

## Social Glue

### Utilizing Oxytocin to Strengthen Connection

Oxytocin is best known as the “love chemical” and is released when we feel love. And while it is generally associated with the parent-child bond and more in-depth relationships, it is also significant in overall human connections. With all the stress and pressures of the world today, many children go through life feeling that they need to get better and better, which never seems to be enough. What they need, however, is to develop a healthy oxytocin response, which comes from feeling affection and attachment. This can come from the way important adults in their lives interact with them daily.

Although it is naturally occurring in the body, the release of oxytocin is not an automatic reaction. It is, instead, a learned response. Therefore, it’s vital for children to bond in the early years of their life. When they don’t, the fight or flight response becomes the norm for them, which inhibits their release of oxytocin and decreases their ability to calm down. This is often why children who are abused or neglected have difficulty managing strong emotions. Oxytocin is essentially an anti-stress chemical and it has lasting benefits on children who receive love and trust from adults in their lives.

The positive feelings that come from the release of oxytocin help children feel more secure, which leads to a more positive self-image and increased empathy towards others. And although oxytocin is most often related to more intimate relationships, teachers, coaches, and anyone else who works with children often can generate healthy oxytocin responses. By building rapport with each child and creating learning environments that are supportive and nurturing, we can focus on ways to increase children’s “social satisfaction.” This will ultimately create an upward spiral of positive social relationships.

As an innovative child development center, the SKILLZ method was developed after years of research in the areas of science and psychology. This game-based learning approach teaches

with the **brain** in mind. Instructors are trained in these areas and certain **techniques** used in the classroom are specifically designed to improve the oxytocin response system in children. This helps to increase social skills and improve empathetic responses. A **teaching** tactic such as "Healthy **Competition**" creates a "tribe" feeling among students and reinforces trust in relationships. SKILLZ also provides information to parents on the best methods for enhancing the parent-child bond.

As children grow, it's beneficial for adults to be knowledgeable of the varying aspects of development. And while the release of oxytocin is a learned response, the important thing to know is that our brains can develop this at any age. It can take patience and time, especially for **children** who have had fewer opportunities for healthy connections early in life, but the benefits will be enormous. By immersing children in environments that foster trust, this process will become easier. Even the smallest of friendly interactions such as warm smiles, fist bumps, and high fives can release oxytocin.