Supporting Behavior Through Connection



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Whether you are a family member or a practitioner, caring for and teaching young children means balancing many responsibilities. When children use behaviors that are challenging, you likely respond with what feels familiar and manageable, and what works in the moment. Sometimes you do what is necessary just to make it through the day.

This resource is not meant to ask more of you when you are already doing your best. Its purpose is to help you notice and reflect on how you might respond to everyday moments more intentionally. At the center, or guiding everything, is one question to help you begin to shift your mindset:

How can I show the child they matter to me right now?

This mindset shift can be challenging. It makes sense that when time, energy, and support are limited, you focus on what creates control or helps children move more quickly through the day. However, focusing on controlling a child's behavior can lead to responses that prioritize compliance over connection.

Even with the best intentions, we may focus more on routines and schedules than on connection. When this happens, we risk overlooking the nurturing relationships that help children feel safe, confident, and ready to learn, grow, and play.

Over time and with practice, connection can become the most effective and responsive way to meet children in the moment, offer guidance, and provide support.

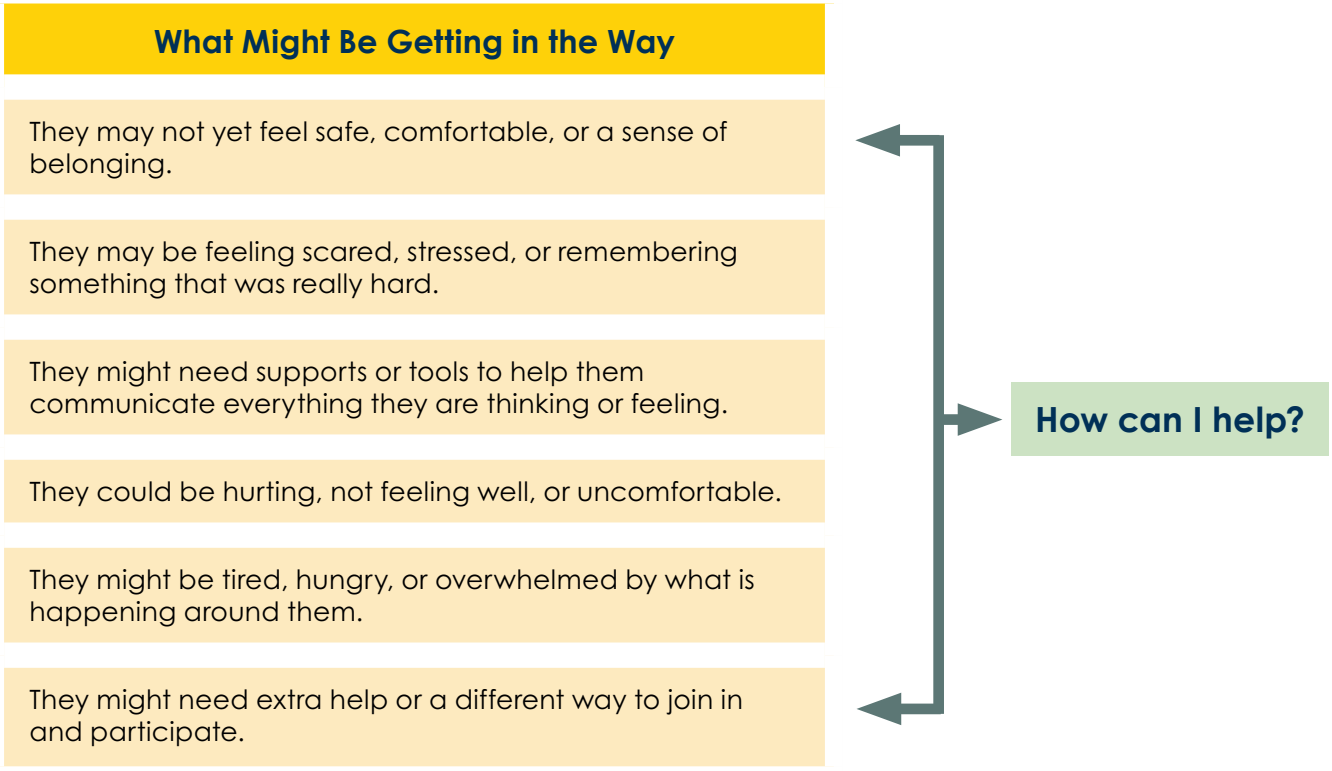
Strategies to Connect While Supporting Behavior

Everyday moments are opportunities to support children in ways that promote connection and trust, which are fundamental to establishing nurturing and responsive relationships. The three strategies below build on your existing efforts, offering ways to implement Pyramid Model practices by honoring each child's value, autonomy, and opportunity to belong.

