

# Emerging Minds Families

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

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.

Parents are generally doing the best they can to help their children thrive. There are hundreds of books, websites, courses, Facebook pages and more that offer parents advice about raising children. All this information can be helpful, but it can also feel overwhelming and confusing.

Based on research and the conversations we've had with families and health professionals, we've identified five key things parents can do to support their children's mental health, now and in the future.

Every family is unique and will experience different ups and downs. Whether life is going well right now, or your child or family is navigating tough times, focusing on these five areas of family life will help nurture and protect your child's mental health and overall wellbeing.



### Focus on the PERCS

As parents and family members, there are five key areas you can focus on to support children's development, learning, mental health and overall wellbeing.



In the following video (2 minutes, 5 seconds) Emerging Minds' Ben Rogers explains PERCS and how you can use this approach to support your child's and family's wellbeing.



[WATCH THE VIDEO TO LEARN MORE](#)

In this next video (2 minutes, 58 seconds), parents and practitioners talk about how PERCS works, and the benefits of this approach for children's mental health and family wellbeing.



[WATCH THE VIDEO TO LEARN MORE](#)

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

Select the following headings to learn more about how focusing on each area of family life nurtures and protects a child's mental health and wellbeing. There are also suggested strategies, based on research and the experiences of other families and health professionals that you can add to your parenting toolkit.

### Parent-child relationship

Build a strong bond with your child by responding warmly and consistently to their needs and making time to connect with them.

### Emotions and behaviours

Tune in to your child's feelings and be curious about what's behind their behaviours, so you can help them understand and express all their emotions in healthy ways.

### Routines

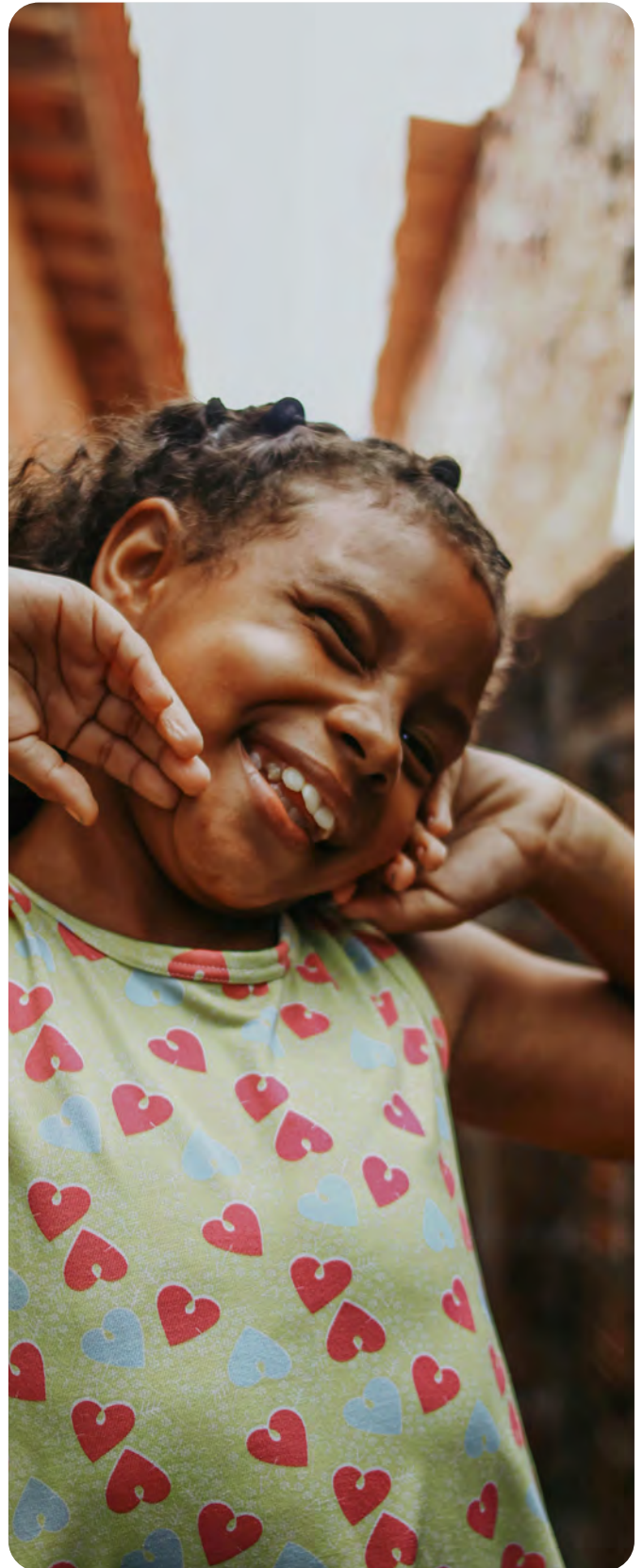
Create family routines to help children feel secure, reduce stress and find time for connection and fun.

