

Connect: Working with Parents from an Attachment Perspective

Synopsis of the Program & Manual



NOTE: This is not a treatment manual but a synopsis that provides an overview and description of key features of the program. Manuals are provided to clinicians upon enrolment in the Connect training workshop. Provision of services without training and certification is not recommended, should not and will not be recognized as the Connect program.

For information on Connect training go to: www.sfu.ca/connect

The Connect Program is a Community-University Partnership between researchers at Simon Fraser University, the Maples Adolescent Treatment Centre and the BC Ministry for Children and Family Development.

INTRODUCTION

The Connect Parent¹ Group was developed drawing from research on attachment, child and adolescent development, and parenting effectiveness, in combination with clinical expertise derived from two decades of clinical work with clinically troubled children, adolescents, and parents. Unlike other parent group programs which adopt a behavioural management approach, Connect focuses on helping parents acquire knowledge and develop skills to enhance sensitivity, reflection, and effective emotion regulation in parenting. These components of parenting are the 'building blocks' of secure attachment and have been demonstrated to exert sizeable influence on children's social, emotional, and behavioural adjustment. In particular, Connect works to increase parenting competence by teaching skills that help parents 'reframe' their child's behaviour from an attachment or relational perspective; modulate their own emotional response to problem behaviour; practice and communicate empathy for their child's experience; and mindfully utilize parenting strategies that support their relationship with their child while clearly communicating expectations and setting limits.

Connect is:

- Developmentally informed.
- Principle-based.
- Strength-focused and future-oriented.
- Relational and systemic.
- Integrates intervention strategies and techniques.
- Structured; psycho-educational; experiential; and supportive.

Connect is respectful and collaborative. Parents are welcomed as active partners rather than passive recipients of treatment. We listen and rely on their feedback to shape program development. Parents are encouraged to reflect on the program as it unfolds, and to consider which aspects best fit their needs. Our explicitly collaborative orientation enhances openness and engagement and minimizes defensiveness and resistance.

Connect is a 'developmentally-informed' intervention. Parents acquire knowledge about the ways in which attachment is important to child development from infancy through adolescence and young adulthood. They also learn about the ways in which transitions in development, such as the transition to adolescence, relate to attachment challenges.

Connect is a 'principle-based' program. Connect avoids teaching parents the A-B-C's of parenting and helps them to learn basic principles of attachment, relationships, and child development, which can then be applied across a broad range of contexts. The program avoids telling parents the 'right' versus 'wrong' way of parenting; instead, it strives to stimulate curiosity, reflection, and informed choices in the use of parenting strategies. At all costs, Connect avoids blaming parents or their children for problems that may have arisen. The focus is on developing understanding, skills, and mindful parenting rather than assigning blame.

¹ The term 'parent' is used throughout this manual as an inclusive term to refer to all adults who take on a parenting role in relation to a particular child, including biological, adoptive, and foster parents; extended family such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and adult siblings; and other professional caregivers such as staff from group homes, and temporary or permanent care facilities.

Connect is strength-focused and future-oriented. Many parents come to the program with a history of difficulties in parenting: it is easy to find weaknesses and reasons for past failure. Rather than find focusing on problems, Connect challenges leaders to meet parents where they are, with the skills that they possess, and to move forward from there.

Connect adopts a relational and systemic perspective. Connect recognizes that parenting is something that emerges as a function of both parent and child characteristics; it is bi-directional in influence and transactional over time. Past events shape how parents and children understand and respond to new experiences, but new experiences reshape the understanding of past events. Parents and children are also influenced by the larger systems in which they are embedded, including their family and community context, cultural background, and broader social milieu.

Connect integrates therapeutic techniques to achieve set goals. Intervention techniques derived from cognitive-behaviour therapy, emotion-focused therapy, relational approaches, and mindfulness training are used strategically to reach goals that are specified for each session. Connect uses a variety of experiential exercises to help parents better understand attachment principles and needs.

Connect adopts a structured, psycho-educational approach with opportunities for hands-on learning and self-reflection in a supportive context. Connect is a structured program that is supportive to parents but is not a 'support program' in the traditional sense. Parents share some information about their challenges in parenting; however, the focus is on learning, moving forward, and trying new approaches, rather than on exploring personal problems and providing support for distress.

The Connect program is delivered in a 10-session manualized format. Each session begins with the presentation of an attachment principle that helps parents acquire new knowledge about attachment and developmental issues (see Table 1 – Connect Parent Group Principles and Illustrative Goals). Parents are encouraged to consider new ways of understanding their child and their behaviour, new ways of understanding themselves and their parenting responses, and new options in parenting.

OVERVIEW OF THE CONNECT PROGRAM

A detailed overview of the program is provided in Table 1. The program begins with an information night where parents are provided with information on the focus and format of the Connect program and are invited to participate as partners in program development. This is followed by nine sessions, each focused around a principle and a set of learning objectives. Sessions include a didactic component (generally first 10 minutes) and hands-on learning exercises (approximately 40 minutes).

