


**The Happiest Preschool**  
How To Create A Classroom Culture Of Caring, Cooperation, Creativity, Learning, & Emotional Health  
**A MANUAL FOR TEACHERS**  
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**The Happiest Preschool**  
The Future of Early Childhood Education



THE NATALIE G. HEINEMAN  
**SMART LOVE**  
PRESCHOOL

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**Presentation Overview**

**The topics we will cover are based on our unique approach and will describe in detail how to create The Happiest Preschool**

- o Social-Emotional Learning
- o Classroom Management
- o Play-Based Learning that is Truly Play-Based
- o The Role of the Teacher
- o Understanding and Interpreting Fantasy Play



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**The Natalie G. Heineman Smart Love® Preschool**

- o The Smart Love Preschool in Chicago's Logan Square neighborhood is the model for this progressive approach.
- o The Preschool has been in operation since 2010, and you can find out more at our website provided in the handouts.
- o We will be giving you actual examples of interactions between teachers and students at the Preschool that illustrate the Smart Love philosophy.



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**Smart Love<sup>®</sup> is Transformative of the Preschool and Kindergarten Culture**

**Smart Love was created to help children...**

- o Accept and value all of themselves
- o Retain and enhance their curiosity
- o Love learning
- o Learn through play
- o Be creative in fantasy play, art, music, drama, and projects
- o Demonstrate unforced social-emotional learning
- o Regulate themselves without any type of discipline or coercion
- o Embrace differences in race, culture, appearance, and language
- o Move on to the next grades as eager learners who make positive contributions to any classroom culture
- o Cooperate with and show compassion and care for themselves, classmates, and teachers



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**Polling Question**

In 2023, the median annual wage for all workers was \$48,060 according to the U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics. The median annual wage in 2023 for preschool teachers was:

- A. \$37,000
- B. \$48,000
- C. \$32,000
- D. \$52,000
- E. None of the above

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**Social Emotional Learning**

**We can't repeat it too often:**  
A child's relationship with their teacher is the most important determinant of the quality of social-emotional learning, because social-emotional learning occurs most comprehensively by imitation.



The Key to a Happy Preschool is a Welcoming, Developmentally Informed, Consistently Positive Relationship with Your Students.

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**Social Emotional Learning: S.M.A.R.T.**



<b>S</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>T</b>
Stay Positive	Model Kindness	Acknowledge & Accept Feelings	Loving Regulation	Time With

The S.M.A.R.T acronym represents the behaviors you want to model for children to develop genuine social-emotional learning.

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**Social Emotional Learning: Embrace All Feelings**

- o **Welcome All Emotions**  
Treat all feelings as morally neutral and acceptable.
- o **Differentiate Feelings from Actions**  
Help children understand that anger is not inherently bad, and feelings are separate from actions.
- o **Address Misbehavior with Understanding**  
Teach that "bad" actions stem from unhappiness and need support, not punishment.
- o **Promote Positive Social-Emotional Learning**  
Show that even difficult emotions can be managed with care and understanding.

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**Social Emotional Learning: Learning That Asking for Help Reliably Results in Support**

- o **Normalize Asking for Help**
- o **Acknowledge Emotional Needs**
- o **Build a Culture of Helpfulness**
- o **Promote Independence through Support**



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**Social Emotional Learning: Welcoming All Feelings Eliminates Fear of Punishment**

- o **Encourage Openness**  
Children are more willing to share mistakes when there's no fear of shame or punishment.
- o **Reduce Secretive Behavior**  
Gentle, understanding responses lessen the tendency to hide misdeeds.
- o **Normalize Mistakes**  
Help children understand that small rule-breaking actions are normal and not cause for harsh punishment.
- o **Promote Loving Regulation**  
Use kindness to address the emotions behind actions, teaching that sharing with a caring adult is always better than hiding.



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**Social Emotional Learning: Introducing the All-Powerful Self**

**Understanding the All-Powerful Self**

- o Normal Developmental Phase
- o Adaptive Belief
- o Social-Emotional Impact
- o Recognize Feelings
- o Avoid Power Struggles
- o Gentle Acceptance
- o Natural Maturation



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**Social Emotional Learning: Racial, Ethnic, Class, and Religious Diversity**

- o **Celebrate Diversity**  
Incorporate various cultural and religious traditions into classroom activities, making them fun and personal.
- o **Promote Inclusivity**  
Address prejudices by emphasizing that everyone is valued for their unique story, not material possessions.
- o **Interactive Learning**  
Use games to help children understand and appreciate differences, showing that personal value is not about money.
- o **Language as a Bridge**  
Introduce foreign languages through bilingual classmates, making differences engaging and interesting.



