



(Hamre, 2014; Howes & Ritchie, 2002). This research demonstrates that across the full age span of infancy through the primary grades, a caring, sensitive relationship with a teacher is related to positive social and academic development. For example, in one study, first-graders who were at high risk for school failure but had emotionally supportive teachers had achievement scores and relationships with teachers comparable to those of children who were not at risk (Hamre & Pianta, 2005). By contrast, children whose teachers were not emotionally supportive had lower achievement and more conflict with their teachers and peers. Other studies demonstrate that when teachers have positive relationships with children and are sensitive to their needs, children develop better self-regulation and social skills (Johnson, Seidenfeld, Izard, & Kobak, 2013; Williford, Vick, Whittaker, Vitiello, & Downer, 2013).

In addition, attachment relationships with parents may not predict attachment relationships with teachers (Howes & Ritchie, 2002; Beckh & Becker-Stoll, 2016). Just as a child who is securely attached to parents may be insecurely attached to teachers, a child who is insecurely attached to parents may develop a secure attachment to a teacher (Buyse, Verschueren & Doumen, 2011). Teachers serve attachment needs when the parent is not present. In this way, teachers know that they can make a positive difference for all children, even those who have troubled family relationships.

Although building relationships with insecurely attached children can be challenging for teachers, these children are most in need of such support if they are to succeed in school and life. Research shows that teachers tend to have more conflict in their relationships with children with behavior challenges, with boys, and with children of color (Gallagher, Kainz, White, & Vernon-Feagans, 2013). Therefore, it is vitally important for teachers to be aware of how their own potential biases may affect their behavior.

Responsive teachers observe children carefully and notice when children need extra attention or support, and children respond by growing in their social and academic competence (Hamre, 2014). Although the attachment literature tends to focus on individual relationships between parents or teachers and children, it does not focus on children’s roles as members of groups, which we discuss next.

Relationships with Other Children Across the age span of birth through age 8, teachers create a caring community by promoting positive interactions among young children. Such a community is essential not only for social–emotional development but for learning in every area. Teaching that supports children’s peer relationships depends in part on the age of the children served.

Infants and Toddlers Building relationships with babies and toddlers takes time, sensitive touch, talking, and playful learning experiences (Raikes & Edwards, 2009). Teachers create a climate of respect by listening and responding to babies’ verbal and nonverbal cues, such as their cries or coos, facial expressions, and body movements. These behaviors send signals about the baby’s wants and needs, such as “I’m hungry” or “I’m bored and want to do something else.” When adults respond appropriately to their cues, babies begin to develop a sense of trust and efficacy.

Toddlers in child care can show the same patterns of attachment and exploration behavior that were described for parental attachments. In order to engage actively in exploration, play, and learning while enjoying the stimulating environment, toddlers need to feel confident about their relationships with non-parental caregivers. Thus, providing a secure base for exploration and a haven of safety to which the children can return when needed is a critical task for toddler teachers. Think about what this might mean for room arrangement, and where teachers position themselves in the classroom.

Teachers also model the kind of warmth and caring that they want children to develop. Even very young infants and toddlers demonstrate empathic behaviors toward their peers (Raikes & Edwards, 2009). Teachers can promote empathy by labeling children’s

