

## Supporting Attachment and Authenticity in Children

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### **Supporting Attachment & Authenticity in Children**

Parenting and grandparenting for both attachment and authenticity isn't about choosing one over the other — it's about creating safety **and** space at the same time. Attachment gives your child security; authenticity gives them identity. When both are supported, your child feels, "I belong" and "I can be myself." Let's explore how fostering both can be built into our daily routine.

**1. Build connection first:** Children thrive when caregivers are consistently responsive and emotionally available. This means noticing feelings, responding with warmth, and repairing after conflict. When a child feels safe, they don't have to sacrifice themselves to keep your love. They internalize: *Even when I mess up or disagree, I'm still connected.*

**2. Separate behavior from identity:** To protect authenticity, correct actions without shaming the child's character. Instead of "You're rude," try "That comment hurt your sister — let's try again." This teaches accountability without implying

their core self is flawed. When children feel their worth isn't conditional on performance or agreement, they're more likely to express their real thoughts and preferences.

**3. Model and teach "Like Yourself First":** The best way to teach through parenting is to model that same behavior to which we aspire. We cannot preach what we don't practice. Notice your language and actions about who you are and how you show up. Suppose your child asks, "Do you think my teacher will like my shirt today?" Remind him/her that it was most important that they like her own shirt. Other people's opinions of us cannot help to build or shatter our own opinions of ourselves.

**4. Don't force them:** This can be challenging, especially when you know what needs to be done. Share your request, let them know the consequences, and then let your child decide what they will follow through on. This advice applies to situations like not wanting to eat what's for lunch or wanting a cookie just before dinner. It might look like this (depending on the age of the child), "I see that you are upset that I said no to having a cookie. We will eat soon and there are some carrots for now and we can have a cookie after dinner." (This obviously does not apply to immediate physical safety concerns, like a toddler running into the road.)

**5. Encourage emotional literacy:** Help them name what they feel — even feelings that are inconvenient for you. "You're angry I said no," validates experience without giving in. When children learn that their inner world matters, they don't need to distort it to stay connected. Emotional validation strengthens attachment while reinforcing authenticity. There are some great charts that can help kids and adults identify emotions and feelings.

[www.amazon.com/Teacher-Created-Resources-Colorful-](http://www.amazon.com/Teacher-Created-Resources-Colorful-Emotions/dp/B09B231SQC)

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[www.amazon.com/Feelings-Therapy-Diameter-Emotion-Upgrade/dp/B0DR362TP2](http://www.amazon.com/Feelings-Therapy-Diameter-Emotion-Upgrade/dp/B0DR362TP2)

**6. Listen, don't argue:** If you argue with your child, you give power to their position. You engage in stubbornness, which will just take you through a stressful experience. Listen to what your child has to say, without defending or refuting. *This is also good advice for spouses and friends.*

**7. Welcome differences — don't personalize them:** Authenticity grows when kids can safely disagree. If your child has different interests, beliefs, or emotional

reactions than you, treat that as development, not defiance. You might say, “I see it differently, but I’m glad you told me.” This protects attachment while signaling that individuality won’t threaten the relationship. The message becomes: *We can stay close even when we’re not the same.*

**8. Give them options:** Stubbornness often arises in times of life when children are developing more autonomy. They need choices. They need to know they have power to act in their own lives. So, give them the chance to choose. The choices can even be narrow, depending on the situation: “You can do this in 5 minutes or 10, which one do you prefer?”

**9. Model authenticity yourself.**

Children learn more from observation than instruction. If you admit mistakes, express your feelings appropriately, and set boundaries respectfully, you show them that being real and being loving are not opposites. You demonstrate that connection does not require losing oneself.

In short:

- Attachment says, “*You are safe with me.*”
- Authenticity says, “*You are allowed to be you.*”

The sweet spot in parenting and grandparenting is communicating both, repeatedly. When a child trusts that love is steady, they’re free to grow into who they truly are — and they won’t have to choose between belonging and being themselves.

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