

# **When Behavior is about Safety**

Understanding attachment in  
children with disabilities

*A CAREGIVER RESOURCE BY 2VILLAGES*





# WELCOME

This resource is for caregivers of children with disabilities.

It is not a behavior plan.

It is not about fixing your child.

It is not about doing more.

It is about understanding what your child's behavior may be communicating; especially when disability changes how attachment shows up.

**Behavior often makes sense when we look at safety instead of control.**

*Zvillage.com*



# A Grounding Reframe

**Attachment** is not about behavior.  
**It is about felt safety.**

For children with disabilities, safety is often experienced through the nervous system. Sensory input, predictability, fatigue, and how adults respond under stress all matter. This means attachment may look different; and that difference is not a problem.



# BEHAVIOR AS COMMUNICATION

When children feel safe, they don't always  
look calm.

Sometimes safety looks like:

- Big reactions
- Needing more help
- Falling apart at home
- Push-pull closeness

**These are not signs of failure.  
They are often signs of trust.**



# What Secure Attachment Can Look Like in Disabled Children

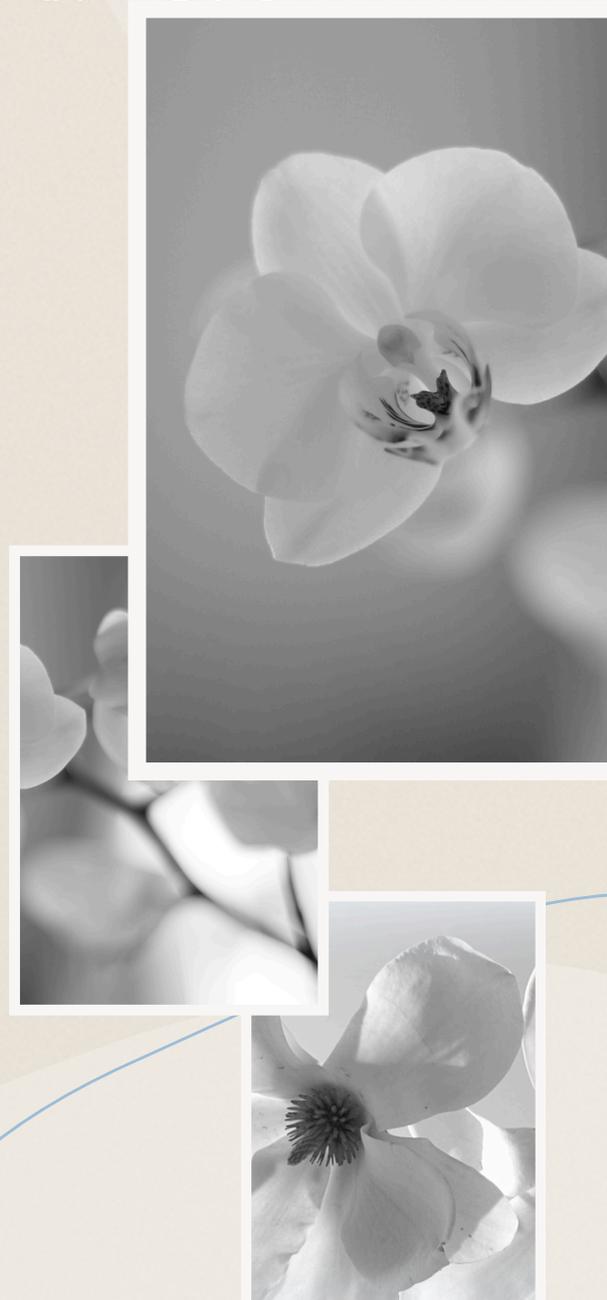
Secure attachment does not require independence, calm bodies, eye contact, or age-typical development.

For children with disabilities, secure attachment may look like:

- Needing adults longer
- Strong reactions after holding it together
- Seeking closeness, then pushing away
- Relying on familiar people for regulation

**This does not mean attachment is broken.**

**It often means attachment is working.**





# WHAT IS OFTEN MISREAD

**Often labeled as...**

**May actually be...**

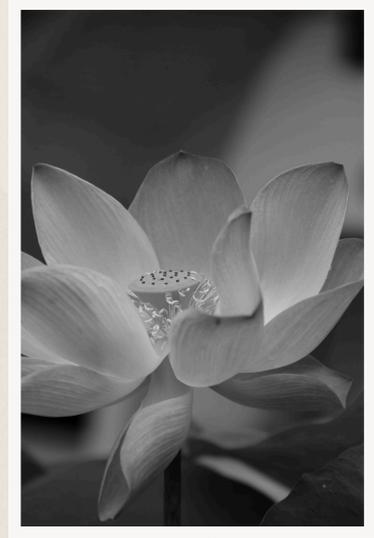
- Defiant -----> Overwhelmed
- Manipulative -----> Unsure how to ask for connection
- Too dependent -----> Building safety before independence
- Attention-seeking -----> Connection-seeking
- Non-compliant -----> Dysregulated or overstimulated

**When disability is involved, behavior is often misunderstood; not intentional.**



# How Caregivers Can Support Attachment

You don't need perfect responses  
or new strategies every week.  
What supports attachment most is  
how you show up.



## What often helps:

- Staying present during big feelings
- Repairing after hard moments
- Lowering demands during dysregulation
- Offering predictability
- Allowing dependence without shame

**Your calm presence is the intervention.**



# A Gentle Reminder

You are not creating dependency.  
You are creating security.  
Security is what allows children,  
including children with  
disabilities, to grow, explore, and  
stretch when they are ready.

**If your child needs you more than  
others expect, that does not mean  
you are doing something wrong.**



Created by a caregiver, for caregivers.  
[www.2villages.life](http://www.2villages.life)