

89 - Learning Happens Best with Relationships

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Audience: Current Active & Enrolled Students

Episode Transcript

Host Dr. Shipley: Hello everyone and welcome to Early Childhood Chatter with Dr. Shipley and Dr. Heald. We will upload a new episode every other week on Wednesdays.

Host Dr. Heald: Twice a month, we come to you with a short professional development with new ideas for you to try.

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Today we are so honored and excited to have Anne McKittrick here with us today. Anne has her master's degree and is the founder of Nurtured Noggins, which is a comprehensive resource for parents, and host of Parenting in the First Three Years Podcast.

A frequent conference speaker, she's a parenting coach and an early childhood specialist with over 20 years of experience in higher education. Anne provides online professional development for thousands of childcare professionals each year through her business, Texas Child Care Training. Welcome Anne.

Anne McKittrick: Thank you, I'm so happy to be with you. Thanks for inviting me.

Host Dr. Shipley: Yes, Ann, we're super excited, so thanks for being here.

I am just so happy to hear about your topic, which is learning happens best in relationships. But I want to know first, why did you choose this topic and why is it so important?

Anne McKittrick: You know, for one thing, I talk to a lot of moms, young moms, and so often they feel like they're doing it wrong, and they just worry about how their child is going to develop, they're unsure about their parenting. And, you know, there's a lot of voices that come towards parents these days that, you know, I didn't have even when I was raising my children.

And so, teachers of young children have the ability to speak into the lives of these parents to educate them and to change their mindset through their relationship with the parents.

Host Dr. Heald: You know, we talk so much about the relationships we have and just really the importance of positive rapport with parents, right? Because we want those positive partnerships and that homeschool connection. Why is this just so important and how can we do it?

Anne: ****McKittrick:**** You know, I've been thinking about this question like, what is rapport anyways, you know? And when you have rapport with a person, there's a level of comfort and, you know, just knowing of that, you know that person that you're talking to.

In a sense, it's kind of like small talk with a purpose. And so, we have pretty minimal time with parents at the beginning of the day and at the end of the day. Very often, there's just not a lot of time.

Teachers are busy, parents are in and out quickly, but there is time for a quick question that will connect you with that parent to find out how things are going. And so, just to have a couple of ideas of things that you might ask a parent, you

might just say, "on a scale of 1 to 10, how's the morning been"? And that is a connection point, but it also gives you some real insight as to how that child is doing when they arrive into your classroom. And how you might best be able to meet their needs.

And so, that's, you know, just asking a question that has a little bit of purpose to it, even maybe, you know, at pickup time, what are you looking forward to tonight? And then the next morning, how did that go? The thing that you were looking forward to. And so, that's what rapport is. It's connecting with somebody and remembering what they said and then asking about it, you know, and showing that you care because you've listened to them.

Host Dr. Shipley: Right.

Host Dr. Heald: You know, do you mind, Dr. Shipley, sorry, this is just, it reminds me of something that I say all the time, my favorite quotes in education is from Theodore Roosevelt. And it's, people don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care.

And everything you're saying right now, right, and building that family partnership is along with that. Whether it be the kiddos in our setting or the parents, they ultimately have to know that we are on this path together. We care for their child. We care for their success. And ultimately, we care for them. Right? And I think you really speak to that point.

Anne McKittrick: Yeah. You know, when we do that, what we're doing is we're building a foundation of trust and support for the parent.

You know, imagine a new parent coming into your classroom. They don't know you and they don't they don't trust you quite yet. We have to build that trust.

And that's, you know, why these conversations are so important and crucial to building that trusting relationship. And the person who benefits the most from that, of course, is the child, because then they see that their parent and their teacher are connecting and that they both care for that kid. They both care for me.

They want to know, you know, all these things about me. And I'm really loved because I'm loved at home and I'm loved at school and seen in both places very well.

Host Dr. Shipley: So, I tell my students all the time and I tell people who asked, one of the main things that I focused on from day one was building that relationship with my families.

And I wanted a reciprocal relationship where we could go back and forth and we could share ideas and bounce ideas and give each other tips and tricks to use at home. But, when it comes to building these relationships, oftentimes at the very beginning, it's tough and it's scary and you don't know what to do. Do you have any really good examples or really great things that you did along the way to have these parents feel comfortable with you and want to invite them in the classroom? What did you do that are tips and tricks that we could share with our listeners to build these relationships?

Anne McKittrick: You know, my time in the classroom before I moved up into different positions was really as an infant teacher.

And so, infant parents and infant teachers, you know, we have it's really important that we talk with the parents and find out all those nuances of that baby. You know, like, what do they like? How do how will I know they're sleepy or they're hungry? You know, what are the cues I should look for? And how do you how do they like to get to sleep? Do they like to be bounced? Do they like to be rocked? Do they like to just be laid down and get themselves to sleep? And so just getting all that information, I mean, you get it on the registration forms. It's all written down.

