

# “Connect Before They Need It Approach” with Connection-Seeking Attachment Patterns

## C - Connection Seeking Attachment Adaptation

- Children with connection-seeking (C-type / ambivalent or preoccupied) attachment adaptations have learned that closeness is unpredictable, they must amplify emotion to stay connected
- Their distress, clinginess, or constant need for reassurance reflects fear of being forgotten or abandoned, not manipulation
- The “connect before they need it” approach helps meet their attachment needs proactively, signaling safety before the child has to escalate to get attention

## Core Principles

- Preemptive connection prevents escalation and teaches the child they don't need to fight for attention
- Warm attunement and gentle prosody soothe the nervous system before distress peaks
- Predictable presence builds trust:
  - Small, consistent moments of connection matter more than big emotional gestures
- Safety before insight, connection comes first
- Then reflection follows once the child is regulated

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Therapeutic Goal	Connection-Seeking Child’s Reaction	“Connect Before They Need It” Response
Regulate arousal	Becomes loud, clingy, or dramatic when feeling ignored or uncertain.	Offer connection early. Use eye contact, gentle tone, or brief touch: “I see you, I’ll be right here.”
Reduce emotional escalation	Uses big emotions to draw attention or avoid separation.	Anticipate need for reassurance: “Looks like it’s getting a bit much—I’m right beside you.”
Strengthen predictability and safety	Feels unsafe when attention is inconsistent.	Provide frequent, small check-ins—smiles, nods, brief comments—to reinforce “I’m here and you matter.”
Support reflection and self-regulation	Stays stuck in heightened emotion; struggles to calm alone.	Co-regulate first (“Let’s breathe together”), then encourage autonomy (“You’re calming yourself really well”).
Build trust and containment	Fears being forgotten, easily misreads neutral cues as rejection.	Keep your tone warm and your presence steady, especially during transitions or separations. “I’ll see you after snack time.”

## In Practice

- In the classroom:
  - A teacher greets a student warmly before class begins, using the student’s name and a smile
  - This early connection reduces anxiety that might otherwise appear later as attention-seeking behaviour
- In therapy:
  - A clinician notices the child’s breathing quicken and voice rise
  - Instead of interpreting behaviour immediately, they lean in slightly, soften their voice, and say:
    - “I’ve got you, I’m here”