

## How to use the CONNECTION KIT:

The Connection Kit will be a box of little activities and fun that you can have with your kids at anytime to reestablish connection or to foster connection or as a set playdate with your child. This is also a great gift that you can give to a parent of toddlers, preschoolers, preteens, or teens if they are in need of a boost of enjoying their kids again, or a great gift to make for parents that are becoming foster or adoptive parents. Read all of the summaries about each activity and then print out the Activity Cards on card stock or you can paste them onto index cards. Pick out the activity cards you would work best with your kid(s) and then gather the materials for those activities and put them in a box with the corresponding cards.

The Connection Kit is for fun and relaxed play. It's only goal is connection. It isn't a time of teaching and correcting. Make up new ways to use the materials that suit your family and each particular child. Often when parents and kids feel out of sync with each other, or if they are just learning to trust each other, there can be lots of power struggles, and lots of guilt on the parents side to correct and help your child move in the right direction. This isn't that time. This is a time for you to let them feel completely unjudged, a time for you to bumble a little bit (really... pretend like you aren't good at what the thing is or be really silly about it), it is a time for you to delight in your child. Some of these activities are in fact teaching tools, some work on good touch, some on eye contact, some on asking permission. The lesson or skill that it teaches though is just a bonus of the time together, not the goal. The number 1 goal is connection.

## How to Introduce the kit:

You know your kids best. If showing them the box will make them want to see and touch everything and try it all out right now, just talk about it and keep it in a safe high spot. Tell them it is a kit of activities to do together and have fun. Determine before hand how often you will want to do it and for how long, if your kids need that structure. You might say we will do it every Wednesday for "child 1" for ten minutes and every Friday for "Child 2" for ten minutes. And then you can bring it out at other times when you see that someone is struggling. It's good to have a set time so that if they ask for it you can tell them we only have 2 more days and then it's fun time.

If that is too much, I would just make the kit and bring out activities from it when ever you want. It would be like a box of fun or a list of fun activities to do. Still keep the kit up high and away, or little curious minds will want to see where you keep getting all of the fun things. It might take trial and error to figure out what works best for your family. Sibling dynamics can be a struggle with special time with a parent, some of the activites can be used for more than one kid at a time, but try to use some of them one on one, especially with the kids that can struggle the most with regulation, or anger, or participating in family activities. We have four kids and this is a problem when we do special time. Our youngest gets so jealous of the other kids when it's their turn. We often do some of it when he is a sleep. It's a good idea to practice this connection kit time when everyone is in a good mood. When the first kid goes tell the other child that they can color or play legos or anything they can do independently in the next room so you can see them and then they get their turn. It's important to get them good at this because sometimes it's good to bust out the Connection Kit when things are starting to get a little disregulated and for it to work you need everyone capable of waiting their turn. It's something fun they will like to practice. You can call it the Fun Drill.

Read through the activities and make note of the ones you like and write down the materials you will need. Print out the cards that explain each game and activity and put them all in a box. (Remember you might not want all of the activities, just what you think will work with your family.) We put ours in a shoe-sized plastic bin from the dollar store. When things are used up or if things aren't as big of a hit, switch them up with the other activities on the list. Note, some activities you should set a timer and let the kids know when it will end, it can be hard to stop doing something fun. An extra bonus if there is something fun afterwards, like you give them a piggy back ride to put the stuff away, or it's time to go outside, or it's finally their screen time. They may need to ease out of the fun. If you don't have that much time, have an activity the child can do afterwards in mind. We use audiobooks often after fun, it calms them down and it's still enjoyable (if they have practiced and learned to like them). If not, coloring or having a snack can be good. Please don't be discouraged if they have a little fit when it's time to stop, that will lessen with practice and it shows how much they crave this type of attention. Be calm and offer a hug and to sit with them for a bit. Next time you do an activity warn before hand.. "It will be hard to stop, we will set a timer and then I'll bounce you on my knee for a minute when it's over" or something else. Give them a plan. This time is about connecting, so if there is sadness afterwards it gives you a chance to comfort.

Activities with an \*o can be good for older kids and ones with an \*e are activities that everyone can do at once if needed.