Didactic Component (or Learning Content)

During the didactic portion of each session, group leaders present an attachment principle that helps parents understand attachment issues related to child development and as they relate to challenging interactions with their children and teens. Each session builds on principles covered in prior sessions, which are revisited over the course of the program and consolidated in the final session.

The manual provides important background information for group leaders on key concepts and issues in attachment theory in relation to each principle. Leaders learn this material in training and are encouraged to prepare for each session by carefully reviewing background information and additional readings as necessary. Connect provides ongoing updates to trained and certified group leaders, including new papers on theory, research and clinical practice, to promote continued learning and development.

Experiential Component (or Active Learning Exercises)

Parents engage in hands-on learning exercises, including role-plays and reflection exercises, in each session. These exercises are integral to each session as they facilitate parents' understanding of the attachment principles and help parents develop skills to recognize, reflect upon, and respond to their child's attachment needs.

Role-plays and Reflection Exercises:

Role-plays enact parent-child interactions to illustrate key issues and explore alternative parenting options, their risks and their benefits. Group leaders refrain from telling parents that there is a 'right' or a 'wrong' way to parent children; rather, they encourage parents to see the costs and benefits to different parenting strategies, particularly as they relate to their needs, their child's needs and the quality of their relationship. This minimizes parental blame and defensiveness and maximizes parental motivation and openness to developing new skills.

Group leaders take responsibility for the role-plays in early sessions, however as parents become more comfortable they are invited to participate in role-plays. This provides first-hand experience of how their child might feel and respond in different interaction contexts and how they might feel and respond as parents in these situations.

Each role-play is followed by exercises to help parents attend to the behaviour of the child and the parent, their feelings, thoughts and underlying needs. Such activities help parents slow down their reactions to problem child behaviour, modulate their own feelings and thoughts, and consider the inner world and needs of their child. Reflection exercises also help parents to understand their reactions to problem behaviour in relation to their own experiences as teens and in their current relationships. They consider their past experiences of conflict, what needs they had as adolescents and the impact of others' responses to them.

Practicing sensitivity, empathy, and mindfulness helps parents realize that they have more options to respond in ways that set clear limits, balance their own and their child's needs, and strengthen their relationship with their child. Connect exercises help parents develop the necessary skills for navigating conflict without turning to coercion and escalating aggression. Parents routinely tell us that the role-plays are essential to their learning experience. The 'Illustrative Session' section of this document includes examples of role plays and reflection exercises used in Connect.

Parents are provided with handouts summarizing the key points and the take home message for each session. Leaders may recommend homework exercises or topics to think about in the interim between sessions.

The final session of Connect offers parents with an opportunity to provide feedback, offer opinions and to ask questions. This session is as important as the rest of the sessions, as it recognizes the collaborative relationship with parents, provides an opportunity for consolidation of learning, and encourages parents to integrate those features that fit best with their needs.

THE MANUAL

The first several sessions of the manual provide detailed descriptions, concretely illustrating how to introduce learning material, how to use role-plays and reflection exercises, and how to emphasize key take home messages. The manual provides tips on ensuring coverage of key points, managing group dynamics, and maintaining a balance between structure and support. This material is illustrative rather than prescriptive. With experience, group leaders are encouraged to tailor their presentation to their own personal therapeutic style and the unique needs of each group, **however, key principles and goals remain set and clear for each session.**

Failure to adhere to these aspects of the intervention will compromise the impact of the intervention.

EFFECTIVENESS

Connect has been shaped through ongoing evaluation and parent feedback. The effectiveness of this program has been evaluated in three community-based trials. Detailed results of these trials are provided in the published and unpublished papers listed below.

Briefly, two uncontrolled trials showed significant pre- to post-treatment reductions in parent reports of externalizing and internalizing problems in pre-adolescent and adolescent youth. A waitlist control study revealed no significant changes over the waitlist period, followed by significant pre- to post-treatment reductions in parent reports of youths' internalizing and externalizing problems. Parents also reported significant improvements in their perceived parenting efficacy and parenting satisfaction. All improvements were maintained at 6-12 months post-treatment and further significant changes were observed, including significant reductions in youth reports of their internalizing and externalizing problems.

Connect places a strong emphasis on continuing evaluation of client satisfaction and treatment effectiveness. Parents are invited to participate as partners in program development by completing baseline and end-of-treatment measures assessing parent and child functioning; they also participate in the Connect feedback and debriefing session which closes the program. Evaluation procedures are specified in the manual in the descriptions of the first and last sessions of the program. Standardized baseline and end-of-treatment measures are made available to leaders in training and trained leaders of established Connect groups.

