

# WELL-BEING SNAPSHOTS K-7

## CONNECTING AT EVERY AGE & STAGE

When our mental health is challenged in some way, the greatest insulation is found in our relationships. Our ability to connect with our kids effectively are impacted by two key factors:

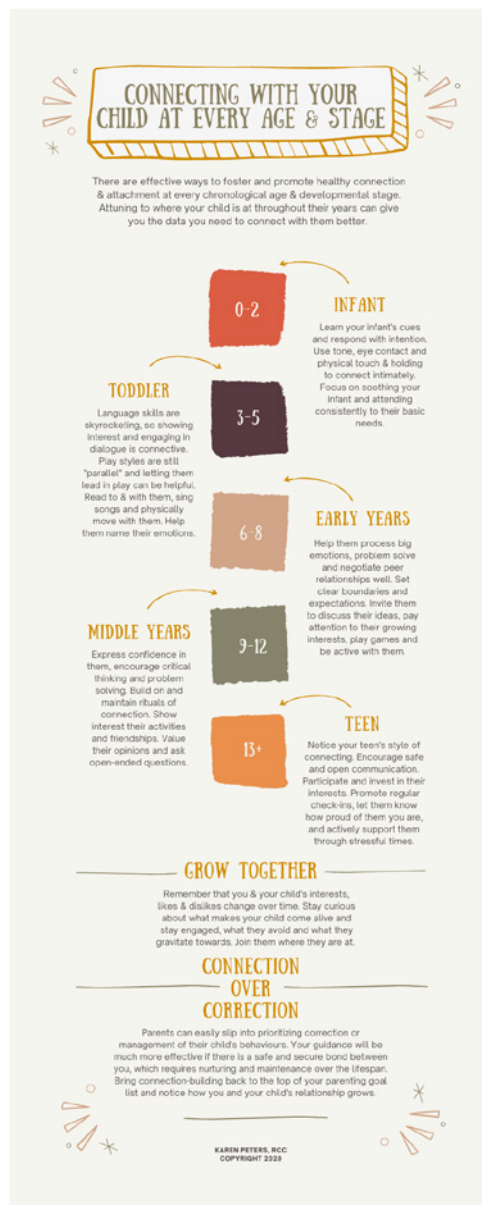
1. *How available we are as parents.* I don't just mean how much time we're around, but also how emotionally available we are to our kids at each age and stage of their development. Our own ability to be available can depend on a number of variables such as accurately reading our child's needs, being influenced by how we were raised, financial/workload pressures, struggles with our own mental health, access to resources and supports, and other competing priorities.
2. *How available our kids are for connecting.* If your child faces mental health or other health challenges, they struggle significantly in their social development. They live in their "fight/flight/freeze" reactive states, making their minds and bodies preoccupied with survival. These states don't allow our kids to be available for secure connection, play, and strong social engagement. Perhaps there are lags in their ability to empathize, recognize social cues, or signs of emotion in others. If those areas of development are delayed, connection can feel difficult.

Fostering strong connections happens over time and it's never too early or too late to begin. You don't just build a connection, you also need to maintain it as your child grows up.

Start by taking a curious stance. Do they socialize in new ways, has there been a shift in their friend group, or have they grown tired or unmotivated in particular activities? The more you take the perspective that your child is ever changing and there's always something new to discover about who they are becoming, the more opportunities you have to grow alongside them and connect with them in meaningful ways.

Next, consider ways of inviting or joining them. How can you demonstrate interest in who they are or what they are "into," and how can you participate in some of those things? Ask open ended questions to dive deeper in knowing their thoughts, ideas, and experiences. Be supportive and validating of their feelings and highlight their strengths. Intentionally create bonding traditions – rituals of connection you can both lean into throughout the years. Meet them where they are at socially, emotionally, and physically. You are never too young or too old to engage in play, and playing together is a powerful tool for building and sustaining connection.

Challenge yourselves to actively connect or reconnect with your child today – it happens one moment at a time. ●



### RESOURCE LINKS:

[Parenting in the Trenches Podcast episode S1.E2 FamilySmart: Conversations about Mental Health](#)  
[FamilySmart: How to connect at every age and stage handout](#)