## Activities:

**Bubble Gum** - \*o\*e Keep really chewy bubble gum in the kit. Always make sure that you have at least one per person. Take it out and say it's bubble time. If the kids are young, you guys can cut it up into pieces and teach them how to chew it and then spit it out into a container, this is lots of fun. If older you can teach them how to blow bubbles. Google how to blow bubbles and try to learn. Just watching youtube together and laughing can be connecting.

**Materials:** Lots and Lots of gum and something to spit into

**Mirror Game** - Sit facing your child and tell them they are your mirror so they look at you and if you move your arm then they move their arm to match. Be silly with it. After they get the idea you tell them now you are the mirror and they get to be the leader and do what ever they do. It is a great opportunity to make emotion faces and movements and then label them so that the kids can see and feel that and maybe even label those feelings later on. If you have a child that is a bit older, and wouldn't play that game you can play mirror drawing. You get two pieces of paper and two of the exact same color pens, markers or crayons and have them draw and then you try to draw it like they are. If you are an awesome artist, the goal is to make it look like theirs not really awesome. (ie. if they are drawing a house, don't give suggestions on what to add or make yours have a balcony, just try to make yours like theirs, they will feel complemented.)

**Materials:** Paper and matching drawing utensils

**Puppets or small action figures** - These are great, especially if your kid hasn't seen them in a while. I keep lots of little toys from over the years in a big bin... think happy meal toys, things from a pinata, party favors, and I take them out for novelty. These are great to act out something that might happen or a pretend story. Depending on your child's ability you might have to make it funny or a great adventure, but they will catch on. Some children that come from hard places struggle with pretend play so you might really have to take the lead and show them specifics, like "lets play school with them, yours can be the teacher".. etc.

**Materials:** Small action figures or puppets, change up every now and then

**The Clothes Pin game** - \*o\*e You just need a regular wooden clothes pin and the goal is to start a sneaky spy game. First teach your kids how it works. The parent will quietly and hopefully sneakily clip the clothespin to your clothes. If you catch them the parent has to say "You are the best spy ever!" Then the kid gets the clothespin and can clip it on to anyone in the house at any time, it doesn't have to be right away. This continues, anyone that finds the person clipping it will hear "You are the best spy ever!" and then they get to be the clipper. If the person doesn't notice they will get to clip it on to someone else when they finally notice it. This is fun to play over a couple of days and is really fun if you have a few people in the house to play. If you notice a kid being sad that the person caught them clipping it on, encourage everyone to say we are all spies training each other and ask another kid to give them the "hint" to clip it on to you and make sure you don't "notice" them clipping it on. This isn't as much of a connecting activity for you and your kid as it is a whole family connecting game. It gives your family something unique and a memory that reminds them that your family plays together. it may even be something they bring into their family when they are older.

**Materials:** Clothes pin

**Silly string** - \*o\*e This is another activity that can be a whole family bonding game or played with just you and one child. I watched a video about TBRI practioners (Counselors) do this with teenagers that were in a group home. It was amazing seeing the kids empowered and seeing them have fun and allow others into their space, and stretch their comfortability level. Full disclosure, we do this with our kids several times a year; it's a crowd pleaser from kindergarten to high schooler. We even started a tradition of doing it on Easter after we take a picture in our nice clothes. You know your kids, my son that is sensory avoidant doesn't like to get sprayed, so the rule is we can't spray him, but he can only spray on those that let him. The parents and the big sisters always let him, big brother only rarely. Also if your kids are young get an extra can so everyone can practice spraying, it can sometimes be difficult for those with fine motor skill delays. Practicing helps. If a child can't do it you can work with them and they can pick where to spray it. After we've practiced, I say we are going to silly string each other (don't hand out the silly string yet!), but you have to ask permission first before you spray someone. Then have them practice, "Mom, can I silly string you?" and I reply "Yes go for it." The first time we played they asked every time before they shot, which is like the video I watched, now they just ask before I even hand out the spray and then just go at it, knowing they can't get the littlest brother. You can always find the cans at the dollar store or amazon, again get extra because sometimes one jams up.

