

Banking Time: Strengthening Your Relationship With Individual Children

Strong, safe, nurturing, and responsive teacher-child relationships are essential for young children to thrive. Children may show you through their behavior that they need more relational connection, or you might identify a child you want to strengthen your relationship with.

What is it?

Banking Time is a strategy that focuses on improving the relationship between an individual child and their teacher. Teachers use specific strategies to support positive relational interactions with children.

How do you use it?

- ▶ **Identify a child with whom to use Banking Time.**
 - The child might be someone you want to build a stronger relationship with.
 - It might be a child where a relational boost would be beneficial or healing.
 - A child with behavior that challenges the adults indicating they could use positive relational time with a safe, trusted, nurturing, and responsive adult.
- ▶ **Meet with the child for play-based one-on-one relationship-building time 2-3 times a week for 10-15 minutes.**
 - Think about a quiet space in the learning environment or a space outside the environment, like a hallway, where sessions can happen.
 - Let the child pick a play-based activity that they will engage in with the teacher.
 - Make sure there are enough materials for the child and the teacher to play.
 - Engage in the activity with the child.

Banking Time strategies to try:

Follow the child's lead in play.

- ▶ **Let the child pick what and how you play together.**

Elle picks dinosaurs for her banking time session. Her teacher has enough dinosaurs for both her and Elle to use. Elle picks which dinosaurs she wants to use; she also picks which dinosaurs her teacher uses.

- ▶ **Observe the child and their play before you jump in and play with them. Show your interest in what the child is doing by watching with limited talking.**



- ▶ **Let the child set the tone for the play and follow the child's play ideas.**

Elle has two dinosaurs pretending to eat grass from the table. Her teacher takes her two dinosaurs and has them pretend to eat grass from the table, imitating what Elle does. Elle changes, having her dinosaurs walk around in a circle; her teacher shifts her play to have her dinosaurs walk around in a circle following Elle's lead.

- ▶ **Imitate how the child plays: actions and language.**

Elle has her dinosaurs make a loud "ROAR," and her teacher makes her dinosaurs "ROAR" loudly, too. Elle decides one of her dinosaurs is now a horse; her teacher shifts to call one of her dinosaurs a horse, too. Elle makes a silly noise and says, "This is how my dinosaur talks," her teacher imitates the silly noise, saying, "This is how my dinosaur talks too." Elle and her teacher have their dinosaurs make noises back and forth. The teacher only stops this back-and-forth play when Elle changes how she plays.

- ▶ **Match energy level and mirror emotional states.**

Elle has one of her dinosaurs fall and start to cry. The teacher makes her face look sad and says, "Your dinosaur fell and is crying." Elle nods her head. She then has her dinosaur jump up and says excitedly with a big smile, "My dinosaur is okay!". The teacher shifts her face from sad to excited and says energetically, "Your dinosaur is okay!"

- ▶ **Check in with the child to ensure you understand their play themes, directions, and requests.**

Elle shows her teacher how she wants the teacher's dinosaur to play with her dinosaur. Elle's teacher says, "Let me make sure I understand what you want me to do." The teacher then repeats what Elle said and imitates the moves she made with the dinosaurs.

Use helping statements.

- ▶ **"Remember, you can ask me if you need help."**

Theo and his teacher are playing with Legos for their Banking Time session. Theo is trying to find a specific Lego piece from the bucket, and he is getting frustrated. Theo's teacher notices this and says, "You are working so hard to find just the right Lego. Remember, you can ask me if you need help."

Be a sportscaster and narrate the child's play.

- ▶ **Verbally say what the child is doing.**

Theo is putting different Lego pieces together. His teacher says, "Theo, you have Legos in your hands; you put the blue Lego on top of the red Lego. You are building with Legos."

Label and describe child and adult emotions.

- ▶ **Label the child's emotions as well as your own emotions.**

At the beginning of the Banking Time session, Theo says, "I want to play Legos with you!" He has a big smile on his face. His teacher says, "I am so excited to play with you today; I love Legos too!" At the end of the session, Theo is slow to clean up, and his mood has changed. His teacher says, "You seem disappointed that it's time to clean up. I am sad our special time is over today, too. We will play again together soon."

Things to avoid during Banking Time

► Questions

(e.g., “Can you count how many animals are on the table?” “What color are the Legos?”). Your goal is for the child to lead the conversation. It is also okay if there is not a lot of conversation.

► Directives

(e.g., “Draw a family”; “Let’s pretend we are making pancakes for breakfast.”).

► Praise

(e.g., “Great job!” “You did it!” “You figured it out; what a problem solver.”). Your goal is to have the child lead the play and conversation. There is no right or wrong way to play.

What does the research say?

A study at the University of Virginia found that children in preschool classrooms where the teacher used Banking Time had improved their behavior over the school year, including behavior changes for children with externalizing or identified challenging behaviors (Williford et al., 2017). Another study showed that children who experienced Banking Time showed less cortisol in their bodies, meaning their internal systems were more protected from the impacts of stress (Hatfield & Williford, 2017).

Implementation Guidance

The [ECE Resource Hub](#) offered by the Center for the Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) at the University of Virginia provides videos and guides related to the use of Banking Time.

References

- Hatfield, B., & Williford, A. (2017). Cortisol patterns for young children displaying disruptive behavior: Links to a teacher-child, relationship-focused intervention. *Prevention Science*, 18, 40–49. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-016-0693-9>.
- Williford, A. P., LoCasale-Crouch, J., Vick Whittaker, J. V., DeCoster, J., Hartz, K. A., Carter, L. M., et al. (2017). Changing teacher-child dyadic interactions to improve preschool children’s externalizing behaviors. *Child Development*, 88, 1544-1553. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12703>.

Before the Banking Time Session

- ▶ Who are you using Banking Time with:
 - Child's name:
 - Teacher's name:
- ▶ Why has this child been identified for banking time sessions?
- ▶ What days/times will sessions occur?
- ▶ Who will provide coverage for the classroom?
- ▶ Where is the session happening?
- ▶ How have you communicated about Banking Time with the child's family?

After the Banking Time Session

- ▶ Name of child:
- ▶ What activity did the child pick for their Banking Time session?
- ▶ What was your comfort level with this activity?

Banking Time Strategy

Banking Time Strategy	Strategies I used during the Banking Time session	Strategies I feel most comfortable with	Strategies I would like to continue to practice	Strategies I would like support with
Following the Child's Lead				
Using Helping Statements				
Narrating Play				
Naming and Describing Emotions				

Reflections

Consider the questions below. If you are working with a coach or consultant who is helping you with the use of Banking Time, you might want to review your thoughts with them.

Your Implementation

- ▶ Did you find yourself using questions?
- ▶ Did you find yourself using directions?
- ▶ Did you find yourself using praise?
- ▶ How was your mood before the session?
- ▶ How was your mood after the session?

The Child's Response

- ▶ How was the child's mood before the session?
- ▶ How was the child's mood after the session?

Progress

- ▶ Have you noticed any changes in your relationship with this child across the day?
- ▶ How have you communicated about your Banking Time sessions with the child's family?
- ▶ Are there any barriers to having Banking Time sessions consistently with this child?