### Communication and meaning-making

Talk openly with children to help them understand and make meaning of what's happening in their world.

### Support networks

Know where you can get support and how to ask for help when you need it, and how to help your child build their support team, too.



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

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.



[WATCH THE VIDEO TO LEARN MORE](#)



## 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](#).



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# Emotions and behaviours: Understanding and supporting children's feelings and responses

To reach their full potential, children need to feel safe and nurtured. They also need to be able to express their emotions and have them 'seen' and responded to in a supportive and caring way.

Understanding your child's emotions and behaviours and knowing how to support them makes a positive difference to their development, learning, relationships and mental health.

## Understanding behaviour as communication

Children may not yet fully understand, or have the language to express, their emotions, so their behaviour can be a way of exploring and communicating their feelings and needs.

If your child's behaviour is challenging, it's normal to feel concerned or want to 'fix it' as quickly as possible. But this is not always the best way to support your child.

Instead of only focusing on the behaviour itself, try to be curious about what's behind it. For example, you might say, 'I've noticed that you've been hitting your sister. I want you to know it's never OK to hit someone. I wonder if you were feeling angry about something when you did that?'



Create opportunities and space for your child to talk about what's going on for them and how they're feeling. When children experience big emotions like anger or frustration, connecting with you (or another trusted adult) can help them to feel safe and calm down.

Trying to understand what your child might be experiencing, feeling and trying to express can help you to understand their emotions – and help your child to understand them, too. Helping your child recognise and name their emotions can also [strengthen your connection and parent-child relationship](#).

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**A lot of the times I feel because I am a parent, I have to have a solution. But 99% of the time it's not about me doing anything. It's me just walking alongside [my kids] and letting them know that they're loved.**

FLICK, MUM OF FOUR, NEW SOUTH WALES



It's not always obvious or easy for you or your child to pinpoint what's behind their behaviour. As adults, we don't always understand our emotions or reactions either! By taking the time to be curious and show empathy, you're showing your child that their feelings and thoughts matter.

In this video (2 minutes, 53 seconds) parents and practitioners talk about ways children express emotions and the importance of being curious about what might be beneath a child's behaviours.



## Taking care of yourself

To support your child's emotions and mental health, you need to first look after your own wellbeing.

Taking care of yourself will help you to 'tune in' to how your child is feeling and coping and be better able to support them. Also remember that children notice and learn from the behaviour of those around them – so watching you take care of yourself and use positive coping strategies will benefit them (and the rest of your family) too.

If you regularly find your child's behaviours and emotions difficult to understand, it can be helpful to get some advice and support for yourself. Not all adults grew up with the support to understand and regulate their own emotions. It's often not until we become parents, and we're helping children understand emotions, that we realise how important that is.

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**We went through so much terrible stuff, and I didn't manage that very well. But when we came out the other end, one of the goals that I set myself was to be the best parent that I can be at all times. And that meant putting my kids' needs at the forefront, and making time even when it wasn't suitable. And I'm really glad that I was able to do that because that's been hugely supportive and helpful for their mental health.**

EMI, PARENT OF FOUR, NGARRINDJERI COUNTRY

## Thinking about your child's emotions and behaviour

What have you noticed about your child's emotions and behaviour?

