



# **STRENGTHS-BASED FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS**

## **STRATEGIES FOR MOVING BEYOND NEGATIVITY AND JUDGMENT**

**RESOURCES AND REFLECTIVE ACTIVITIES**

*Resource Guide*

**PRESENTED BY: SUSAN MACDONALD**

Inspiring New Perspectives

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# welcome

## **Strengths-Based Family Relationships: Strategies for Moving Beyond Negativity and Judgment**

A child's learning and development are best supported when teachers and parents (or other caretakers) have strong, trusting relationships. Establishing effective and collaborative relationships can be challenging. This webinar will guide you in utilizing impactful strategies to enhance your connection with parents. You will be inspired to find new ways to illuminate and share daily moments to reduce negativity and judgment that can cause stress and fuel misunderstandings.

This webinar will empower you to:

- Incorporate easy-to-implement strategies for building positive relationships
- Move past the often limiting TTWWADI (That's the Way We've Always Done It) habits and practices, and embrace new ideas and techniques
- Broaden your understanding of the current research on how strengths-based connections with parents affect children's early learning experiences

Susan will provide participants with a comprehensive reflection guide containing valuable resources, including information from her new book – [101 Ways to Supercharge Professional Development Experiences!](#)



## About Susan

**Susan MacDonald** is the founder of Inspiring New Perspectives, a consultancy focused on empowering educational leaders to create programs that deeply respect and nurture the possibilities that lie within each child, parent, and teacher. She has been developing and delivering inspirational courses and workshops for more than 25 years. Her background includes director of a Reggio-inspired preschool program, adjunct faculty at Lesley University and Wheelock College, and Commonwealth of Massachusetts licensing supervisor. She holds a master's degree in instructional design and several professional coach certifications. Susan is the past president of the Boston Area Reggio Inspired Network and past vice president of the Massachusetts Association for the Education of Young Children.

Susan is the author of two books, *Inspiring Early Childhood Leadership: Eight Strategies to Ignite Passion and Transform Program Quality*, *Inspiring Professional Growth: Empowering Strategies to Lead, Motivate and Engage Early Childhood Teachers*, and *Supercharge Professional Development for Early Childhood Educators*.

Let's  
Connect

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# CASE STUDY

1. Think of a parent you would like to have an engaging and impactful conversation with. Then, summarize the issue you would like to discuss.
2. What is the key focus and goal of this conversation?
3. How will you approach this conversation with positive, strengths-based energy?
4. What specific strength or positive experience (related to the parent or child) will you highlight during this conversation?
5. What do you feel are the most important things for you to remember during this conversation?

# SAMPLE QUESTIONS

*“In times of stress, the best thing we can do for each other is to listen with our ears and our hearts and to be assured that our questions are just as important as our answers.”*

– Fred Rogers

## QUESTIONS TO BUILD ENGAGEMENT WITH PARENTS

- *What three words would you use to describe your child?*
- *What does your child love? What interests or excites them?*
- *What are your hopes and dreams for your child this year?*
- *What do you see as your child's strengths?*
- *What skills is your child working on?*
- *What are your favorite things to do with your child?*

## APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY QUESTIONS FOR CHALLENGING SITUATIONS

- *What is working well for you as a parent despite the current challenge we are facing?*
- *In what ways can we work together to improve this situation?*
- *How do you handle this (specific challenge or behavior) at home? What works best? What does not work well?*
- *What do you see as a positive outcome of this situation?*
- *How can working through this challenge benefit your child?*
- *What is the one thing you would like me to fully understand about this situation?*
- *What skills is your child working on?*
- *What are your favorite things to do with your child?*

## KEY QUESTIONS

- *What would it be like to be curious about who you're with rather than judging or fearing them?*
- *What would it be like to engage together, exploring possibilities rather than withdrawing in conflict or disagreement?*
- *What would it be like to be working well together?*

