

Relationship Building and Maintenance

Just like a house, relationships require a strong foundation and consistent maintenance to remain intact.

Respectful family relationships are a great way to ensure the family is likely to rally together in tough times. Feeling connected and emotionally healthy creates a nurturing environment that benefits all family members. It gives children a role model to base their own relationships on and gives them confidence to grow and explore the process of building and maintaining a relationship in a safe family environment.

One component of managing a relationship is recognising that from time to time your relationships will experience stress. Relationship stress can be caused by many things such as conflict, disagreements, life stress and/or caring responsibilities. During times of stress, family members often just focus on getting through the day or week and forget to give their attention to just spending time together as a couple or a family.

There are many ways to take care of your relationship such as:

- Sharing your feelings with your partner or other family members and listening to their feelings;
- Sharing the daily tasks. This can be as important as the emotional support – it says ‘we are both in this together’;
- Making regular times together with your partner – this may seem hard to do but it is very important. Go on a ‘date’ together, have a movie night each week, cook dinner for the two of you and feed the children earlier.

Considerations for building a strong relationship:

How well do you know your partner’s and other family members likes, joys, dreams, stresses, worries? Get to know each other again.

Update your knowledge regularly – make time for “friendship talk” as opposed to “everyday talk” (such as who is picking up whom, at what time and what’s for dinner). Try to take 15 minutes a day to ask open ended questions, find out what’s happening in each other’s lives and what’s important to each other right now.

Remember what you love and appreciate about each other – and tell each other.

This helps everyone feel valued and respected. Try telling your partner and other family members 2 positive things that you value and respect about them. Do small things often to make your family members feel special – help each other around the house, watch a favourite movie together.

When communicating, “turn towards” your partner and other family members.

Respond to their bids for connection; it might be as simple as making sure you say hello to each other when you come home or smiling when you make eye contact.

Share the power in your relationship

Let your family influence your decisions. Showing interest in and respect for each other's opinions make it feel like you are in it together as a team.

Resolve conflict

Talk about issues; bring up difficult topics in non-threatening, tactful ways. Take time out to calm down if things get off track.

Accept that some things can't be resolved

Despite differences, you can find ways to respect your partner and other family members.

Create shared rituals that reflect you as a family

This could include routines during everyday life and during emergencies, or just simply the way you say goodbye to each other.

Share the daily tasks

This can be as important as the emotional support – it says 'we are all in this together'.

For more information on building strong relationships within your family please visit <http://raisingchildren.net.au/> or contact your local family mental health support service.

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