- What is your child like?
- What do they enjoy? What are they good at?
- What happens for them when they're upset?
- If your child often gets upset, angry or worried, what have you found helps them to cope with those big feelings?
- What do you think your child would say helps them?
- When you're finding it hard to deal with your child's emotions or behaviour, what have you found helps?

## Learn more about children's emotions and mental health

To explore more about children's emotions and mental health and ways parents can support them, we recommend the following resources:

- [In focus: Understanding children's emotions and behaviour](#)
- [In focus: Understanding children's mental health](#)
- [In focus: What shapes children's mental health](#)
- [Podcast: Supporting your child's emotions](#)
- [Tuning in to Kids](#) courses for parents
- [Learning about emotions](#) (Raising Children Network)
- [Emotions and play – for preschoolers](#) (Raising Children Network)
- [Emotions and play – for school-aged children](#) (Raising Children Network)

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# Routines: Creating family routines to support children's mental health

Routines are the way we generally do things in a day or a week – like leaving for school at the same time each weekday, going to swimming lessons on Thursday afternoons, or reading two stories together every night before bed. Some families call them rituals or rhythms.

Family routines support children's mental health but they're also good for everyone's wellbeing. They help each member of the family to get things done, reduce stress levels, and find time to connect and have fun together.

**Routines and predictability help children feel safe, secure and connected.**

Young children especially cope best when they know the order and way in which you do daily activities such as dinner, bath time, stories and bedtime.

When children are older, including them in planning daily or weekly routines and creating family rituals increases their 'buy in' and builds family connections.

If you're introducing new routines with older children, you might get some resistance. This is normal and doesn't mean you should give up. Keep trying and remind your child why having routines helps everyone in the family.



In this video (2 minutes, 41 seconds) parents and practitioners talk about the importance and benefits of family routines and rituals.



[WATCH THE VIDEO TO LEARN MORE](#)

## **Stick to routines as much as possible – but be flexible**

There might be times when you need to change or simplify a routine – for example, if you all got home late it might be a quick wash for your toddler instead of a bath; or on nights your child has sports training they might eat dinner in the car on the way home. Children cope better with changes to routines if you can tell them in advance (which we know is not always possible) and explain what will be different.

As much as you can, try to keep the order or 'rhythm' of your child's days as predictable as possible. For example, even if their bedtime is later, you'll still read one book or chapter together before bed to help your child wind down.

You might ask people in your support network for help. Is there a family member or friend who can come over and read with your older child so you can bathe your baby, or take your children to sports training when you're not able to?



Also remember that it's normal to skip, forget or have to change routines sometimes – and don't feel bad or give up on them when you do. Routines don't have to be perfect or set in stone. Keep them flexible and do what works for your family.

### What if creating or maintaining family routines feels impossible?

Keeping routines as consistent as possible, especially when things are tough, is one way parents and other adults can help a child feel a sense of safety and predictability, which supports them to cope.

But it's also important not to feel guilty if it feels impossible to set up or stick to family routines right now.

When you're under stress, unwell or dealing with unavoidable changes like moving house, it can be extra difficult to create or stick to routines. Sudden or external events like a disaster or the death of a family member can also upset family relationships, routines and dynamics and take a toll on your own mental health and wellbeing.

If you can, try introducing just one routine at a time. A good way to start is always 're-connecting' with your child after you've been apart. It might be a hug when they wake up, a snack and chat about your days after school or work, or a cuddle on the couch when they get home from a friend's house or sports practice. Those routine moments help your child feel safe, secure and connected to you.

It's also important to know that children can cope with different routines in different places. For example, when parents separate it's common for there to be different rules and routines in different houses. Focus on what you can control – trying to keep routines predictable in your own home – and remind your child that 'this is how we do it here'. Remember, children learn to manage different routines at their childcare/school, and other caregivers' (e.g. grandparents') houses, so with time they will adjust to the changes between your households.

