

Connected Parenting



A Bringing
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Resource



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Australian Childhood Foundation



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About the Australian Childhood Foundation

The Australian Childhood Foundation is a national not for profit organisation that provides therapeutic services, educational programs and creative resources aimed at ensuring that all children are raised in relationships that are safe, caring and respectful.



Australian Childhood Foundation

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Connected Parenting

This booklet explores a number of important topics about being a parent. Above all, it gives you a chance to think about children, parenting and how you can provide children with the experiences you want for them as they grow up.

It will help you answer some of these questions.

- What does it mean to be a child?
- What do we expect of children? Is this realistic?
- What experiences do we want childhood to be about?
- How do we want children to experience adults in their lives?
- How do I want children to experience me?
- What messages are we giving children about their priority in our lives and in our community?

Remember:

As adults, we shape our community through the values and attitudes we promote and tolerate.

Children's experiences influence their relationships, their beliefs and their behaviour.

The experiences we give our children will stay with them forever.



Through a child's eyes...



The more we understand our children the more we can help and support them. One of the ways we can do this is to think about memories of our own childhood and imagine the world from a child's point of view.

Remember what it was like to be a child.....

Think about significant things that happened to you as a child and reflect on how they have influenced your life and relationships.

What things did your parents say and do that were important for you?

What would you have liked your parents to have said or done?

What experiences do you want your child to remember?

Children think in different ways to adults. They do not always understand situations in the same way as adults. For example, children can think they are to blame for things that have nothing to do with them.

Try walking in your child's shoes for a while and understand his or her experience of the world. How does it feel to be so small when everyone is so big? What is it like to be unable to find the words to say how you feel?

As adults, it is our responsibility to respect and appreciate children.

- Consult children about things that affect their lives. As adults we must try to balance a child's own wishes and views with what is safe and reasonable. As they get older, allow children to have more say in their own lives. Give your child some choices and be prepared to accept that choice.
- Help children take on responsibilities.
- Understand that children may think and feel differently to the way you do.
- Make sure that children feel listened to. Children need to feel you respect them in order to feel good about themselves.
- Appreciate and celebrate their individuality.
- Make sure children are safe and protected.



Children need
you to help them
develop and grow.



Being a parent

Being a parent is the most important job you can do. It also lasts a lifetime.

Some say it is a journey filled with amazing rewards and sometimes seemingly impossible challenges.



Parenting Myths

I should know all the answers.

You don't have to know everything. No parent has all the answers. There is no such thing as 'one style fits all' parenting. Parents need to understand and be able to respond to the unique personalities, strengths and vulnerabilities of each child. Have reasonable expectations of yourself. Have confidence in what you do know. It's OK to say I don't know. Find out more about things you feel less confident in.

Parenting comes naturally.

Parenting requires understanding, persistence, imagination, energy, knowledge and patience.

All parents need support. Congratulate yourself on what you are doing well. Accept there may be things you could do differently. Do not be too hard on yourself. Every parent makes mistakes and learns through experience. Mistakes only count if you keep repeating them. Appreciate that parenting has its ups and downs and accept that this is normal.

Raising my children is my job.

Historically, extended families and communities shared the responsibility of caring for children. Today parents, more than ever before, are viewed as solely responsible for raising their children. Parents can often feel judged and alone. But you will find that many other parents feel exactly the same way! Asking for support is a positive thing to do for you and your child. Seek support from family, friends, community and family support services.

Parenting is a community activity – many people play a significant role in children's lives. Grandparents, uncles, aunts, friends, teachers and neighbours all contribute to and support family life.

Look after yourself as well as your children.

Children and parents learn together

There is no such thing as a perfect parent. There is no such thing as a perfect child. There are many ways to parent. Children and parents learn from each other.

Children of all ages are constantly watching, listening and learning from their parents. They watch how you do things, how you express your feelings and how you relate to others.

As a parent, you constantly learn more and more about your child as they change and grow.

Your parenting should change with the changing needs of your children.



Understanding yourself as a parent



We all want to be the best parent we can be

We all start out as parents with many ideas about parenting. We have hopes and dreams for our children and ourselves as parents. However, sometimes things get in the way of us being the parent we want to be. Sometimes we can feel stuck in patterns of responding to our children that we don't like, without really understanding why it happens.

