

Families that work well



Family is the most important part of a child's life. A loving, supportive family can help create confident, resilient children and young people. A strong relationship with parents/caregivers is key to their wellbeing.

The whole family benefits when everyone respects and supports each other and works together to solve problems. Building positive family relationships helps things run well in the good times. When things get tough there's a solid foundation to fall back on.



Family

There are many different types of families. They can include:

- a mother, father and children
- one parent raising children
- separated or divorced parents sharing parenting
- adults and children from previous marriages living together
- grandparents/other relatives, parents and children living together
- same sex parents
- grandparents or other adults raising children
- kinship, adoptive or foster parents.

In families that work well everyone feels loved, safe and secure. Parents/caregivers help children develop the skills they need to grow into capable, caring young people.

Children learn how to:

- manage strong feelings and express their feelings and needs to others
- solve problems
- make good decisions

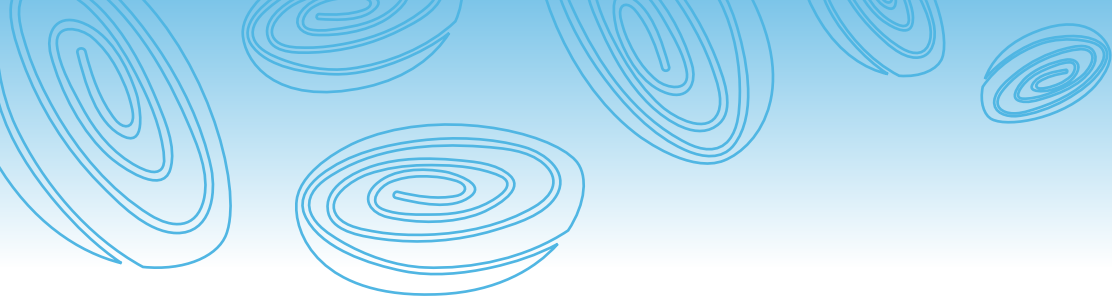
- learn from their mistakes
- feel good about who they are
- care about others
- face challenges.

It's important for parents to look after their own health and wellbeing too. Take time to relax, do things you enjoy and recharge. Taking care of yourself makes it easier to support children and young people to be the best they can.

Family values

Values reflect what really matters to you and your family. It helps to talk with children about the kind of family you want to be and what's important to each of you – even young children can have good ideas. You could have a family meeting, pizza night or whatever works for you. You may decide it's important to:

- always take turns
- not hit, yell or name call
- say sorry
- be kind and caring
- be patient and fair
- accept each other's differences
- stick up for each other.



You can talk about what might help children practise these values, eg tell a parent if a sibling has upset them, go to a quiet or ‘feel better’ space to help calm down. Put a copy on the fridge (words, drawings, pictures) to remind everyone. Decide together what will happen if these expectations aren’t met – be consistent in your response.

Young children in particular will need lots of practice and support to learn new skills. You can help them understand the reasons for what you expect by linking these to family values, eg ‘We help each other, that’s why we all have jobs to do’ or ‘We respect each other so we don’t yell or hit’.

When children see you living by your family’s values they learn to do this too.

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Having clear ideas about ‘how we do things in our family’ helps children know what’s expected. They’re more likely to cooperate if they’ve had a say in these ideas.

Family catch-ups

Getting together regularly can be a useful way to check how things are going at home and discuss any issues. Everyone can have a say and suggest solutions. Some families find it helps to have a structure, eg each person gets to speak without being interrupted, issues are listed beforehand, everyone takes a turn to run the discussion. It doesn’t have to be anything formal, just whatever suits your family.

Being involved in day to day family matters helps children and young people feel valued. They learn their view is important and can practise problem solving, making decisions, respecting different views.

Parenting styles

Research points to four broad parenting styles: ‘authoritarian’, ‘permissive’, ‘disengaged’ and ‘supportive’ (see Parent Easy Guide ‘What is your parenting style?’). While parents usually employ a mix of styles they tend to use one the most.

The ‘supportive’ style works best for children’s wellbeing and development. This involves balancing being warm and loving and providing clear guidance and support (see Parent Easy Guide ‘Positive approaches to guiding behaviour: 2-12 years’).

- Children are hard wired to need connection with their parents/caregivers.
- ‘Supportive’ parenting doesn’t mean letting your child do anything they want. A strong, warm relationship allows you to set limits in a way that encourages positive behaviour, eg going to bed at a certain time, waiting for their turn, not hitting, staying safe as they grow older.
- Engaging in a calm, respectful way and acknowledging children’s feelings when they’re upset/disappointed/hurt/angry helps them feel secure.

