



# Foundations for Learning

Growing a child is like building a house: it's all about the foundation. Four factors are critical for the healthy growth and success of a child: **movement, touch, connection, and nature**. When these underlying brain and body systems are activated, children become strong and coordinated, secure and regulated, calm and focused.

## Movement

Movement promotes cardiovascular fitness and supports the motor coordination required for achieving literacy.



**How?** Movement activates the *proprioceptive system*, which refines gross and fine motor skills needed to attain literacy, and the *vestibular system*, which increases alertness to enhance attention and learning.

**Think about** classroom movement breaks and “every day is an outside day” recess.

## Touch

Touch promotes emotional regulation, reduces stress, and helps children feel secure.



**How?** Touch activates the *tactile system* to lower adrenaline, thus reducing anxiety and panic states. Deep pressure touch, such as hugs or sustained shoulder squeezes, can be particularly effective when treating children exposed to trauma.

**Think about** weighted devices, cozy reading spaces, and rough and tumble play.

## Connection

Connection involves building trust, responsiveness, attachment, and communication—all of which are vital for personal and academic success.



**How?** Human connection supports co-regulation, a secure state where children feel seen and heard. Strong attachment bonds between child and adult are life-sustaining and predict lifelong success.

**Think about** circle stories, group games, appreciations, celebrations, and reflections.

## Nature

Nature provides a calming environment that promotes physical and mental well-being.



**How?** Nature is sensory soothing and lowers stress hormones. Green space improves attention and behavior. Children move more when they are outside, enhancing cardiovascular fitness.

**Think about** one class per day outside or an “in/out school” concept of holding half of the class outside and half inside with a midday switch.



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## How Can We Activate the Four Factors?



### NATURE CHECK-IN

Invite students to find one thing in nature that reflects how they are feeling, as a way to practice connecting nature with their emotions.



### FIVE SENSE MINDFUL WALK

Guide students on a walk where they focus on what they can see, hear, smell, touch, and taste in nature. Ask them for specific details.



### NATURE DRAWING

Provide students with drawing materials and ask them to identify a tree that will be "their tree." Bring them back to sketch the tree during each of the four seasons.



### OUTDOOR ART

Bring out students' creative side by having them create artwork using natural materials like leaves, sticks, shells, and stones.



### THREE-PERSON TRUST WALK

Encourage trust and communication by teaming up students and blindfolding one person in each threesome to be guided through a natural setting.



## Resources

- [Moving to Learn blog](#): Why screens in schools failed and what to do now to create solid foundations for literacy and learning
- [Kikori](#): an app that suggests experiential activities aligned with teaching and social-emotional standards
- [Foundations for Learning Pyramid](#)