**Materials:** Silly String container for everyone

**Funny yoga cards** - \*o\*e This is a fun group connecting activity. It's fun to have the whole family do it or you and your child try yoga together. It is always a mood lifter to do exercise and many kids from hard places benefit from yoga. If you type "Kids yoga" into google videos will come up from Cosmic kids, those are the ones we do. But you can also print out a yoga page or card and keep it in your Connection Kit and do them from the pictures. There is a free printable at <https://wyqualitycounts.org/animal-yoga-for-kids/> which you can keep in your kit. We did this a lot during the pandemic and we had a lot of fun where one kid would make up an exercise routine for about a minute and video tape it and then we would play the video on the computer and we would all do it together with them as the instructor. It was a crowd pleaser and if every kid made one it was an activity that took up about 30 minutes after we planned, video taped, and then exercised.

**Materials:** Printable Yoga Cards

**The Sticker Game (Eyes):** In this activity you are trying to promote healthy eye contact. We want our kids to be able to look into our eyes and see our love for them. Sometimes kids are taught to not look into someone's eyes and/or it is too scary for them. We want them to feel safe with us. Take a whole bunch of little stickers and start putting them all over you. On your arms, and then on your face and then get them close to your eyes (as you will get some eye contact). Then give your child the stickers and let them do the same. Please check out the website <https://www.thechaosandtheclutter.com/archives/12-activities-to-promote-eye-contact> for even more ideas.

**Materials:** lots of little stickers

**Weather or Alphabet Game:** This is a game to promote healthy touch. Kids need healthy loving touch to feel connected, but some kids or parents don't like hugs or snuggling or piggy back rides. In the weather game, your child sits in front of you with their back to you. Draw "weather" on their back. That might mean soft swishy rubbing for windy or the picture of a sun for sunny or light pouds for thunder. It can be anything, and as you are doing it you give the weather report in a weather reporter voice. Today it looks like there is lots of wind and rain and you give lots of finger moves on their back, but it looks like this afternoon there will be sunshine. And then do a movement for that. Etc. They just get to sit there and giggle while you do it and then they can do it to you. You can also play the alphabet game where you draw a letter on their back and they have to guess what it is. You can even do it with spelling words as a fun way to practice.

**The Sticker Game (Touch):** In this game you take the little stickers and give half to your kid and say we are going to sticker up. You put a sticker on me and I'll try to put it on you in the same spot. It is silly and fun and we both end up covered in stickers and there was lots of funny stilly touch the whole time.

**Materials:** lots of little stickers

**Matchbox Car Fun:** This is also to promote healthy touch. Have your child laydown and take a matchbox car and drive it over them. You make up a story as the car travels around them to different parts of the land (them). For example you can drive it on their legs and say the family is going on a trip to leg land to see their Aunt Linda or they are driving on head highway. I have even seen people take an old white t shirt and sharpies and draw roads and houses and a map on the back of it and drive the car on it. They can do it to you or you to them. Please be sensitive with this activity, if your child has had any abuse this activity may be triggering. Start with the alphabet game.

**Materials:** Match box car, T-shirt, permanent markers

**Massage/Nail Polish:** \*o Your teen might not be up for the weather game, but they still need healthy touch. You can have a small bottle of good smelling lotion and give hand massages if they will be okay with it. You could also give them a manicure or let them give you one.

**Materials:** lotion/nail polish

**Hair Time:** \*o Doing hair is a great way to get healthy touch. Let your child do your hair and then also do theirs. If they are older talk about new hair styles and techniques and try them out on each other. Even if it doesn't look great it's fun to practice. You can also dye hair with semi permanent dye or spray or even dye that comes in a Hair Coloring Dye wax. It will be a fun thing for them to express their identity as well as give lots of healthy touch. They will be empowered to do it to you!

**Materials:** hair brush, hair dye wax

**Small Photo Album :** \*o Our house is full of scrapbooks and they are all in the family room on the shelf displayed and easily grabable. I find them often on the couch randomly. Our kids love to look at them weekly. Its fun to get a \$1 store 4x6 album and fill it with pictures for your kid to look at when you want to connect. You can make them baby pictures of your kid, pictures of them doing activities they like, or even pictures of different family members. The goal is to look through it together and talk about it. It helps kids feel grounded and part of the family. This is great to do one on one. You can also just have them sit on your lap and go through pictures on the ipad or on the computer.

