



Connect Before Correct

A simple guide for caregivers of kids with big feelings and hard behaviors

Presented by Eloisa Patterson



Take a Moment

Before we begin — just a quiet moment for yourself. No need to share.

Think of a child in your life who has been hard to reach lately.

What does it feel like when things escalate? In your body. In your mind.

What do you wish someone had told you sooner?

📄 There are no right answers. This training is a space to learn — not to be judged.



Behavior is Communication

Not Defiance

When a child acts out, they are trying to tell you something. It is not about being bad or trying to make your life hard.

Missing Skills

Kids often don't have the words for big feelings. So they show it with their body and behavior instead.

Won't vs. Can't

When it looks like they **won't** do something, most of the time they really **can't** — not yet.



Think Like a Detective



Find the Why

Ask yourself: Do they want attention? Are they avoiding something hard? Does something feel too loud or too much?



Look Before the Behavior

What was happening just before? That moment is your clue.



Address the Root

Don't just stop the behavior. Figure out what they need — then help with that.



Your Brain vs. Their Brain



1 Protection Mode

When kids feel scared or stressed, their brain shuts down

2 Thinking Brain Goes Offline

They can't think clearly when they're feeling big feelings

3 Survival First

Kids **cannot** listen or follow rules when they feel unsafe



The 3 Rs of Regulation

In this order — every time



Regulate

Help them calm down **first**



Relate

Show them you are on their side



Reason

Talk it through **only** after they are calm

📌 Don't jump to teaching too soon. Calm comes first. Every time.





Borrowing Calm

Kids look to you to feel safe. When you stay calm, they can calm down too.

🙏 You Are the Anchor

If you get upset, they get more upset

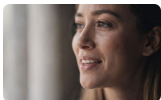
🧘 Your Calm = Their Safety

Staying calm is the best thing you can do for your child



When They Explode Outward

BIG, OUTWARD REACTIONS



Lower Your Voice

Talk soft and slow. Don't get loud like them.



Reduce Stimulation

Turn down lights. Make it quieter. Clear the space.



Give Space

Step back a little. Stay close, but give them room.

📌 **Before It Gets Here:** Watch for early warning signs — restlessness, clenched jaw, raised voice. Step in early with a calm word, a break, or a change of scenery. Prevention is easier than de-escalation.



When They Shut Down Inward

QUIET, INWARD REACTIONS



Move Closer

Sit near them. Being close shows them they are safe.

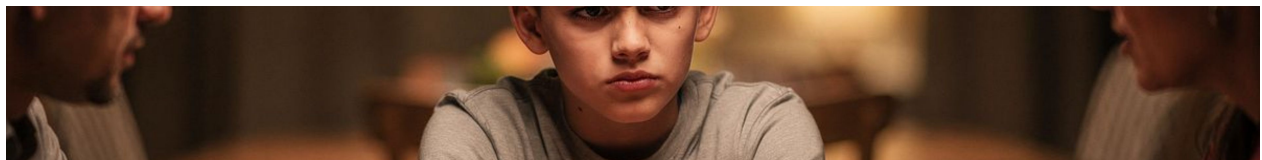
Warm Face

Keep your face calm and soft. No frowning or tension.

Invite, Don't Command

Say "Want to sit with me?" — not "Come here, now."

① **Before It Gets Here:** Notice when they start going quiet or pulling away. That's your window. A gentle check-in — "You okay?" — before they fully shut down can make all the difference.



FOR TWEENS & TEENS

When Older Kids Escalate

Bigger kids, bigger reactions. Here's what actually works.



Don't Take the Bait

They may say hurtful things. Don't argue back. Stay calm and say less, not more.



Walk Away Together

Suggest a break: "Let's both take 10 minutes and come back to this." Then actually do it.



Name It Without Shaming It

Say "I can see you're really angry right now." Don't say "You're being ridiculous."



Pick Your Battles

Not everything needs a response right now. Safety first — everything else can wait.

① **Before It Gets Here:** Build in daily connection time — even 10 minutes of their choice of activity. Teens who feel seen and heard are less likely to explode. Relationship is the best prevention.



FOR TWEENS & TEENS

When Older Kids Shut Down

Silence isn't nothing. It's a signal. Here's how to reach them.



Don't Force the Conversation

"We don't have to talk right now. I'm here when you're ready." Then leave the door open.



Connect Through Activity

Drive them somewhere. Watch a show together. Side-by-side time is easier than face-to-face.



Text Instead of Talk

Some teens open up more over text. A simple "You okay?" can go a long way.



Check In Later — Not Right After

Wait until things are calm — maybe hours later or the next day — then gently bring it up.

☐ Teens still need connection. They just need it to feel safe and low-pressure.

📘 **Before It Gets Here:** Make small talk a daily habit — in the car, at dinner, during commercials. Low-pressure moments of connection keep the door open so they come to you before they shut down.



