

# HARD-WIRED TO CONNECT:

## Why do relationships matter to children?

Children need to be able to trust that their caregivers and other adults in their lives will be able to consistently provide for and care about them. This includes everything from meeting their emotional and physical needs to setting predictable limits to teaching them new skills. Different areas of development such as emotional regulation, cognition and speech & language are powerfully influenced by consistent and meaningful relationships.

### How can I create an environment that supports connection?

1. Establish a **caring and trusting atmosphere at home, in the classroom or caregiving setting**:
  - recognize and respond to your child's feelings
  - make the environment safe and predictable
  - explain that your door is always open if they want to talk
  - practice active, non-judgmental listening
2. Teach your children that they are **part of a greater community** that also cares about them.
3. Remember, it is equally important for you as a caregiver to **have your own caring connections**, model supportive relationships and be who you are.

### When you are with your child:

**Facial and body language** can make a child feel open when they talk to you. Smile, make eye contact and get down on their level to help them feel comfortable.

Be in tune with how your child is feeling on a regular basis. This **consistent check-in** will assure them that you are always there to listen and talk if there is an issue.

Notice, recognize and praise the **child's actions**. They should know you are paying attention.

### When you are not with your child:

Have a **transitional object** that your child can bring with them so that they feel connected with you, no matter where they go.

If you are **co-parenting** from two different homes, make sure to keep adult problems separate from the children. Never make the child the messenger.

Try to maintain **predictable routines** that the child can follow even when you are apart.

Be **available** by phone, email or text.

Make it a point to **ask about their activities/experiences** when you next reconnect.