CLIENT CONSIDERATIONS: THE IMPORTANCE OF A SYSTEMIC PERSPECTIVE

Connect was developed for parents of pre-adolescent and adolescent youth struggling with significant mental health issues, most notably aggression and delinquency, concurrent anxiety and depression, and substance use problems.

It is imperative that the severity and range of clinical needs be fully assessed in advance of providing the Connect program. In situations where parents and youth present with mild to moderate problems that are circumscribed in scope, Connect may be used as a stand-alone intervention. Connect should be used as part of a systemic program of care in situations where parents and youth present with severe, chronic problems across multiple domains of functioning. In such cases, using Connect alone is not advised. The relation between the complexity of clinical needs and the provision of systemic care is summarized in Figure 1 – Matching Systemic Intervention to Clinical Needs.

The assessment of clinical needs should be guided by a systemic perspective on child development, health, and service delivery. This perspective begins with the acknowledgement that children are nested within their families, who are in turn nested within their social and cultural contexts and broader social systems (see Figure 2 – A Multi-level Ecological Model). Assessing clinical needs requires consideration of key domains in which children function, such as their families, schools, and local recreational contexts, to best understand the strengths and areas of need within these systems. Where multiple domains of functioning need support, we recommend an integrated program of care which utilizes Connect as a central organizing component (see Figure 3 – Connect as an Integrating Component of Systemic Programming). Application of the Connect principles across multiple domains can support a shared understanding, focus, and coherent intervention strategy. This multi-systemic approach has been adopted by the Maples Bifrost Program. For further information on the Bifrost Program, contact the Maples Adolescent Treatment Centre.

Recently Connect has been adapted for use with parents of teens struggling with major mental health disorders such as schizophrenia and bi-polar disorder. An adapted manual is forthcoming. For further information about this adaptation, contact the Maples Adolescent Treatment Centre.

TRAINING

Training and certification are required to become a Connect group leader. Training is achieved through participation in a three-day training workshop and seminars followed by supervision of performance to specified standards of competence. This process is designed to provide leaders with high-quality training in the theoretical background and practical application of the Connect program. Leaders in training receive detailed feedback on their clinical skills, strengths, and areas that require further development. The training, supervision, and certification of leaders ensure program integrity and maintain high quality program delivery. Once certified, leaders may pursue further training to become supervisors and trainers of other Connect group leaders. Information on training opportunities and requirements can be accessed by contacting the Maples Adolescent Treatment Centre.

Selected References on Connect & Attachment:

Moretti, M. M., & Obsuth, I. (2008). Attachment and Aggression: From Paradox to Principles of Intervention to Reduce Risk of Violence in Teens. In M. Kerr & H. Stattin (Eds.), *Understanding Girls' Problem Behaviour*.

Obsuth, I., Moretti, M. M., Holland, R., Braber, K., & Cross, S. (2006). Conduct Disorder: New directions in promoting effective parenting and strengthening parent-adolescent relationships. *Canadian Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Review*, 15, 6-15.

Moretti, M. M. (2008). Conceptualizing Change from an Attachment Perspective. The Connect Program. Invited Symposium, Prevention in Families and Schools: Issues and Practice, XIth Biennial Conference of the European Association for Research on Adolescence, Turin, Italy.

Moretti, M. M. (2008). Family Roots of Adolescent Violence in Relationships and Effective Interventions: A Developmental and Relational Perspective, *From Ideology to Inclusion: Evidence-Based Policy and Intervention in Domestic Violence*, Sacramento, California, USA

Moretti, M. M., Penney, S., Obsuth, I., & Odgers, C. (2006). Family lessons in attachment and aggression: The impact of interparental violence on adolescent adjustment. In J. Hamel & T. Nicholls (Eds.), *Family Therapy for Domestic Violence: A Practitioner's Guide to Gender-Inclusive Research and Treatment*. (pp. 191-214). NY: Springer.

Moretti, M. M., & Peled, M. (2004). Adolescent-parent attachment: Bonds that support healthy development. *Pediatrics & Child Health*, 9 (8), 551-555.

Moretti, M. M., Holland, R., Moore, K., & McKay, S. (2004). An attachment-based parenting program for caregivers of severely conduct disordered adolescents: Preliminary findings. *Journal of Child and Youth Care Work*, 19, 170-179.

Moretti, M. M., DaSilva, K., & Holland, R. (2004). Aggression and violence from an attachment perspective: Gender issues and therapeutic implications. In M. Moretti, C. Odgers, & M. Jackson (Eds.), *Girls and aggression: Contributing factors and intervention principles. Girls and aggression: Contributing factors and intervention principles* (pp. 41-57). Kluwer-Plenum.

Moretti, M. M. & Holland, R. (2003). The journey of adolescence: Transitions in self within the context of attachment relationships (pp. 234-257). In S. Johnson & V. Whiffen (Eds.), *Attachment Processes in Couple and Family Therapy*, Guilford: New York.

