

## **Building Blocks of Relationship**

### **Use of Positive Touch:**

Touch is a powerful tool in creating relationship with children. Unfortunately, many children who have been exposed to trauma have been the victims of negative touch used to hurt, manipulate, over-power or degrade them. It is crucial that we help children to create new positive associations with touch. But this must be done at the child's pace and never in a way that is coercive, threatening or leaves the child feeling tricked or confused.

Put arm around shoulder/ side hug	"Sculpt" each other into statues
Hug	Play Tag
Pat on Back	Hand Clapping game
High Five	Take care of "hurts" – put band-aids on all injuries visible and not visible
Shake hands	Outline child on paper
Secret handshake	Dig in sand together
Art projects – paints, clay	Circle activity (human knot)

### **Non-physical Affection:**

There are countless ways to connect with a child in a way that increased positive relationship that do not involve touch and can be much less threatening to a child who has experienced trauma. A few have been listed below.

Thumbs up	Smile
Wink	Wave
Call/ text/ email/ to check in when not together	Put positive and encouraging note in place where they will find it later
Provide a sensory intervention	Give / share food
Acknowledge a feeling : "You seem sad"	Recognize an important event
Provide an opportunity for a break	Provide safety
Asking open ended questions (question that cannot be answered in simply "yes"/ "no")	Sharing an "inside joke" or special signal that connects you
Play a game with them	Provide opportunity for non face to face conversations – car ride, fishing, walking etc.
Tell them you believe in them; give them hope	Notice when they are not there and tell them next time you see them

## **Effective Praise:**

We can also increase our connection to children through using effective praise. “Nice job” is great but tends to lose meaning when overused. Please note that some children who have been exposed to trauma may have difficulty accepting praise if it is out of the norm for them. Here are some tips for creative ways to effectively praise children to encourage positive behavior and strengthen relationships.

1. Acknowledge and encourage with specific examples highlighting the child’s efforts. Relate effort to outcome when possible.

*“You worked so hard to learn those words and now you are able to read the whole story”*

*“You kept on trying, even when it got tough”*

2. Value for “being” not just for “doing” - Show interest and acceptance that is not dependent on performance but on child’s innate value as a human being

*“Daniel, I am glad you are my friend/son/student”*

*“ Oh good, Julie is here!”*

3. Positive Body Language: Stand as close as is comfortable for both of you, make eye contact on their level, smile, use a pleasant tone of voice.

4. Report your observations:

- a. Positive observations:

*I noticed that you shared your pencil with Tommy. I am sure that he appreciated that.*

*Your group took time to work out a solution that seemed to work well.*

- b. Constructive observations:

*You cleaned up the toys without being asked.*

*You listened without interrupting*

5. Reserve excessive praise for outstanding effort. If everything is amazing, nothing is!