

# Emerging Minds Families

## FACT SHEET

# Parent-child relationship: How positive connections support children's wellbeing

Emerging Minds acknowledges that families come in many forms. For the purposes of easy reading, the term 'parent' encompasses the biological, adoptive, foster and kinship carers of a child, as well as individuals who have chosen to take up primary or shared responsibility in raising that child.

We also appreciate that every child is unique and has different strengths, vulnerabilities and experiences that shape their health and development.

One of the most important things for a child's wellbeing is having safe, secure and nurturing relationships with adults they can rely on. As a parent, you build that kind of relationship when you respond warmly and consistently to your children to meet their needs.

It's important to work on building your connection with your child when things are going well, as this might make it easier to maintain closeness when your family is under stress.

A strong relationship with your child helps protect their mental health when they, or your family unit, are facing challenging situations. It helps them feel safe, secure and loved, and better able to cope during difficult times.



In this video (2 minutes, 38 seconds), parents and practitioners talk about the importance of building a strong parent-child relationship and ideas for connecting with your child.

## How to build a positive parent-child relationship

Ways you can build a positive parent-child relationship depend on the age of your child. For example:

- With **newborn babies**, you can strengthen your bond by just holding them, making eye contact and smiling at them, and responding when they cry. This helps babies to feel they are safe in the world.

- Most **infants and toddlers** thrive on any kind of fun interaction, like when you play, sing, move or read with them. Depending on their age and interests you might play 'peek-a-boo', have a dance party in the kitchen or make up silly songs while you're grocery shopping.
- If you have a **preschooler or young child**, it's important to look for chances to connect with them, even if you only have a short amount of time. When your child is playing by themselves, sit beside them or get down on the floor with them. Let them decide if and how they want you to join in. Doing so will help you see the world through your child's eyes and get to know their interests, preferences and strengths. Your child will feel special and more connected to you because you've shown you're interested in what they're doing.
- With **older children and teens**, notice and look for opportunities to connect around the things they are most interested in. These opportunities will often be spontaneous rather than planned: for example, if your teen shows an interest in cooking, you might have a chat while making dinner together. These chances often come at an inconvenient time, but whenever you can accept an invitation from your teenager or pre-teen to connect – to go to the park and kick the football, or look at the art project they're working on, for example – it can have a big impact.

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**When I play with my child without distractions, I enjoy seeing how much they love having me spend time just with them. I also enjoy watching them play and seeing their creativity.**

PARENT OF THREE CHILDREN (3, 5 AND 8 YEARS OLD)

Knowing your child and what they like and enjoy will help you to spot or create those moments to connect. If you're not sure, ask your child. You might say something like, 'Hey, I would love to spend some time with you, what would you like to do?'. Have a few ideas ready to suggest if your child says, 'I don't know'.

The most important thing is to give your child 100% of your attention while you are playing or talking with them. Show you're interested by making eye contact, smiling and nodding. Tell them why you like spending time together – for example, 'I really like this game you've made up!' or 'It's fun hanging out with you.'

When you are busy or feeling stressed, it might feel impossible to find time to connect with your child, or you might not want to get down on the floor and play with them. You're not alone. But even a few minutes of

quality time with your child can make a big difference to their mental health and wellbeing.

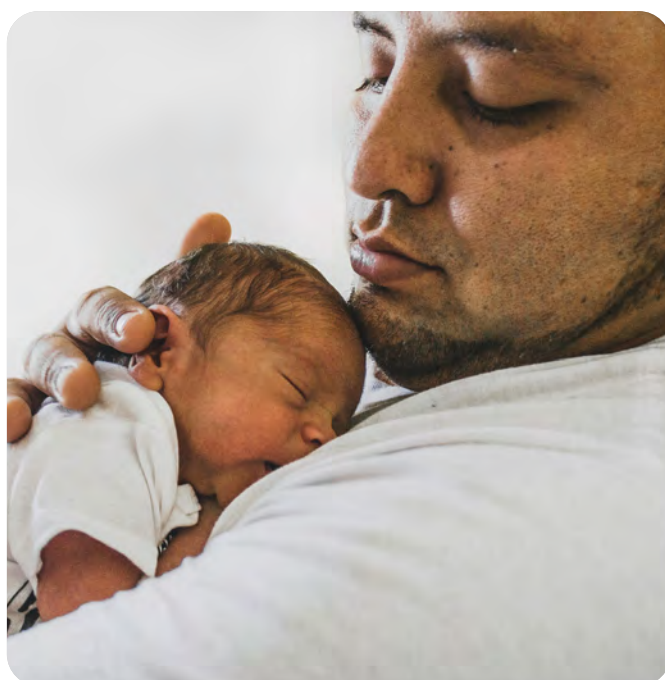
Creating moments of connection regularly and often, and showing you're really focused on your child boosts their development and wellbeing. All those little moments add up and fill your child's emotional cup. And you might just find that taking five or 10 minutes to stop and listen to your child read, have a cuddle on the couch, or take the dog for a walk together, is good for your mental health, too.

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**There's no such thing as perfect parenting and no such thing as a perfect parent and child relationship. Even though we would aspire for more, research shows we only have to get it right about 30% of the time to still have a child who feels like they have a strong bond and a healthy relationship with their family.**

LYNDSAY HEALY, EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR

Children thrive on positive connection and quality time with you and other significant adults in their life. Making time to play, chat or just hang out together reminds your child that they're loved and that you enjoy being with them. It also creates opportunities to talk about what's going on in their life. All these moments build your child's sense of self-worth and knowledge that they're likeable, which gives them the confidence to build their own relationships and friendships, and explore the world around them.



## Thinking about your parent-child relationship

You might like to take a few minutes to think about your relationship with your child (or each of your children if you have more than one) and any ways you can strengthen your bond with them.

- How would you describe your relationship with your child?
- How do you think they would describe their relationship with you? What do you think they'd say is the best part?
- When do you feel most connected with them?
- When do you think they feel most connected with you?
- If there's been times you felt disconnected, what helped bring you closer again?
- What is something you think your child would like to do together with you?

## More resources to support your parent-child connection

- The Emerging Minds Families podcast offers more practical advice about the importance and ways of [building a strong and positive relationship with your child](#).
- [Connecting and caring for each other in tough times](#) shares other families' experiences and ideas for connecting when things are really difficult
- The Raising Children Network website has information for parents on building [positive relationships with children](#) as well as [connecting with children of different ages](#).
- Check out these ideas for fun (and free or low cost) [activities you can do with your child](#) (from birth to around five years old) from South Australia's Department for Education.
- The Raising Children Network also has some great resources about the [importance of and ideas for play](#), including [child-led play](#).

This resource is one in a series of five ways you can support your child's mental health. Find out more about the other ways you can nurture and protect your child's mental health, now and into the future.

AVAILABLE HERE

**Five ways to support your children's mental health**



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