When family circumstances change (e.g. if money becomes tight) it can be hard to keep up your child's routines. But children's regular activities – and the friends they have there – are a valuable source of support, so it's important to do what you can to maintain them.

Routines help children (and adults) to cope and feel more secure during difficult or stressful times. If you can maintain at least some of your family routines it can help you and your child connect and feel some sense of control and predictability. Uncertainty is one of the biggest causes of anxiety, so keeping up your routines is also a great way to support both your and your child's mental health.

## Routines can be fun

Routines help children feel secure because they know what to expect and when. But routines aren't just about scheduling your days or weeks. Things you do routinely on special occasions or at particular times can also be fun.

Family traditions or rituals – like movie night on Fridays, or always having ice cream cake when it's someone's birthday – are fun, and also important ways to build connections within your family.

### Thinking about family routines

Take a moment to think about routines and rituals that your family currently has or might like to start.

- What activities do you and your child like doing together?
- What do you find is the best day/time to do things with them?
- What routines or family rituals do you already have?
- If something has upset your child's routines or meant they've had to stop an activity they enjoy, how has that affected them?
- Is there someone or something that could help keep up or re-establish your child's routines and activities?
- Are there any new routines or family traditions that you would like to try to introduce?

### More information on family routines

Take a moment to think about routines and rituals that your family currently has or might like to start.

- If your family has experienced a disaster or traumatic event, watch our video about [re-establishing routines and rules](#) to support children's mental health, wellbeing and recovery.
- Read more about [how and why family routines work](#) on the Raising Children Network website.
- The Raising Children Network also has information about [routines and children with disability, autism or other additional needs](#).

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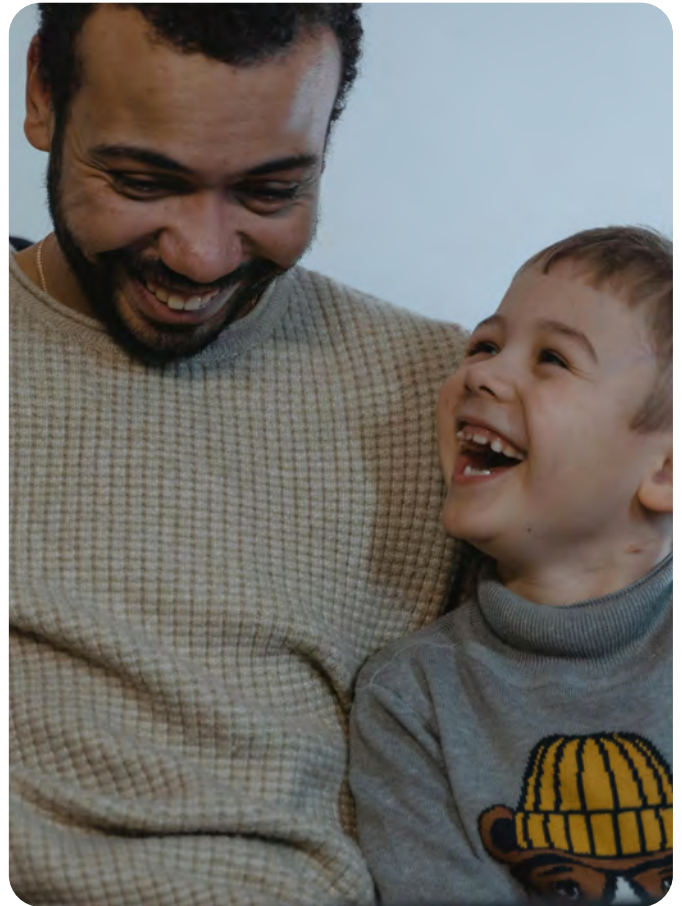
# Communication and meaning-making: Why good communication is key to children's mental health

Communicating clearly with children ensures they have the information they need to understand or 'make meaning' about what's going on in their world. Being open and talking regularly with your child about all sorts of things also builds trust and strengthens your connection.

