

Pyramid Model in Nebraska

What does the Pyramid Model teach?

The Pyramid Model gives child care providers evidence-based tools for guiding children to recognize and manage their emotions, make safe and responsible choices, and build caring relationships with other children and their teachers. While nothing can replace parents as the guiding force in their child's life, the lessons that parents teach about being responsible, safe, and kind should be reinforced in child care settings and preschools.

It's impossible to remove emotions from learning – especially in the very young. When children learn and play, they feel many emotions - happiness, frustration, sadness, nervousness. Feelings are an essential part of being human; recognizing and managing them is something that must be learned from parents and other caregivers. Trying to help children understand their own feelings helps them make better decisions (not hitting, not screaming) when faced with stress or a challenge.

All children can benefit from learning to regulate their emotions. It is understood that children do not know how to count until they have been taught, but sometimes it is easy to forget that they also need to be taught and supported in understanding and managing their emotions. This learning process takes place across all environments where children spend time, including child care.

Why are we teaching this in child care settings?

- **Addressing challenging behaviors**

In Nebraska there is a growing trend of challenging behaviors among young children in child care settings. Providers are sharing that they spend so much time dealing with tantrums, hitting, biting, etc., that it takes significant time away from play and learning. In extreme cases providers have been forced to expel these children, or face burnout that drives them from the field. That is why the Rooted in Relationships initiative was created and why implementation of an evidence-based framework like the Pyramid Model has been adopted. Rooted in Relationships gives tools to providers so they can guide young children in ways to express their emotions that are safe for themselves and others. We all want our children to make good decisions, and we are working to reinforce the lessons that parents are teaching their children at home.

- **Academic success**

Healthy child development and academic success go hand-in-hand. If you've ever had a worry on your mind, you know it can make focusing on something else extremely difficult. Children who have not been given tools to manage their emotions in a healthy way can have a hard time focusing on learning. Teaching children to identify and manage their feelings and actions is important so they can practice regulating themselves while also engaging in classroom instruction. When young children learn these skills, they are more prepared and more likely to graduate high school and attend college.

- **Addressing emotional intelligence that many employers say are lacking**

While the technical skills needed for many of today's careers are important, many employers

say they are finding that the workforce is lacking in the soft skills or emotional intelligence that are just as important – such as communication skills, teamwork, problem-solving, stress management, conflict resolution, adaptability, and persistence. The Pyramid Model is designed to lay the foundation for those employable skills.

Does the Pyramid Model promote LGBTQ issues, sexual identity, or CRT?

The behavioral and emotional skills being implemented through the Pyramid Model do not teach children about sexual, gender, or cultural identity issues. The Pyramid is about teaching children to recognize their emotions and appropriately express them, learn problem-solving skills, and work on being a good friend.

Shouldn't parents be responsible for teaching this?

Teaching children to recognize and manage their emotions and not act in violent or disruptive ways reinforces what parents are teaching their children at home. It allows educators and child care providers to spend more of their time teaching their students the alphabet or counting rather than spending an overwhelming amount of time dealing with behavioral issues.

Recognizing that parents are their child's first and best teachers, the Pyramid Model specifically has a family involvement component, where parents are encouraged to participate in their child's classroom, meet with their teachers, and be highly involved in their learning. Positive Solutions for Families is a seven-part training series designed for parents and caregivers to learn the exact same strategies that are being taught in classrooms utilizing the Pyramid Model.

Quote about NE Pyramid Model implementation:

"One of my favorite observations was when a little girl was dropped off and she was sad because it was Monday, and her mom was leaving. Her teacher picked her up, talked about how it's hard to be sad, that mom always comes back, and allowed her to go to their calm down area. She quietly flipped through feeling face cards and calming strategy cards, and after about 10 minutes she put on a paint shirt and got to work. Why were we not teaching this 50 years ago? An entirely different approach for children that is so supportive of mental health.

I have a bold theory: Pyramid implementation, especially if it is continued in schools, lowers mental health care costs. This little girl could absolutely end up in my office someday if someone didn't teach her that feelings are welcome and that she can learn to cope, but she may not because these coping skills were taught to her at an early age."

- **Licensed Mental Health Provider and Pyramid Coach**