

Being a parent



Being a parent can bring great joy and happiness. It will often also be demanding. Most people benefit from support from time to time. This support can come in many forms, eg family, friends, other parents or professionals.

As you nurture your child, watching them grow and develop into their own unique person, it is important to look after your own health and wellbeing too.



The role of parents

There are many different ways to be a parent. As a parent, you are mostly free to raise your children according to your own values and beliefs. The welfare of your child is your greatest responsibility. You are there to care for them, protect them and ensure they are safe from harm. Children will thrive with love and guidance.

Parents can help children achieve their best and prepare for adult life by:

- building their confidence and resilience
- providing opportunities to learn and explore
- providing safe boundaries and guidance
- helping children learn to get along with others.

Each child is a unique individual with their own temperament and qualities. Parents need to be flexible and adapt their parenting to meet their child's needs.

Being a parent will bring you delight. It will also be demanding at times. Seeking support is a healthy response to your new role. It is important not to feel you have to go it alone. Support can come from many sources including family, friends, other parents and professionals. While all parents bring strengths and skills to their parenting, many find they grow and learn 'on the job', just as children grow and learn. They come to understand more about children

and what they need as they find their feet in this world. Parents can also learn a lot about themselves and what helps them be their best as a parent.

What influences our parenting?

How we were raised and the relationships we have with our own parents are often the biggest influences on our parenting. You might have memories about what worked well in your own childhood and what was important for you. You can repeat patterns from the past or do things differently for your own children. It's up to you. You can decide the kind of parent you want to be.

Our parenting can also be influenced by:

- our culture or religion
- what we see friends, family and others doing
- images we see in the media
- our life circumstances, eg health, job, income
- the amount of practical or emotional support we have from family, friends, or services.

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The most important thing you can do as a parent is show children you love them and that you are there for them. Enjoying time together and getting to know each other builds your relationship and provides a strong foundation for parenting.

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Parenting styles

Research shows there are four broad styles that parents use: 'authoritarian', 'permissive', 'disengaged' and 'supportive' (see Parent Easy Guide 'What is your parenting style?').

While parents usually use a mix of these, they tend to use one style the most. The 'supportive' style works best for children's wellbeing and development. This involves being warm and loving and providing clear guidance and support (see Parent Easy Guide 'Positive approaches to guiding behaviour (2 to 12 years)'). Some ways to be a 'supportive' parent are below.

Show love and kindness

The most important thing children need from parents is to feel loved, safe and secure. Children become free to focus their energy on the growing and learning they need to do as part of childhood.

- Be kind and patient with your children. It will bring you closer and build your relationship.
- Show you enjoy spending time with them. Play and have fun together.
- Pay attention to children. Talk and really listen. Show interest in what interests them. Be aware of how much time you are using your phone or other devices when you could be interacting with your children.
- Tell children you love them. Be affectionate and give hugs and cuddles.
- Have regular meals together as a family, without TV or other screens. It's a chance to talk and share your day. When possible, involve children in helping prepare meals or setting the table.

Build on strengths

Help children learn and build on their strengths. This develops self-confidence and resilience.

- Be interested and support children's learning. Keep in touch with their school or childcare provider.
- Help them have a go at different activities and find what they enjoy or are good at, eg art, music, sport, languages, writing, science, dance. Help them pursue their interests and show them where these could take them in life. If your budget is limited, there are organisations that can help your child to participate.
- Encourage children to play and be creative, both indoors and outdoors.
- Share books together. This can be a special time children remember all their lives.
- Seek help and support if your children need it.

Be optimistic and positive

How you think and what you say to yourself and your children really matters. Being positive and optimistic creates a happier outlook for your family and models this for your children.

- Notice and talk about the good things in a situation.
- Rather than say to yourself 'Why should I put up with this?' say 'What's happening for my child to make them behave this way?' It will help you respond in a way that meets your child's needs.
- When there are problems, take positive steps to deal with them. Talk about how you'll get through it or how things will get better.

Provide guidance

Children need to know what is OK and what is not OK. Set clear rules and boundaries suitable for their age and development. Be patient as children practise what you want. Rules can be changed as they learn and grow.

- Talk about the behaviour you want, eg 'In our family we are kind to each other/share things'. Try not to constantly say 'don't'. Praise children when they do well. This works much better than punishment.
- Say sorry to children when you make a mistake or act unfairly. You will be modelling taking responsibility.



- Help children learn, aim high and see all the possibilities for their future.
- Help children have other adults they can talk to. Older children benefit from mentors who can expand their horizons.

