



nsw commission for
children & young people

Listening to children

Children need to know their parents love them. When children feel loved, cared for and respected they are more likely to go on to have strong connections with their family and school, to be healthier and to find learning easier.

Building strong relationships

Parents can show children and young people that they are loved by:

- giving them encouragement
- treating them with respect
- listening to their opinions
- taking an interest in what they like without being critical eg. watching a favourite TV program or movie or listening to a CD
- watching them play sport
- talking to them about their problems
- respecting their privacy
- making sure they know you want to be involved in their life

Children know they are loved in lots of different ways. Babies and young children feel loved and special when their parents:

- give them lots of kisses and cuddles
- smile at them
- talk and sing to them
- hold baby while feeding and making sure it is a quiet, special time
- listen to what children are saying
- play with them

Child abuse and listening to children

Every child has the right to be loved and cared for and to feel safe both at home and away from home.

Children often try to tell adults if they have experienced abuse but it is very difficult and painful for them. They often feel ashamed and frightened and find it hard to find the right words to explain.

As adults we can make things easier for children by recognising when a child is trying to talk about a difficult subject. We should get into the habit of listening to children so that they feel comfortable talking to us about their worries.

By building a trusting relationship with a child you will make it easier if he or she needs to tell you something that is hard to talk about.

Building your child's self esteem

By taking the time to listen to your child you are showing them that you love and respect them. Children feel worthwhile and valued when adults, especially their parents, listen to what they say.

When your child wants to tell you something stop what you are doing and listen. Give children time to make their message clear and show them you respect how they feel. These actions give valuable messages to children and let them know how important they are to you.

If talking and listening is part of your relationship with your child from a young age it will help you both through difficult periods later such as when they are growing into adults.

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information

Being positive

Even when your child isn't behaving well he or she still needs to feel loved by you. By praising even the smallest thing children do you are letting them know they are valued.

Whether children are babies or teenagers when they feel loved and worthwhile they:

- have the confidence to try new things
- are happier
- recognise their own achievements
- are better behaved and less likely to use drugs and alcohol
- value themselves and others

All children need to have self-esteem. Children build self-esteem when they feel loved and respected by their parents.

Making conversation

When young people talk to adults they often get a sermon that can discourage them from finding their own ways to deal with problems.

The most helpful responses are ones that show interest and open the way for further conversation like:

'How come?'

'You must have felt...'

'That sounds exciting.'

Try to talk regularly during meal times or share ideas and interests in the car – driving children somewhere opens up opportunities and for teenagers the conversation usually flows more easily when not looking at adults face-to-face.

Remember:

- Children think differently to adults and it's not always easy to understand what they are telling you
- When children interrupt your adult conversations it is usually their way of trying to get your attention
- Spend special listening and talking time with your child
- Explain to children that parents need time to talk about things
- Listening is not the same as giving in. If your child keeps asking for something he or she can't have, let them know you're listening but explain why they can't have what they want
- Have meals together at the table without the TV on so that everyone has the chance to talk and listen

If you think your child has a problem

- Listen to your child and let them know you take their feelings and fears seriously
- Try not to 'take over' the problem as this is likely to further undermine your child's confidence
- Help your child work out what ideas they have about coping with the problem – talk with them about which ones might help or not help and why
- Don't call your child names such as 'sook' or tell them they are weak – or let anyone else do so

Where to get more information and help

Parent Line	13 20 55
Tresillian (for babies)	02 9787 5255 1800 637 357 (freecall outside Sydney)
Karitane (for babies)	02 9794 1852 1800 677 961 (freecall outside Sydney)
Kids Help Line	1800 55 1800
DoCS Help Line	13 21 11
Domestic Violence Line	1800 656 463/ 1800 671 442 TTY
Websites	www.parenting.nsw.gov.au www.kids.nsw.gov.au