Good communication in families doesn't mean talking a lot or telling children everything. Clear communication is about:

- sharing information truthfully with children, in age-appropriate ways
- clear and consistent words and actions
- allowing space for questions and checking what your child is thinking and feeling, so you can uncover any misunderstandings or worries
- communicating in ways that work for your family
  - for example if you have a child who's non-verbal or prefers to get information in bite-size chunks rather than long conversations.

It's common for family members to have different understandings of an event or issue. Children often see and hear more than we realise, so their understanding might be based on bits of information they've overheard and their own thoughts and feelings about what's going on.



## Open communication and age-appropriate truth-telling are important

Often parents think it's better to protect their children from difficulties by not telling them what's happening, or by pretending everything is 'normal'. But children pick up on tension and stress within the family. If they aren't told about the cause— such as money struggles or a parent being unwell – children can make guesses based on their own ideas and sometimes their worst fears. And often children will blame themselves for what's happening.

For example, when parents separate many children think it's because of something they did. It's important to tell children, in age-appropriate ways and words, what's going on, and reassure them the separation is not their fault. (For more information, see our resource on [talking to your child about separation and divorce](#).)

Talking to children honestly can help them:

- ask questions and get the correct information
- make sense of what's going on (in or around your family)
- know it's OK to talk about difficulties and any worries they have
- be reassured that what's happening is not their fault
- feel connected to you and part of the decisions that affect them
- learn problem-solving skills
- be hopeful that things will improve (if you explain actions you're taking, for example)
- build skills and resilience to deal with challenges they might face in the future.

In this video (2 minutes, 34 seconds) parents and practitioners talk about what good communication within families looks like and some of the challenges of talking with children and helping them make meaning of their experiences.



[WATCH THE VIDEO TO LEARN MORE](#)



## Tips for talking with children

- Find a time that is good for both of you – when you have space, won't be interrupted and you are as calm as you can be.
- With younger children, it might be while they're having a snack or drawing, or you're doing a puzzle together.
- Often children, especially teens, are more likely to open up if there's no eye contact – while you're walking the dog or in the car together, for example.
- Be as honest as is appropriate – depending on the situation and your child's age.
- Use simple, straightforward language to explain what's going on, and address any fears, worries or feelings of self-blame your child might have. For example, you might say, 'Mum and I are arguing a lot at the moment. We know that it's not ideal and we are trying to work it out. We want you to know that it's not because of anything you did, and that we both love you.'
- If you are concerned about getting emotional, take a few minutes to plan and practice what you want to tell your children. It can be helpful to talk it through with another adult beforehand.
- Allow space for children to ask questions and express their feelings. It's understandable they might cry and need a cuddle, or be angry and need reassurance. Make sure your child knows their reaction doesn't affect your love for them. If your child asks a question that you can't answer now, tell them you will come back to them with an answer as soon as you can.
- Open the door to ongoing conversations – tell your child they can ask questions, or talk about it more, anytime they need to. Talk about other trusted adults they can talk to and either set up a conversation or make sure they know how to contact those people.

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**We started a thing called “walk and talk”. So the kids could ask to go for a walk and they would talk out problems as we went. It was beneficial, the exercise, and a good thing to practice for getting things out in the open. It has been so helpful, yet so simple. Even the older kids still go to this regularly if they need it.**

KIRSTY, MUM OF FOUR, NGARRINDJERI COUNTRY



## Helping children make meaning of their experiences

When children have new or difficult experiences – like starting school, parents separating, a disaster in their community, or experiencing bullying – they need your support to make meaning or make ‘sense’ of their experience.

Many children have a deep understanding of themselves and the skills and imagination to:

- make meaning of experiences – including negative or difficult ones
- know what helps them feel better
- solve problems or cope with challenges
- join in family conversations and offer ideas.

Children often understand much more than they can express. To help your child make sense of a situation – especially stressful or distressing ones – take the time to talk with, and really listen to, them. Be curious about what they already know and what they are thinking and feeling, and be ready to answer their questions truthfully. Helping a child to make meaning – to understand how an event or experience relates to them – often takes time and more than one conversation.

