

# Building better family relationships

Caring and commitment are the basis of strong family relationships. This means making the wellbeing of family members a first priority and offering support when needed. Some families seem to pull together easily, while for others it takes greater effort. To build strong family relationships, start by identifying the strengths you do have and appreciating them. Paying attention to the things that work well and building on them will help to strengthen your relationships. The following suggestions may be useful reminders.

## There are lots of ways to show you care even in busy families

### Tune in

One way to show you care is by listening to what other family members have to say with interest and enthusiasm. Other ideas include doing things for one another, helping (without complaining!), celebrating birthdays and achievements, and taking the time to understand how other family members are feeling. Hugs are another favourite.

### Have fun together

Spend time doing things you enjoy. Doing simple things that allow you to relax and play together is very important for building positive feelings and connections amongst family members. Playing games or sports, going to the park, having picnics, visiting with friends or just relaxing together are examples of family activities that help to build relationships.

### Family rituals

Family rituals can help to build a sense of connection and belonging. These may include family celebrations that happen once a year, as well as everyday activities like bedtime stories, morning cuddles or cooking a special meal together once a week. Having family rituals and routines that you enjoy together helps to create strong family bonds.

## There are lots of ways to show you care even in busy families – *continued*

### **Make time to talk**

Regular time for talking and listening to one another helps families to plan and set priorities, strengthen relationships and build mutual understanding. Taking a few minutes to talk with children after school or before bedtime, and making time for adults to 'check in' with each other, is important for building connections and cooperation. Family discussions are often very helpful ways of resolving conflicts and maintaining positive relationships. Make sure that everyone gets a turn to share feelings and thoughts and contribute to finding solutions that can work for the whole family.

### **Share values**

Sharing common values strengthens belonging and helps families work together when challenges arise. Discuss your beliefs and values or tell stories about your own family and cultural history. Demonstrate through your behaviour values like respect, care, compassion and responsibility. Remember that children are influenced by what you do even more than by what you say.

### **Appreciate differences**

Family togetherness doesn't mean everybody has to be the same or always do the same things. It helps to appreciate that everyone is different, and to value and respect each family member's unique needs, wants and talents. Avoiding negative comparisons, and affirming what each individual has to offer, creates strong family bonds.

### **Share the load**

Family life can get out of balance when one person feels they have the burden of responsibilities, or when one person makes all the decisions. Supporting each other includes sharing the chores and making sure that everyone gets to have a say in the decisions that affect them.

### **Get support**

Family life has many challenges as well as rewards. Getting support when you need it – from extended family, friends, or professionals – is important for managing the challenges. Professional counselling is a particularly valuable strategy for helping many families who experience relationship problems.

This resource is part of a range of KidsMatter Primary information sheets for families and school staff. View them all online at [www.kidsmatter.edu.au](http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au)



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