ILLUSTRATIVE SESSION
Session ONE
Understanding the Influence of Attachment on Behaviour



PRINCIPLE: All behaviour has meaning.

*Attachment is a basic human
need that shapes behaviour*

LEADER GOALS FOR THIS SESSION:

- ✓ To create a sense of safety within the group.
- ✓ To provide an orientation to the structure and format of the group sessions.
- ✓ To recognize that all behaviour is a form of communication about attachment.
- ✓ To recognize that all behaviour has an impact on our relationships with others.
- ✓ To recognize that the same behaviour may have different meanings.

PARENT EDUCATION GOALS:

- ✓ Parents begin to see that they have options in how they respond to their child's behaviour rather than simply reacting to it. The options they have depend on how they understand the intent and meaning of their child's behaviour.
- ✓ Parents begin to understand that they can provide structure and guidance even in the face of 'difficult behaviour' and they begin to consider options that work to maintain a healthy connection with their child.

PARENTING SKILL GOALS:

- ✓ Parents begin to consider their child's behaviour through an attachment lens; that is, to consider the attachment issues behind behaviour.
- ✓ Parents attempt to step back and think about the possible purposes (i.e., meaning, functions) of their child's behaviour in terms of the parent-child relationship.

SYNOPOSIS OF THE BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE FOR GROUP LEADERS:

Attachment is a biologically-based system that is essential for survival. Infants and children experience distress when separated from their parents or caregivers and particularly when overwhelmed by fear or other needs such as hunger or pain. They communicate their distress through crying and seeking out their parents, and they are soothed by their parents' presence and responsiveness in meeting their needs. The simplest example of the attachment system in operation is when a baby cries and the mother goes to the baby and looks after the baby's needs....

Through repeated experience in their relationships with caregivers, children begin to develop a 'pattern' in their expression of attachment needs, their expectations of how others will respond, and their reactions to their caregivers' attempts to meet their attachment needs....

Although early work on attachment focused on infants and young children it is now widely recognized that attachment continues to be critical for healthy adjustment in later childhood, adolescence, and throughout adulthood... while the need for independence becomes important in adolescence, the need for connection, safety, and security remains constant.

Secure attachment – or what most people call a ‘healthy relationship’ – requires a balance of connectedness and separateness... we constantly balance the need for safety and protection (being close and connected to others) with the need to explore and take on new challenges (being independent, separate, and distinct from others).

Attachment patterns develop from our experiences with others, particularly people who have been responsible for our care, but it is also determined by individual characteristics such as our own sensitivity and reactivity to stimulation in the world, and how clearly we communicate our needs through our behaviour to others...

Understanding an individual's ‘life story’ helps us to understand the way they express their attachment needs. Each individual has unique experiences and has learned ways of connecting with others. An attachment perspective encourages us to be mindful, curious, and sensitive to the meaning behind behaviour. It helps us to step back and wonder about the message behind the behaviour. When we do this, we are in a better position to respond in a supporting way and effectively rather than to react. When we understand the meaning of behaviour we have more choice in how we respond.

The way we behave in our relationships is determined by our previous experience and expectations about how others will respond to our attachment needs...

Recognizing the underlying attachment needs expressed through behaviour can be challenging in both our relationships with our children... it is often more challenging in our relationships with our adolescent children because their behaviour seems contradictory – it can feel as if they are asking for closeness and independence in the same second.

When we do not understand someone's behaviour and we are frustrated by it, we end up making assumptions that fit with how we feel – we may incorrectly assume that the person intends to hurt us or doesn't care about us. We react to their behaviour based on these assumptions and our responses often escalate their behaviour. When this happens our relationships can be undermined and damaged. Therefore, as much as it is difficult, it becomes important to step back and take the extra time to think about the meaning behind the behaviour in order to respond in a constructive way that will support and sustain our relationships.

SUGGESTED BACKGROUND READINGS:

- Bowlby, J. (1977). The making and breaking of affectional bonds: I. Aetiology and psychopathology in the light of attachment theory. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 130, 201-210.
- Bowlby, J. (1978). Attachment theory and its therapeutic implications. *Adolescent Psychiatry*, 6, 5-33.
- Moretti, M. M., & Peled, M. (2004). Adolescent-parent attachment: Bonds that support healthy development. *Paediatrics & Child Health*, 9, 551-555.

SESSION FORMAT

1. **Welcome** to all of the participants and brief introduction of group leaders.
2. **Set the stage** – *outline what will occur and what the goals for the current session are.*

3. Introduce structure and general guidelines of the program

- ✓ Each session will introduce a specific attachment principle and information about this principle.
- ✓ We will have learning activities as a way of thinking through and discussing each principle while also sharing our experiences. We will often use role-plays to illustrate the issues we talk about
- ✓ As we have ___ people in this group, I ask that you be considerate with your time when talking so that everyone has an opportunity to speak
- ✓ While we hope that together we can provide a *supportive* environment ***This group is primarily educational and skill development focused; it is about helping you establish foundations and develop skills that will be helpful in parenting and supporting your relationship with your child.***
- ✓ This will take hard work. ...The goal is to help you and your family to get back on track and to provide useful skills to further your development ...

