

Parent-child connection

TIP SHEET

Relationship Australia WA's education team has developed a range of tips to help support you during difficult times. As a free resource, we encourage you to share this with your community.

Being a parent is the most important job you can do. Some parents liken it to a journey –one filled with rewards and joy, but also of frustration and challenges.

Good parenting is hard work. However, there are certain things you can do that support your children's development and will help you feel more confident and fulfilled as a parent.

Here are some suggestions you may find helpful.

1. Be a positive role model

Your child learns more by watching you, than by what you say to them. By watching you, your child gets clues on how to behave. Model the qualities you wish to see in your child, e.g. respect, courtesy, honesty, generosity. For instance, if you want your child to speak respectfully to and of others, then watch the words and tone of your voice.

If you do occasionally break one of your own rules, explain to your child the situation and why you behaved the way you did. Explore how you could have handled it better and what you would do differently the next time.

2. Make time for your children

It's often difficult for parents and children to spend quality time together, especially if you're a working parent. But there is nothing children would like more.

One-on-one time is like gold, so schedule together time with each child and do something they enjoy. Create a "family night" each week to be together and let your kids help decide how to spend the time. Neither have to be complicated or expensive - it can be as simple as making popcorn together or eating pizza at the beach. These occasions are even more valuable during stressful times.

3. Tune into your child's feelings

Being aware of what your child is feeling, and labelling those feelings, is the first step towards healthy emotional development. Children's emotions can be hard to figure out, but if you try to see the world through their eyes you will be in a better position to offer them support and understanding in trying circumstances.

4. Be available to listen and talk

This is one of the most important things you can do as a parent. When your child knows you

are interested and listening, it sends the message that what your child is thinking and saying is important to you. If you don't have time right now, let them know when would be a good time. Make sure you follow through.

If there is a problem, talk about it and express your feelings. Then invite your child to work on a solution with you, including consequences if necessary. Be open to hearing your child's suggestions as well. Children who participate in decisions are more motivated to carry them out.

5. Notice your child behaving well

All parents want their children to behave well. Even if it's well-intentioned, you may find yourself criticizing more often than complimenting. The more effective approach is to catch your child doing something right. For example, *"You made your bed without me asking. That's great!"* or *"I noticed how nicely you were playing with your brother."* These statements will do more to encourage good behaviour over the long run than repeatedly reprimanding them or applying consequences for misbehaviour. A smile or hug sends a similar message.

Remember, if children have a choice between no attention or negative attention then they will act out to receive negative attention. So make a point of finding something to praise every day.

6. Set limits and follow-through

The goal of discipline is to help children know what behaviours are acceptable and unacceptable, and learn to self-regulate. They may test the limits you establish for them, but they need those limits to grow into responsible adults. They also need you to be consistent so they know you mean what you say.

Discipline works best when you have a warm and loving relationship with your child and encourage good behaviour, so parenting needs to focus on these fundamentals.

7. Know what is good for your child's health and wellbeing

As a society, we have become much more aware of the importance of mental health and wellbeing.

We recognise its centrality to long-term happiness, healthy relationships and success at work. You can assist your child by embedding good habits such as plenty of sleep, a healthy diet, lots of exercise, time in nature and relaxation techniques.

8. Get support if you need it

All parents need support and help at times. Understanding that there will be challenging aspects to raising children and getting some help when necessary will help you maintain your sanity and be a better parent.

As we journey through these challenging times, please reach out for support and connection amongst your community or if you'd like further support from Relationships Australia WA you can call us on 1300 364 277.

Our Education team are continuing to facilitate Relationship Australia WA's seminars, workshops and courses face-to-face and online.

If you'd like to register your interest in attending **Parent-Child Connection**, or any of our other courses, please email education@relationshipsaustralia.org.au or call 6164 0200.