

Scripts to Help Build Connection

What is Attachment? (Bowlby)

Attachment theory as it pertains to children, is focused on the long-term relationships and bonds between parent and child.

“Big Six” (Adam Young)

SCENARIOS AND SCRIPTS FOR PARENTS

1 Attunement

The parent should try to know what the child is feeling, but this is difficult when the parent is distracted by their own emotions. Parent should focus on naming and labeling feelings like mad, sad, happy, frustrated and hurt without trying to fix the problem.

Quick Facts on Attachment

- 55% of infants get what they need in first two years of life; 45% do not.
- If they do; it's considered healthy attachment; if they don't it's considered unhealthy attachment.
- Six practices that lead to healthy attachment to parents.

SCENARIO FOR YOUNGER CHILD

You are at the science center or a playdate and another child takes they toy out of your child's hands.

Supportive Response:

- “You're really frustrated right now because that toy was grabbed our of your hands. That was unexpected.”

Unsupportive Response:

- “You should take the toy back!”

SCENARIO FOR OLDER CHILD

Your middle schooler comes home from school and states that she was left out of the conversation with her friends at lunch.

Supportive Response:

- “That must have been hard. That sucks and is hurtful.”

Unsupportive Response:

- “Just ignore them! It'll blow over.”

2 Responsiveness

The parent can do this when they are attuned to the child. They offer comfort, care, kindness in response to the child's feelings. The parent's presence is for the comfort of the child, not their own.

SCENARIO FOR YOUNGER CHILD

Child hits parent when child does not get what she wants.

Supportive Response:

- "I understand you are angry because you wanted to do something else."

Unsupportive Response:

- "That makes mommy/daddy sad when you do that."

SCENARIO FOR OLDER CHILD

Child wants to change his AP class to honors because he feels overloaded with his coursework.

Supportive Response:

- "Let's talk to your advisor and see how that impacts your graduation."

Unsupportive Response:

- "You're lazy and need to try harder."

3 Engagement

Engagement can only happen when the parent is attuned and responding appropriately. Pursue and engage the child's heart with genuineness and intention by practicing eye contact, appropriate touch, voice control, playfulness and laughter.

SCENARIO FOR YOUNGER CHILD

Child hits parent when child does not get what she wants.

Supportive Response:

- "Let's make a game of cleaning up the toys. We'll work together!"

Unsupportive Response:

- "I'm going to spank you if you don't clean that up now."

SCENARIO FOR OLDER CHILD

Daughter's friend always changes their plans at the last minute and daughter appears sad.

Supportive Response:

- "I noticed you seemed sad after the latest plans were changed. I also know that you seem happier when you know what to expect. I wonder if talking it out would make you feel better."

Unsupportive Response:

- "What an unthoughtful friend. She doesn't make you a priority and if I were you, I would get new friends."

4 Ability to Regulate Your Arousal (Dysregulation)

The parent has the ability to bring the child out of dysregulation by being attuned to the child as well as being willing to respond and willing to engage. The parent does so by soothing the child during anxious moments or drawing the child out when the parent sees signs of withdrawal. In other words, the parent models coping skills.

SCENARIO FOR YOUNGER CHILD

Child does not want to get out of the bathtub when told bath time is over. Consequence is story time shortened. Child then cries uncontrollably.

Supportive Response:

- “Let’s take a belly breath. I know you are disappointed. We can still read one story and sing.”

Unsupportive Response:

- “You should have gotten out of the bathtub, then.”

SCENARIO FOR OLDER CHILD

Parent is teaching teen how to drive and teen runs into a tree.

Supportive Response:

- “That was understandable. It’s hard to see the other side of the car. Let’s get out and inspect the damage.”

Unsupportive Response:

- “How did you not see that tree!”

5 Strong Enough to Handle Negative Emotions

Allow the child freedom to express negative emotions such as crying, raging and silence. The parent is able to convey love and acceptance to them through verbal and nonverbal communication such as “you are loved.” and “Do you want a hug?”

SCENARIO FOR YOUNGER CHILD

Child is angry at parent for not allowing screentime and yells “You’re mean, I don’t like you.”

Supportive Response:

- “You’re allowed to be angry and disappointed. I still love you.”

Unsupportive Response:

- “Don’t you know that that hurt’s my feelings?”

SCENARIO FOR OLDER CHILD

Child is away at camp and parents decide to paint the child’s room a different color. Child is upset that she did not get to choose the color and slams the door.

Supportive Response:

- “We should have asked for your input regarding the color. Do you forgive us?”

Unsupportive Response:

- “You don’t appreciate anything we do for you!”

Willingness to Repair

The parents are willing to own and rectify harm done on their part, and take responsibility for arguments and ruptured parent/child connection. The parent takes responsibility for repairing that rupture through attunement, responsiveness, regulation and appropriate responses.

SCENARIO FOR YOUNGER CHILD

Parent and child are at grocery store and parent has asked child to sit down in cart. When child does not comply, parent yells and tells child they are leaving without the cookie and the child begins to cry.

Supportive Response:

- “I’m sorry for yelling. I should not have spoken to you that way. I was frustrated and should have done a belly breath. I still love you. Do you forgive me?”

Unsupportive Response:

- “You brought this on yourself!”

SCENARIO FOR OLDER CHILD

Child is out past curfew and comes in late. Parent yells at child.

Supportive Response:

- “I’m sorry for yelling. I was worried about you and had imagined something happening to you on the way home.”

Unsupportive Response:

- “You have no idea what it’s like to be a parent and worry all the time!”

The good news is that it’s never too late to engage these practices, no matter how old your child is!