



Promoting Positive Parent/Child Relationships.

Parenting is the most fulfilling job that we will ever have, but it's not without its challenges. Modern family life can be stressful and with various pressures on families is not always easy. Parents want what is best for their child and a strong parent-child relationship can help lead to better outcomes for children, it also affects the strength of their social, physical, mental and emotional health.

The parent-child relationship consists of a combination of behaviours, feelings and expectations that are unique to a particular parent and a particular child. This relationship is important and involves the full extent of a child's development, it nurtures the physical, emotional and social development of the child. A child who has a secure relationship with parents learns to regulate emotions under stress and in difficult situations.

Other benefits of a positive parent-child relationship include:

- children stand a better chance of developing happy and content relationships with others in their life.
- helps the child exhibit optimistic and confident social behaviours.
- helps children to also gain strong problem-solving skills.
- healthy parent involvement and intervention lays the foundation for better social and academic skills.
- a secure attachment leads to a healthy social, emotional, cognitive and motivational development.

Forming and developing a connection with your child is important and we do need to change and adapt as our children grow and our relationship evolves and develops.

Strengthening the parent-child relationship

Below are a few tips to help you strengthen your relationship with your child:

- **Tell your child that you love them:**

Of course you love your children but tell them every day, no matter what age they are. Even on difficult days let your child know you didn't like the behaviour but you love them unconditionally. A simple "I love you" can do a lot to strengthen a relationship.

- **Play together:**

Play is so important to children's development. Young children can develop many skills through the power of play. As well as it being fun and helping you develop your relationship with your child, it can help children's language skills, emotions, creativity and social skills.

- **Develop and maintain bedtime routines:**

Good sleep is important for your child's physical and mental wellbeing. A relaxing bedtime routine is one important way to help your child get a good night's sleep.

Doing the same relaxing things in the same order and at the same time each night helps promote good sleep.

A warm bath will help your child relax and get ready for sleep. Keeping lights dim encourages your child's body to produce the sleep hormone, Melatonin. Once in bed, encourage your child to read quietly or listen to some music, or read a story together. Avoid tablets, smartphones, TVs and other electronic gadgets as these can affect how easily your child will go to sleep. Encourage your child to stop using screens an hour before bedtime. Your child's room should ideally be dark, quiet and tidy. It should be well ventilated and kept at a temperature of about 16 to 20C.

If you have tried all of the above and your child keeps having problems getting to sleep or sleeping through the night, you may feel you want more support. If so, speak with your GP or health visitor.

- **Eat meals together:**

Eating together as a family sets the stage for conversation. Encourage no technology at the table and enjoy each other's company.

- **Let your child help you:**

If you are doing the housework and your child asks if they can help, don't automatically say "no" because you know the job will get done faster. Find a reasonable task for the child to do, like dusting or sweeping. This can help build trust between you and the child as well as boost their confidence.

- **Listen and empathise:**

Connection starts with listening. Try and see things from your child's perspective and foster mutual respect. Acknowledge your child's feelings, show them you understand, and reassure that you are there to help them whenever they have problems.

- **Spend one on one time together:**

If you have more than one child try and make a point of spending individual time with each of them. Children have different personalities, and some children might seem to need less time than others - but they'll all benefit from quality, individual time with you which will strengthen your bond, builds their self-esteem and lets them know they are valued.

- **Be available:**

Make time to talk to your child without any distractions, even ten minutes a day can make a big difference in establishing good communication habits. Turn off the TV, put away technology and spend some quality time together.

- **Notice what your child is doing and comment or encourage it:**

Treat every interaction as an opportunity to connect with your child. Be warm in your expressions, give eye contact, smile and encourage. If your child has homework to complete sit with them, ask what they are doing, get involved. Ask them what interesting facts they have learnt, use this information to start a conversation and to share ideas. Share a book together, take it in turns to read, discuss the story or what is happening in the pictures, depending on the age of your child.

- **Provide your child with opportunities:**

It is very common to automatically say "no" to a child when they ask if they can do something. This can range from getting out the paints to playing in the park. You can't let your children do whatever they want, but limiting them just because you may not want to do something is not always the best approach.

- **Provide a secure environment:**

Make sure the basic needs of your child are met, such as healthy food, a place to sleep and activities to do at home. Providing simple rules, such as television guidelines and specific bedtimes, will also help give your child a routine and sense of security.

- **Refrain from spoiling your child:**

It is not uncommon for parents to win affection and effectively control their child's behaviour by using a reward system or by giving them whatever they desire. Although this might appear to make the child happy and keep your relationship positive, in the long run it does not work. Children often end up demanding and grow up with a sense of entitlement.

Trust and respect

Trust and respect are also essential to a positive parent-child relationship. Even in the early years with your baby, developing trust and respect is important. Your baby feels safe and secure when they learn they can trust their primary carers to meet their needs. Trust and respect become more of a two-way street as your child gets older.

Trust and respect can be nurtured in your parent-child relationship. For example:

- Be available when your child needs support, care or help.
- Get to know your child and value them for who they are.
- Allow your relationship to evolve as your child develops and their needs and interests change.
- Don't make promises unless it's a promise you know you can keep. Promise what is reasonable and within your ability to complete. Be reliable.
- Set up some firm but fair family rules. Make clear statements about how your family wants to look after and treat its members.

- Respect your child's need for privacy. Trust also means that you respect your child's right to keep some matters private (except in cases where it is necessary to intervene). Sometimes your child may not want to talk about everything, and you need to accept that. Unless you have a reason to believe that there is something that needs to be discussed, it is alright to let your child have a part of their life that is separate from you.

Positive parent-child relationships help children learn about the world - whether the world is safe and secure, whether they are loved, who loves them, what happens when they cry, laugh or make a face, and much more. By building a warm, positive and responsive relationship with your child helps to shape the adult they will become and give them a strong foundation for the rest of their life.

Extracts of this information were taken from the following web sites where further, more detailed information can be found:

www.raisingchildren.net.au

www.parenting.org

www.verywellfamily.com

www.healthofchildren.com

www.nhs.uk

www.parenttoolkit.com