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**It is all confusing as a kid, nothing anyone says makes it really OK. Just being with my family was helpful, and Mum telling me it would not be forever, and that lots of other people are going through the same thing, was the only thing that was OK. And that I was loved.**

LIAM, 11 YEARS OLD, REFLECTING ON BEING HOMELESS AT AGE NINE

## Keep the communication going

It's important that communication in your family is open and ongoing.

If you have more than one child, making time for one-to-one chats with each of your children gives them space to share their thoughts and feelings. It also gives you the opportunity to tune in to any individual concerns or challenges they may be experiencing. Listening and answering their questions helps children understand and make meaning of what's happening in their world.

Whole family conversations can also be important. Often siblings react to challenges in different ways,

which can create tension within the family. Help your children understand that no one's feelings are wrong and it's normal for people to have different perspectives.

## Thinking about family communication and meaning-making

Considering these questions can help you notice what's working well now, and any ways you might like to improve communication in your family.

- When have you found is a good time to talk with your child?
- What does your child most like to talk about?
- If you've had to talk about a tricky topic, when and how did you handle that? How did your child react?
- If you, your child or your whole family has been through a tough time, how did you help your child understand what was happening?
- If your family is going through a stressful experience, what do you want your child to know and understand about it?
- How do you keep communication ongoing with your child (e.g. check-in about how things are going for them)?
- What do you think your child would say are the best times and places to chat with you about things?

## More resources for talking with your child and helping them make meaning

The following Emerging Minds Families resources offer tips for planning and having conversations with children of different ages when your family is navigating difficulties:

- [Communicating with your baby during tough times](#)
- [Communicating with your toddler during tough times](#)
- [Communicating with your primary school-age child during tough times](#)
- [Communicating with your teenager during tough times](#)
- [Talking to your child about separation and divorce](#)
- [Talking to children about family money struggles](#)
- [Talking to children about homelessness](#)
- [Podcast: How communicating well can keep separated families connected](#)

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# Support networks: Building support networks for you and your child

At all ages and stages of life it's important to be able to get the support we need, when we need it. Feeling connected to family, friends, neighbours or your community and having a support network you can rely on can protect and boost both your children's mental health and wellbeing, and your own.

Support can look different for each family and situation. It may be that at times the extra support you need comes from extended family members or trusted friends. Or it might be talking to your child's teacher or early childhood educator.

At other times, finding support might involve looking online for reliable information about a challenge your child or family is experiencing and getting some strategies or practical ideas that you can try at home.

In this video (2 minutes, 57 seconds) parents and practitioners discuss the importance of building a support network and helping children identify who's in theirs.



[WATCH THE VIDEO TO LEARN MORE](#)

We know it can be challenging to reach out to others and uncomfortable to ask for help. But staying connected with the people who support you is especially important when times are tough.



It's common as adults to feel an urge to withdraw when things get challenging, or to think we should be able to cope alone. But the people around us often want to help and are just waiting to be asked – so think about how the people in your 'village' could support your family.

For example:

- Is there a family member who could take your toddler to the park for an hour?
- Who would be happy to pick up some groceries for you?
- Which friend, or health professional, can you talk to about the stresses you or your family are facing and how you are feeling?

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**I never understood the idea and importance of “your village” until I had my children. It really does take a village in the hard times, and it can take many forms. I had to learn to ask for help from family and friends and outsource anything I could ... I had to realise I couldn’t do it all and give myself permission to ask for help.**

MELISSA, MOTHER OF TWO

## Building support networks

Building a support network beyond your family can take time.

If you feel like you don’t have people who will support you when you need some help, it is important to look for opportunities to make these connections. You might try:

- a free parents’ group, [play group](#) or toddler music group at your library
- your child’s school – go to events where you might meet other parents, volunteer at the school canteen if you have time, and get to know your child’s teacher/s
- your local council or community centre, to find out about groups or activities in your area.

## Helping children to build their own support network

There’s lots of evidence that feeling supported can help protect children from harmful impacts. It also protects their mental health when they experience things like bullying, parental separation or disasters in their community.