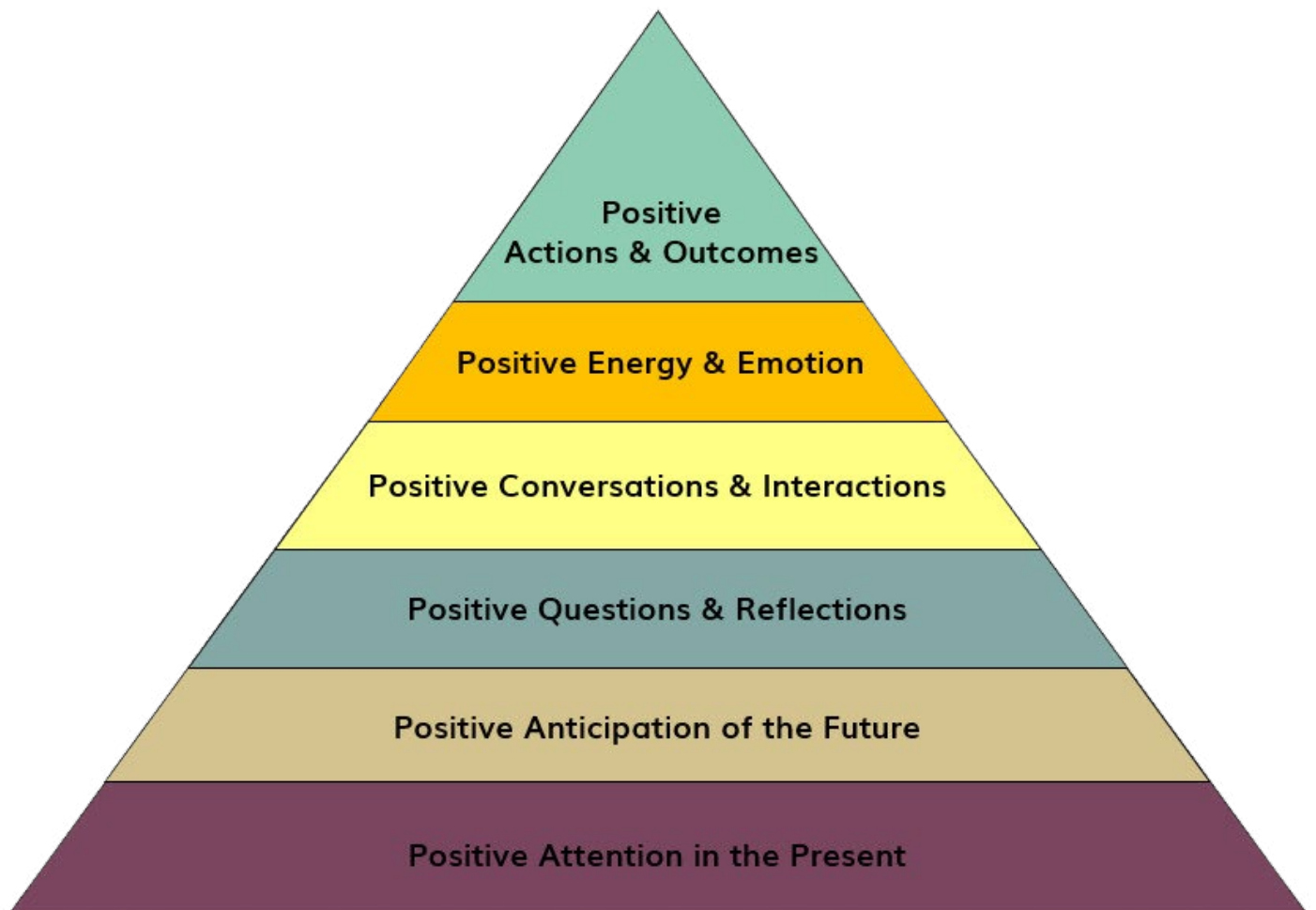
—Margaret Wheatley

## HELPFUL QUESTIONS FOR UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS

- *Is this thought in any way helpful or useful?*
- *Is this thought an old story? Have I heard it before?*
- *What do I get for buying into this story (thought)?*
- *Does this thought help me take effective action?*

