

# WHAT CHILDREN NEED: PILLARS OF SECURITY



**Bright Horizons.**

Early Education & Preschool

**Together, we have an obligation to raise and educate a generation of healthy, vibrant children who live in the world with confidence and wisdom, understand the natural world, and are committed to making the world a better place.**

**— Jim Greenman, former senior vice president, Bright Horizons Family Solutions**

There is nothing more basic than the need to feel secure — to feel that you are all right, right here, right now. We feel secure when the world is safe, predictable, and manageable. We know we can fit into that world as ourselves and will be accepted by the people we encounter. We can relax when we are with people we trust, when we know what to expect, or when we have confidence that our life experience gives us the skills to cope with whatever will come our way.

Children, in particular, need a sense of security and safety. Young children are perpetual tourists without much life experience, truly strangers in a strange land. They are developing their minds and bodies at such a rate that they feel like new people each day. Their backlog of life experience is so slight that each day, each new place, and each new experience feels like a surprise.

As we grow up and experience more of the world, good and bad, our life experience gives us more of a base, but children and adults depend on four pillars of security to help us face life's struggles:

- ▶ People
- ▶ Places
- ▶ Routines
- ▶ Rituals.

## **THE FOUR PILLARS OF SECURITY**

**People:** For most of us, the most insecure feeling of all is feeling alone — no hand to hold, no one to look up to, no one to warn us, and no arms to catch us when we stumble. Security comes from familiar and trusted loved ones who know and understand us and whom we know and understand. But if those people are just not themselves and behaving unpredictably (as often happens in a crisis), or worse, if we have no one and are surrounded by strangers, a calming sense of security is hard to come by.

**Places:** In our homes, we can relax. We take comfort in the familiar order, the sounds, sights, and smells. We know our way around and how things work. There are few surprises. Our treasured things are there to reassure us, as are our memories. An unfamiliar place makes demands on our awareness — we need to be alert. In our places, we have the freedom to find or create sanctuaries and places to pause.

**Routines:** Routines are patterns of actions and expectations, the familiar order of the day, and the tasks that we do protect us from fear of the unknown. The structuring of time into routines has an enormous impact on how we feel. Routines reassure each of us and stabilize groups — the regular meal, the prompt dry diaper, the inevitability of sleep.

**Rituals:** Our individual lives are orderly and meaningful with daily rites that have gained our affection — the first cup of coffee in our favorite cup, goodbye kisses, how we wake up or go to sleep, or the routes taken to work or school. Rituals join routines and our physical space as the binds that hold individuals and groups together in times of stress and uncertainty.

**The four pillars are not equal; certainly people matter the most.** But places, routines, and rituals are essential and support the first pillar. When you are a child or an adult in a crisis, all four pillars — people, places, routines, rituals — may become shaky or crumble and your world may feel as though it is crashing down upon you — strange people, strange places, strange routines, and few rituals.

**The concept of the four pillars is simple yet powerful. Parents and professionals can refer back to it during times of stress and crisis as a starting point for restoring security and stability for children. Thinking about the four pillars (or a lack of them) in a child's life can build patience, empathy, and understanding.**