Help your child to build a team around them that includes their peers (friends, siblings and cousins around their age), extended family members (e.g. aunt, grandparent) and other supportive adults (e.g. a sports coach or favourite teacher). There is no perfect size for your child’s support network; it might be made up of several people, or just one or two key individuals you and your child trust and can rely on.

Children often know best which people (or places or things) in their lives they feel most connected to and who give them a sense of belonging or support when they need it.

If your child has trouble identifying or choosing people to be in their support network, brainstorm together. Try asking them:

- ‘Outside of our family, who do you like to have fun with?’
- ‘Who do you feel safe with? If you were sad or worried about something, who could you talk to?’
- ‘Who do you hang out with at school?’
- ‘If you had a problem or felt upset at school, which adult could you go to?’

Remind them it doesn’t have to be their current homeroom teacher – it might be a previous teacher, the school counsellor, a year level coordinator or someone else they feel comfortable talking to.

Talk to your child about who’s in their support team and the different roles they have. For example, Grandma might be the person they go to when they don’t want to talk about problems, they just want a hug and to watch TV together. Their older sister might be the person they talk to when they want advice about how to deal with stuff at school.

If your children are around six to 12 years old, you could show them our video with [young people talking about the ‘support heroes’ in their lives](#). Then have a chat with your child about the people in their life who support them in different ways.





With preschoolers or young children, ask them to hold out their hand and tuck in a finger each time they name:

- someone who is safe
- someone they can trust
- someone who is kind;
- and so on.

See if they can think of enough people to 'fill' both their hands. You can trace around their hand on a piece of paper and write the names of those people on the fingers, then stick it up on the fridge or in their bedroom as a reminder of who's in their support team.



## What to do when you need more support

Sometimes the stress and worries of everyday life pile up and families get overloaded. There are resources and services that can help lighten the load – but it can be hard to know where and how to access further support when you need it.

Your family doctor/GP or another health professional can be a great source of support, and can point or refer you to other resources to help you and your family. If you're unsure who to speak to, check out our 'Practitioners speak' video series about different professionals and the services they provide.

If you have any concerns about your child's, or your own, mental health, speaking to your family doctor/GP or another health professional is a great place to start.

## Thinking about your family's support networks

Take a moment to think about your own support network, and who's in your child's support team.

- Who are the people you can rely on and call on for support (practical and/or emotional) when you need it?
- Who supports you as a family? Would they talk with you if they were worried about how you were coping, or noticed your child might be struggling to deal with something?
- Have you met your child's teacher or early childhood educator? How would you go about talking to them if you felt they could help support your child?
- Have you helped your child identify who's in their support team?
- Who does your child like spending time with, outside of their immediate family? Who are their close friends?
- How do you support your child to stay connected with their friends and with other important people in their life?

## More resources for building support networks

We know it can be hard to ask for help, find the right health professional or service, and navigate the sometimes-complicated systems they work within.

Emerging Minds Families has several resources to help you identify or access the right support when you might need it:

- Our 'Practitioners speak' series includes [videos with many different health professionals](#). They explain what they can do to support you and your family, what you and your child can expect, and how to make the most out of your visit.
- Find out about getting professional support if your [child is experiencing anxiety](#).
- Developed for parents living with mental illness, these resources have helpful information for all parents about the [importance of your 'village'](#) and ways to build your support network. They also have advice around [helping your child build their support network](#) (including a guide you can use with your child).
- [Supporting children's social connections in tough times](#) has helpful tips from families about sustaining children's relationships outside the home when times are tough.

Other support services and resources we recommend:

- Healthdirect's [National Health Services Directory](#) can help you to find a GP, counsellor, psychologist or other health professional in your local area.
- [Child and Family Hubs](#) across Australia provide various supports and services to families in one place.
- The Raising Children Network has compiled a list of [parent support helplines and hotlines](#).
- [Kids Helpline](#) offers free 24/7 support for both parents and children (over five years old). You can [call Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800](#), [chat with a counsellor online](#), or [send Kids Helpline an email](#).

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child's mental health**



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