**Materials:** Small photo album, 4x6 pictures

**Ticket for Fun:** \*o This is a really great connector, but may not be as fun for you. This would be a time where you truly just enjoy that your kid is enjoying themselves. At the end of the PDF is a printable ticket of fun. You can fill it in with your kid's favorite activity or hobby. (ie. 10 minutes of Beyblading, 10 minutes of playing the Switch together, 10 minutes of listening to your favorite music.) This really is a time when you are showing your kid that their interest is important and that you love when they are happy. So often we have to limit some of these activities because of too much screen time, or our general dislike of it, but it is a connecting activity when you put that aside and just enjoy it because they do.

**Materials:** Printable ticket

**Crafts:** o\*I have 3 kids that absolutely love crafts and I that would rather have a tooth pulled than do crafts. So don't add this unless you think your child will like it. I love the website HelloWonderful.co (not .com) and they have so many crafts under create that are for all different ages and often use household items. You can also get a craft kit from the dollar store. We love shrinky dinks and the rainbow catcherers. Get all of the supplies together and put them in a bag so you are all set and you don't have to waste time finding things when you want to connect.

**Materials:** a craft in bag

**Pillow or Snowball Fight:** \*o\*e Sometimes kids need to blow off steam in a safe way so they don't do it in a destructive way. If they can get out their energy in fun positive ways when it builds up everyone has a better day. We have a snowball kit (you can get them on amazon or oriental trading company), but you can just use clean socks or even scrunched up paper. It might be a fun tradition to have everyone help match socks when doing the laundry and then have a sock ball fight at the end. You can just grab some pillows and start playing. I set a ground rule that everyone has to be smiling and if someone isn't we stop and help them feel better and then start again. I like to be the one that ends up losing and getting pummeled (they win), but my husband is so good at moving out of the way and doing sneak attacks and they like that too. They like getting all worked up. Then we get to practice how to calm ourselves down. Sometimes we listen to music or go for a walk.

**Materials:** snowballs, socks, pillows, or scrunched up pieces of paper, waterballoons if hot out

**Flashlight:** \*o\*e This is great to take out and offer to read to your child under the blankets or in a fort. It's novel and you get to cuddle close and they feel like they are in a secret club.

**Materials:** flashlight, blankets

**Twin Markings:** \*o\*e A great connecting activity is matching. You can just choose to match in clothes or hats or some little accessory or you can get some ink. Temporary tattoos are great and you can get matching ones for you and your kids. My daughters and I do Dwell and all wear the same matching tattoo for a week while we practice our verses. We have also used henna. Michael's sells it and with the 40% off coupon it's about \$7 and can last for about 4-5 tattoos. We always get the jaguar henna which is darker so it shows up on our variety of skin colors. This is another opportunity to make something matching or even henna their name in a heart on your arm, they really will love it. This is healthy touch as well, win win.

**Materials:** henna kit or temporary tatoos

**Box of Baking Mix:** \*o\*e This is always a crowd pleaser in our house because if you help make a treat you can have it when it's done baking, even if it isn't after a meal with vegetables (our dessert rule). We always have a box of something on hand usually brownie mix or muffin mix because they don't require icing which would be another item. The kids take turns mixing, spraying the pan, licking spoons, so much spoon licking and I take pictures and then we set the timer. It's a great time to get to play together or independently because it is a set time. They have to go off for 30 minutes and comeback together for a tasty treat. Really it makes everyone happy. You can also clean while it's cooking which is a great thing to practice.

**Materials:** Box of baking mix and eggs and oil (depending on what you are making, make sure you have these items before you choose this from the connection kit).

**Cotton Ball Race** - \*o\*e You have cotton balls and straws. The object is to blow the cotton ball with the straw. It can be played in lots of ways. You and your child can each have a straw and put the cotton ball in the middle of the table and one is trying to blow it off one side and one wants to blow it off the other end. If being in a competition is a trigger for you and your child, work collaboratively to both blow the cotton ball off one side together. You can also use tape to make a "track" and try to blow the cotton ball through the track. We like to use tape to make squares that we call "goals" and we try to get 1 or several cotton balls into the goals to a certain number.