Just like our children, our life experiences shape who we are. We draw our ideas about children and parenting from many sources around us, including our own parents, family, friends, child care, schools, professionals and the media.

As parents, we often repeat what we know best. Most often what we know best is drawn from our own experiences. Our experiences of growing up in our family of origin are an important basis for the values and beliefs we hold about children, parenting and families.

Doing things against our better judgement.....

All parents have times when they find themselves doing or saying things to their children that are against their better judgement.

"I don't want to yell at my children, they just push my buttons and I get so mad I can't seem to stop myself."

At these times parents often feel they are letting themselves, their partner and their children down.

Emotions can take over and get the best of parents at times. Understanding where these feelings are coming from allows us to change how we respond to our children.



Awareness of yourself and your child

Children challenge us to remain flexible and in control of our feelings and behaviour. We can lose our ability to respond flexibly if we are stressed, tired, angry or frustrated.

Our own needs or feelings may result in a “knee-jerk” reaction rather than one that matches the situation. This can often result in parent and child feeling disconnected from each other, each left feeling angry, hurt or misunderstood.

As parents, we need to be aware of our triggers or what ‘pushes our buttons’. Often our child’s emotions or behaviour can trigger emotions and behaviour in ourselves that are not relevant or helpful to the situation in which you and your child find yourselves. We need to try to separate our own needs and feelings out from the situation with our child in order to respond appropriately.

Through self-reflection we can become more aware of why we think, feel and behave the way we do. Through self reflection and self-awareness we can be flexible and adaptive as parents.

Where do your ideas about parenting come from?

What does your child need from you as a parent that is different to what you needed from your parents?

What do you like about your parenting?

Where do your expectations about children come from?

What would you like to change about your parenting?

In what way and to what extent does your own childhood experience influence how you parent today?

What do you think you will need to change in your parenting approach as your child grows and changes?

Parenting under pressure



Many parents feel like they struggle to keep pace with the rapidly changing world in which they are trying to raise children.

Many are worried about how safe the world today is for their children.

Many parents feel that childhood is shrinking and that children are growing up too fast in today's society.

Many feel they are struggling on a number of fronts to meet the competing demands of work and parenting.

Many feel under pressure to not fail their children. They struggle to find the time to spend with their children, even though they recognise the importance of doing so.

Many feel isolated and alone, cut off from the important support of families and friends.

The challenges and pressures facing parents today are significant and the cause of much concern and, at times, overwhelming stress.

You are not alone. Many parents feel exactly the same way as you do

Stress is a normal part of parenting. Small amounts of stress are healthy and can help us to focus and get things done. Too much stress can be overwhelming and result in feelings of helplessness, fear and frustration.

No parent is perfect. We do not always respond to our children in the best possible way. The important thing is to recognise when we are feeling overwhelmed and do something about it.

Looking after yourself helps you look after your child

Look after yourself. Don't always put everyone else first.

Do things that help you to relax. Listen to music, read a book, go for a walk. Even if it is only for ten minutes.

Reflect on where your stress and feelings of being overwhelmed are coming from and identify small, achievable steps to address the causes.

Try to be organised. Establish routines for yourself and your child and stick to them.

Reflect on what really is really important to you and your family and try to prioritise these things.

Give yourself permission to not be perfect.

Avoid taking your frustrations and stress out on your child. We have all had times when we have done or said things to our children that go against our better judgement. It's ok to apologise to children and admit you were wrong.

Try to make some special time for yourself and your family.

Talk to your partner, family or friends about your concerns and worries. Sharing the experiences can help you feel less alone.

The importance of parenting to children's brain development

The human brain takes time to develop. By birth, the brain has developed the main functions necessary to life – breathing, keeping your heartbeat steady, sucking, sleeping. The rest of the brain takes years to develop.

Knowing more about your child's developing brain is a good way to understand how children think, feel and behave. Young children have limited ability to think and be reasoned with – they can't link their feelings, thoughts and behaviour in their early years. The sections of the brain responsible for these areas are not 'switched on' in early childhood.

Understanding how children's brains develop gives us insight into the questions parents often ask....WHY?

Why do they do that?

Why don't they listen?

Why do I have to say the same thing over and over?



