

# Creating Authentic Connections with Children

## Sebastian Twesigomwe, Chaplain and Soccer coach

As a chaplain at a children's hospital, Sebastian brings hope and comfort to kids who are sick, injured, or struggling with chronic health conditions. Just like adults, children need emotional support – whether they are healthy or sick. Here is Sebastian's advice for how to form meaningful connections with children.

### 1. Talk about their interests.

Ask what they like to do, and give them a chance to talk about it. For Sebastian, the point of connection is often soccer or another sport – but it could be anything that interests your child, like art, music or video games. Ask questions and listen to their answers.

### 2. Find a connection.

It's easier to connect with a child when you have something in common. Did you play the sport they love when you were younger? Is there a movie, TV show or favorite food you both enjoy? Have you had similar experiences? Talking about shared interests helps to build rapport.

### 3. Show an interest.

Even if you don't share a hobby with a child, you can still show an interest. Ask them to teach you how to play their favorite video game, or watch them play for a while. Taking an interest in their hobbies shows that you care.

### 4. Play with them.

It may seem obvious, but a great way to connect with a child is to play the sport, game or activity they enjoy with them. You don't have to be great at it. You just have to have fun.

### 5. Observe their environment.

Shy or quiet children may not open up right away – but their environment may tell you more about them. At the hospital, Sebastian often asks children about objects he observes in their rooms, such as stuffed animals, toys or games. This may lead to conversations about who gave them the toy, or what it means to them.

### 6. Spend the time.

Sometimes, the thing that comforts a child most is simply knowing you are there for them. Spending time with a child, even if you're just watching TV or playing a game together, goes a long way.

