



Characteristics of a Relational Child and Youth Care Approach

Printable Cutouts

These convenient reference cards outline 25 essential dimensions of the helping relationship.

Designed for care providers and other professionals in diverse roles, they offer practical guidance on fostering trust, safety, and a supportive environment that encourages self-expression and growth.



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FEATURES

Equipping Care Teams for Excellence

- **Compact and Accessible Design** - Each card distills a specific dimension of the helping relationship, making it easy to reference and apply in daily practice.
- **Grounded in Practice-Based Theory** - Developed from the Characteristics of a Relational Child and Youth Care Approach Revisited, providing a trusted foundation for guidance.
- **Versatile Applications** - Designed for use in various contexts, including team meetings, training sessions, supervision, and personal reflection.

BENEFITS

How These Cards Can Help Foster a Culture of Relational Safety and Growth

- **Enhances Practical Understanding** - Provides actionable insights to improve how individuals show up in relationships and foster trust and safety.
- **Supports Professional and Personal Growth** - Encourages reflection and skill-building, promoting deeper, more restorative connections.
- **Facilitates Collaborative Learning** - Serves as a tool for meaningful discussions within care teams, enhancing collective understanding and cohesion.

Adapted from Garfat, T., Freeman, J., Gharabaghi, K. & Fulcher, L. (2018). Characteristics of a relational child and youth care approach revisited. *CYC-Online*, 236, 7-45.

Suggested reference: Freeman, J. (2025). *Characteristics of a relational child and youth care approach* [Reference cards]. Training Grounds LLC. www.training-grounds.net

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Rituals of encounter



Rituals of encounter 1

The way we welcome and receive others shapes the foundation for deeper connection and communication. Engaging others in a way that eases the connection can build trust and help reduce feelings of risk and fear.

- Establish spaces that invite openness and comfort
- Recognize and celebrate cultural expressions to build mutual respect
- Show others they are seen and valued in every interaction



Meeting others where they are



Meeting others where they are 2

Creating spaces of acceptance and value—free from judgment—allows others to feel safe, both physically and emotionally. In this environment, authenticity can thrive.

- Approach each interaction with curiosity and a willingness to listen deeply
- Foster collaboration by sharing power and empowering others
- Embrace each person as they are, respecting their unique journey and perspective



Hanging out



Hanging out 3

Shared experiences in everyday life foster feelings of safety and comfort. Relaxed, unstructured moments—like reading together, watching a movie, sharing a meal, or enjoying a hobby—create opportunities to connect.

- Build connections through shared experiences
- Encourage relaxation and recreation
- Ease the demands of schedules and structure



Participating with others as they live their lives



Participating with others as they live their lives

4

Stepping into someone's life space means engaging with their culture, customs, routines, and the people, places, and interests that matter most to them.

- Build connections in the spaces where life happens
- Confront systems of inequity and oppression
- Learn through curiosity about context and culture



Being in relationship



Being in relationship

5

A helping relationship is a co-created space where connection, healing, and growth unfold through mutual engagement. It thrives on being present and responsive, fostering trust while honoring boundaries and individuality.

- Respond to invitations for deeper connection
- Create opportunities for connection and self-discovery
- Embrace mutual challenges and opportunities for growth



Rhythmicity



Rhythmicity

6

Natural, flexible routines offer reassurance and co-regulation, especially during stress and uncertainty. Over time, predictable patterns foster trust and open doors for growth.

- Build trust through consistent patterns
- Establish restorative patterns and routines
- Adapt to the rhythms of daily life



Working in the now



Working in the now 7

While influenced by past experiences, the present moment is our only reality. Embracing where we are and the resources at hand creates a foundation for growth and transformation.

- Notice and accept how things are in the present moment
- Take time to pause, feel, and reflect
- Treat each new step as a fresh start



Emotional presence



Emotional presence 8

Being attuned with others means settling ourselves and eliminating distractions. This allows us to offer support and reassurance while remaining open to the reciprocal nature of the connection.

- Tune into the immediacy of the shared experience
- Resist the urge to prematurely offer solutions or advice
- Stay open to the emotions that emerge



Examining context



Examining context 9

Our personal histories shape how we experience the present. By setting aside assumptions and being mindful of the context around our interactions, we can better understand and engage with others.

- Learn to recognize personal, social, and cultural influences
- Explore connections between the present, past, and future
- Seek to understand others' values and identities



Reflection



Reflection

10

Critically analyzing our interactions—including our use of power and biases—enhances the quality of our connections, reduces harm to others, and models personal growth.