The developing brain

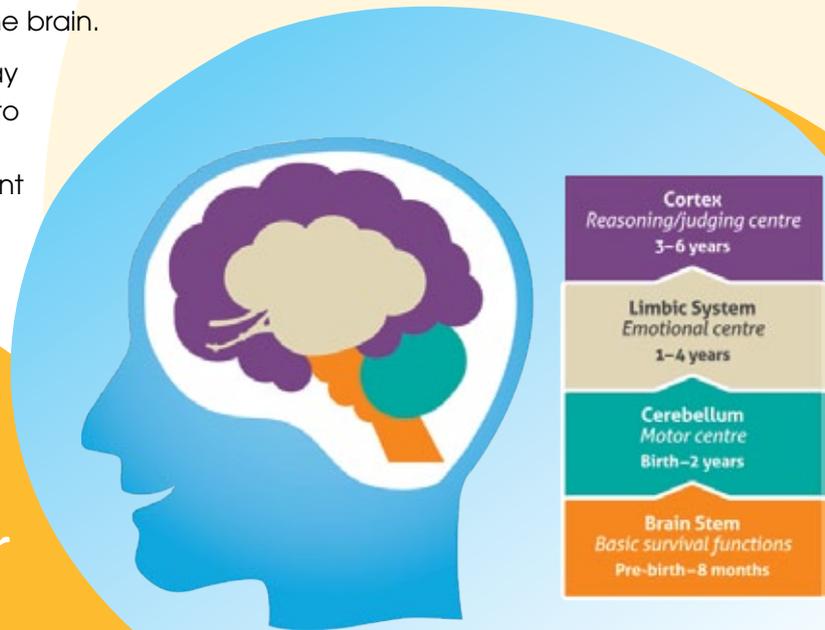
Genes and environment interact at every step of brain development but play very different roles. Genes are largely responsible for the 'basic wiring plan' of the brain. Experience is responsible for fine tuning and strengthening connections within the brain.

Our brains are continually changing in response to our lived experience. Children's brains are more impressionable or 'plastic' in the early years. However, the brain remains plastic throughout life, shaping and reshaping, as we continue to adapt to new experiences and learning.

Different parts of the brain develop at different ages and in a set order. Thus different kinds of experiences are important at different ages to strengthen each part of the brain.

Understanding more about the way children's brains develop helps us to understand why children feel, act and think in certain ways at different stages of their lives.

There are four major brain centres.



The Brain Stem: is the first to develop and is responsible for the basic functions which keep us alive such as our hearts beating and breathing. The Brain Stem is fully developed by birth.

The Motor Centre: is responsible for movement and develops over the first few years of life. It starts when babies gain head control and continues to mature as they sit, crawl and walk. Over the next few years they learn to skip, kick a ball, ride bikes, drawing, and even eating with cutlery.

The Limbic System: is the emotional centre of the brain and rules the lives of children up to four years of age. During the Toddler years, the Limbic System goes through a period of rapid development. This explains bursts of emotional behaviour and tantrums. Toddlers need our help to support and manage their feelings. Young children feel and act at the same time. They have limited ability to think and be reasoned with - they can't link their feelings, thoughts and behaviour together. Thinking and being able to know what to do when develops later when their cortex matures.

The Cortex: or thinking part of the brain is the last part to develop. This is the part responsible for reasoning and planning. It is only when it has come on line that children learn to think before they act. In order for the thinking part of the brain to grow and mature, children need everything to be repeated before they can remember it and use it later.

You are the active sculptor of your child's growing brain

Young brains are very sensitive to experience. Early experiences and environments have a very strong influence on the development of children's brains. This is why families help shape the biological structure of children's brains.

Supportive, caring and consistent relationships between children and their parents are the key to healthy brain development.

Fostering healthy brain development

- Touching, holding, comforting, rocking, singing and talking to young children provides the necessary stimulation for their growing brains.
- Talk and read to your child from infancy.
- Provide lots of opportunities for repetition and practice as your child acquires new skills. This helps to strengthen connections in the brain.
- Play with children as much as you can.
- Encourage children to do physical activities, like tumbling, riding a bike, playing with a ball, jumping and running.
- Support children to be hopeful and optimistic.
- Establish consistent routines.
- Encourage and praise your child as they experiment with new experiences.
- Be realistic about what children can do at different ages. Don't set them up to fail.
- Help your child to take small steps and experience success.
- Don't criticise a child for failing, praise their efforts.
- Allow children to engage in new experiences at their pace, not yours.