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**S.M.A.R.T Management for a Healthy Happy Classroom**

- Teachers Actively Engaged with Children
- Children Choose Who They Play With
- Teachers Focus on Feelings that led to Anti-Social Behaviors
- Creative Solutions to Transitions
- Academic Subjects Feel Fun
- Gentle Separation
- Rewards are Counterproductive and Unnecessary
- Loving Regulation is the S.M.A.R.T. Way to Manage Behavior



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**Polling Question**

According to a nationwide poll of 2,500 teachers in 2022 by Teaching Strategies, an early childhood training group, what were the top two challenges for early childhood educators:

- A. Low Compensation & Burnout
- B. Lack of Resources & Mental Health
- C. Burnout & Mental Health
- D. Low Compensation & Professional Development
- E. None of the above

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**S.M.A.R.T Management for a Healthy Happy Classroom**

A Classroom only has 3 Rules

- No Hurting Yourself or Others
- No Grabbing
- No Damaging the Classroom



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### S.M.A.R.T Management for a Healthy Happy Classroom

#### Unnecessary and Inappropriate Rules

- o Bathroom Restrictions
- o Taking Turns Talking or Using "Inside" Voices
- o Being Orderly
- o Sitting Quietly
- o Sharing
- o Including Others
- o Good Manners and Politeness



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### The Smart Love® Teacher

- o **Positive, Trusting Relationships**  
Establishes a supportive atmosphere that eliminates the need for most rules and negativity.
- o **Engagement and Partnership**  
Actively participates in children's play to model cooperation, foster joy, and support emotional needs.
- o **Caregiving vs. Personal Motives**  
Focuses on developmentally supportive responses rather than personal feelings; helps children understand and manage their emotions while maintaining positive relationships.
- o **Modeling Kindness and Understanding**  
Demonstrates how to handle resistance and negative behavior with empathy and creative solutions, reinforcing a caring relationship.



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### Playful Learning that is Truly Playful

- o Build on Interests
- o Scaffolding/Asking for Help
- o Praise for Effort, Not Success
- o Subject Areas



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**Assessments**

- **Unreliability of Formal Assessments**
- **Impact on Learning Motivation**
- **Smart Love Approach to Assessment**
- **Negative Effects of Testing**
- **Inaccuracy of Test Scores**
- **Curriculum Implications**
- **Play-Based Evaluation**
- **Trusting the Process**



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**Scaffolding / Asking for Help**

- **Scaffolding Concept**
- **Help is always Abundant and Available - Never Has to be Rationed**
- **Emotional Needs**



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**Praise for Effort Not Success**

- **Praise Effort, Not Success**  
Focus on praising children's effort, regardless of whether the outcome is correct. A "growth mindset" promotes learning resilience and curiosity.
- **Avoid Fear of Failure**  
Praising only correct answers can make children fear failure and impede effort. Trying is learning.
- **Ineffective Preschool Practice**  
Many preschools still reserve the most enthusiastic praise and rewards for correct answers, despite acknowledging effort.



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**Subject Areas**

- **Teaching Content Playfully**  
Content is taught without worksheets, formal instruction, or directed play.
- **Math as an Example**  
Math is often presented in ways disconnected from children's interests, like worksheets.
- **Natural Math Learning**  
Many children's games and interests naturally involve counting, adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing.
- **Role of the Teacher**  
Look for opportunities to facilitate and engage in math-related play.
- **Building on Enthusiasm**  
Children naturally invent fun ways to learn and use counting, which can be leveraged for learning.
- **No Need for Quizzes**  
Partnering with children in play allows you to assess their mathematical skills without formal quizzing.



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**Responding Knowledgeably and Helpfully to Fantasy Play**

- **Fantasy Play Expresses Misconceptions**
- **Communication of Feelings Through Play**
- **Teacher's Role**
- **Social-Emotional Benefits**



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**Addressing Painful Experiences Through Fantasy Play**

- **Getting in Touch with Feelings Children Would Otherwise be Unaware Of**
- **Figuring Out the Hidden Message**
- **Expressing Unhappiness with Conventional Forms of Discipline (i.e. Time Outs)**
- **Reworking Painful Experiences**

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**Thank You**

The Happiest Preschool. A Manual for Teachers  
<https://www.smartlove.com/s/the-happiest-preschool>

Dr. Martha Heineman Pieper  
<https://www.marthahieinemanpieperphd.com/>

The Natalie G. Heineman Smart Love Preschool  
<https://www.smartlovefamily.org/smart-love-preschool-education>





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