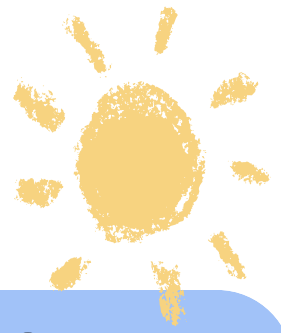


A Way of Being with Children

Practical Tools for Connection, Safety, and HOPE in Early Childhood



CONNECTION IS PROTECTION

Building Safety, Trust, and Resilience through Relationships

Resilience grows through relationships. When children experience consistent, caring connections with adults, their brains learn how to recover from stress and adapt to challenges. Feeling understood and supported helps children develop confidence, problem-solving skills, and emotional flexibility. Each moment of connection, especially during hard times or moments of dysregulation, teaches children that they can handle life's ups and downs because they are not alone.

Why Connection Matters

Children develop their sense of self and their understanding of how safe the world is through their relationships with caring adults. Before children can explain their feelings with words, their brains are shaped by how adults interact with and respond to them. When adults show warmth, consistency, and care, children's brains become wired over time for lifelong resilience, emotional regulation, and healthy relationships.

Connection is not about being perfect or fixing every problem. It's about being present. Even small, everyday moments of connection, such as a smile at drop-off, a playful glance across the room, a bedtime story, or a hug before school, send powerful messages to a child's nervous system: *You are safe. You are loved. You matter.* These moments of connection act as a protective buffer against stress and help children feel grounded, confident, and capable.



Connection in Daily Life

Connection happens through ordinary moments, not grand gestures. It grows when adults are predictable, consistent, emotionally available, and curious about the child's inner world.

Children feel most secure when they experience:

- Adults who notice them
- Adults who respond calmly and consistently
- Adults who stay connected even during challenging behavior

When children feel connected, they are better able to:

- Manage big feelings
- Try new things
- Recover from stress
- Build healthy relationships

Connection Can Be Quick

You don't need long stretches of time. Small moments add up:

- A wink
- A gentle touch
- A kind word
- A shared laugh

Skills & Practices to Build Connection

1. **Be Fully Present.** Eliminate devices such as phones and television as much as possible in order to truly connect. Make eye contact and get down to the child's level. Use a warm facial expression and gentle tone.
2. **Create Predictable Connection Rituals.** Simple routines build emotional safety as children, then know what to expect and feel secure. Try special songs, bedtime stories, morning check-ins, or goodbye handshakes.
3. **Name and Notice Effort.** Acknowledge effort as much as achievement. This builds confidence and resilience. Say: "You worked really hard on that" or "You kept trying even when it was tough."
4. **Practice Co-Regulation.** Stay calm during your child's big emotions. Remember: Children borrow calm from adults. Use your calm presence to help their nervous system settle.
5. **Repair and Reconnect.** If a moment feels disconnected, it's okay to try again. Repair strengthens trust. Say: "That was hard. I'm still here with you."

Connection Tips for Everyday Moments

Remember: Connection Comes First. Connection builds the foundation for learning, emotional health, and positive behavior. When children feel safe in relationships, they are open to guidance and growth.

Consistency Over Perfection. Children don't need perfect parents. They need safe, predictable ones. Showing up consistently matters more than getting everything right.

Pause Before You React. When behavior is challenging, pause and ask: "What might my child be feeling and/or needing right now? How can I connect before I correct?" A calm response helps children feel safe, even when limits are needed.

Use Relationship-Based Language. "I'm here with you."; "We'll figure this out together."; "You're not alone." These words help regulate stress and build trust.

Follow the Child's Lead. Notice what brings your child joy. Join them in play, curiosity, or conversation. Even a few minutes of child-led attention can strengthen the connection.

When You're Unsure, Reconnect. If things feel tense or overwhelming, return to the relationship. A simple phrase can reset the moment: "I'm here with you."

A Way of Being Reminder

Connection is not something you add to your day; it's a way of being with children. Every warm interaction helps build a sense of safety that protects children now and supports their lifelong well-being.

Connection provides protection by creating a sense of safety that supports healthy brain development. Through consistent, caring interactions, even small everyday moments, adults help protect children from stress while building resilience and happy children.



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