Child's play is a parent's business



Play is one of the most important needs children have. At the heart of play is fun. It is through play that children do much of their learning.

Play fuels all aspects of healthy development.

- Running, kicking and throwing balls helps children develop balance and co ordination.
- Singing and rhyming games help with language development.
- Puzzles and problem solving games help children's intellectual development.
- Turn-taking and sharing in play help develop important relationship skills and self-control.

Play is an important way that children can express and work through their feelings. Through watching and joining in children's play, you can gain insight into how your child is feeling and thinking.

Parents play a crucial role in children's play

Joining in play builds positive relationships between you and your children in a climate of fun.

Playing with your children promotes opportunities for you to support them as they experiment with new skills. The most positive reinforcement children can get comes from the approval and praise of a parent.

The most important play for young children is play with parents – make sure you make some time for play every day.

Playing with children

Playing activities should be at the right level for your child. Too easy and your child may get bored. Too hard and your child may get frustrated.

- Let your child lead the play. Don't take over.
- Make sure the play is safe.
- Ask your children what they would like you to do as part of the play.
- Allow enough time for play.
- Don't compete with young children. This can discourage them from wanting to play.
- Be patient if your child wants to repeat the same play over and over. New skills require lots of practice! Stay enthusiastic.
- Appreciate and encourage their efforts, no matter what the outcome.
- Look for opportunities to engage in play at any time. For example, join your child in making up rhymes or songs about normal daily activities like making the bed.

Most of all have fun and laugh with your children.



'Tuning in' to your child

Being 'tuned in' is the way that parents come to know what their children are feeling and thinking and what their children need. 'Tuning in' is the basis for secure, positive and supportive relationships between you and your child.

'Tuned in' parents let children know that their experiences and feelings are acknowledged, understood and will be responded to.

Children can tell if their parents are 'tuned in'. It is the way that children sense your interest in and approval of them. It forms the basis for a deeper level of connection with your child and builds the platform for positive relationships as children grow.

When you are 'tuned in', you are able to read your child's emotional and behavioural cues and respond appropriately. When children feel responded to and understood, they develop confidence and positive self-esteem.

Babies communicate from birth through sounds (crying, cooing, squealing), facial expressions (eye contact, smiling, grimacing) and gestures (moving legs in excitement or distress and pointing.) Being 'tuned in' to your baby begins with non-verbal communication: eye contact, facial expressions, tone of voice, gestures and the timing and intensity of your response.

As your child gets older, 'tuning in' involves both verbal and non-verbal communication.

Getting to know your child

Being 'tuned in' to your new baby is critical to the baby feeling safe, secure and loved. 'Tuning in' to your baby's cries will help you to know if he/she is hungry, tired, need changing or wanting a cuddle.

Being 'tuned in' to your toddler might include knowing when he or she needs quiet time, a snack or a change in activity. 'Tuning in' to your two-year-old child in the middle of a temper tantrum will include not only responding with appropriate limits, but understanding what the emotional meaning of the outburst might be. Is your child tired, angry or hurt?

Be able to 'tune in' comes a result of patience, practice and getting to know your child.

Being 'tuned in'

Remember, every child is unique, with his/her own style of communicating his/her needs and approaching the world.

Observe your child. Learn to understand what makes your child 'tick.'

Understand and adapt to your child's body rhythms, temperament and personality. How do you know if your child is hungry? Tired? Needing some attention from you? Needing reassurance and comfort?

Be sensitive to changes in the rhythms of your child's movement, the tone of voice and the intensity of their activity.

Learn children's strengths and vulnerabilities. How do they show you when they are happy? Are they easily overwhelmed? Do they go quiet when they are upset?

Respond to your baby's gestures, looks and sounds. When he puts his arms out to you, pick him up, kiss him and use simple words, "You want up."

Talk with and listen to your child. Respect and recognise your child's feelings.

Be aware of your own body language. Is your verbal and non-verbal communication saying the same thing to your child?



