

Emotional Availability

Relevant Satellite Accreditation Standards

I. Interactions and Relationships

A. The provider's verbal and non-verbal communication with children helps build positive relationships and conveys support, respect and trust.

8. The provider offers comfort and reassurance when children show distress, fear, or discomfort.



Learning 4 Life



Little Smiles with Big Dreams



Flourish Family Childcare

The Basics

Emotional availability refers to the **quality** of an adult-child **emotional connection** (Saunders et al., 2015).

Adults with high emotional availability provide children...

- *sensitivity* – the capacity to maintain a positive emotional connection
- *structuring* – the readiness to offer guidance and set limits
- *non-intrusiveness* – the willingness to follow the child's lead
- *non-hostility* – the ability to remain calm

Stress, burnout, mental health, and personal history may contribute to an adult's ability to provide any or all of the above components. Internal and external demands, like the work expectations of a family child care educator, may also contribute to one's ability to be emotionally available.

Why is emotional availability essential? Young children rely on adults as a **secure base** for times of exploration and a **safe haven** for moments of distress, fear, or discomfort. This responsive pattern of exploration and safety supports children's self-regulation and emotional well-being, laying a foundation for future physical and mental health and academic success (Bendel-Stenzel et al., 2022). In the absence of an emotionally available adult, young children experience prolonged, heightened stress and display decreased empathy and social disengagement (Panfile & Liabe, 2012).

[How do I practice emotional availability?](#) Family child care educators hold the emotional experience of multiple children of mixed ages. It is nonessential and impractical to remain emotionally available to every child always. Research indicates that access to an emotionally responsive and supportive adult at least 50% of the time is sufficient for supporting children’s development (Woodhouse, 2020). Below are strategies for supporting children’s diverse needs for a secure base and safe haven in early learning programs.

Secure base	Safe haven
<i>Intentional educators strive to...</i>	<i>Intentional educators strive to...</i>
share in children’s excitement and joy	remain in close proximity
support children’s problem solving	welcome children’s coming to you
establish boundaries and set limits	empathize with and validate emotions
follow children’s lead	provide comfort and reassurance
celebrate children’s discoveries	offer physical touch and affection
find non-interruptive ways to engage in play	check in with children during play

[I want to learn more!](#)

- [You’re the best teacher! Responsive Interactions with Young Children](#) (Resource)
- [Promoting Young Children’s Social and Emotional Health](#) (Article)
- [Emotional availability: Theory, research, and intervention](#) (Research article)
- [Responsive Care: Nurturing a Strong Attachment Through Everyday Moments](#) (Video)

[Books available through Satellite’s lending library:](#)

(for Satellite participating programs only)

- *Secure Relationships: Nurturing Infant/Toddler Attachment in Early Care Settings* (Honig, 2002)
- *Emotionally Responsive Teaching: Expanding Trauma-Informed Practice with Young Children* (Wright, 2023)
- *Being with Babies: Understanding and Responding to the Infants in Your Care* (Kovach, 2008)

