FAMILY GUIDE FOR BUILDING CONNECTION

Brain Blossom PROGRAM™

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Brain Blossom Guide to help you build connection with the avoidant child! This guide aims to help parents understand and support their children who often fly under the radar due to their avoidant and disconnected behaviors. These children are frequently misinterpreted as rude, lazy, or defiant. By addressing the underlying neurological and developmental challenges rather than labeling them as behavioral problems, parents can work collaborative with their providers to create a safe and supportive environment for these children.

Signs you may have an avoidant or disconnected child

- They may often be considered “rude” or “lazy” for not engaging in social settings.
- They may often struggle to exhibit appropriate manners with adults outside of the family in social environments.
- They need to be consistently told to “look at the person in the eyes” and say please and thank you.

This presentation is often misunderstood, especially in the teenage years, as the avoidant or stress response behavior is frequently mistaken for mere defiance. However, it can commonly be more than just defiance. In this guide, we will help define some big ideas to consider and develop a “watch and wonder lens” for you as the parent and some connection strategies you can start using immediately. We will discuss the benefits of finding a “whole child approach” chiropractic provider. This guide aims to provide a comprehensive approach to understanding and supporting avoidant, disconnected children by addressing their unique neurological and developmental needs so that they and their families can THRIVE.

TOP BIG IDEAS TO CONSIDER

MISUNDERSTOOD BEHAVIOR

Avoidant, disconnected children are often mislabeled as "rude" or "not trying" in social settings due to their withdrawal and lack of engagement. One thing to consider is if there seems to be some people or environments where this child tends to consistently struggle with making eye contact, communicating verbally, "paying attention," and connecting. For example, **do they do well with certain close friends or family, but at home, they seem very different? Or do they exhibit this "rude or disconnected" behavior when they are at school or in larger groups?** This can be a sign that the environment has an increased demand for processing and the individual is not yet able to meet this higher demand.

FREEZE RESPONSE

These children may display a freeze-type of presentation characterized by a lack of verbal communication, eye contact, and responsiveness. **A sign this is happening: You ask your child to do something or answer a question that they clearly know how to do or answer, but they seem to have no idea how to answer or accomplish the task at times.**This is a window into a stress response and not a behavior.

DEMAND-TOOLS MISMATCH

The child's sensory, social, and other demands often exceed their developmental or neurological readiness, leading to avoidant behaviors. Do they tend to demonstrate a retreat from one or more sensory inputs in environments with more sensory, social, and cognitive demands? **For example, do they change how they attend to their visual system by putting a hood up when they enter a brightly lit building with increased visual demand? Do they begin to squint their eyes and make less eye contact? Do they seem to "not listen" or respond when others talk to them in some settings? In some settings such as school, church, or sports, have they begun developing rigidity in what they wear and how their clothes feel, such as becoming very selective about what clothes and shoes they will wear?** These are all examples and signs that they may not be meeting the demands of the processing world they are in and are developing reduction and control strategies to reduce the complexity of demand. This can look like a behavior or a defiant or rude child, but this is a window to the brain!

DIFFERENT IN DIFFERENT SETTINGS

Behavior may vary significantly between home and more demanding social settings, often being more apparent in the latter. This is a common pattern and understanding the reason behind behaviors helps us differentiate between "bad behaviors" and developmental/neurological challenges.

LIMITED SOCIAL CIRCLES

These children may have only a few close friends and are often misunderstood by peers and adults alike. You will find that these kids usually have a few close friends and activities they like to participate in and push back if asked to expand outside those people or realms. Commonly, kids with underlying needs in this area will be very resistant to expanding their social connections and extracurricular activities even when it does not seem logical. For example, a child loves playing volleyball and has an opportunity to try out for a new team that would be a great fit. They may become highly resistant and maybe even quit the sport before leaving the team and environment they have played with for years. While it would be typical to have some avoidance and nervousness, it is when we see extreme avoidance that does not seem to be worked through logically that is the window to the brain for us to recognize there is more at play than preference or behavior. Another sign would be when a child is not particularly happy and connected with a “best friend” but does not feel confident enough to engage with other friends or be open to making new connections.

Top "Watch and Wonder" Considerations

1. **Behavioral Indicators:** Look for signs of avoidance, such as lack of eye contact, reduced responsiveness, and physical withdrawal.
2. **Modifying Sensory Input:** Watch for signs and clues of decreasing sensory input, such as always having hair in their face or a hat on, hoodie up, sleeves over hands, headphones on, or covering ears.
3. **Environmental Triggers:** Identify situations or settings that increase the child's stress and avoidance behaviors.

4. **Physical Signs:** Watch for physical signs of stress during interactions, such as watery eyes, laughing or silliness, crying, or flushing of the face.
5. **Postural Clues**: Note the child's posture, particularly if they often slouch or flex forward to reduce engagement.
6. **Resilience Testing:** Finding a Chiropractor who uses a "whole child" approach to care can perform various tests to check for nervous system resiliency.

CONNECTION & CONTROL

Creating a Safe Space:

Foster an environment of safety and trust where the child feels comfortable and understood. If possible, give them a choice on the order of tasks and chores, for example.