Understanding your child's emotional development



When we talk about emotional development, we are referring to children's growing ability to

- identify and understand their own feelings
- accurately read and understand the feelings of others
- manage the way they feel
- shape the way they behave
- develop empathy for others, and
- build and keep good relationships with friends, family and others.

From the time they are born, children quickly develop their abilities to experience and express different emotions, as well as their capacity to cope with and manage a variety of feelings.



Managing feelings

Children's ability to manage or shape the way they feel is a critical part of their development and often the source of much parental concern.

Children don't start life with the ability to control how they are feeling. They are easily overwhelmed by strong feelings and cannot calm themselves down. Babies and young children need parents to help them to do this.

Young children frequently get frustrated because there is a large gap between the things they want to do and what they are actually able to do. This often results in a temper tantrum.

Feelings and behaviour are closely linked. When feelings are not well managed, children's ability to think can be impaired. As a result, children act on their feelings often without thinking.

By the time they start school, children are more aware of their own feelings and the feelings of others. They are better able to link their thoughts and feelings and use words to describe their feelings. As such, they become better able to change and shape the way they feel. Children's ability to change and adapt their feelings means they are more likely to tolerate their own frustration better, put off getting things they really want and are able to calm themselves down.



Relationships are important for children's feelings

Children's emotional development is greatly influenced by the quality of the relationship that is developed between themselves and their parents. The way parents interact with their child has a lot to do with the way the child will develop emotionally.

Children learn to manage their emotions by watching how other family member express and manage their emotions. Parents play a critical role in modelling how to respond to strong feelings.

Children need help and practice in managing their emotions.

Supporting your child's emotional development

Keep the emotional climate of the home calm, warm and predictable.

Accept and acknowledge your child's emotions.

Read stories to children and talk about the different feelings characters in the book may be feeling. Talking about emotions helps children to better understand their feelings.

Help your child to put feelings into words - "it seems like you are feeling disappointed at the moment".

Encourage children to talk about situations that make them feel excited, happy, angry or worried.

Praise children for not losing control and staying calm.

Help children to separate feelings from behaviour - "I know you are feeling angry but it is not OK to hit."

Help children to understand the difference between their own and other people's feelings - "I know you are feeling frustrated right now but what you are doing is making your sister feel sad".

Have I Told You Lately That I Love You

The things our parents say to us as children often stay with us forever.

Children need to feel loved and accepted just for being themselves, not only when they do things well.



Every child is unique

Individual differences in children should be encouraged and valued.

Every child has his or her own contribution to make to family, friends and the community.



Children need to feel good about themselves

Positive self esteem is feeling good about yourself, feeling that you are worthwhile.

Self esteem gives children confidence and hope in their future. Children need to like themselves, to feel that they are important, capable and that they can achieve in their lives. Children with a healthy self esteem feel more confident about learning and trying new things.

Ways to tell children they are important



- Tell them often that you love them for who they are.
- Show them that you love them by spending time together, listening to them, giving them lots of hugs and smiles.
- Celebrate their achievements, no matter how small.
- Praise them for trying, no matter what the outcome.
- Keep special reminders of their successes and milestones.
- Let them help you do things.
- Let them know it is OK to make mistakes, it is all part of learning.
- Help them to build on their strengths.
- Ask their opinion on family matters. It shows you care about what they think.
- Help them to solve their own problems. Show them that you have faith in them.
- Make limits and expectations clear and consistent.
- Give feedback about inappropriate or unhelpful behaviour, but don't criticise your child.
- Feedback should aim to teach, not hurt your child.





Words and actions can hurt ...

The way we talk to and act with children influences how they feel about themselves. Our behaviour often speaks louder than words. What are you saying to your child?

The things we say to children act like a mirror, reflecting back to children ideas about who they are and what they will become.

Hurtful words can last a lifetime. As a parent you may sometimes do or say things to your child that goes against your better judgement. Generally children are strong enough that occasional hurtful or negative comments have no lasting impact. However, the more often we communicate negative messages to children through our words and actions, the more they will come to believe them.

Listening to Children

Listening to children tells children they are important.

Spend time with children listening to their point of view.

Sometimes children do not speak because they are not given the opportunity. Try to make sure there is space in your family for everyone to be heard.