By trying to understand your child’s perspective even when you need to say ‘no’ or try to reach a compromise you are teaching them:

- it’s okay to have big, uncomfortable feelings
- it’s possible to manage their feelings – you show them how by staying calm, caring and respectful when things get heated
- when they get things wrong it’s the behaviour that’s the problem, not them. They can keep seeing their positive qualities which makes it more likely they’ll get things right in future
- in a relationship you try to make things work for both people.

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When children and young people feel their needs, wants and feelings are ‘heard’ they are more willing to consider other people’s point of view and to compromise. Understanding what they need helps us support them to become their best selves.



Guiding their behaviour

No matter how well families get along there will always be some challenging behaviour. Children aren't born with all the skills they need to become well-balanced young people. It's up to us to guide and teach them. Children do best within caring, responsive environments with clear, simple family expectations and routines that encourage fairness and respect for everyone.

When there is challenging behaviour it helps to:

- pause, take a deep breath or wait until you can respond calmly
- try and understand the feeling or need behind the behaviour
- see children's mistakes as learning opportunities
- acknowledge their good behaviour, eg 'you did a great job tidying the toys/being patient with your little brother/coming home at the agreed time'
- strengthen your connection.

Maintaining a strong relationship with children and young people helps support them to meet your expectations. For further tips and strategies see Parent Easy Guides 'Positive approaches to guiding behaviour: 2-12 years' and 'Living with young people'.

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Remember to 'connect before you correct'. When children feel connected to us they're more likely to try and meet our expectations.
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Being a positive role model

You are an important role model for your family. They learn from what they see you doing. This is more effective than just talking about what's expected.

- Model the behaviour you expect from your children and treat people the way you want them to treat others.

- Stop and take a deep breath if you're angry or upset. When children see you respond in a calm, respectful manner they learn they can have big feelings and still work things out. If you can, explain what you are doing and why you're doing it.
- Show you value and respect yourself. Routinely do things that support your own health and wellbeing.

Building a support network for your child

Parents/caregivers play a vital role in raising children. Children and young people also benefit from having a broader social network. They can:

- practise interacting with other adults, see how their families do things and hear different perspectives
- learn how to get on with others outside the family
- connect with people who share their interests/hobbies
- be mentored by someone you both respect
- feel connected to the broader community
- practise being more independent.

Help your child develop a safe, supportive network.

- Support them to make friends and welcome them to your home. Get to know their parents if you can.
- Encourage spending time with trusted adults they like. It gives them other people to talk to as they grow.
- Support them to take part in activities, sports or hobbies.
- Make sure they know how to stay safe and tell you if anyone makes them feel uncomfortable.



Staying connected as a family

Taking care of family relationships helps families stay strong. Everyone feels supported to achieve their best and deal with challenges.

Make time for talking and listening

- Talk to all family members as often as you can. Talk about what each person has done for the day and their interests – be excited and encouraging.
- Let family members express a wide range of feelings such as joy, excitement, sadness, anger, fear – as long as they do it in a way that is safe for everyone.
- Really listen to what children say. Try to understand their thoughts and feelings behind the words.
- Talk about a wide range of things including sensitive topics in ways that suit their age. They will be more likely to come to you if they have a problem.
- Talk together about things that affect the whole family. Ensuring everyone feels listened to and valued encourages trust and caring.

Spend time as a family

- Spend time together to relax, have fun and keep in touch with how everyone is doing. You could go to the beach or park, play or watch sport, play games or do other things. Family holidays can create special memories.
- Have meals together if you can. If this is difficult in a busy life try eating together as regularly as possible, eg once a week. Turn off the TV/screens/phones.
- Share the chores among the whole family - cooking, cleaning, gardening. Young children may be able to help prepare food or set the table. As they get older they can have more responsibility. Couples who support each other around the house help the family run smoothly.
- Have daily routines - mealtimes, bedtimes, family time, chores. This helps children feel secure.

- Try to spend time with each child on their own doing something you both enjoy.
- If you are a couple spend quality time together. This helps you work well as a team and benefits the whole family. If you are single spend time away from the children doing something for yourself. This helps recharge and makes it easier to support your family.

It's in the little everyday moments that relationships with children are built and you create a strong foundation for your family.

