

# good relationships WITH CHILDREN



*Children with loving parents are more likely to grow up happy and healthy and to get on well with others. Taking time each day to build good relationships with our kids makes sense and can be enjoyable, even if this can be a bit difficult in a large family.*

*The key to good relationships is open communication – a theme that comes up throughout this magazine and is explored in depth in this article.*

## **Begin when the children are babies**

Strong and loving relationships begin in the first few years of life. Research tells us this is very important to a child's later development. With babies and young children, words are only one way of communicating. You can show your love and make babies and toddlers feel special by:

- singing to them in your traditional language
- smiling at them
- giving them lots of kisses and cuddles
- learning what they're saying through their expressions and cries.

## **Listening**

Finding time to listen to what our kids want to tell us is not always easy. We're all busy and children can have trouble expressing themselves clearly. But it's important to try to understand your kids and show them that they

are loved. Some ways you can listen better to your children include:

- allowing them to finish what they're saying without interrupting or criticising
- checking with them that you understand what they're saying - "I think what you're saying is ..."
- encouraging them to keep talking by asking questions, for example, "Why do you think that is?" and showing encouragement, for example, "That's fantastic" or "Good job!"
- giving them our full attention by putting down the newspaper or turning off the TV
- using your ears and your eyes. Full attention requires that you hear what your child is saying and stop to look at them while they are talking to you. By making eye contact you really show them that you are listening and that what they are saying is important.

## Communicating well

Children pick up as much from our tone of voice, gestures and face as from what we say. An angry face will show what we are really thinking, no matter what our words are. Remember to:

- speak calmly and look your child in the eye
- avoid discussing something important when you are feeling angry
- come down to their level. Don't stand over a child – they will feel threatened
- choose a time to talk when both of you are feeling relaxed
- be as clear as possible. For example, "Be home by 5 o'clock" makes more sense to a child than, "Don't be home late today."
- avoid lecturing or nagging children and teenagers. Children tune out because lecturing is one-way communication that excludes them.

## Showing interest

If we take interest in what our children are doing and what they enjoy, their self esteem or feeling of self worth will flourish, which will help them to get the best out of life.

Show interest in your kids by:

- watching their favourite TV show or video with them and talking about it afterwards
- going along to watch them play sport
- asking them for their opinions
- getting to know their friends and making them feel welcome in your home
- as they get older, sharing things that are important in your life, for example, by talking about your job and friends.

## Encouraging children

Encouragement from parents means a lot to children. It also raises a child's self confidence. Praise your kids for doing their best and be clear in your praise, for example say, "I really liked how you packed up your toys so neatly."

While encouragement is positive, criticism is negative. It rarely changes behaviour and makes kids feel bad

about themselves. We should always take care not to be critical or blaming. The article on page 8 suggests some different approaches to teaching kids how to behave well.

## Time together

Spending time together as a family is important to kids and teenagers. It helps them feel safe and loved.

To encourage family time you can:

- organise fun times together that will allow your family to share good memories – birthdays, picnics, parties, going to the beach or bike riding
- celebrate cultural and religious festivals together. This will also give your kids a stronger sense of their cultural identity
- eat meals together without the TV on
- make time to discuss things together that affect the whole family.

*Giving children responsibility and a real say in family decisions helps build strong relationships.*

## Involving children

Giving children responsibility and a real say in family decisions helps build strong relationships. We have to give them support to do things for themselves and not expect more than they are capable.

You can involve your kids in family life by:

- talking with them about family issues
- planning a family outing or holiday together
- asking for their opinions
- giving them regular household chores that are suitable for their age.

## Looking after ourselves

Being a parent is the most important job in the world. To do the job well and cope with all the demands on us as parents, we have to take care of ourselves. This means we should:

- take time out each day for ourselves, for example, quietly reading a book for 15 minutes
- share parenting tips and stories with other parents
- find family members and friends who can listen to our problems
- make sure we exercise regularly so that we can manage stress better
- ask for professional help when we need it.

## Finding help

If parenting gets too hard, don't be afraid to ask for professional help. The *Contact List* at the back of this magazine has details on counselling and other support services.