Listening means not only hearing the words but working out the feelings behind the words.

Listen to the things that are not said. For many, behaviour speaks louder than words. What is your child trying to tell you?

Be a patient listener. Allow your child time to tell his or her story. Don't jump in before the story is finished. Don't finish children's sentences.

Be an enthusiastic listener. Share in your child's excitement.

Help children to express their thoughts and feelings by helping them to find the words or other ways to communicate with you.

Children are listening

Things to avoid:

- Ignoring children.
- Negative labels to describe the child or name calling. For example, "Stupid" or "You're a bad boy".
- Blaming a child unfairly. For example, "You must have done it - your sister would never do something like that" or "You are the reason mum and dad fight all the time".
- Withdrawing your love from a child. For example, "I wish you were never born".
- Frowning or sighing when they want to talk to you.
- Comparing one child with another.
- Talking about children negatively in front of others - they can hear.



Shaping children's behaviour



Children are not born knowing what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. They learn by watching how you and others around them behave and how they and others are treated.

Discipline Versus Punishment

Many parents today feel they are not allowed to discipline their children.

Every child needs discipline to feel safe and secure whilst learning about themselves and their world.

Discipline and punishment are not the same thing.

Discipline comes from the Latin word "to teach".

Punishment is reactive and focused on penalising unacceptable behaviour. Children rarely learn correct or acceptable behaviour through punishment.

The aim of discipline is to help children take responsibility for their own behaviour through teaching them acceptable ways to respond to situations. As they grow, children become more self-disciplined. They understand how to behave and can control their behaviour themselves. Self-discipline develops through adults teaching and nurturing children's confidence.

Successful discipline relies on a good relationship between you and your child and builds on your child's wish to please you.

Successful discipline involves understanding the rules and what happens when rules are broken.

What about physical punishment?

Successful discipline can be achieved without the use of physical punishment.

Physical punishment causes pain to stop the behaviour. For example, hitting a child with a hand or object.

Physical punishment does not communicate care or respect to a child.

Physical punishment can undermine a child's sense of love and security. They can often become anxious, fearful or rebellious.

Physical punishment teaches children that violence can be an acceptable way to solve problems.

Hitting a child does not teach acceptable ways to behave. Instead it may result in a repeat of the misbehaviour.

Often children are so upset or angry after being hit, they forget why they are being punished.

Children learn by watching you. Speak to children as you would like to be spoken to. Behave as you would like them to behave.

Why do children misbehave?



It is often difficult for parents to understand why children continue to do things you do not want them to do. Children's behaviour is their way of telling you how they are feeling.

There could be a number of reasons for misbehaviour:

- to gain attention
- lack of skills to deal with the situation differently
- a cry for help or frustration
- misunderstanding
- unreasonable rules or expectations
- forgetting the rules or limits.

Understanding the reasons for your children's misbehaviour will assist you in finding ways to help them behave differently.

Limit Setting

Children need limits. They need safe rules within which they can make choices, have responsibility and experience success.

Limits must be clear and consistent! Inconsistency leaves children uncertain about what they can and cannot do.

Set simple rules for everyone to follow and give reasons for these. Be aware of your reasons for setting the limit and make sure they are reasonable.

Constantly remind children of the rules and limits.

Consequences for breaking rules should:

- happen as soon as possible
- be short or they will lose their meaning
- be linked to the original problem
- always be safe and respectful of a child

Be firm but fair.



You can help your children by:

- Listening to them and keeping lines of communication open
- Acknowledging their feelings
- Being consistent
- Making sure your expectations are realistic
- Giving them your time and attention
- Encouraging their own problem solving
- Praising them for good behaviour.

Remember:

- All children are different and may require different parenting approaches.
- No approach will work all the time! Be creative.
- Parenting styles must change and grow with the age, abilities and needs of a child.

Brothers and Sisters



Brothers and sisters can be the best of friends and sometimes act as if they are the worst of enemies. Their feelings for each other vary and can change over time along with each child's age and stage of development.

Brothers and sisters can squabble, tease and tell on each other. This is normal and one way children learn how to get on with others.