1. Stay Curious, Ask More

- **What it means:** Instead of asking, "How do I get the child to stop, start, or do something?" ask, "What is making this hard for the child right now? How can I help them?" As you reflect on the possible function of a child's behavior, notice the child's experiences, relationships, communication, and environment, in addition to the current situation.
- **Stay Curious, Ask More Examples:** Staying curious means trying to understand what is happening beyond the behavior to learn more about what a child might be feeling, needing, or responding to.

Staying curious means considering factors like:



2. Name It to Tame It[1]

- **What it means:** Help children experience emotions by naming what they might be feeling based on their experience and by offering support and co-regulation.
- **Name It to Tame It Examples:**

Recognize and Name the Emotion	Connect Emotion to Experience	Offer Support and Co-Regulation
It looks like you're feeling really frustrated right now.	You really wanted a turn, and it's hard to wait.	Do you want to take a deep breath together?
I see that your body is moving a lot. Are you feeling a little overwhelmed?	It's loud and busy today. I feel a little overwhelmed myself.	We could find a quiet spot together.
Your face looks scrunched, and your fists are tight. You might feel mad.	You worked so hard on your tower, and it fell down. How frustrating.	It's okay to feel frustrated. Do you want a hug or help rebuilding it?
You're crying. It looks like you feel sad.	Your family just left, and you miss them.	I'm here with you, and we'll find something to help.

1 Siegel, D. J., & Bryson, T. P. (2012). *The Whole-Brain Child: 12 revolutionary strategies to nurture your child's developing mind*. Bantam.

3. Connect Before You Direct[2]

- **What it means:** Before giving a direction or guiding a behavior, take a moment to connect with the child first. Consider the child's experience and be flexible whenever possible. After connecting, you might support them in doing something different than what you planned. At other times, you might offer responsive choices that still align with your plan but also demonstrate understanding and give the child some autonomy.
- **Connect Before You Direct Examples:**

Situation	Instead of Direct First	Connect First	Then Direct
Elijah stays in the block center instead of transitioning to the table.	Elijah, you need to do the table activity first before you can play.	You want to keep playing with the blocks instead of coming to the table.	You could put the "Under Construction" sign on your tower or bring some blocks with you to the table.
Jose serves a pretend pizza during an art activity.	Jose, this is art time, and we're using sponges to make triangles on the paper.	You have a pizza chef brain today! You want to make pizzas instead of art.	You have such creative ideas! It looks like Zeenath wants to play pizza, too. It's ok with me if you and Zeenath take the extra sponges to Dramatic Play to make pizzas instead!
Anna and Simon are playing in the water table, splashing a little and laughing.	Ok, settle down. Water stays in the table, or we have to be all done.	You are having so much fun figuring out which container holds the most water!	But, Uh oh! The floor is wet. Should we be the water safety team? We can use a towel to dry the floor to make sure no one slips.
George pushed Ava off the stairs, and Ava is crying.	George, please stop! We do not push our friends.	George, uh-oh. It looks like you wanted a turn, but pushing hurt Ava. She's crying.	We use safe hands with our friends. I can help you ask for a turn if you want one. When you're ready, we can check on Ava.

2 Siegel, D. J., & Bryson, T. P. (2012). *The Whole-Brain Child: 12 revolutionary strategies to nurture your child's developing mind*. Bantam.

Bringing It All Together: Supporting Behavior Through Connection



Even on the hardest days, an adult's continued presence, patience, and care matter. These simple questions can help adults slow down and refocus on what matters most: safety, connection, and belonging.

- **Am I connecting with this child?**
  Do they feel safe, seen, and valued in this moment?
- **Am I honoring what they feel?**
  Do they know their emotions are okay and that I'm here to help them?
- **Am I paying attention to what might be hard for them right now?**
  Are there any needs, stressors, or other things I should consider to help this child feel safe and connected?

IDEAs that Work
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