....

7. Introduction Summary

Acknowledge the common themes presented such as feeling frustrated, hopeless, and hurt/pain as well as the participants' perseverance and obvious caring about their relationship with their child, as well as their child's welfare.

Leader: These sessions will not be about 'teaching' you 'behaviour management'. Rather, our goal is to help you develop a different way of understanding your child's behaviour – one that focuses on your relationship with them and their attachment needs. To achieve this we will encourage you to think about what is happening in your child's life and about your relationship with them so that you recognize the choices you have in responding to them. In turn, we believe this will make a difference in your relationship with your child, in how you feel as a parent, and in how your child feels.

8. Learning Content (5 minutes): Overview of attachment and the first principle.

The guiding principle tonight is:

All behaviour has meaning. Attachment is a basic human need that shapes behaviour.

Post Connect Principle Poster 1 for review and keep it (and gradually the following principles) displayed for the duration of the parent group.

Leader: This is the principle we are going to focus on today. We will discuss this principle through questions, discussions, and a role-play.

What we mean by this principle is that all behaviour is a form of communication. It tells us something about:

- the person who engages in the behaviour;
- what he or she may have experienced in past relationships;
- what he or she expects about how others will respond in the current situation.

Attachment – or what we often call ‘relationship’ – with caregivers is a biologically-based basic human need for survival. When a baby cries, the mother goes to the baby and looks after the baby’s needs. ..., this is the process of attachment, or relating to each other.

But attachment needs are expressed differently as the child grows and develops... Nonetheless, the need for attachment remains constant. We need to feel safe and secure in our connection with others; and we need to feel that we can be independent and effective in the world

In today’s session, we are going to ask you to take a ‘step back’... to try to understand your child’s behaviour from a different perspective in order to discover new ways of responding and connecting with your child..... This does not mean that you need to agree with or condone all of your child’s behaviour – that anything goes – we are merely asking you to step back and consider what’s behind your child’s behaviour before you respond to it.

9. Active Learning Exercises (20 minutes):

Prioritize the reflection exercises and discussion questions. Know and keep in mind throughout the session what the principle is and where you want to get to by the end of the session. Whenever you feel that the group is getting off track, pose the following question to the group: “Now let’s go back to the principle and make sure we’re on track...how is our discussion right now related to the principle?”

a. Reflection exercise

On flip chart, post: **Children have ways of letting us know what they need from the moment that they are born.**

Post the following questions on flip chart with enough space to write down examples offered by parents.

How did your baby let you know what they needed?

Typical responses:

- Crying; Smiling

As a parent, how did it feel when your child let you know that they needed you?

...

How did it feel when you struggled to understand what your baby needed?

Typical responses:

- I felt scared, helpless; Frustrated

...

What did you do when you didn’t understand? What happened?

Leader: As parents, trying to understand the needs of our kids can be like trying to ‘**crack the code**’.

b. Reflection exercise

On flip chart post: **Adults try to do their best to meet their child’s needs.**

How did you meet your baby’s needs?

...

How did it feel when you were able to meet their needs?

- I felt relieved, satisfied;

Happy ...

How did it feel when you were unable to meet their needs?

Tip: *Be selective in choosing the above questions so as to prompt caregivers to thinkhow the child's behaviour **communicates** needs to the caregiver; how the caregiver attempts to **understand** (decode) what the behaviour means; and what the caregiver does behaviourally and emotionally to **respond** to the child's behavioural communication.*

Note: *Some caregivers will be adoptive or foster parents and may not have had this child from birth... the exercise is still useful and they can be encouraged to think about when the child was younger, or younger children they have known.*

Leader: sometimes it is hard work to figure out what your child's needs are or what your child is trying to communicate. We all vary in how clearly we communicate our needs.... like babies our older children and adolescents also communicate through their behaviour despite their ability to talk and express their needs verbally. It can be even more challenging and frustrating to try to understand older children's behaviour (i.e., to 'crack the code') and the meaning behind it (even though they can talk!), particularly when your child is an adolescent. Often they cannot tell us in words what their needs are or the reasons for their behaviour.

c. Role-play

Included here are two suggested role-plays. Choose ONE only. The role-play should be short and ambiguous to facilitate multiple views/interpretations of the behaviour.

Leader: Now we are going to do a role-play to illustrate and reflect on what we've talked about.

All we want you to do is just watch closely... *(Group leaders should identify who is role-playing the parent and who is the teen.)*

Pass out note paper and pens and have discussion questions written out on the flip chart.

Parent is sitting, watching TV when youth enters, slamming the door behind him.

