

4. Learning to care

It is through warm, responsive relationships with educators that children learn what it feels like to be cared for and what it means to care for others.

“infants and toddlers learn to be the one-caring in the very context of being the cared-for”

Cooper and Quiñones (2020)



Look at the photo. Think about what is happening in this interaction.



Learning to care

What the research tells us

The foundational relationships young children form with their caregivers shape their sense of self, others and the world. As such, they are inherently pedagogical.

- One-year-olds initiate nurturing acts, such as feeding, rocking and soothing, in their play with dolls that mirror their own experience of being cared for.
- This shows how the care received in responsive relationships with educators is internalised by toddlers and subsequently offered in relation to others.
- Toddlers offer invitations, which are often subtle, for educators to join them in care play. When educators notice and respond by joining in and

helping to shape the play narrative, they extend the child's understanding of care.

"Having their caring actions validated through verbal and non-verbal prompts, storying, and gentle support [...] gave the toddlers opportunities to act, think about, and extend their ideas about being the one caring."

Cooper and Quiñones' (2020)

Find out more:

Cooper and Quiñones (2020)



Look out for the non-verbal cues, body gestures or movement toddlers use to share their understanding of 'caring for' through their play.