Such behaviour can happen for a number of reasons:

- Sometimes it is not possible to treat children in the same way all the time. Parents need to respond to each child's age, personality and the specific circumstances.
- It is normal for brothers and sisters to think and behave differently. It is also normal for children to disagree at times.
- Brothers and sisters may often fight as a means of gaining a parent's attention.
- Children will often argue over something they feel is not fair.

Responding to siblings

Value and respect each child's individuality, needs and rights. Avoid negative comparisons.

Promote respectful relationships by having family rules that apply to everyone.

Acknowledge and praise times when children are getting on well together.

Allow each child to pursue his or her own interests.

Have realistic expectations about how long young children can play together.

Spend time with each child as well as with all the children together.

Allow children space to sort out their own arguments, ensuring that the conflict is kept to a manageable level.

Ask children if they need your help to sort things out. Step in when the conflict becomes unmanageable for children. Don't look for someone to blame. Look for solutions.

Encourage children to think about how other children feel.

Help children to understand that not everything can or should be shared.





Every child is different

As parents, we are constantly comparing our children to others. Whilst this can be a source of great pride, it can also become a source of worry that something is wrong with our child or that we are doing something wrong as parents.

Every child is different. Children develop differently, have different personalities, possess different strengths and require different kinds of support to meet their individual needs.

All children develop at their own pace and in their own way

Children grow and develop at different rates. While their developmental pathways may differ, most pass a set of predictable milestones along the way. It is normal for children to experience developmental spurts and slow spots in different areas of their development over time. If your child is a little ahead or a little behind at a certain age - this is normal. Most of the time, given the right nurturing and stimulation, all children will catch up in the end.

All children have different strengths and vulnerabilities. Some are good at sport, others music. Some are very academic and others not. Some are highly anxious and others are more relaxed. Some children are good sleepers and others wake through the night for years.

Feeling confident that you are on the right track

Many parents are feeling under increasing pressure to 'get their parenting right'. Others feel under increasing pressure to do well in raising their children who in turn are expected to succeed in school, recreation and employment.

Many parents feel that parenting doesn't come naturally to them.

Parents often lack confidence to know they are parenting in a way that best meets their individual child's needs. Many parents feel judged by others about their parenting approach. These experiences can leave parents feeling alone and isolated. Many feel that no other parent is going through similar experiences.

These are all common feelings and experiences.



You are not alone

The task of parenting is a constantly changing one as the growing needs and abilities of our children change over time. There is no 'one-size fits all' way to parent. What works for one child may not work for another. What worked when children were two years old may not work when they are four.

Adaptability and flexibility are key ingredients to parenting.

It is normal to lack confidence in your parenting at some time. Share your experiences with other parents, friends and family. You will find you are not alone.

Sharing common experiences can reassure you that you are 'on the right track' and give you improved confidence.

Trust that you know your child better than anyone else.

Finally, avoid comparing your child to others.

If you are concerned about your child or need support with your parenting seek assistance. This is a sign of strength, not a weakness.

Helping children cope with stressful events



Families face many stresses these days. For example, long working hours, divorce, illness, unemployment and moving house affect both adults and children. Whilst a new baby is an exciting time for a family, it can also be a time of significant change for everyone, especially children. These experiences impact on our parenting. Your own feelings at these times may be so strong that you may not notice or feel able to respond to your children's needs.

What's going on for your child?

Your child may feel frightened, vulnerable and insecure at times of stress or change.

Do not assume your child understands what is happening. This can be a very confusing and unsettling time.

Children can feel responsible for 'bad' things happening to people they care about.

Children respond to stress or change in a number of ways:

- They may act younger than their age. This is their way of telling you that it is all too much and they need you.
- They may be clingy, demanding, or disruptive in an effort to gain attention, care, support and information from you.
- They may have disturbed sleep, nightmares or bedwetting.
- They may become very withdrawn or easily upset.
- They may try very hard to make everything better for the family.
- They may find it hard to tell you how they are feeling because they do not want to worry or upset you further.





What to do...

- Reassure your children constantly that you love them.
- Tell your children that what is happening is not their fault. You may need to do this a number of times.
- Let them know that even though you may be upset yourself, you are in control.
- Be honest and clear with your children about what is happening.
- Where possible include your children in decisions that affect them.
- Give your children time to talk. If they can't talk to you encourage them to talk to someone they trust.
- Let your children know they may experience a range of feelings. Reassure them that it's OK and give them ways to express how they are feeling.
- Take time to try and understand how they are feeling and why they are behaving the way they are. Be patient and tolerant.
- Try to stick to familiar routines.