Open Conversations:

Engage in open, non-judgmental, and age appropriate conversations with your child. It is important to help your child see that you see them beyond the outward presentation and "behavior" and that you know they are truly a good kid.

Empathy and Understanding:

Empathy and a non-blaming approach are best when discussing the child's difficulties and potential strategies for support. It is important to connect with the child, meet them where they are, and not try to force connection in the way that **you** process. For example, if you notice they tend to reduce visual attention, you don't want to force them to connect and engage in eye contact while talking or trying to connect with them. In this scenario, you would want to position yourself in a more side-by-side orientation when connecting with them. This will lower the demand for connection and help you "enter their world." BIG Connection Tip: try to find an "entry into their world." For example, they may love Pokemon cards. Ask them to show you or teach you something or just remark on what you know or like about that. Enter their world, build connections, and lower demand! You will build amazing connections and safety this way.

What's the deal with control?

You will often hear us talk about providing your child with control. Control is what creates safety and connection. Depending on a child's age, they may have very little control over what happens in their daily life. So, giving them control over seemingly small daily choices can go a long way in helping them feel safe, in control, and connected to you. This could look like letting them pick the order in which they do their chores, what clothes to wear, “snack a” or “snack b”, etc.

SIGNS YOUR CHILD MAY BE IN "FIGHT OR FLIGHT"

A sympathetic response, also known as "Fight or Flight," is a physiological response to the brain thinking you are in physical threat of being harmed. Due to various factors, one may be more susceptible to physical, chemical, and emotional stress, which could cause a person's nervous system to be more prone to a dominant or stronger "fight or flight" response and become Sympathetic Dominant. We commonly see signs of Sympathetic Dominance in children struggling with avoidant or detached presentations, as well as other challenges.

Sympathetic Dominance Signs:

When presented with a "hard" task, do you notice...

- Increased heart rate
- Sweating
- Agitation/avoidance
- Facial flushing
- Eyes tearing/squinting
- Teeth grinding
- Emotional response
- Sudden laughter

TOP BRAIN-BASED RIGHT NOW STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORT

Gradual Exposure:

Introduce sensory and social demands gradually to build the child's tolerance and resilience over time.

Safe Retreat Spaces:

Provide safe spaces where the child can retreat and regroup when feeling overwhelmed.

Predictable Routines:

Establish predictable routines to create a sense of stability and security for the child. The key is to always be "filling the buckets" of control, prediction, and connection for the child.

PREDICTABLE STOPS ALONG THE WAY FOR CHANGES

Initial Resistance

Expect initial resistance and avoidance behaviors as the child begins to engage with new strategies and demands.

Gradual Progress

Look for gradual progress in the child's ability to tolerate and engage with sensory and social demands.

Setbacks

Anticipate occasional setbacks, particularly in new or highly demanding situations. It is very common for a child with this presentation to have initial wins and then have some setbacks. (There is reason!!) It is essential to prepare parents for this, or it will feel like a loss when they see what we call "pulling in," as this can look like regression.

Increased Engagement

Monitor for increased engagement and responsiveness as the child becomes more comfortable and confident. This is a window into a changing brain!

Long-Term Resilience

Remember that there are short-term and long-term goals and this is a journey.

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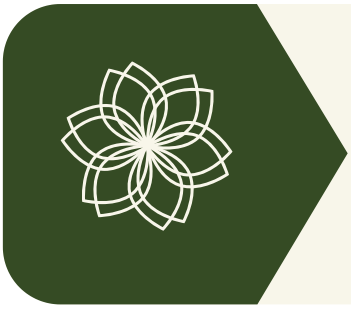
HOW CHIROPRACTIC FITS IN

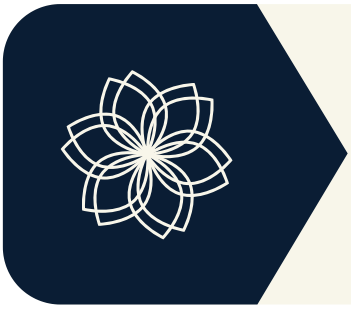
A comprehensive chiropractic exam can address structural and neurological components:

- A subluxation exam checks for proper neurological function and structural components that may be impacting the communication between the brain and body.
- Brain Blossom providers use a variety of gentle, low-force specific techniques, which are especially beneficial for sensitive children.
- A common underlying consideration often overlooked lies within the communication and efficient function of the nervous system. This is an underlying challenge brain-based chiropractors are trained to analyze and correct. They do this by looking at the structural alignment of the spine and see residual impact to the nervous system as a result. These structural misalignments causing neurological impact can lead to secondary challenges such as presented in behavioral, learning, and socialization challenges.

BRAIN-BASED TIPS FOR CONNECTION & CONTROL



Secret hand shake once a day at a predictable time



Choose an activity your child loves and let them teach you for 10 minutes every week. Whether it's their favorite video game, building with legos, or teaching you to draw, the key is to step into THEIR world. This will not only strengthen your bond but also help you understand and connect with your child better.

Practice lowering demand at stressful times such as school pick-up and giving them control. For example, don't ask, "How was your day?" Instead, say, "I thought about you today." Let them pick their favorite music for the car ride home, allowing them to control the situation at this moment.

Play copy-cat with silly facial expressions

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