

ParentLink guides use 'he' and 'she' in turn. Change to suit your child's sex.



ACT
Government

Community Services

The family that children grow up in is one of the most important parts of their life. It has a big impact on how well they will cope with life. A loving, caring family can help create a happy child with good self-esteem, but an unhappy family can lead to low self-esteem and a range of problems for children.

While there are many different forms of family, and styles of parenting, unhelpful ways of doing things can form over time. We may not realise what is making things difficult in our family, and making us unhappy. Here are some ideas for helping your family to work well.

Make time for talking and listening

- Make time to talk to all family members as often as you can.
- Talk about what each person has done for the day. Talk about each other's interests—be excited and encouraging.
- Make it possible for family member to express a wide range of feelings such as joy, excitement, anger and fear—as long as they do it in a way that is safe for everyone.
- Listen to what children say. Be sure you understand what they are thinking and feeling behind the words.
- 'Put down' messages, threats, interrogation and blame can make children feel bad or hopeless.
- Couples need to spend quality time together without the children so they can support each other. When couples work well together, this flows on to the whole family and children feel secure and happy.

Make family time

- Plan time together to talk about things that affect the whole family, including children. Maybe family meetings would be useful.
- Make time to spend together as a family—even simple outings to the beach or park will help.
- Have meals together if you can, without TV or phone calls. If this is difficult in a busy life, try having a regular family meal together, say once a week.
- Have fun together as a family—play cards or games, go camping, play sport, or share hobbies. Family holidays often create important special memories for children—make them enjoyable for the whole family.
- Sport can be a big part of some families' lives. Parents and children being involved together in playing or watching sport are important family activities.

Be affectionate, caring and kind

- Everyone in the family will feel good when they're encouraged and appreciated.
- Let your children know that you love them. Tell them all the things you like and love about them. It will make them feel proud.
- Show affection, give hugs, be thoughtful and kind.

Accept the differences in each person

- Let it be known that each family member is special in their own way—whatever their differences.
- Don't pressure people to be the same as each other or to hide their differences. Let them feel proud to be themselves.
- Allow each person to be excited about their own interests—show respect and tolerance.
- No one should be left out or made to feel the odd one out in a family.

Share the power and the chores

- Let all family members, including children have a real say in what happens in the family—it's important people feel listened to and valued.
- Use adult power wisely. Try to use humour and encouragement in your parenting, not punishment or threats. An ongoing fight for control is not helpful to children. The use of violence or intimidation is destructive and makes all family members unhappy.
- Share the chores among family members. Work out the jobs each of you will do—cooking, cleaning, washing, gardening. Couples who support each other around the house help the family run smoothly.

THIS GUIDE AND OTHERS ARE AVAILABLE ONLINE

Share the power and the chores *(cont)*

- Help children at an early age to take on chores that they are able to do. Young children might help you set the table for meals, or prepare food. As they get older, they can have more responsibility and be allowed to have more say in their life.
- Have daily routines in the family. This helps children feel secure.

Keep in touch with friends and family

- The more a family is linked with others the more likely they will be able to overcome problems.
- Make the effort to catch up with family and friends often. Invite them to your home, visit theirs or meet somewhere. Celebrating special occasions such as birthdays is a chance to do this.
- Having friends and people outside to turn to when things get tough will help your child.
- Share day to day problems with family, neighbours or the parents of your child's friends if you think it may help. Don't do this in front of children.

Commitment

- Make the wellbeing of your family a priority. Sometimes work can overtake family life, and children can miss out on time with their parents.
- Be loyal to your family—stick up for each other.
- Pull together to solve problems when there is trouble.

Family rituals and traditions

The little things you do each day and on special occasions help to build your family. Daily rituals can be how you say goodbye, what you do at mealtimes and bedtime. Families benefit from celebrating special times together (for example, birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas and Name Days) and by having traditions about how this is done.

Spiritual values and beliefs

Many families have spiritual beliefs which give meaning and direction to daily life. They can also add strength and hope in hard times. Attending cultural or religious services and events can help the family bond together and feel part of a bigger community.

Resilience

Strong families have a positive attitude and know they will help each other when things are tough.

Reminders

- Create a safe place for talking, listening and expressing feelings.
- Value the differences in each family member.
- Be quick with praise and slow with criticism.
- Sharing power promotes trust and caring.
- Develop friendships for support and be part of a community.
- Make time to be together and celebrate important occasions.
- Hold on to your beliefs.

Contacts

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| Child and Family Centres (parenting information and support) | 9am–5pm Monday–Friday: Gungahlin | 6207 0120 |
| | 9am–5pm Monday–Friday: Tuggeranong | 6207 8228 |
| | 9am–5pm Monday–Friday: West Belconnen | 6205 2904 |
| Family Relationships Advice Line | 8am–8pm Monday–Friday, 10am–4pm Saturday, except public hols | 1800 050 321 |
| Parentline ACT | 9am–9pm Monday–Friday, except public hols | 6287 3833 |

Websites

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| www.cyh.com | Parenting and child health information |
| www.parentlink.act.gov.au | Other parenting guides including Being a dad, Being a mum, Families that work well |

This guide's content has been produced by Parenting SA and adapted by the ACT Government to reflect the application to laws of the Australian Capital Territory.

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