



Australian Government



Parents and carers

Strategies to connect with your child or young person

The relationship you have with your child or young person is one of the most powerful tools for preventing harm and building their long-term wellbeing. When children feel connected to a trusted adult, they are more likely to seek help, build healthy relationships and recover from difficult experiences.

This guide gives you practical strategies to strengthen that connection and support your child as they navigate social dynamics or harmful behaviours. It also includes a reflection tool to help you build on your existing strengths and identify areas you may want to grow.

What you will need

A quiet moment and somewhere to write if you would like to take notes.

Step 1: Model the behaviour you want to see

When you model kindness, empathy and taking responsibility for your actions, it can encourage your child to develop these behaviours. Let your child see you work through feelings, challenges or difficult situations in a way that suits their age.

If your child is in primary school:

Name your feelings simply and honestly. For example: 'My body feels tense right now' or 'I said sorry because I knew I had hurt their feelings'. Let your child watch you regulate by controlling emotions, thoughts and reactions, and by repairing things with other adults when things go wrong. This shows them that everyone's feelings matter – including their own. Let them see you respecting and including others.

If your young person is in secondary school:

Narrate more complex emotions and situations where appropriate. Let your young person see you regulate by controlling your emotions and behaviours, and explain why you do it. For example, focusing on your breathing and taking time to calm your thoughts before responding. Be openly curious about others' perspectives. Name your behaviour and its impact, and allow your young person to witness you apologise and repair with others.

'Young people often model their parents. If a young person sees you owning up to mistakes, showing healthy emotions and vulnerability, while displaying empathy and kindness, it gets absorbed much more than any lecture on kindness.'

– YOUNG PERSON, 19, PROJECT ROCKIT NATIONAL YOUTH COLLECTIVE

Step 2: Create low-pressure moments to talk

Regular conversations about your child's friendships, social life, stresses and worries help you stay connected. They also mean you are better placed to support your child when something goes wrong. Try talking side by side during an activity, such as driving, preparing food, playing games, walking or doing crafts together. Children may find it easier to open up when there isn't direct eye contact, and there are natural pauses in conversation. This can be especially helpful for neurodivergent children who may use movement to regulate.

Note

Family communication styles vary across cultural and other contexts. Adapt all strategies to what feels comfortable and effective for your family and your child's needs.



Step 3: Understand before you offer support

When your child shares something about their social life, focus on understanding before you offer solutions. You may want to fix things quickly. But listening first makes your child more likely to feel ready to accept support when they need it. This protects their sense of agency – their ability to choose, decide and influence what happens.

'Young people don't always tell adults what's going on, not because they don't trust them, but because they're unsure if they'll be understood.'

– YOUNG PERSON, 16,
PROJECT ROCKIT NATIONAL
YOUTH COLLECTIVE



Tip

Ask your child to choose the activity. This increases their sense of agency and can deepen your connection with each other over time.

If your child is in primary school:

Regular short activities work well. Even a 10-minute walk or a simple craft activity can create the right conditions. Keep it low-key and consistent rather than making it feel like a special occasion.

If your young person is in secondary school:

Avoid framing the activity as a deliberate attempt to connect, as this can feel forced. Choose something they already enjoy and let conversation emerge naturally. The less it feels like a check-in, the better.



Tip

Open-ended questions help your child to think critically and understand their emotions. These questions can't be answered with just 'yes' or 'no'. For example: 'What do you think was going on for them?' or 'How did that feel for you?'

If your child is in primary school:

Try asking 'Would you like me to listen or would you like some help?'

If your young person is in secondary school:

Try asking 'Do you want advice or do you just need to talk it through?'



Step 4: Respond rather than react

When your child shares something challenging, you may have strong feelings. Pause to settle your own emotions before you respond. This helps you listen, understand and support your child in the way they need. They are also more likely to come back to you and keep talking over time.

Step 5: Choose curiosity over judgement

You might easily assume how your child is feeling or judge their reactions. Try to notice when this happens and stay curious instead. Ask yourself: 'Do I actually know how they are feeling, or am I assuming?' When your child feels understood and not judged they are more likely to open up to you.

What if it does not go to plan?

Sometimes, even when you try, things do not go perfectly. Be kind to yourself. Pause, then try again. These are long-term approaches that build over time and across many interactions.

Tip

If you notice yourself wanting to react, take a breath first. Do what you need to regulate, then return to your child and keep connection central.

'Big feelings look like me just staring out of space, trying to piece everything together like solving a puzzle. Trying to question why I feel like this, and whether it is or not valid.'