Parent: Hi Steve...

Youth walks past parent without saying anything or looking directly at his parent and slams his books or bag down on the table. Youth looks and behaves in an angry, sullen manner. He then grabs the phone and dials, turning his back away from the parent and the group members. Parent and group members cannot hear who he is talking to/what is being said.

Discussion questions – point out that there are no right or wrong answers; ask to think of what first comes to mind. Ask participants to write down their responses first before sharing with the group, as this allows members to reflect individually.

What behaviour did you see?

What was the child thinking and feeling?

What was the parent thinking and feeling?

What do you think Steve's behaviour means?

Typical responses

- He's probably mad about something that happened at school.
- He doesn't respect his parent; he's trying to push their buttons.
- Maybe he's scared.

Note: *Use parents' responses to illustrate the principle. That is, all behaviour has meaning and it*

communicates about attachment needs and expectations. If parents give different responses point out this fact and raise the possibility that the meaning of the behaviour may depend on our prior experience and our expectations.

Tip: *If parents give very similar responses, suggest a few alternatives yourself and see if they can appreciate that the behaviour could have more than one meaning.*

Leader: **Isn't it interesting that we all watched the same role-play, and we had so many different takes on what was going on for Steve?**

It's like watching a movie. Sometimes we can watch the exact same movie and ... have completely different interpretations of someone's behaviour than the person sitting next to us.

Behaviours set off our own thoughts and feelings. We make assumptions about our child's behaviour based on our own experiences and the history of similar behaviours from the past. We react according to these assumptions, which may be correct but they may be off-base.....our child's behaviour can mean different things at different times.

Note: *It can be very tempting for the group leader to ask the other leader playing the youth what was 'really' going on for them in the role-play. This 'undoes' the point of the exercise because participants then take away that their understanding of the portrayed behaviours was either 'right' or 'wrong'.the task is to 'not assume', but to peel away the layers beneath the behaviours and look at the possible reasons for the behaviours. The meaning of the behaviour can only be understood in the context of the relationship.*

Key Question: Do you think you would respond differently to the child's behaviour depending on the meaning you ascribed to the behaviour – that is, what you thought the child was thinking/feeling; your awareness of what you were thinking/feeling; and what you thought the behaviour meant?

ALTERNATE ROLE-PLAY:

We're going to do a role-play. All we want you to do is just watch closely...

Pass out note paper and pens and have discussion questions written out on flip chart.

Parent and youth are driving in a vehicle. Youth looks anxious, sullen, and/or downcast. Youth looks out the window and avoids looking at parent. Parent pulls the vehicle over to park.

Parent (*pleasantly*): Ok Marcy...we're here.

Youth does not respond and continues to look down.

Parent (*still pleasantly, but slightly impatiently*): C'mon Marcy. You need to get going or you'll be late.

Youth remains unmoving. Parent glares at youth.

Youth (*continues to look out the window and emphatically states*): I am NOT going!

Follow up discussion questions – the same questions as for previous role-play. .

10. Take Home Message

Note: *It is essential that each session end with a simple and very clear take-home message. Group leaders should have this message in mind from the beginning of each session and ensure that they weave it throughout the session.*

Summarize the principle of this session, recapping the rationale.

E.g., Let's take a few minutes to review what we've done today. The goal of this session was to start us thinking about what behaviour means and to show that there are many ways to view a set of behaviours. Sometimes it is hard to 'not assume' what it means; it is hard to stop and think about the possible meaning behind the behaviours, and look at the possible reasons for the behaviours, particularly with our children and family members we have known for years. But doing so can provide the opportunity for seeing things in a different light and for responding in a different way. We can consider the behaviour of our youth in the context of what is going on in their lives and what is going on in our relationship with them. If we look at things from a different perspective we have alternatives in how to respond and we can choose to respond in a way that supports and maintains our relationship/attachment with our children AND also communicates clear expectations and structure. When we communicate our understanding of another person's experience – even if we do not condone their behaviour – we open the door to more open communication and greater mutual respect.

11. Wrap Up and Handout:

Provide handout.

Thank participants for coming, sharing with the group, and being respectful to each other as they share.