- Pause to reflect on your actions
- Identify opportunities to improve your approach
- Integrate what you learn into your future interactions



It's all about us



It's all about us

11

We bring our whole selves to each interaction. By prioritizing our own wellness and healing, we can connect in ways that support rather than harm others. How we show up deeply influences the quality and depth of our relationships.

- Cultivate a growing sense of self-awareness
- Integrate personal wounds, trauma, and lived experiences
- Learn about your own strengths and limitations



Love



Love

12

Places without love breed loneliness, and feeling unloved or isolated is at the core of much of the world's pain. Love is an active, inclusive force that values people for who they are, is built on trust, and is free from exploitation.

- Practice kindness and compassion
- Protect the vulnerable and those in need
- Affirm the worth and lovability of others



Flexibility & individuality



Flexibility & individuality

13

Creating connection means moving beyond assumptions, prejudice, and labels. Each person's cultural context, life experiences, and identities add to the beautiful diversity of the world.

- Embrace the unique qualities of each individual
- Challenge stereotypes and avoiding assumptions
- Adapt to each individual and interaction



Connection & engagement



Connection & engagement

14

Human connection starts with genuine curiosity about another person and their interests. This curiosity can foster deeper engagement, involving varying levels of mutuality, partnership, and participation.

- Break down barriers to inclusion and participation
- Learn about the lives, interests, and concerns of others
- Be present and vulnerable in your interactions



Family oriented



Family oriented

15

Our families' relationships, culture, and traditions shape our lives, especially in early childhood. Both our ancestral roots and the families we choose today are integral to who we are.

- Create opportunities for intergenerational sharing
- Honor the wisdom in family stories
- Support the building of stronger family ties



Doing with (not for or to)



Doing with (not for or to)

16

The process of doing things together—rather than imposing or enabling—shapes how a person is valued, fosters learning, and builds skills for self-sufficiency.

- Empower participation through authentic engagement
- Help others recognize their unique influence
- Engage in reciprocal conversation and actions



Needs based



Needs based

17

A person's basic needs must be met to feel safe and live a healthy life. We can help others find greater satisfaction by supporting them in meeting their unique drives and motivations.

- Ensure equitable access to basic needs (e.g., food, clean water, housing, healthcare)
- Encourage community participation
- Help others prioritize what matters most to them



Strength based



Strength based

18

Every person has a unique blend of gifts and strengths, even if they are difficult to recognize. Helping others discover and nurture these strengths is key to their identity and personal growth.

- Identify each person's unique capabilities and passions
- Create opportunities for others to use their strengths
- Honor and acknowledge each person's unique gifts



Developmentally responsive



Developmentally responsive

19

Responsive care and teaching involve noticing and analyzing the immediate context to guide decisions that support an individual's next steps toward growth.

- Support diverse ways of knowing and learning
- Value what is while challenging toward potential
- Respond to the needs and concerns of others



Hanging in



Hanging in

20

Feelings like pain, grief, or loss often hide behind challenging behaviors. Consistently being present—through both struggles and triumphs—shows others they are not alone and helps ease frustration, overwhelm, and discouragement.

- Celebrate progress, no matter how small
- Strengthen your ability to stay present in adversity
- Help others recognize their strengths and potential to navigate setbacks



Intentionality of action



Intentionality of action

21

Mindful interactions are essential because our actions either foster or hinder a supportive environment. Achieving this balance involves a clear plan while remaining adaptable to the needs of the moment.

- Prepare with foresight and anticipate challenges
- Embrace spontaneity and seize unexpected opportunities
- Make thoughtful, deliberate choices to navigate alternatives effectively



Meaning making



Meaning making

22

Caring interactions and meaningful conversations support the process of finding clarity and significance from life experiences, especially those that are challenging or traumatic.

- Create space for emotions and reflection
- Help connect and integrate elements of one's story to foster clarity
- Offer support during disorienting or challenging moments



Counseling on the go



Counseling on the go

23

The natural rhythm of everyday life offers moments for spontaneous, supportive conversations. Reflecting together in these moments can foster resilience, deepen insight, and inspire hope.

- Be present in moments of need
- Highlight progress and cultivate hope
- Guide others to tap into their inner strengths



Purposeful use of activities



Purposeful use of activities

24

Participating in meaningful experiences like music, sports, arts, academics, or team activities within a safe space fosters connection, builds lasting memories, and encourages exploration and enjoyment.

- Create opportunities to play, learn, work, and rest
- Prioritize the process and shared experience
- Engage in cultural and creative interests that inspire growth



Using daily life events to facilitate change



Using daily life events to facilitate change 25

Everyday moments hold countless opportunities to encourage others to explore new ways of connecting and growing, fostering positive change and development.

- Notice moments that align with personal goals
- Support progress toward meaningful growth
- Leverage natural opportunities to inspire and empower



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