

SHOWING NURTURANCE, EVEN WHEN CHILDREN APPEAR TO BE INDEPENDENT

In many ways we want to encourage our children to explore and feel safe doing so. Little children will move away from you for a short time, but return to check out that you are still there and emotionally available. This is a form of independence that is helpful.

Sometimes children will seem reluctant to go to a parent or caregiver for comfort when they are upset. They might appear as though they are being “independent”. But in fact, they may be wanting contact with their carer but don’t know how to express this. All children need to be cared for and loved when they are upset, and even more so if they have experienced trauma.

Such situations can be really challenging for caregivers. A child who is upset may move away as you move towards them to comfort them. You may feel rejected or perhaps just not needed. What their carers need to do is work out if the child who is spending time on their own is clearly engaged in an activity and seems happy. If so, they are probably just exploring their world. But if they are on their own and not engaged in an activity, they may be feeling a bit lost and wanting some contact without knowing how to express that.

It is easy to see how a pattern can be set up where you end up feeling unwanted as a caregiver and you think that your child is fine without you. So the child stops turning to you so much for emotional support.

HAS THIS HAPPENED TO YOU?

CAN YOU DESCRIBE HOW THIS MADE YOU FEEL: Finding the right words for such difficult situations is tough. Be kind to yourself – maybe come back to this idea again and try to find more words to describe this situation.

WHAT YOU CAN YOU DO

STAY CLOSE: Even though your upset child may appear to not want you, we know that children can experience stress inside and you being present in a quiet and calm way really helps.

MOVE CLOSER WHEN THEY APPEAR TO BE SLIGHTLY LESS UPSET: Just calmly and quietly move a little closer – your voice will help them if you keep it soft and say gentle, kind words.

WHEN THEY ARE READY TOUCH THEM: Just a gentle touch – perhaps a stroke of their arm or a pat on the back. Together with gentle kind words will help them feel loved and safe.

THE MORE YOU ARE ABLE TO DO THIS THE MORE SAFE YOUR CHILD WILL FEEL: This may take time and it will be difficult to always be calm. Think through some of the exercises in Module 4 that can help you here.