

Parents: healthy relationships

What are healthy parent relationships?

Being a parent can be great fun. It can make you feel even more deeply connected as a couple, with lots of opportunities for love and excitement. It also brings challenges and hard work. A healthy relationship helps you face these challenges in a positive way that minimises conflict and strengthens your connection.

Why are healthy parent relationships important?

Your children will feel safer and more secure if your relationship is positive. Healthy relationships between parents also show children how to care for and get along with others.

When you're parents: how relationships might change

Most couples experience relationship changes when they become parents. For many people the birth of a child brings positive changes in their relationship. For example, you and your spouse might feel a new and different level of connection.

But you might also experience some strains, even if these were not part of your relationship before becoming parents. Less sleep, less time to talk, less time to spend together – these things can all take their toll on your relationship while you care for your new baby. These changes and strains might mean you disagree more often or that things do not quite feel right. Also, you might not have the energy to sort out problems when they arise.

Open **communication** and making time to **connect** with your spouse can help you nurture healthy relationships.

Tips for parents for a healthy relationship

Communication

- **Listen to each other.** Good listening is the most important communication skill you have. It helps you and your spouse feel heard, understood and supported. If you want your spouse to listen to you, you need to be prepared to hear issues from your spouse's point of view.
- **Tell your spouse how you feel.** When you talk about your frustrations and fears, your happiness and joys, it makes it easier for your spouse to know what you are going through.
- **Use 'I' statements.** 'I' statements are easier to listen to than 'you' statements, which can seem like criticisms. So, when you talk, you could say things like 'I feel a bit lonely when we spend less time together'. This might be better than 'You don't make any time for us anymore'.

- **Talk honestly about the changes.** This might mean talking about how you feel about your new roles as parents. Having children often brings up issues from your own childhood. Discussing these together can help you both to understand how they might influence what you do and say as parents.
- **Manage conflict.** Differences in opinion will come up as you go through changes – talking about these can help you both understand each other’s perspective. It is OK to disagree. As parents, it is important to understand each other and work together, but you might find that agreeing on things like routines, discipline and bedtimes takes some teamwork.

Connecting

- **Accept the changes.** You can look at your relationship as being in a new phase, rather than off track. It is good to talk about what the new phase means to you both and how you can manage it. If you are finding that spending time together is more difficult in this new phase, try planning time for the two of you.
- **Stay close now you are parents.** Simple things like asking your spouse about the day (‘What was good?’, ‘What wasn’t so good?’) can help you keep in touch. Small gestures that show your spouse that you care can also bring you closer. This might be just a cup of tea or offering your spouse a sleep-in when tiredness sets in.
- **Make some ‘couple’ time.** Making some time to spend together as a couple can give you both the opportunity to talk, reconnect, enjoy each other’s company and nurture your relationship. For example, you could organise a babysitter and go out somewhere you both enjoy – it could be for a meal, a walk or a movie.
- **Plan ahead.** If you plan ahead for these activities, they are more likely to happen. It also gives you something to look forward to.



Recommended Reads by the National Library Board

Recommended Reads

- [Parenting without power struggles: Raising joyful, resilient kids while staying cool, calm and connected](#)
- [Positive parenting: An essential guide](#)
- [Parenting - From Surviving to thriving](#)