

11 Ways To Help Young Children Develop a Strong Sense of Mattering

The science of mattering can inform practical, actionable strategies that we all can use to build a strong ecosystem of mattering for young children, whether we are caregivers, providers, policymakers, or community members. By building the foundation for mattering in the earliest years, we can help our children thrive both in childhood and across their lifetimes. Below are suggestions for specific strategies for how to bring mattering into a child's developmental environment.

Practice serve and return daily.

Responding warmly and promptly to a child's cues, whether it's a smile, a cry, or a question, shows them they are worthy of a caregiver's time and attention.

Model repair.

When an adult intentionally reconnects after a conflict, it tells the child that the relationship is worth repairing because they are worth it, reinforcing that they matter and are valued even when things are hard.

Know the child.

Notice what excites them, ask questions, and listen. It shows they're seen and valued for who they are.

Watch for anti-mattering.

Be alert to messages that make children feel invisible or unwanted, especially those from marginalized groups. Every child should hear and see that they matter.

Encourage them to contribute.

Help children build a mattering mindset in small, age-appropriate ways, like handing out spoons or putting away toys.

Call them a "helper."

The language we use helps children see their contributions as part of who they are.



Support excluded or isolated children.

Connect isolated children with counseling, mentors, or group activities to help rebuild trust, foster a sense of belonging, and make them feel valued.

Value caregivers.

Parents, teachers, caseworkers, and other caregivers need to feel appreciated and supported so they can give their best to the children in their care.

For nonprofit leaders:

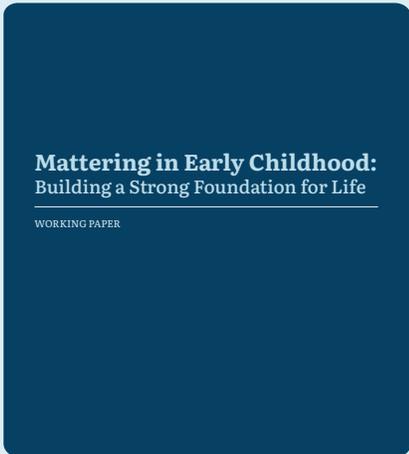
In family programs, treat each person as an individual. Use names, listen fully, and respond with care to show they matter beyond their case file.

For business leaders:

Reinforce to employees that they matter by involving them in decisions that affect their jobs, keeping workloads reasonable, and recognizing their impact. When employees feel they matter at work, they have more bandwidth to care for their families.

For policymakers:

Invest in supports for children and caregivers, such as home visiting and paid leave, so that families feel valued and are able to thrive.



Mattering in Early Childhood:
Building a Strong Foundation for Life

WORKING PAPER

Learn more about the importance of mattering in early childhood.

[Read our working paper](#) to learn more about how mattering affects children's lifelong health and well-being and find additional insights on how to promote a sense of mattering in young children.