APPENDIX

Figure 1. Matching Systemic Intervention with Clinical Needs

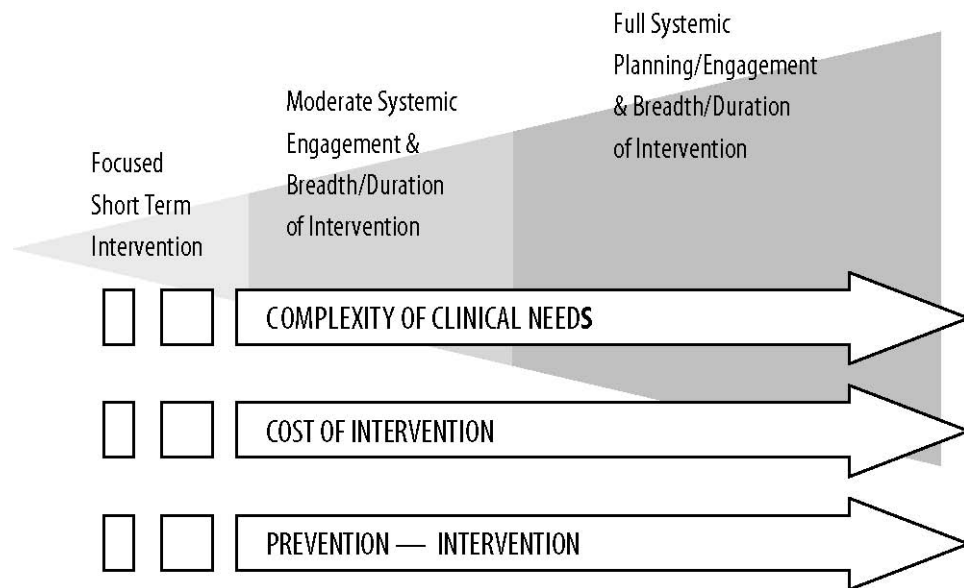


Figure 2. A Multi-level Ecological Model

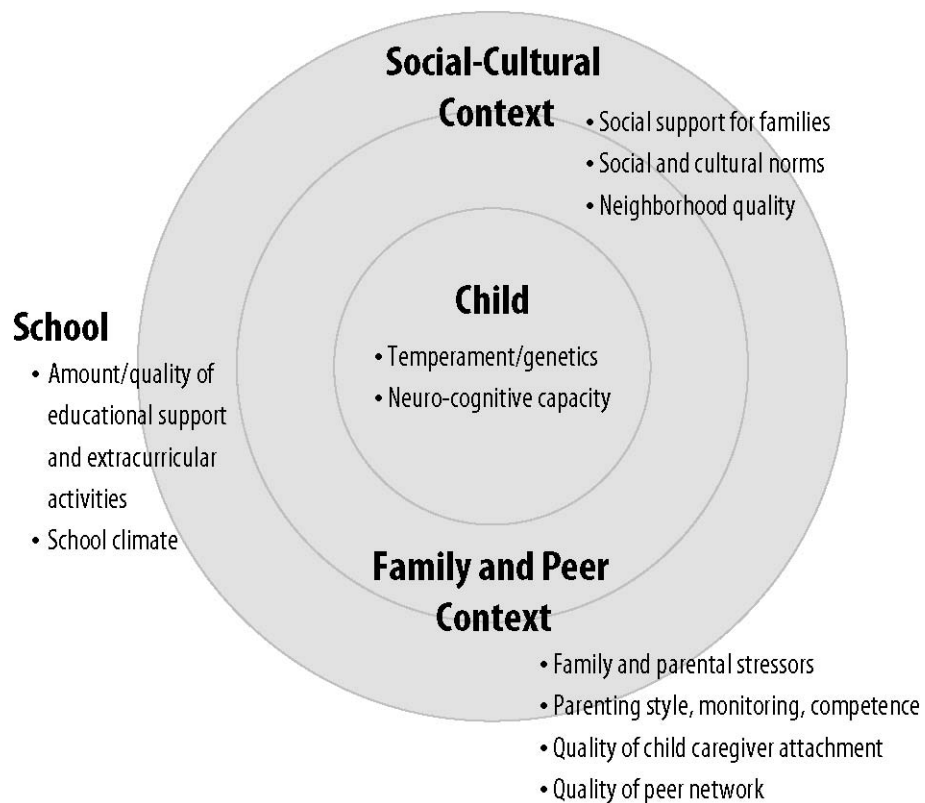


Figure 3. Connect as an Integrating Component of Systemic Programming

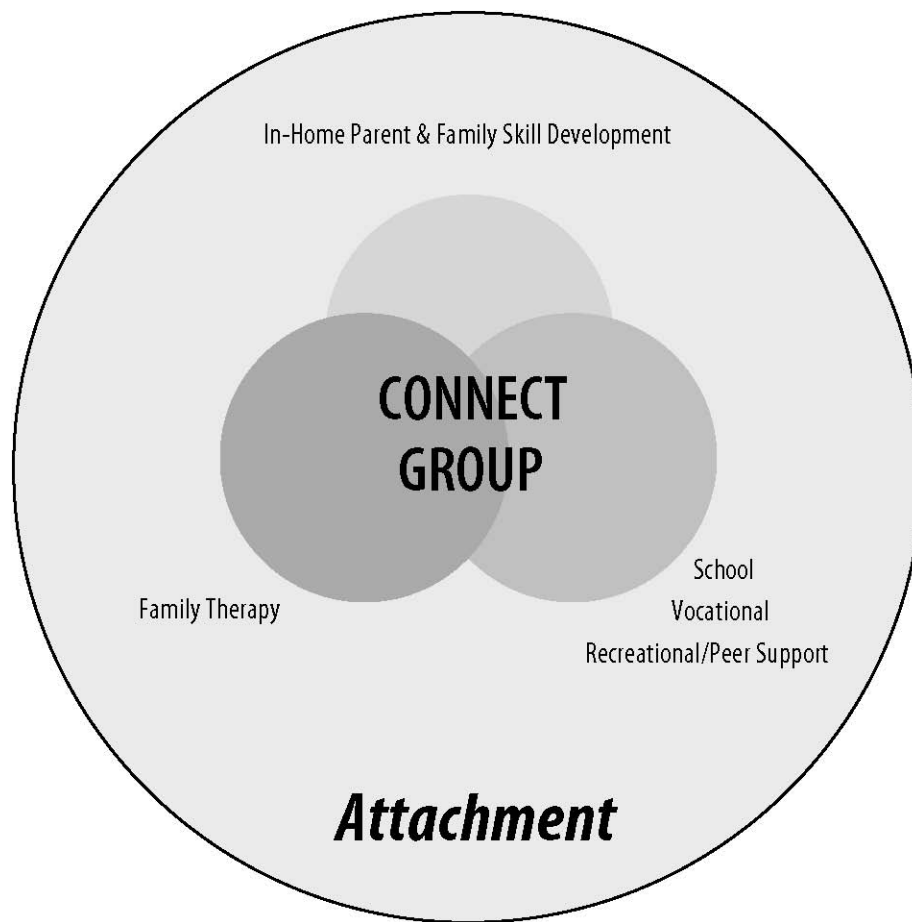


Table 1. Connect Parent Group Principles and Illustrative Goals

S	Title	Principle	Illustrative Goals & Skill Development Focus
	Information Session	Attachment and Your Child	- Provide information on the role of attachment in development and adolescence. - Provide overview of program and enhance motivation.
1	Understanding Behaviour Through Attachment	All behaviour has meaning.	- Enhance recognition of behaviour as a form of communication about attachment. - Develop skills in stepping back and considering alternate meanings of behaviour.
2	Attachment over the Lifespan	Attachment is for life.	- Enhance recognition that attachment needs continue throughout life but are expressed differently as children develop. - Develop skills in reframing children's behaviour in terms of their developmental level and attachment needs.
3	Conflict - An Opportunity for Understanding and Connection	Conflict is part of attachment.	- Enhance recognition and acceptance of conflict as a normative part of relationships, particularly during adolescence, that often communicates attachment needs. - Develop skills in regulating affect, maintaining connection and negotiating in the face of conflict.
4	Autonomy Includes Connection	Secure attachment: A balance between connection and independence.	- Enhance recognition and acceptance of adolescent strivings for autonomy but continued need for parental availability in support. - Develop skills in providing continued emotional support coupled with clear structure and expectations in response to adolescent behaviour.
5	Change - Understanding It and What It Takes	Growth involves moving forward while understanding the past.	- Enhance understanding of the impact of personal narratives on experiences in attachment relationships and the capacity to be open to new experience. - Develop skills in identifying the expectations and barriers parents carry regarding change in relationships with their children and enhance motivation to overcome these obstacles.
