



Structure and Nurture

Some of you were able to attend the Empowered to Connect Simulcast two weeks ago and we're so thankful you did. It was a time of refreshing, encouragement and getting new information and tools or reminding of things we already knew but had forgotten. When we receive this kind of information we may react in different ways: we may feel guilty or sad because we didn't know, we forgot or we didn't do what we knew we should have done or we may come out feeling encouraged for all the things we received and we can't wait to apply everything when we get home. There is a time for both, we can't feel sorry for the past too long because it's gone, we can learn from our mistakes and the new information and we can move forward one step at a time.

For those who were not able to make it, we will continue to share in small bites the information received so you can keep practicing one or two weeks at a time.

This time we want to focus on creating a structured environment. There should be a balance on affection/nurture and structure and we will focus on the former in future newsletters.

Having and keeping a structured environment helps provide safety for children who did not feel safe for what seemed like a long time for them.

Safety and predictability in relationships and environment for children from hard places, help reduce fear and promotes trust, development of healthy emotions and behaviors.

What are some ways we can provide structure for our children?

1- Establish a schedule and keep it as much as possible.

Make the day predictable as much as you can. Have routines or rituals for bed and or the morning. It may be: play time, dinner time, shower, pj's, story time and go to bed. You may even add a short foot or hand massage with some lotion for the smell and the healthy touch and that way they can associate it with bedtime.

2- Simplify your schedule.

Do you really need to do all you do right now? Do you have to participate in every single activity? Quality is very important and most times, when we're involved in too many activities we can't fully give our attention, affection and care to the ones who need it most.

3- Ensure smooth transitions.

On a daily basis: Let them know 15, 10 or 5 minutes in advance when you'll switch from one activity to the next. That will help them prepare and adjust for what's next. Some of these children may take a little longer processing information and we need to be mindful of that so we can be patient. For example: "Hey Lucía, in 15 minutes we're having dinner." "Hey sweetie in 5 minutes we're putting the toys away for dinner." And when time comes she should be more willing to do it because you've prepared her in advance. (If she doesn't cooperate remember the IDEAL response, we'll talk about that again in future newsletters :)).

For major transitions such as moving from one house to another or changing schools would be beneficial to talk about it months in advance if possible with your child. Making a Life Book with your child about their past and present could help him/her make sense of his/her story. Adding pictures, drawings, notes that they made or they had in their previous family or institution. Where did he come from, how did he become part of your family and when? who was part of his life? etc.

When the environment feels safe it promotes a space for exploration, love and growth. Remember that structure of the physical environment is just one of the necessary components for a child to feel safe. Our availability, willingness, affection and congruence in our words and actions will also have a great impact.

Our prayer for your family this week,

"The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you;
the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace."

Numbers 6:24-26

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