But it's sure a lot better to hear that from the parents, you know, through conversation so that you can ask questions and go back and forth and tell them how you tried what they said at school and what happened and how their child responded to it. And so, I think that hearing those, I mean, having those conversations face to face is really important for establishing the relationship, especially in the baby room, but at all ages.

Host Dr. Shipley: Right. And that goes back to what Steph said in her quote, because parents want to know that you care, too. They want you to care as much as they care about their child. So, when asking questions and letting them know that I really do know the most about my child, you're going to build that relationship.

Anne McKittrick: Right. Yeah. Yeah, because what they tell you about what happens at home really does explain a lot of what happens at school. Right.

Host Dr. Shipley: Yes. Exactly.

Anne McKittrick: And that's what allows us to kind of individualize our teaching and our our caregiving with young children.

And I remember I had one little boy and his parents told me the most ingenious thing that they did, and that was that she would open up the dishwasher and put his snacks on the dishwasher door so that when she was in the kitchen doing things, this little baby could just crawl up, pull himself up onto the door and eat whatever snacks and she would just close it up and not have to clean it. But knowing that about how that little boy ate his snacks at home was real insightful for me when we had snack time at school.

Host Dr. Shipley: That is very true.

Anne McKittrick: So, yeah, that's just one little example.

Host Dr. Heald: I love these ideas and these stories. Now, we you know, we want to be mindful of our audiences, a lot of educators.

We have a high population of educators who listen. And what happens if a family does come to us with questions that we're just not able to answer?

Anne McKittrick: You know, I think that, first of all, educators need to know that they won't have the all of the answers for young children, for the parents of their kids, and they're not expected to, even though it might feel that way, you know, when they ask the questions. But there's several things that a teacher can do.

And one is that they just need to listen really attentively and give the parent their full attention and actively listen to their questions and concerns. And in active listening looks like eye contact, nodding your head, repeating back what you've just heard them ask and acknowledging their question. "I hear that you're saying "or "it sounds like you are concerned about those kinds of words".

When you repeat it back, then you are really getting clarification and you're digging deeper and trying to find out a little bit more of what it is that they're wanting and needing. And then, you know, I would suggest that if you're not sure or if you need a minute to think about it, that it's fine to say, you know, "I hear this question and I would like to have a little bit of time to formulate my answer "and that way I can really help you to the best of my ability and not feel like you just have to answer right there on the spot. I think sometimes people will ask me a question and I just kind of blurt out an answer.

And later, I think, well, I should have said this or that or that. And I think, you know, that it's OK to take a pause and say, you know, let me get back with you. I'll give you a call during my lunch hour and we'll talk this through or something like that.

But to acknowledge their question, repeat it back, follow up as promptly as you possibly can, and then involve people that that need to that they might need for help. You know, and this a lot of times might be that there's a person on your staff that you could refer them to. Maybe your administrator of your program might be able to address the question a little bit better than you or have the referrals that they might need.

You know, there's a lot of specialists. There's a lot of very helpful resources for parents. And we need to be very aware of what those are and ready to distribute them as needed when these questions come up.

Host Dr. Heald: I love that, and I think it also shows that educators are indeed humans, and we need to investigate their resources. So, I think it shows our true rawness and realness and transparency. Do you have three takeaways that you can provide our listeners with?

Anne McKittrick: I do.

My first takeaway is that. It to build this rapport and build a relationship with the parents. You know, sometimes it's a little tricky because one parent might bring the child in for, you know, a long time and then another parent brings them in and then you have to, you know, start it again with this new person. But go ahead and make it your intention to know the parents and to build this rapport.

And then the second one is that, you know, parents have all these messages coming at them through social media and other sources. And early childhood professionals, we can help clarify these messages and point them to what's the best thing for their child's development and assure them that they are the expert on their child, that they do have intuition that tells and tells them what to do and guides their parenting and that they can trust themselves and that you're there to support them through that process. And then last, that you can foster secure attachments with infants especially, but all children at school and support this attachment with the parent by creating a strong homeschool connection that when the parent I mean, when the child is very attached to you, of course, they're very attached to their parent.

But the combination of that attachment is what really creates a very safe world for the child.

Host Dr. Shipley: I agree with that 100 percent. And like I said, building strong relationships with my family was one of my main priorities because it makes your year go smooth.

What is one challenge you would like to leave our listeners with?

Anne McKittrick: My challenge is to talk to the parents of each of your children as much as you can each day, but at least several times a week to take time for a conversation and ask for stories about something that's happened at home with their child. And this personal connection will give you insight into their child and how you can best serve that family.

Host Dr. Shipley: Perfect. I love it, Anne, thank you so much for being with us today. And we can't wait to chat with you again.

Anne McKittrick: You're welcome. Thank you so much for having me.