

Connection & Validation



# Why Connection Comes First



## Emotional Safety

Before children can regulate their emotions, they need to feel emotionally safe with us.



## Developing Brain

The prefrontal cortex – responsible for emotional regulation – is not fully developed yet.



## You Are Their Anchor

When overwhelmed by big emotions, children look to us as their anchor and safe place.

# Following Your Child's Cues



## Watch & Listen

Experiment with what works – every child is different in what they need in the moment.



## Respect Their Space

If they pull away when you get close, step back – be present while giving them room.



## Offer Closeness

Some children need physical closeness and touch to feel secure during big emotions.



## Stay Flexible

Your child's needs may differ across situations – what works once may need adjusting next time.



## Get on Their Level

Physically crouch or kneel to their eye level – it helps them feel seen and heard.

# The Power of Validation



## Acknowledge Feelings

Validation means acknowledging your child's emotions – not approving of their behavior.



## Nervous System Relief

When children feel understood, their distress eases and their nervous system begins to settle.



## Builds Trust

Meeting children with empathy builds trust and strengthens your connection over time.



## Grows Their Capacity

Each time you validate their feelings, you build their ability to understand and manage emotions.



## Safe Expression

They learn that big, messy emotions are okay and that they have support in managing them.

# What to Say Instead



## Avoid

"Calm down" or "It's not a big deal" – these can make children feel dismissed or misunderstood.



## Try Instead

"I see that you're upset. I'm here for you." – soft, reassuring language that signals safety.



## Name the Feeling

"I know this is really hard right now." – naming the emotion helps children feel truly heard.



## Be Specific

"I see you're frustrated because you can't have the toy right now. That's really tough."



## Remember Yourself

Think of how you feel when told to "calm down" vs. hearing "I hear you. That sounds really difficult."

# References

References: American Psychological Association (APA), American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Zero to Three, HealthySteps.

APA (American Psychological Association)

AAP (American Academy of Pediatrics)

CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

Zero to Three (Early childhood development resource)

HealthySteps (Pediatric health & development program)