You are a role model for your children. Remember to behave the way you would like them to behave. When you show care and empathy for others, they will learn this from you.

Your feelings

Some of the things that can have an impact on parenting are your feelings and attitudes towards it. Are you enjoying it? Do you feel relaxed and confident, or scared and worried? As a parent you can feel a range of emotions at different times which are all normal, yet it can feel like a rollercoaster ride. You can feel happiness, joy and pride as well as unappreciated, tired, upset, angry, panic, despair and even hatred.

Take time to notice your feelings. What is causing negative feelings? A first step can be to talk things through with someone supportive - your partner, family, friends, or services. If you feel upset or unhappy a lot, talk with a professional.

Calming yourself

At times, children's behaviour or other things in life can 'push your buttons'. When this happens remember one of the most important things you can do for your children is to calm your own emotions. When children see this, they can learn to do it too. This is an important life skill, and it builds resilience.

When children's behaviour upsets you, remember they are probably doing something that is normal for their stage of development. How you feel about it and how you respond is up to you. You could ask yourself:

- do I really understand why my child is behaving this way?
- am I reacting from my own emotions, or what my child needs from me in this situation?
- am I being fair?
- am I being kind and patient?

Pausing and taking a deep breath before you react can make a big difference. Practising this regularly makes it easier to do. Children need you to see things from their point of view and show you understand their feelings. If they have big emotions, they need your help to calm down. You can choose to get angry or use this as a chance to connect with your child and help them learn. If you are concerned about your child's behaviour, or about your behaviour towards your child, it is important to seek professional help.

When you stay calm you are showing children how to manage their emotions. You are teaching them an important life skill.

Your values

Being clear about your values and beliefs can be a good foundation for your parenting. Talk with your child's other parent/your partner about what's important for your family. You might decide you value:

- showing love and kindness
- respecting each other's differences
- being responsible
- no shouting or hitting.

If you have different views, try to reach an understanding. Don't criticise or put each other down in front of children.

Parents can grow into their role and develop their parenting skills every day.





Finding helpful information

When you are a parent, information and advice comes from everywhere - friends, family, the media, the internet and professionals. It is important to be open to ideas but to base your decisions on trustworthy information.

- If you find information online, check the facts to make sure it's reliable.
- Social media can be a great way to share experiences with family and friends and find encouragement and support. It can also be a place where parents feel judged and criticised. If it doesn't feel helpful, you may not want to continue. If your concerns continue, seek help.
- Ask for information and advice if you don't know something. If the first place you try doesn't have what you need, keep looking until you find someone or something that helps.
- Like every child, every stage of a child's development is different. Your knowledge will grow along the way as you find out about how you can best meet their needs.

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Seek help from others but keep on believing in yourself.
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Work and family

Many parents feel they are constantly juggling work and family life and doing neither as well as they would like. Many feel guilty about not 'being there' or having time to do all the things they'd like to do with their children. These feelings can include:

- worrying about what to do when children are sick
- worrying what others think when they have to leave work to care for a child
- feeling stressed when things don't go as planned. Sometimes plans can be disrupted before work even starts for the day.

It helps to plan how you will manage the demands and deal with the unexpected. You could consider:

- what is the most important thing to do first?
- who will do what tasks?
- what plans are there for sick children, school events? Who will take time off work?

If you are using childcare, it is important to choose a place your child enjoys. If you are confident their needs are being met, you are less likely to feel anxious or guilty. Check the service's credentials to ensure quality and that they have ways to keep children safe. Sometimes it can be difficult to find a childcare provider you and your child/ren are happy with. If you can, plan your return to work and your care options early. Some parents do this before their child is born.

Balancing competing demands can be tricky at times. In a busy day children can feel they need to compete for your time and attention, so it's important to set priorities.

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Children have an ongoing need for connection with parents. Spending quality time with you is much more important than just being told they are loved or given material things. The more positive experiences parents and children share, the better the relationship will be.
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Taking care of your relationships

Taking time to nurture your own needs can help you to parent at your best. One of the best things you can do for your children is ensure your needs for support and love are met. Make regular time to be alone with your partner, do things you enjoy, talk about your day, share ideas and feelings, and just relax. These times are important for strengthening your personal and intimate relationships. It will also provide opportunities to work through any issues that may arise in your relationship. Spend time with others who are important to you too.



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Children learn about relationships from what they see happening with people around them.
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Looking after yourself

Being a parent takes a lot of physical and emotional energy. It is only natural you will become tired, worn out and stressed from time to time. These feelings will make it harder for you to be your best as a parent. Nurturing yourself and looking after your own needs is important for your whole family. Try to 'refill your cup' so you have more to give to your children. Here are some things that can help.

