

# ATTACHMENT & CONNECTION

**The Calming Stairs Framework**  
*Trauma-Informed Support for Families*





# Overview

Attachment is the emotional bond between a child and their caregivers. It develops through repeated experiences of safety, comfort, and responsiveness over time.

When adults notice a child's needs, respond with care, and remain emotionally available, children learn that relationships are safe and reliable. This sense of security supports emotional regulation, learning, and healthy development.

For children who have experienced trauma, loss, neglect, or early instability, attachment may feel uncertain or unsafe. This guide explains why connection is essential for emotional wellbeing and how strong relationships support long-term resilience.

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## In This Guide You Will Learn:

- What secure attachment looks like
- How early experiences shape behaviour
- Why connection supports regulation
- How adults build trust and safety
- Practical ways to strengthen relationships





# What Is Attachment?

Attachment is a child's sense of safety within relationships. It is built when adults consistently meet emotional and physical needs with warmth, patience, and reliability.

Through secure attachment, children learn that they are valued, protected, and supported, even during difficult moments. This foundation helps children feel confident to explore the world, manage emotions, and form healthy relationships throughout life. When attachment is strong, children are more likely to trust others, seek help when needed, and recover more easily from stress.

## Why Attachment Matters

- Builds emotional security
- Supports brain development
- Encourages healthy relationships
- Improves self-regulation
- Increases confidence and resilience





# How Trauma Affects Attachment

When children experience loss, neglect, abuse, repeated separations, or inconsistent caregiving, their sense of safety in relationships can be disrupted.

They may learn that adults are unpredictable, unavailable, or unsafe. As a result, they may struggle to trust, depend on others, or feel secure in close relationships.

These early experiences shape how children protect themselves emotionally. Some may become overly dependent, while others may withdraw or avoid connection altogether.

## Common Attachment Difficulties

- Fear of abandonment
- Clinginess or avoidance
- Difficulty trusting adults
- Controlling behaviours
- Strong reactions to separation





# Attachment and Emotional Regulation

Children learn to manage emotions through relationships. When adults respond calmly, consistently, and with empathy, children gradually learn how to calm themselves.

Through repeated experiences of co-regulation, children begin to understand their feelings and develop internal coping skills.

Without secure attachment, children may struggle to regulate emotions and rely on survival behaviours instead.

Strong attachment provides a safe base from which emotional growth can take place.

## How This Appears in Daily Life

- Intense emotional reactions
- Difficulty accepting comfort
- Pushing adults away
- Seeking constant reassurance
- Shutdown or withdrawal





# How Adults Build Connection

Connection is built through everyday moments of presence, empathy, and reliability. It does not require perfection — it requires consistency, patience, and genuine care.

Children feel safest when adults notice their emotional needs, respond kindly, and remain emotionally available, even during challenging moments. Over time, these experiences build trust and security.

Repairing relationships after conflict is also essential. Apologising, reconnecting, and restoring safety strengthens attachment.

## Ways Adults Strengthen Attachment

- Active listening
- Predictable routines
- Warm tone of voice
- Physical and emotional reassurance
- Repair after mistakes





# Practical Ways to Support Attachment

Strong attachment grows through small, repeated experiences of connection. These moments may seem simple, but they have a powerful impact over time.

Consistent attention, shared activities, and emotional support help children feel valued and understood. These everyday interactions create a strong foundation for trust and resilience.

## Everyday Connection Strategies

- One-to-one time
- Shared activities
- Emotion coaching
- Positive touch
- Celebrating effort





# Final Thoughts

Attachment is not about being a perfect parent. It is about being present, responsive, and willing to learn and repair when things go wrong.

When children feel connected, they feel safe. When they feel safe, they can regulate emotions, build confidence, and develop healthy relationships.

Connection is the foundation of regulation and wellbeing.