6	Empathy – The Heartbeat of Attachment	Understanding, growth & change begins with empathy.	- Enhance understanding of the role of empathy for children's and parents' experiences as essential to secure attachment. - Develop skills in empathic listening with others in conflict situations.
7	Balancing Connection and Independence	Relationships include being connected and independent: Maintaining balance is key.	- Enhance understanding that adolescence is a unique developmental period that involves expanding one's own sense of self, developing new relationships, and balancing these with existing attachments. - Develop skills in maintaining a partnership between parents and adolescents that nurtures their relationship and supports the expansion of attachment relationships in adolescents' lives.
8	Celebrating Attachment	Attachment brings joy and pain.	- Enhance understanding that attachment brings joy through celebration of connection with adolescents and pain through negotiation of conflict and change in the relationship. A focus on conflict and change can obscure opportunities for continued celebration of connection. - Develop skills in continuing to embrace opportunities for celebration of connection despite conflict and the importance of clarity and consistency in expectations for adolescent behaviour.
9	Two Steps Forward, One Step Back: Staying the Course	Attachment allows trusting the relationship even during turbulent times. Adversity is an opportunity for learning.	- Enhance understanding that change is not a straightforward process; setbacks occur and can undermine motivation (i.e., relapse recognition and prevention). - Develop skills in reframing 'setbacks' as opportunities for learning and growth rather than failures.
10	Feedback Session	The parent group is a tool-kit for continued work in relationships.	- Embrace parents as partners in development; encourage honest feedback. - Gather parent feedback to improve delivery of service.