*ACT Defusion Metaphors - What is Negativity Bias and How Can It Be Overcome? Catherine Moore, Positive Psychology. December 2019 <https://positivepsychology.com/3-steps-negativity-bias>*

# USE THE APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY MODEL TO STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILIES





## ACTIVITIES TO STRENGTHEN CONNECTIONS WITH FAMILIES

### ASK PARENTS TO SHARE THEIR HOPES AND DREAMS

This easy-to-implement activity guides you in learning about each parent's hopes and dreams for their child. You can ask parents to share their hopes and dreams at an in-person meeting or by sending a form home to each family. Create a master list of all of the hopes and dreams, and use them as inspiration to build strong connections with families. Consider creating a wall display with keywords from all the responses to hopes and dreams. You can also weave the messages from the hopes and dreams statements into newsletters and future parent events. Find ways to show parents that you honor their thoughts and strive to bring their desires to life in the program.

### CREATE A SUCCESS BOARD TO HIGHLIGHT POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

Invite parents to share special moments they have experienced at a parent event or provide individual opportunities for sharing. Encourage them to think about everyday moments of joy, wonder, and connection. Consider asking parents to share their thoughts by sending them a letter and asking them to fill in slips of paper or send their thoughts to you electronically. Adding the parents' thoughts and ideas to your success board will help everyone see how their work matters!

*Additional activities to engage parents can be found in Susan's new book:*

*MacDonald, Susan, and Nancy Toso. Supercharge Professional Development for Early Childhood Educators: 101 Ideas for Designing and Facilitating Engaging Learning Experiences. Redleaf Press, 2024.*

# RESOURCES

Bungay Stanier, Michael. *The Coaching Habit: Say Less, Ask More & Change the Way You Lead Forever*. Box of Crayons Press, 2016.

Catherine Moore, Psychologist. "What Is the Negativity Bias and How Can It Be Overcome?" *PositivePsychology.com*, 12 July 2024, [positivepsychology.com/3-steps-negativity-bias/](https://positivepsychology.com/3-steps-negativity-bias/).

Feeney, Stephanie. *Ethics and the Early Childhood Educator: Using the NAEYC Code*. National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2019.

Figueras-Daniel, Alexandra, and Bernice Vasquez. "Engaging Families of Multilingual Learners: Using Families' Stories to Link Classroom Content with Children's Funds of Knowledge." *Young Children*, Fall 2024. Vol. 79, No. 3. <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/fall2024/engaging-multilingual-learner-families>

Fredrickson, Barbara. *Positivity: Discover the Upward Spiral That Will Change Your Life*. Harmony Books, 2019.

Heath, Chip, and Dan Heath. *Power of Moments: Why Certain Experiences Have Extraordinary Impact*. Corgi, 2019.

Stavros, Jacqueline M., and Cheri B. Torres. *Conversations Worth Having: Using Appreciative Inquiry to Fuel Productive and Meaningful Engagement*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2022.

"Spotlight – Strengthening Parent Engagement to Improve Student Outcomes." AITSL Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, June 2024, [www.aitsl.edu.au/research/spotlights/strengthening-parent-engagement-to-improve-student-outcomes](http://www.aitsl.edu.au/research/spotlights/strengthening-parent-engagement-to-improve-student-outcomes).

MacDonald, Susan, and Nancy Toso. *Supercharge Professional Development for Early Childhood Educators: 101 Ideas for Designing and Facilitating Engaging Learning Experiences*. Redleaf Press, 2024.

Wheatley, Margaret J. *Restoring Sanity: Practices to Awaken Generosity, Creativity, and Kindness in Ourselves and Our Organizations*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2024.

Whitney, Diana, Amanda Trosten-Bloom, and Kae Rader. *Appreciative Leadership: Focusing on What Works to Drive Winning Performance and Build Thriving Organizations*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010.



OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN WITH SUSAN

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# INSPIRING PROFESSIONAL GROWTH FOR LEADERS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS 2024–2025

AN EIGHT-MONTH LEARNING COMMUNITY

Are you ready to reignite your passion, thrive as a leader, and discover new and empowering ways to sustain and recruit an engaged workforce? It's time to reduce the feelings of isolation and stress so you can reconnect with your vision, reignite your passion, and transform your work culture into one that is vibrant, professional, and positive.