Make sure there are people around to support both you and your children.



Enjoy your child

As a parent you probably spend much of your time trying to be a good parent, doing whatever you can for your child whilst balancing the needs and demands of a busy life.

Increasingly you might be feeling more like a manager - managing a household, managing time, managing a job and managing children's behaviour.

So often, today, we hear about the costs of having children. These are usually described as economic, social or career costs. We hear talk of the sacrifices made by adults in their lives as a result of having children.

It is sometimes easy to lose sight of what is important. In the middle of life's busy pace, take the time out to reflect on the ways your child contributes to your life rather than on what else you can do for your child.

One of the greatest gifts parents can give themselves is time with their children.

Children enrich our lives in so many ways

Children give parents:

- Unconditional love and admiration just for being you
- Trust that you are the strongest, wisest and bravest person in the world
- The chance to be a hero
- The chance to be a child again through sharing in the magic and wonder of their emerging world
- The chance to experience an intensity of emotion and range of strengths and skills that may otherwise have remained hidden from you
- The chance to reflect on your own values, attitudes and assumptions about the world
- The chance to re-experience the joy and pleasure to be found in children's play
 - The chance to share in their fun and their laughter
 - The chance to revisit your own childhood
 - The chance to take time out from being a grown up

Take some time each day to laugh, cry, play, dream, wonder and explore with your child.

Keeping children safe from harm

As parents, we can relate to feeling tested, at times, to the limits of our parenting ability. Sometimes we can feel out of control. In other situations, we can have personal problems that stop us from caring for our children. This can result in children being abused or neglected. These are difficult subjects to talk about, but sadly, the problems of child abuse and neglect are not uncommon. These problems affect children and families from all backgrounds, and occur for many different reasons.

Experiences of child abuse and neglect can have devastating consequences for children and young people including severe emotional, social and psychological problems.

Child abuse can cause poor self esteem, learning difficulties and behaviour problems in children.

Children have a right to be safe and protected.

As parents, your responsibility is to recognise **when** you need help **before** the harm happens.

If you feel you may hurt, or have hurt your child, it is important that you seek immediate assistance.

STOP what you are doing.

THINK about how your child and you are affected by what is happening.

DO something to change things.

GET SUPPORT to make the changes.

Seeking support and assistance can take courage. However, this step is critical for you and your child.

Seeking support and assistance reflects:

- your love for your child
- your ability to appreciate there is a problem
- your desire for things to be different for your family
- your commitment to working towards changing things for the better.



All parents need support and information



All parents need support and information at different times, for different reasons.

Seeking out and using support is a vital part of parenting.

The following directory gives you some of the key support services in your local state or territory.

ACT	Parentline	(02) 6287 3833	9 am to 9 pm (Mon-Fri except public holidays)
	Health Direct Australia	1800 022 222	24 hours, 7 days
NSW	Parentline	1300 130 052	24 hours, 7 days
	Karitane Care Line	1300 227 464 (02) 9794 1852 (Sydney metro)	24 hours, 7 days (Mon-Thurs) 9 am – 9 pm (Fri-Sun)
	Tresillian Parent Helpline	1800 637 357 (02) 9787 0855 (Sydney metro)	24 hours, 7 days
NT	Parentline	1300 301 300	8 am – 10 pm, 7 days
QLD	Parentline	1300 301 300	8 am - 10 pm, 7 days
SA	Parent Helpline	1300 364 100	7:15 am - 9:15 pm, 7 days
TAS	Parenting Line Tas	1300 808 178	24 hours, 7 days
VIC	Parentline	132 289	8 am – 12 am, 7 days
	Maternal and Child Health Advisory Line	132 229	24 hours, 7 days
WA	Parenting Line	1800 654 432 (STD) (08) 6279 1200	24 hours, 7 days
	Grandcare (service for grandparents)	1800 008 323	10 am - 3 pm (Mon-Fri)
	Ngala Helpline	(08) 9368 9368 1800 111 546 (STD)	8 am – 8 pm, 7 days



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