



THE ARCHETYPE APPROACH / CASE STUDY LIBRARY

AA-CS-002

Belonging Before Independence

How Relational Safety Supported Confidence and Exploration

CASE TYPE	Attachment, Regulation & Independence
AGE / CONTEXT	2-3 years - settling
DATE RANGE	11/25-01/26
PRACTICE SITE	Children of Towan Kindergarten
PRACTITIONER	Oliver Riddett

EMERGING AA PRINCIPLE

Independence grows more securely from belonging than from pressure to separate.

OBSERVE

What is happening?

RECOGNISE

What pattern is this?

BALANCE

What is missing?

INTEGRATE

What has emerged?

Observe -> Recognise -> Balance -> Integrate

What was happening?

The pattern as it first appeared



INITIAL PRESENTATION

A two-year-old child entered the setting showing high levels of anxiety and a strong reliance on parental presence in order to feel safe. Separation from their parent resulted in significant distress and dysregulation.

RECURRING PATTERNS

- Separation anxiety
- Dependence on parental presence
- Physical outbursts during distress
- Disruptive behaviour around separation
- Difficulty accessing play and routines
- Control-seeking responses when overwhelmed

OBSERVABLE BEHAVIOURS

The child regularly required a parent to remain present within the setting. Separation frequently resulted in anxiety, physical outbursts and difficulty engaging with the environment.

CONTEXTS AND TRIGGERS

- Parent leaving
- Unfamiliar environments
- Separation from attachment figures
- New routines
- Social uncertainty

WHAT WAS THE CHILD SHOWING US?

The child appeared to experience separation as unsafe. Independence was difficult to access because emotional safety within the setting had not yet been established.

What pattern emerged?

Seeing beneath the behaviour



PRIMARY PATTERN

Friend

SUPPORTING PATTERN

Emerging Rebel

BRIDGING FUNCTION

Rebel through safe autonomy and confident separation

SHADOW / IMBALANCE PRESENTATION

Friend qualities had contracted around attachment and safety. Connection was strongly dependent on parental presence, while independence, exploration and confident choice-making remained less available.

POSSIBLE UNDERLYING NEEDS

- Relational safety
- Consistent attachment
- Predictability
- Emotional containment
- Trust
- Confidence to explore
- Secure-base relationships

DEVELOPMENTAL UNDERSTANDING

The behaviour appeared less connected to defiance and more connected to an overwhelmed attachment system. Aggression and disruption were most visible when safety felt threatened.

PERCEPTION SHIFT

The key perception shift was from 'The child needs to separate' to 'The child needs somewhere safe to belong before separation can become possible.'

What was introduced?

Keeping the strength - widening access



ADULT APPROACH

- Prioritise relationship before expectation.
- Respond to distress with calm co-regulation rather than behaviour correction.
- Introduce clear, consistent separation boundaries.
- Use a consistent key person as a secure base within the setting.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND PLAY ADJUSTMENTS

- Consistent routines
- Predictable adult responses
- Stable relational experiences
- Supported exploration
- Gentle opportunities for independent choice

BALANCING RELATIONSHIP

Friend -> Rebel

A secure relational base within the setting allowed autonomy to emerge without removing connection.

BALANCING SEQUENCE

Connect -> Trust -> Explore -> Separate

The aim was not to force independence. It was to make independence safe enough to emerge.

What became newly available?

Growth without losing the original strength



OBSERVABLE CHANGE

Over time the child separated confidently from the parent, became more emotionally regulated, engaged in play and routines, made independent choices and explored the wider environment.

WHAT BECAME VISIBLE

- Aggressive and disruptive behaviours reduced as safety increased
- Relationships developed with practitioners and peers
- Participation in routines became more consistent
- Independent exploration increased
- Novelty and separation became easier to tolerate

WHAT EMERGED OVER TIME?

Once belonging became established, confidence, regulation and independence emerged without direct behavioural intervention.

INTEGRATION

Connection remained available while dependence softened into confident autonomy.



Belonging Before Independence

Independence cannot always be taught by asking for more separation. When children experience secure connection and belonging, exploration and autonomy can emerge naturally from that safety.

AA SNAPSHOT

PRIMARY PATTERN

Friend

BALANCING RELATIONSHIP

Friend -> Rebel

BALANCING STRATEGY

Secure attachment, relational consistency and clear boundaries

CASE CATEGORY

Attachment, Regulation & Independence

SUPPORTING PATTERN

Emerging Rebel

MAIN PRESENTATION

Separation anxiety and attachment-based dysregulation

OUTCOME THEME

Confidence through belonging

AGE / CONTEXT

2-3 years - settling

CLOSING REFLECTION

“Children do not unfold through correction alone. They unfold through relationship, balance, safety, rhythm and being deeply seen.”

AA TAGS

Friend

Rebel

Attachment

Belonging

Separation

Confidence

Independence

Exploration

Co-Regulation

Secure Base

AA EVIDENCE THEMES

- Behaviour reveals perception
- Belonging before independence
- Relationship before expectation
- Regulation through connection
- Safety enables exploration
- Balance rather than correction

AA DEVELOPMENTAL REFLECTION | EVIDENCE STRENGTH: 5 / 5

This feels foundational because the visible behaviour changed after the relational conditions changed. Independence was not directly trained; it emerged as the child developed a secure base inside the setting. Further settling-in cases would help test whether this pattern repeats across different children and family contexts.