Becoming a member of this eight-month learning community will inspire you to rethink and refocus your work to reenergize and strengthen your learning community.

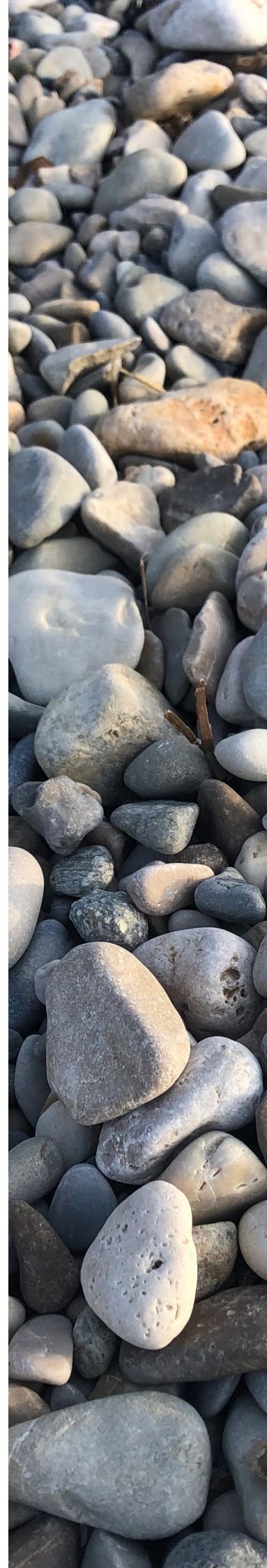
This course is designed with the flexibility needed for busy early childhood leaders. You have the option of joining the monthly live calls or watching a recording of each session.

- **Eight Professional Development Sessions** – Designed to help you embrace a growth mindset, develop a vision-focused action plan, and utilize strengths-based communication skills and strategies for making transformational changes (see a full listing of the sessions on the course schedule).
- **Eight In-Depth Reflection and Resource Guides** – to enhance your learning and build your leadership portfolio
- **Access to a Private Discussion Board** where you will build strong connections, collaborate, learn, and support one another in an interactive forum
- **A 24-Hour Professional Development Certificate**

**THIS COURSE BEGINS ON, SEPTEMBER 25, 2024, AND ENDS ON APRIL 30, 2025.**

Each monthly session will be presented live on Zoom. A recording of each session will be posted to the course site within 24 hours.

[CLICK HERE FOR COURSE DETAILS & REGISTRATION](#)



OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN WITH SUSAN

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## DESIGNING AND FACILITATING INNOVATIVE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Do you have a unique skill or talent you would like to share with other early childhood professionals? Sharing your knowledge and passion is an impactful way to enhance your professional skills and improve the early childhood field!

This four-part interactive workshop series will guide you in creating a professional learning experience that showcases a specific area of interest or expertise you would like to present to early childhood professionals.

Susan MacDonald will use her experience as a professional speaker and instructional designer to support you in identifying an innovative focus for your project and provide a framework for bringing your project to life. This series will focus on:

- Exploring key components of Instructional Design and Adult Learning Theory
- Developing a clear and concise focus for your professional development project. Possibilities include staff meeting presentations, workshops, webinars, conference sessions, and presentations for parent or board events.
- Understanding how to write learning objectives that focus on meaningful outcomes
- Providing insightful tips and strategies for facilitating engaging, inspiring, and interactive learning experiences

Participants will have the opportunity to present their ideas and receive feedback from each other. Susan will share a wealth of valuable resources, including information from her recently published book – 101 Ways to Supercharge Professional Development Experiences!

