# Respectful relationships and responsive engagement

## Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework Practice Principles for Children’s Learning and Development

The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF) provides a comprehensive way of thinking and working with young children that supports their continuity of learning as they move through the various settings from home and early learning services to school. The VEYLDF identifies eight Practice Principles that illustrate the most effective ways for teachers to support children’s learning and development.

The eight interrelated Practice Principles are:

* Reflective practice
* Partnerships with families
* High expectations for every child
* **Respectful relationships and responsive engagement**
* Equity and diversity
* Assessment for learning and development
* Integrated teaching and learning approaches
* Partnerships with professionals (VEYLDF 2016, p.7).

When Prep teachers align their professional practice with the VEYLDF Practice Principles, they can be confident they:

* are working in ways that respond to what research tells us about how young children best learn
* are best placed to build trusting and collaborative relationships with families and other professionals.

#### What are respectful relationships and responsive engagement?

Trusting, secure and reciprocal relationships with children and their families help inform a teacher’s knowledge of children and their interests, skills and abilities. These relationships, and the knowledge of the children that these relationships foster, are the foundation for teachers working effectively. These types of relationships create a secure base that allows children to feel safe, connected and able to try new things, and they work as a buffer for children to help regulate behaviour.

Being attuned to children and families is a way of working responsively. This means being aware of, receptive to and connected with families. A way of describing responsive engagement is the concept of ‘caring presence’. Caring presence requires an awareness of each child that is more than an awareness of their physical presence and is dependent on your active engagement in interactions with them.

Respectful relationships and responsive engagement apply to relationships with both families and children, and all aspects of the learning program should encourage children to develop these types of relationships with others. Working this way requires teachers to respect the values of each family even when they differ from their own.

#### Why are respectful relationships and responsive engagement important?

Respectful relationships with the significant adults in children’s lives build and strengthen secure attachments that are fundamental to all children’s development. Relationships are deeply connected to children’s thinking and learning. For children to learn about negotiation, collaboration, problem-solving and considering the perspectives of others, children require supportive scaffolding from positive adult engagement. This supportive scaffolding occurs best in the context of respectful relationships and responsive engagement. These relationships not only promote emotional security and a sense of belonging but also teach children how to form strong bonds and friendships with others. Embedding these ideas in the ‘everyday’ of children’s school lives will promote their confidence and empower them in developing relationships with others.

#### In the classroom – *Kelly Colson, Junior School Teacher, ELTHAM College*

*‘A fundamental part of a successful year for students, teachers and parents is the ability to work closely together and form positive relationships with each other. Developing mutual respect and trust is paramount in building healthy relationships and in turn creating high-quality engagement for all stakeholders.*

*I highly value and believe in the importance of forming partnerships between the school and home as these partnerships present opportunities to demonstrate respectful relationships and responsive engagement.*

*As teachers, we begin each new Prep year with ‘Home Visits’. This unique opportunity allows the teacher, student and family to begin to build a rapport and a strong partnership, and develop relationships while assisting each child with a positive transition to Prep. Seeing a child in their home environment offers a personalised approach and, importantly, allows me as an educator to learn about the child’s culture and context. I can engage in valuable conversations with parents prior to the school year starting. On the child’s first day of school, parents are feeling comfortable that I know their child, their child knows the space and I understand the needs of their young learner.*

*Parent helpers are welcomed in our classroom and are an integral part of our learning community. This practice enables parents to observe the atmosphere and inner workings of the room and feel connected to the space and their child’s learning. Throughout the year, we also conduct student-led exhibitions. This involves inviting families into our Neighbourhood space, and this event provides an opportunity for each student to share with their family their learning achievements. This is a beautiful illustration of students taking responsibility for their successes and identifying and articulating responses to what they have learned.*

*In each one of these classroom practice examples at my school, the opportunity for all members of the partnership to have a voice is evident. If we are seen, heard and connected, then we have a strong sense of belonging.’*

#### How do I do it? – Top tips

1. Demonstrate sensitivity and initiate warm, trusting and reciprocal relationships with children and their families.
2. Support families’ choices and decision-making.
3. Develop learning programs that are responsive to each child and build on their culture, strengths, interests and knowledge.
4. Hear and take into account the views and feelings of each child.
5. Recognise and deepen children’s understandings about other people and how values and beliefs influence a child’s world.
6. Demonstrate respect for and understanding of the views of other professionals and families when communicating and interacting across cultures.

**Find other useful resources and further information about the VEYLDF on the**   
[**Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority website.**](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/earlyyears/ey-curriculum-resources/Pages/Index.aspx)