- As you go about your busy day, make a habit of pausing and noticing the good things that are happening, however small.
- Enjoy being with your children, notice what's special and unique about them.
- Be sure to have special time with just you and your child. You may wish to keep a paper or digital diary, or photo album of your child's milestones.
- Be kind to yourself. Be realistic about what you can achieve. Try not to be influenced by social media – those 'perfect' posts aren't always what they seem!
- Take time to relax and do things you enjoy. Keep up your interests and hobbies, catch up with friends.
- Value yourself and the job you are doing as a parent. Trust yourself and have confidence in your parenting. Reward yourself and plan things to look forward to.
- Be optimistic and positive. Things don't always go to plan. If this happens try to learn what you can and move on.
- Your family's health matters. Eating well, making time for daily exercise and trying to get enough sleep is good for the whole family.
- Where possible call on the practical and emotional support of family and friends. Services can help too.

Managing anger

Many parents feel angry at times. Sometimes when we feel sad, frustrated or unappreciated, we can feel angry.

- Try to do something about the cause of the underlying feeling.
- Get to know your body signs for when anger is building and act before you lose your temper. Go outside, take a break, give yourself five minutes. Make sure your baby/child is safe.
- Work out when you are most likely to become angry and do something different. Remember to try and pause and take a deep breath.
- Seek help before things get worse. Talk with your doctor or health professional.

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If you feel angry or upset, remember never shake a baby. It can cause brain damage.
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Family Violence

Babies and children are affected by family violence, whether or not they see or hear the violence. It affects children's growing brain and can delay normal childhood milestones. There are many forms of violence, including:

- physical: hurting you, your children or pets. It may be hitting, kicking, pushing or choking
- verbal: using put downs, insults, yelling
- emotional: doing things to scare, worry or upset you; controlling what you do, who you see.

If this is happening in your home or you are worried about your own behaviour, contact a family violence service. They can help you work out what is best for you and your children, and the best possible options. Calling 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732) is a good place to start. (See Parent Easy Guide 'Family Violence'.)





Getting support

All parents need help with some aspect of parenting at some time. Problems in other areas of your life can also take your attention and leave you with less energy for your children. Seeking help and support early is the smart thing to do. You could talk with trusted family or friends, see your doctor, or contact a service.

You are a person as well as a parent. Make time to look after your own needs.

Note: The term 'Parents' in this Guide refers to anyone caring for and/or raising children and young people, eg parents, caregivers, step-parents, grandparents, guardians, foster or kinship carers.

Want more information?

1800 Respect

Phone 1800 737 732, 24 hours

National domestic, family and sexual violence counselling service www.1800respect.org.au

Parent Helpline

Phone 1300 364 100

For advice on child health and parenting

Child and Family Health Service (CaFHS)

Phone 1300 733 606, 9am-4.30pm, Mon-Fri for an appointment with a child health nurse
www.cafhs.sa.gov.au

ForWhen Helpline SA

Phone 1300 242 322, 9am-4.30pm, Mon-Fri

Connecting new and expecting parents struggling with their mental health to services that are right for them from conception to 12 months after birth

Beyond Blue

Phone 1300 224 636

Phone and online support for anyone affected by anxiety or depression.
You don't need a diagnosis to call www.beyondblue.org.au

Nature Play SA

Resources to help make outdoor play an everyday part of children's lives
www.natureplaysa.org.au

Kidsafe SA

Phone 7089 8554, 9.30am-4pm, Mon-Fri for information about child safety
Located opposite the Play Deck, Level 1, Gilbert Building, Women's and Children's Hospital, Adelaide

Kidsafe SA - Hilton

Phone 7089 8554, 9am-5pm, Mon-Fri

To hire, check and fit child car restraints, purchase goods and get safety advice www.kidsafesa.com.au

Raising Children Network

For parenting information www.raisingchildren.net.au

Parenting SA

For more Parent Easy Guides including 'New parents', 'What is your parenting style?', 'Being a mum', 'Being a dad', 'Living with toddlers', 'Living with young people' and 'Positive approaches to guiding behaviour: 2-12 years' www.parenting.sa.gov.au



**Government of
South Australia**

Parenting SA

A partnership between the Department of Human Services and the Women's and Children's Health Network.

www.parenting.sa.gov.au

Parent Easy Guides are free in South Australia.

Important: This information is not intended to replace advice from a qualified practitioner.

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