Be affectionate, caring and kind

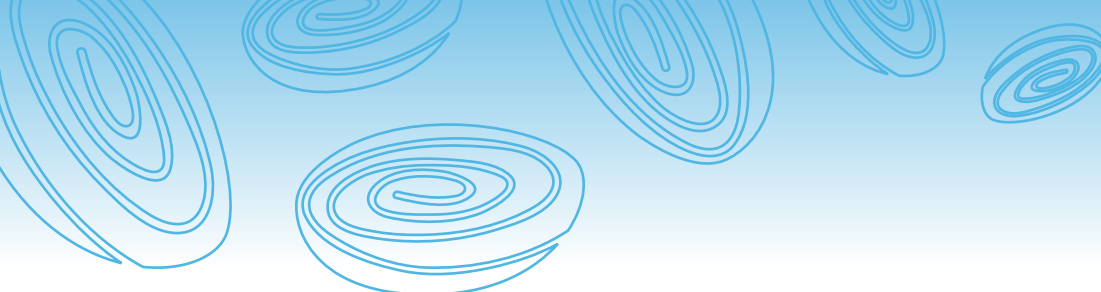
- Show affection, give hugs, be thoughtful and kind. Encourage your children to be kind to others.
- Let your children know you love them. Tell them all the things you like and love about them. It helps them believe in themselves.
- Focus on the effort they make rather than what they achieve. It helps build their confidence and resilience; they're motivated to problem solve and keep learning.
- Avoid 'put downs', threats, interrogation and blame - they can make children and adults feel bad or hopeless.
- Use humour and encouragement rather than threats or punishment. An ongoing fight for control is not helpful for children.

Be wise with adult power. Using violence or intimidation harms the whole family and makes everyone unhappy.

Accept differences

- Make sure no one is left out or made to feel the odd one in a family.
- Let each family member know they are special in their own way – whatever their differences. Encourage them to feel proud to be themselves.
- Support each person to be excited about their own interests - show respect and tolerance.





Keep in touch with family and friends

The more your family is connected with others the more likely you are to overcome any problems.

- Make the effort to catch up with family and friends as often as you can. Invite them to your home, visit them or meet somewhere. Celebrating special occasions such as birthdays is a chance to do this.
- Share problems with family or others you trust if you think it may help, but not in front of children.
- Consider reducing contact with any family members who make you or your children feel unhappy or unsafe. Not all family relationships are positive or healthy.

Have family rituals and traditions

The little things you do each day and on special occasions help strengthen your family.

- Daily rituals can include how you greet and say goodbye to each other, what you do at mealtimes and bedtime.
- Families benefit from celebrating together, eg birthdays and other special days. You may have traditions about how this is done.

When times get tough

Most families go through stressful times at some point. There may be challenges you have little or no control over, eg employment, housing, finance, health; there may be relationship issues. Some challenges may be too big to deal with on your own. This can be a time to boost family wellbeing with some additional support. You could talk to family, friends, a GP or counsellor. There are also helplines and services that can assist.

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Strong families have a positive attitude and know they can rely on each other when things are tough. They also know when to reach out for help.

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Want more information?

For support with family relationships

Relationships Australia

Phone 1300 364 277 www.rasa.org.au

Uniting Communities

Phone 1800 615 677 www.unitingcommunities.org

Centacare

Phone (08) 8215 6700 www.centacare.org.au

Anglicare SA

Phone (08) 8305 9200 <https://anglicaresa.com.au/>

Mission Australia SA

Phone (08) 8218 2800 www.missionaustralia.com.au/contact-us/sa

Some services may run parenting programs, eg 'Bringing Up Great Kids', 'Circle of Security'.

Parenting resources

Community Development Coordinators (CDCs), Department of Human Services

Local community information and support for families
<https://dhs.sa.gov.au/how-we-help/child-and-family-support-system-cfss/family-support-services/community-development-coordinators>

Families Growing Together, Department of Human Services

Free workshops for parents/caregivers including 'My Child and Me' and 'Living with Young People' – face to face or by webinar
<https://dhs.sa.gov.au/how-we-help/child-and-family-support-system-cfss/family-support-services/families-growing-together>

Raising Children Network

Parenting information on a range of topics
www.raisingchildren.net.au

Parenting SA

For other Parent Easy Guides including 'Being a parent', 'Living with toddlers' and 'Time in: guiding children's behaviour'

For videos 'Finding solutions together', 'Learning from natural consequences', 'Misbehaviour is missed behaviour', 'Moving beyond the battleground' and 'Pause and respond rather than react'.

<https://parenting.sa.gov.au/>





**Government
of South Australia**

Parenting SA

A partnership between the Department of
Human Services and 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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