

## MARIJANA'S TOP TIPS FOR HAVING SECURE ATTACHMENT IN FAMILIES

Secure attachment is the lasting emotional closeness that binds families and prepares children for independence. It occurs when a child has a secure, consistent and reciprocal relationship with their primary caregiver: the adult notices and responds to the child's needs in warm, nurturing ways that make the child feel safe and secure. As a result, the child uses their primary caregiver as a secure base to explore the world.

### Why are secure attachments important?

Secure attachment has been linked to many positive outcomes for children, including:



**Brain development:** secure attachment makes the child feel safe and cared for, making it easier for the brain to use its energy to develop pathways crucial for higher level thinking.



**Social & emotional development:** attachment to a primary caregiver is the foundation of all future relationships. When there is a secure attachment, a child learns how to trust others and how to respond emotionally.



**Self-regulation:** secure attachment is a foundation for self-regulation as it enables co-regulation to happen first. When trusted adults respond to a child in a nurturing way, being mindful of the child's needs, they learn to manage their own feelings and behaviour. Over time, the brain develops pathways that allow this nurturing behaviour to kick in during periods of stress. Eventually the child can calm themselves when triggered.

## MAKE THEM FEEL VALUED & SECURE



Be sensitive to children's needs, both emotional and physical. Physical needs (food, shelter, physical activity...) are as important as emotional ones - it is in these situations that children learn if they can rely on us or not.

**The two basic emotional needs are the need to belong and the need to feel significant.**

We meet the need to belong when we connect with the child on a deeper level of empathy, while the need to feel significant is fulfilled when we allow the child to make decisions and be in control of some aspects of their lives. When these two needs are not met, children's behaviour tends to become challenging or they tend to disassociate with us/situations.

## LISTEN & RESPOND



Be responsive and consistent with your response to children's needs. This does not mean giving children whatever they want. It means being Kind and Firm, setting realistic boundaries while implementing them in a gentle, consistent way without blaming, shaming and punishing. It means seeing mistakes that you and your child make as nothing more than wonderful opportunities to learn.

## BE PRESENT & AVAILABLE



Be available and accessible to children, both emotionally and physically. Spending a lot of time with children without being emotionally present and available to them doesn't count for much. Both quantity and quality matter here: without making the time connection can hardly happen. On the other side, without being emotionally present and available emotional needs can't be met. Plan lots of regular 1-1 time with your children and use it to play with them as that is the best way the message of love, connection, belonging and significance will get through. You could also reflect on how much you engage in positive physical contact with your child. Hugging, holding hands, dancing together, snuggling, kissing, leaning, massaging, ticking... are all good ways to maintain the positive physical contact.



## OFFER REASSURANCE & SUPPORT

Hold space for children when they are struggling with their emotions and soothe them when they are in distress. Listen to your child's experience with empathy, understanding, and patience. Allow them to explore and express their emotions without feeling ashamed of their feelings and thoughts. Offer space for them to feel and give them reassurance and support. You can consider saying things like: "I can see that you are really hurting right now.", "That sounds hard", "How can I help?" Make sure they don't feel rushed "to be okay" and hold back with problem-solving until the child is completely calm.

**Anything that interrupts the cycle of attunement between the primary care giver and the child affects the quality of attachment. Substance abuse, care givers ill mental health, stress, anxiety... can all get in the way of secure attachment.**