

Loving attention, warmth and care are critical for your child's development, learning and self-esteem. No parent can provide this every minute of every day, but over time you can build a strong and positive relationship.

Your family is unique. There's no formula or a best or right way to create a strong relationship with your child – each family has to figure it out for themselves. There will be times when you don't or can't do what you'd like for your child, but if you put time into building positive relationships in your family, those relationships will see you through.

You can build positive relationships by:

- being in the moment with your child
- spending quality time with your child
- working on family management.

Being in the moment

When you give loving positive attention to your child, you help her build a picture of herself as a person who is valued and valuable. This kind of attention doesn't have to be a big deal – you just need to 'be in the moment' with your child.

This means trying to **tune in and think about what is going on with your child**. Sometimes this is simply showing acceptance, letting your child be and not giving directions all the time. It's good to give your child the opportunity to take the lead, to have input, to make suggestions and ask questions.

When you're really in the moment, you respond to your child in ways that aren't impulsive or based on habit. Being in the moment includes praising, repeating your child's words, smiling and making eye contact, imitating, playing what your child wants to play, and really having fun together. Parents who give these responses can see dramatic changes in their children.

Your child can tell when you're not really paying attention – when you're giving those mindless 'mmmm' responses to what he's saying. Of course this will happen sometimes, but the aim is to tip the balance in favour of being positive and present.

Spending 'quality time'

Quality time can happen anytime and anywhere, in the middle of ordinary days and situations. A shared laugh when you're bathing your toddler, the discovery of the season's first flower in the garden with your six-year-old, or a good conversation in the car with your eight-year-old – these can all be quality time. Just listen closely to your child or stop what you're doing to pay full attention to her.

You can also make quality time by taking advantage of any opportunity, however small, to **show that you value and appreciate your child**. For example, you can communicate powerful positive messages with your smiles, laughter, eye contact, hugs and gentle touches.

Quality moments like these are an essential factor in building a positive relationship with your child.

The time you spend with your child also makes a difference to how he learns. For example, the time you spend talking with your child in the first three years of life helps him learn language.

Working on family management

Strong family relationships are helped by looking at how your family members interact on a day-to-day basis. Here are some ideas:

- **Plan some one-on-one time on a regular basis** with each of your children. Some children are quieter and don't demand as much attention as others, and they might get left out. On a busy work day, one-on-one time with a child might be brief, but over a week, try to have some longer interactions.
- **Set aside one-on-one time with your partner**. Investing in a strong, loving relationship with your partner is also investing in your relationship with your child. It can take effort, but it's well worth it. If you're a single parent, you could try setting aside time with an extended family member or a close friend. Maintaining your relationships with adults will help you feel supported.
- Think about ways to **organise the household routine** so it's less stressful. Even simple changes can help, such as using an ongoing shopping list so you won't have to rush off unexpectedly to the supermarket to get milk as soon as you get home.
- When children are old enough, **give them some household responsibilities**. Being responsible for some chores, no matter how small, help children feel they're making a valuable contribution to the family's wellbeing. Even very young children like the feeling of belonging that comes from making a contribution

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