Setting Limits With Warmth

Kids need boundaries. But how you set them matters just as much as what they are.



Say What They CAN Do

Instead of "Stop that," try "You can do that outside" or "Let's find another way."



Be Short and Calm

One sentence. Calm voice. No lecture. "That's not okay. Let's try again."



Follow Through — Every Time

If you say it, mean it. Kids feel safer when limits are consistent and predictable.



Separate the Behavior from the Child

"I love you. That behavior is not okay." Never "You are bad." Always "That was a bad choice."

☐ A warm limit sounds like: "I hear you. And the answer is still no."



When Your Child Thinks Differently

ADHD & AUTISM

Some kids aren't being difficult — their brain is wired differently. That changes everything about how we help.

ADHD

- Hard to wait, sit still, or stop once started
- Big emotions that come fast and fade fast
- Not ignoring you — they genuinely forgot
- What helps: short instructions, movement breaks, visual reminders, lots of positive attention

Autism

- Changes in routine can feel like a crisis
- Sensory things (noise, light, touch) can be overwhelming
- May not show feelings the way you expect
- What helps: predictable schedules, warnings before transitions, quiet spaces, clear and literal language

📌 These kids are not giving you a hard time. They are having a hard time.



De-Escalation for Neurodiverse Kids

Standard strategies don't always work. Here's what to adjust when your child has ADHD or autism.

ADHD

Say Less

One word or phrase is enough — "Breathe."
"Outside." Less is more.

Move Their Body

A walk, jumping jacks, or squeezing something helps burn the energy.

Wait 20 Minutes

Let the storm pass before talking about what happened.

Autism

Remove the Trigger

Too loud, too bright, too crowded? Change the environment first.

Go Quiet

Your calm presence is more helpful than words right now.

Give Them Time

Recovery takes longer than you expect. Don't rush it.

📌 What looks like a meltdown is often sensory overload — not a choice.



After a Hard Moment — How to Repair

Things will go wrong. That's not failure. What you do next is what matters.



Wait Until Everyone Is Calm

Don't try to repair in the middle of the storm. Give it time — even hours.



Go to Them

You make the first move. Don't wait for them to come to you.



Say It Simply

"I got too loud. I'm sorry. I love you." Short, honest, no excuses.



Move Forward Together

Don't dwell on it. A hug, a snack, a walk — reconnect and move on.



Repair teaches your child something powerful — that relationships can survive hard moments.



Fill Your Own Cup First



You **cannot** help others if you are running on empty.

Know Your Triggers

Notice when you feel angry or upset. That's okay. Just notice it.

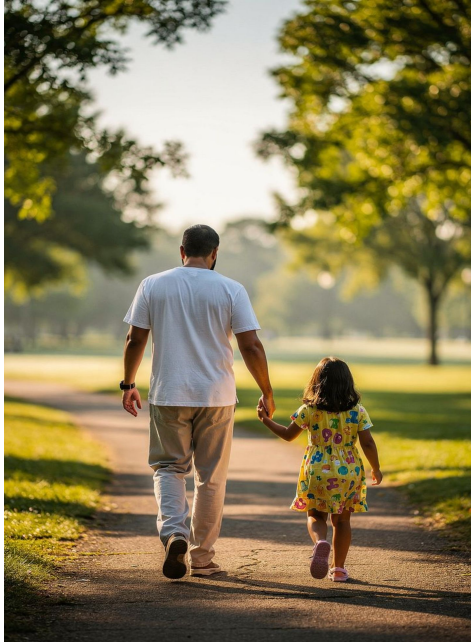
First Me, Then You

Calm yourself down **before** you step in to help.

Your Health Matters Too

Get rest. Ask for help. Be kind to yourself. It makes you a better caregiver.





A Path Forward

Repair is Always Possible

It's never too late to try again.
Every moment is a fresh start.

Connection Builds Trust

Small, loving moments add up.
They help your child feel safe over time.

Small Steps, Big Change

You don't need to do big things. Just keep showing up, little by little.

 You don't have to be perfect. You just have to keep trying.



Questions?

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Please scan to give us feedback



Based On the Work Of

This guide draws from leading experts in trauma, child development, and brain science.

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3. Ablon, J. S. (2018). *Changeable: How collaborative problem solving changes lives at home, at school, and at work*. Penguin Books.
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5. van der Kolk, B. (2014). *The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*. Viking.
6. Porges, S. W. (2011). *The polyvagal theory: Neurophysiological foundations of emotions, attachment, communication, and self-regulation*. W. W. Norton & Company.
7. Barkley, R. A. (2015). *Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder: A handbook for diagnosis and treatment* (4th ed.). Guilford Press.
8. Grandin, T., & Panek, R. (2013). *The autistic brain: Thinking across the spectrum*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
9. Greene, R. W. (2021). *Lost and found: Helping behaviorally challenging students (and, while you're at it, all the others)*. Jossey-Bass.

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