



**NATP**  
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION  
OF THERAPEUTIC PARENTS



*Centre of Excellence in*  
**CHILD TRAUMA**

**Belong, believe, behave**

Sarah Dillon Therapeutic Lead NATP ©

Help them to belong:

1. Give them a small job in the house that no one else can do as well as them such as wiping doors, setting the table or tidying cushions. Set up a situation where someone else offers to do the job in earshot of the child. Be aghast when you turn them down, stating that it's your child's job and his/her important role in this family.
2. Tell them that you'll miss them when they go to school etc.
3. Give them a photograph of you to take with them when away from you. Tell them it's because you miss them and would like them to have the photo as you hope they'll find a moment to think of you. Trust me this works! (Most of the time) It also gives them some control over the attachment process. Rather than giving it to them so they feel better if they miss us, it's about us missing them!
4. Put a photograph of the child on your key ring and tell them it's so they're with you all the time.
5. Notes in sandwich boxes, pockets etc. to remind them you're thinking of them.
6. Be happy to see them (even if you have to fake it to make it) 😊
7. Ask them to do you a favour by helping you with something, cooking, carrying shopping in from car etc. Thank them for their kindness or causally remark that you don't know what you'd do without them at times.
8. If they are fostered and demand you call their social worker as they want to leave. Act as though you're shocked, say you can't imagine what the family would be like without them not to mention their 'special' job/role in the home. Who will do it? Ask them (with a very sad face), if they'll wait a few hours to think about it. Let your voice quiver slightly then tell them you're putting the kettle on.

Then they start to believe:

1. They have a purpose
2. They are good at something, can achieve something no one else in the family can do as well as them
3. They are missed
4. They are needed
5. The family wouldn't be the same without them
6. Someone cares
7. You wouldn't find it easy if they left. You don't actually want them to leave even if they choose to do so
8. They can have a positive impact on the world

9. They are not rejected
10. They are not a burden or a charity case (not my words but the words of a child I know)
11. You wanted them. You're not just another placement! (Grrrr I hate that word with a vengeance)
12. They matter!

Then they learn how to behave:

1. They begin to trust you'll meet their unmet needs
2. You become their regulatory figure
3. Their Unassailable safe base
4. Life becomes predictable
5. They are no longer as frightened
6. They know they can stay or will be missed if they have to go
7. They develop object permanence (they know you're still there even if they can't see you)
8. The negative internal working model is challenged and begins to alter
9. Shame based behaviours reduce
10. They are less likely to recreate trauma-based ways of relating in your family
11. They begin to access you for comfort and co-regulation

NB: This is not about guilt trips, getting them to meet our own needs or denying their autonomy. These are tried and tested strategies which I have personally been on the receiving end of and have recommended to hundreds of families. They have and continue to produce outstanding results. They work because they build the bonds of attachment by communicating the child's importance to us opposed to how important we think we are to them or our expectations of them. It meets them in the broken place deep within, the lonely empty pit in their soul that screams that they are bad, worthless and unloveable. We need to be careful not to 'overdo' it as they are likely to sabotage but when they do, it gives us a wonderful opportunity to 'name the need'. To help them to see that perhaps they don't feel they deserve to belong, be loved, receive care etc. To help them to develop an alternative narrative about themselves. To believe that they matter and are important/special to someone.