fox, & Algina, 2011, 2016; Hemmeter, Hardy, Schnitz, Adams, & Kinder, 2015). Research suggests that fewer than 4% of children require the more intensive level of interventions (Fox, Dunlap, Hemmeter, Joseph, & Strain, 2003). In a group of 20 children, that equates to only one child. In a center serving 100 children, about 4 children might require this level of intensive assistance. In the following sections, we discuss each level of the Teaching Pyramid and provide examples of effective teaching practices.