– YOUNG PERSON, 15,
PROJECT ROCKIT NATIONAL
YOUTH COLLECTIVE

'Parents don't really know the perfect in-between of when to stay out of it and when to put in their advice. It's either 'I'm going to your teacher and moving you out of school' or they don't care at all. They don't know how to just be there.'

– YOUNG PERSON, 17, PROJECT ROCKIT NATIONAL YOUTH COLLECTIVE

Reflection tool

Use this reflection tool to think about how often you use the skills and approaches outlined in the guide above. There are no right or wrong answers, and this is a private resource. Be honest and compassionate with yourself as you work through it. Notice what feels important now. Recognising it is a valuable first step.

Before you begin, take a slow breath. Notice where you are. Relax your body.

Place a dot or mark on the line under each statement (from 'never' on the left to 'always' on the right) to show how often you do what is described.

1. How often do you role model emotions, responses and taking responsibility for your actions?

NEVER SOMETIMES ALWAYS

2. How often do you model empathy and kindness towards others?

NEVER SOMETIMES ALWAYS

3. How often do you have curious, low-pressure conversations with your child about their social life, friendships, stresses or worries?

NEVER SOMETIMES ALWAYS

4. How often do you use strategies to help respond to your child when they share something difficult? For example, using breathing techniques, naming emotions or positive reframing.

NEVER SOMETIMES ALWAYS

5. How often do you try to fix a problem when your child shares one with you?

NEVER SOMETIMES ALWAYS

6. How often do you pause to identify where your child has agency before stepping in to help?

NEVER SOMETIMES ALWAYS

7. How often do you make assumptions about how your child is feeling before asking them?

NEVER SOMETIMES ALWAYS

8. How often do you notice yourself judging your child?

NEVER SOMETIMES ALWAYS

Look back over your responses. Notice which prompts show your strengths first. Then take a moment to recognise them. Next, identify one or two areas where you would like to grow. Be compassionate with yourself and choose just one or two to focus on as a starting point. If you would like to track your progress, come back and complete this reflection again in a few months.

'Parents, sometimes we don't need you to fix things, just reassure us!'

– YOUNG PERSON, 16, PROJECT ROCKIT NATIONAL YOUTH COLLECTIVE

Connected resources

- ◉ Protective and risk factors for children and young people
- ◉ Helping your child develop responsibility and independence
- ◉ Understanding the online world of your child or young person

Where to get more help

If you need further support, help is available:

For children and young people

Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800 or kidshelpline.com.au. Free, confidential counselling for bullying and other harmful behaviours, school issues, online harm and wellbeing, available 24/7.

headspace/ehespace: 1800 650 890 or headspace.org.au. Mental health, wellbeing and early intervention support, available 9 am–1 am daily.

For parents and carers

Parenting support lines

ACT: 02 6287 3833

New South Wales: 1300 1300 52

Queensland and Northern Territory: 1300 30 1300 or parentline.com.au

South Australia: 1300 364 100

Tasmania: 1300 808 178

Victoria: 13 22 89

Western Australia: 08 9368 9368

For all ages

Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636 or beyondblue.org.au. Mental health support for stress, anxiety and overwhelm, available 24/7.

Dolly's Dream Bullying Support Line:

13 36 55 (13 DOLLY) or dollysdream.org.au. Free, confidential bullying support for children, young people, young adults, parents and carers, available 24/7.

Lifeline: 13 11 14 or lifeline.org.au. Crisis support and counselling if things feel overwhelming, available 24/7.

13YARN: 13 92 76. Culturally safe 24/7 support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and carers.

QLife (LGBTIQA+ young people):

1800 184 527 or qlife.org.au. Free, anonymous peer support and referral service, available 3 pm–9 pm daily.

1800RESPECT: 1800 737 732 or 1800respect.org.au. Available for free 24/7 to support people impacted by domestic, family and sexual violence.

eSafety Commissioner:

esafety.gov.au. Report cyberbullying, get advice, and request content removal support.

Australian Human Rights Commission:

humanrights.gov.au. Support for cases involving discriminatory harm. Reports can be made via the website or by emailing infoservice@humanrights.gov.au.

State, territory and non-government education sectors will reflect the expectations of the National Framework for Addressing Bullying in Australian schools in their policies and procedures by Term 1 2027. This includes making reasonable efforts to initiate a response to bullying and harmful behaviour within two school days, recognising that further time may be required to fully address the issue. By Term 1 2027, all schools will also publish or link to policies and procedures that align with the National Framework (or equivalent contemporary jurisdiction specific Frameworks) and their local policies and school context.