### COURSE DATES AND TIMES:

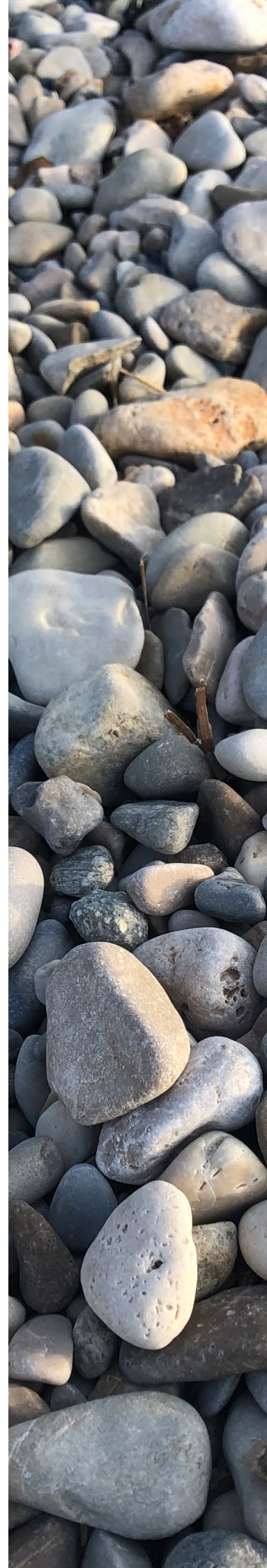
This course will be available from October 15, 2024, to December 30, 2024.

Four live courses session will be held on Tuesdays from 1:00–2:30 pm EST on:

October 15, October 29, November 12, and December 3.

Each course session is recorded and posted to the course site within 24 hours for anyone who cannot participate live.

[CLICK HERE FOR COURSE DETAILS & REGISTRATION](#)



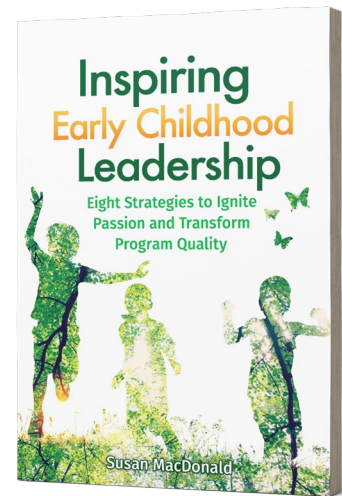
# Susan's Books

## INSPIRING EARLY CHILDHOOD LEADERSHIP

Eight Strategies to Ignite Passion and Transform Program Quality

A positive, strengths-based leadership system is the key to transforming the quality of early childhood programs. Inspiring Early Childhood Leadership lays out strategies designed to support program leaders in finding new ways to reduce the levels of stress on themselves and their staff, and move into a unified, engaging system for leading with passion, intention, and purpose.

[HTTPS://WWW.GRYPHONHOUSE.COM/](https://www.gryphonhouse.com/)

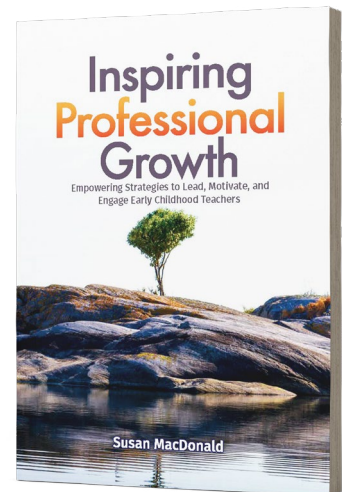


## INSPIRING PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

Empowering Strategies to Lead, Motivate, and Engage Early Childhood Teachers

You've probably seen it: frustration builds, teacher turnover rises, staff meetings become insufferable, indifference breeds throughout the school. Spark change! When your staff feels supported and empowered to grow and develop their skills, your program and the children will thrive.

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## SUPERCHARGE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

101 Ideas for Designing and Facilitating Engaging Learning Experiences

Bring new energy into your early childhood professional learning experiences! Supercharge Professional Development for Early Childhood Educators empowers trainers, workshop facilitators, and early childhood program leaders to transform their current professional development practices, offering innovative and concrete ideas for supporting educators. The timely and inspiring resources in this handbook will increase engagement, build collaboration, and enhance all aspects of any professional development program.

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