



Connection needing behaviours

Attention and connection with others are a basic human need. Children don't generally have the language to communicate their need for connection and attention, so they communicate in behaviours and they aren't always appropriate. When a caregiver realizes that these **behaviours are just a child's way of communicating their need to be seen and heard**, it can change the perspective, allow for greater understanding and creates space for those needs to be met. When you can **re-label attention seeking behaviours as connection seeking**, caregivers are better able to handle the behaviours more positively.

When children desire connection but act out in attention seeking behaviours, how can a caregiver meet the need and **limit the unwanted behaviours**? Check out these three ways to meet your child's need for connection:

Make time to be together: If this sounds simplistic, it's because it is. Often, we overcomplicate how to interact with our children. **It doesn't need to be extravagant** or involve hours of playing together. There are many other ways to give your child the connection they need – see list at the bottom for ideas.

Give your child spontaneous attention: Give it freely and **intentionally**. Don't make them beg you for it. Try giving more than you think they need and see if you notice a **reduction in unwanted behaviours**. This kind of attention can be many random interactions; **quick hugs, pats on the head, high fives, eye contact, or a snuggle on the couch**. Think about what the world is like for your child, look at it through their lens. Why might they be needing to connect? How can you meet that need?

Notice the good: It's easy to notice when our children act out with unwanted behaviours and it is those behaviours that are most often addressed. However, if a child is seeking connection and they only get attention when they are doing what we don't want them to, it is likely we will get more of that. Children will seek any attention, whether it be negative or positive, as long as they are being seen/heard. **Catch your child using appropriate ways to ask for connection and praise them for it!** Praise should outweigh nagging/'telling off', if children hear more negative than positives then they seek connection in less helpful ways. When your child tells a funny story, makes silly faces, hugs you or wants to sit near you, they are **appropriately trying to connect and get your attention**. Try to be present in these moments and it will encourage them to use this type of behaviour for connection in the future.

Remember, children engage in attention seeking behaviours **because they need connection to develop, grow and thrive**. Most of the attention seeking behaviour children display is **developmentally normal**. Parents often refer to unhelpful behaviours by explaining "my child is acting out" or "they are just looking for attention." **Thinking**

of attention seeking as connection seeking can completely change your perspective and in turn, strengthen the relationship you have with your child!

Connection meeting activities

Create time in your evening for each child to get some quality connection time, make it manageable, short but intentional. Making this time uninterrupted- no phones, eye contact if appropriate, 1:1 if possible.

Short – intentional – uninterrupted!

Here are some examples for connection meeting activities:

- watching an appropriate show of their choice with them – point out / comment on funny parts or bits that you enjoy
- reading books together, reading is not just for bedtime and it's not just for younger children – read a chapter of a book that your child loves.
- colouring / drawing
- painting
- cooking or baking together
- Checking in with them / having a chat and simply asking them a question while they are playing independently.
- Engaging with a video game they like to play – ask questions about it and get them to explain how it works, pay interest in their interests
- Being engaged simply means being there and letting your children know that you notice them.
- Playing a card game or a board game such as Uno, snap, happy families, snakes and ladders etc.
- Sing a song / having a kitchen disco
- Talking about 2 things they enjoyed in their day and 2 things you enjoyed in yours
- Eating a meal together or as a family without a screen – talk about what you are enjoying about your meal.
- Rough and tumble play, children need the vestibular output, it can help to calm the nervous system.
- Go for a walk, bike-ride together
- Have a warm drink and snuggle / chat ritual

These are just a few ideas, but remember – **make it simple yet intentional, do it often, and watch your children's behaviour change for the positive!**