**Materials:** cotton balls, straws, tape

**Deck of Cards:** \*o\*e Again you know your child, and if they are too competitive this might not be a connecting activity. But if you think they will enjoy it, play a card game with them. You can play match with the cards and work together to try and find all of the matches. You can google kids card games and try a new one together each time. If possible let them catch on how to play before you do. You can also let them make up their own card game and then have them teach you the rules and just go along with however silly or wrong it is. You can also use the cards to build a house with. Have it fall a lot. A whole lot, especially when you are first getting it together. And then say something silly like "snaglefrazzle" and keep building. Disappointment is hard for all kids, but especially kids with trauma so whenever you can have low stakes practicing of disappointment is great!

**Materials:** deck of cards

**Miniboard games:** \*o Get a mini connect four or battleship and you can sit across from eachother or on the floor on your bellies (which is a great therapy position) and play. It causes lots of back and forth waiting and talking and eye contact.

**Materials:** Minigame

**Luxury bath:** \*o Sometimes your kid will come home and snap at everything. They might tell you why they are out of sorts or you can just guess about a kid being mean to them at school or a bad grade, or just something else hurt them. You can go up to them and say "When I'm feeling upset I love a nice long hot bath." You can get the bath all set with a bath bomb, or bubbles, or bath salts (epsom salt is great to clear out toxins). You can play music outside the bathroom and you can have a towel rolled up for them to lean back on. You can have bath crayons available if they are little and maybe even candles for older kids if you feel it's safe. Try to make it super special, above and beyond and give them all the time they need in the bath. It will really help in resetting their mood, and help them feel taken care of.

**Materials:** Bath bomb, bath salts, mask, bath crayons, candles, good smelling lotion, towel, and any special bath products

**Band-aids:** \*e Keep a set of fun band-aids in the box. They can get expensive so you can get a huge box of regular band-aids and use permanent markers to draw on them. Take out the band-aids and tell your kid about how you were hurt once as a kid and say sometimes you still think about it and ask if they will put a band-aid on your elbow or heart where ever the hurt is. Then ask your kid if they have a hurt they think about sometimes and where they think it still hurts. It could be a mean word and it hurt their head, or being left out and it hurt their heart, or it can be a real hurt, like when they broke their leg, but they still think about it. Then ask if you can put a band-aid on in that spot. Then ask if they want to talk about more hurts and put band-aids on each one. This is helping your child learn to give and receive care. Sometimes we use band-aids in a sibling squabble. The person that did the hurting might feel shame, so this can be hard, but you can use words like "You were mad and then you used mean words toward child 2." Can you help them feel better by putting a band-aid on their hand? (or anywhere, heart might be too hard at first.) Then turn to the kid that did the hurting and saying, I think you were mad because.... and that hurts too, would you like a band-aid? It will do a lot to help make them feel seen.

**Materials:** Band-aids, oh so many band-aids

**Novelty Item:** This is a fun surprise. I often pick up cool things at the dollar store, things I know my kid would like and I'll wrap one up and keep it in the Connection Kit. Then if you need a little something to get some interaction or a little pick me up you can take the item out and you have an activity. Little things that move are really good for this. Then you can move them towards each other back and forth. We've done Hex bugs before and wind up toys. Silly but fun.

**Materials:** Novelty Item, wrapping paper

**Teach me something:** \*o This doesn't necessarily need any materials. If your kid is in a good mood and you want to have some connecting time, ask them to teach you how to do something. It might be a couple of notes on their instrument, how to do something on their video game, how to bake something, how to draw something, something athletic, or something on the phone. Make sure that you ask with pleases and be a great student. This is very empowering for kids and they will really enjoy being the ones to take charge.

**Video Time:** \*o\*e We have enough videos on our computer that we could be Youtube. My kids are dramatic... SO DRAMATIC. They love acting things out, making pretend youtube stations, singing, and even actual plays, if you have an iphone or ipad you will have Imovie and there are trailers that you can make on there, they are so cool. Suggest to your kid that the two of you make a video together. It can be silly or super serious, but make it fun. Make sure you are okay with them posting it if they are older and make sure that you are okay with not posting it if they don't want to, even if it's so adorable! Respect them on the internet and they will respect themselves.

**Materials:** Smart phone or tablet

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