

Therapeutic Parenting: What it looks Like

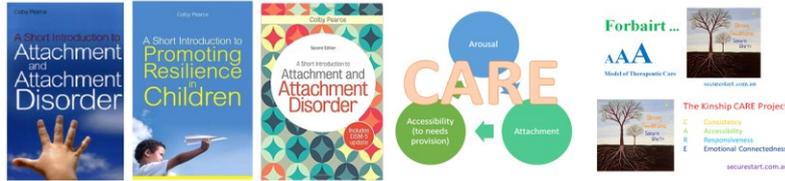
By Colby Pearce

1. **Provide routines and boundaries:** These support experience of order and consistency, where once there was chaos and inconsistency. Simple things like a consistent mealtimes, bedtimes and one-to-one activities (including bedtime rituals).

2. **Check in:** Initiating interaction with the child without them having to do anything to gain your attention offers experiences that you are thinking of them and that you are there for them without them having to control and regulate your proximity to reassure themselves of your availability and responsiveness. Simple things like greeting them when you return to the house before they seek you out, or checking in with them to let them know where you are, what you will be doing, and when you will be back. A simple note in their lunch box can also reassure the child that they are in your thoughts, even when you are parted.

3. **Tune in:** Observing their emotions and allowing yourself to show your own echo of their emotions (also called instinctive empathy) before self-regulating back to calm supports connection on an emotional level. Emotional connection and regulation back to calm supports many aspects of children's socio-emotional development, including emotional awareness, emotional expression, empathy and socio-emotional reciprocity (regulating our own behaviours and expressed emotion to positively influence the experience of others). One of the most common ways to facilitate shared emotional experiences is to do activities with a child (eg art and craft, play, watching/playing sport, card/board games). Other ways are to show pride in their achievements and concern when they are distressed.

4. **Address their needs proactively:** Addressing needs before the child has a chance to express them supports their experience that their needs are understood and important and that they do not have to control and regulate their environment (including you) to reassure themselves that their needs will be met. You already ensure that they have shelter, clothing, physical sustenance, and access to education. You might also offer that snack they regularly ask for at school pick-up before they ask, or offer to help them with their homework, or take them to the playground. If you can anticipate the request or gesture made by the child to secure a response to a need or reasonable wish, get in first.



5. **Speak their mind:** If you have a pre-verbal child or a pet you know what I mean. Most people will say they do this with their pets and small children. *Say* what you think is in their head (thoughts) and in their heart (feelings). *If you know the answer* (even if the child will not give it) *to the question, don't ask it: say the answer.* Speaking their mind assists children who have a tough start to life to feel understood and that their experience matters; that they matter. It also assists them to develop language to use to articulate their experience. If you can see what sort of a day the child has had as they approach you at school pick-up, don't ask them how their day was. Say what you see. Make it a statement that communicates understanding of their experience of the day. You can do the same at mealtimes (*you really like that*) and when you are doing activities together (*this is fun*).

For more information about what therapeutic (re)parenting looks like, I recommend my books about attachment, and resilience; both of which can be purchased through securestart.com.au.

