

KEEPING OUR KIDS SAFE ONLINE THROUGH OUR RELATIONSHIPS

Secure, trusting relationships with safe adults help children navigate the digital world by giving them guidance, support and a sense of accountability. When kids feel connected to adults who listen, set clear boundaries, and provide consistent supervision, they are more likely to make safe choices online, recognize risks, feel comfortable reporting issues, and build resilience. Safe adults acts like anchors, guidance, and filters, making the digital world less risky and easier to navigate.



BUILD CONNECTION

Children need strong relationships with caring adults to feel secure.

When kids feel connected to parents and caregivers, they are more likely to listen, make safer choices, and come to you when something goes wrong online or in real life.

Simple ways to build connection:

- Spend one-on-one time together
- Light up when you see them
- Eat meals together when possible
- Show interest in what your child likes
- Be the one they come to for comfort

Connection is the foundation for learning, behaviour, and emotional health.



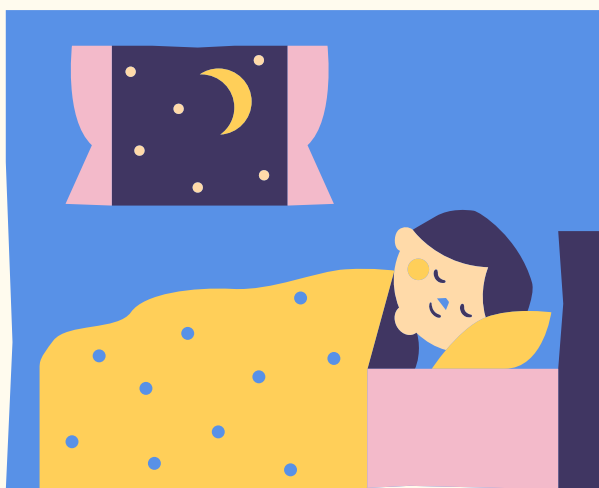
CLEAR LIMITS

Children feel safest when adults are in charge in a calm and caring way. Limits are not harmful – they help children feel protected and supported. Guidance and discipline are essential.

Healthy limits might include:

- When screens can be used
- Where devices are allowed
- What apps or games are okay
- How long screen time lasts

Children may not always like limits, but limits help them feel secure.



SLEEP AND ROUTINE

Well-rested children cope better with school, friendships, and stress.

Helpful habits:

- Keep devices out of bedrooms at night
- Limit screens before bedtime
- Have regular sleep and wake times
- Keep a consistent evening routine

Limit Screens Before Bed

Screens stimulate the brain and make it harder to fall asleep.

Social media, videos, and games can also increase worry or excitement right before bedtime.

Try:

- No screens at least 30–60 minutes before bed
- Charging devices outside the bedroom
- Reading, talking, or quiet play before sleep

Sleep is one of the most important protectors of mental health.

PLAY AND MOVEMENT

Children need active play every day to develop:

- Self-control
- Problem-solving skills
- Social skills
- Confidence
- Stress tolerance

Unstructured play helps children learn patience, creativity, and resilience in ways screens cannot.

Encourage:

- Outdoor play
- Sports and physical activity
- Building, drawing, creating, playing music, singing
- Playing with other children in real life

These moments help children process and regulate emotions.

Play is children's medicine!



FACE TO FACE CONVERSATION

Children learn emotional skills through real conversations, not screens.

Talking together helps children learn how to:

- Express and honor feelings
- Solve problems
- Feel heard and learn to understand others
- Handle frustration

Even small daily conversations make a big difference.

Examples:

- Talking in the car (side by side - less intrusive way of connecting)
- Talking at supper
- Talking before bed
- Talking after school

Remember to validate feelings (i.e., "It sounds like you had a frustrating day, that would frustrate me too"). **These moments build trust.**



GET OUTSIDE CONNECT WITH NATURE

Time outdoors helps children feel calmer, happier, and more balanced.

Simple things help:

- Walks
- Playing outside
- Riding bikes
- Going to the park
- Family time outdoors

Nature helps to support children's mental health, attention, sleep, physical health, emotional regulation and development.



PREVENT PEER ORIENTATION

Peer relationships are important, but children still need adults to be their main source of safety, guidance, and direction. When children become more attached to peers than to parents or caregivers, behaviour, confidence, and emotional wellbeing can be affected. The goal is not to remove friends –the goal is to make sure adult attachment stays strongest.

Here are ways families can help prevent peer orientation:

- Being open and maintaining calm presence
- Praising them when they did something good
- Going for walks
- Doing chores together
- Having regular family routine
- Keep communication open:
 - Listening without overreacting
 - Asking questions with curiosity
 - Thanking them for being honest
 - Helping them fix mistakes calmly

You're not alone



If children fear getting in trouble, they may turn to peers instead of parents.



BE FULLY PRESENT

Connection does not always come from big activities. It often comes from small, everyday moments when children feel that you are really paying attention to them.

This might look like:

- Putting the phone down when your child is talking
- Listening without correcting right away
- Sitting with them while they play or do homework
- Noticing their mood and checking in
- Connect before you correct behavior

Even a few minutes of full attention can help a child feel: "I matter. I am safe. My parent is here for me."

These moments build trust, which makes it easier for children to accept guidance later.



STAY INVOLVED

The most important safety tool for children is not an app or a setting – it is a strong relationship with a caring adult. That includes having a positive relationship with the school. Children can transfer trust from parent to teacher when at school. Sometimes the best thing you can do is be an ally to the school. Its like coparenting, children need to know both parents and school are on the same team. This helps them feel safe to explore.

When children feel connected, guided, and supported, they are more likely to:

- Make safer choices online
- Tell you when something goes wrong
- Handle peer pressure
- Take healthy risks, try new things and explore
- Develop confidence
- Grow into healthy, responsible young people

Technology will keep changing. Children's needs do not.



REMEMBER THE GOAL

Children grow best when they feel:

My safe adults are in charge,
my safe adults are on my side,
and I can always come to them.

**Strong attachment to adults is the best protection
children have in a digital world.**

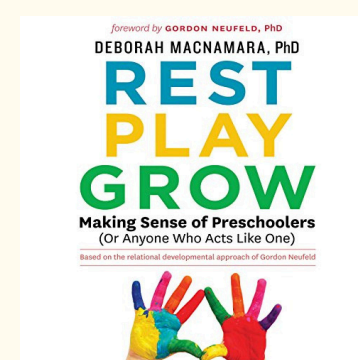
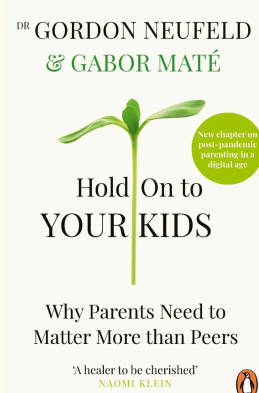


CHILDREN NEED ROOTS BEFORE THEY CAN HAVE WINGS



NEUFELD, 2021

FOR MORE INFORMATION, SEE THE FOLLOWING SOURCES:



HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL: SCREEN TIME AND THE BRAIN
DIGITAL DEVICES CAN INTERFERE WITH EVERYTHING FROM SLEEP TO CREATIVITY
RESEARCH -BY DEBRA BRADLEY RUDER JUNE 19, 2019