

Strengthen Relationship Skills



In order to be successful in school and the workplace, children need to know how to communicate, listen, cooperate and solve problems with others. Helping them learn these skills at home is crucial. Fortunately, families can take advantage of everyday situations to help their children practice establishing and maintaining healthy and supportive relationships.

QuickTips

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Hold Family Meetings

Weekly meetings make family life run more smoothly—and help children learn about cooperation and leadership.

To hold productive family meetings:

- **Establish a meeting schedule.** Meet the same time every week and keep meetings brief. Fifteen minutes is often long enough.
- **Set ground rules.** No devices or other distractions.
- **Plan an agenda.** During the week, let family members jot down issues they'd like to address.
- **Start by noting accomplishments** and positive attitudes. Share compliments.
- **Encourage participation.** Give everyone a chance to talk uninterrupted.
- **Brainstorm solutions** for concerns raised during the meeting. Consider everyone's ideas.
- **Discuss expectations** and review goals.
- **Coordinate schedules.** Review your family calendar and discuss who is doing what this week.
- **End with a quick team-building activity.** Play a game, or make up a story or sing a song.

After a few meetings, let family members take turns being the meeting leader.



Focus on Your Relationship

If you want your child to know what a healthy relationship looks like, demonstrate! Here's how:

- **Share meals together.** Try to eat at least one meal together each day.
- **Enjoy hobbies.** Think of interests you share with your child and plan activities that involve them.
- **Work together.** Sometimes the best conversations happen while you're focusing on something else, such as washing dishes or folding laundry.
- **Educate each other.** Let your child introduce you to a new skill, food or musical group. Do the same for your student.
- **Exercise.** Take a daily walk with your child to keep your bodies—and your relationship—in shape.
- **Hang out.** Ask what your child wants to do. If the answer is "nothing," do just that—together.
- **Say goodnight.** Tuck your child in and end the night with an "I love you."

Source: CASEL's *Widely Used Framework Identifies Five Core Competencies*, Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL).

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Model Listening Skills

Listening is as important to building strong relationships as it is to learning in class. The best way to help your child develop listening skills is by example:

- **Offer your full attention** when your child talks to you. Make eye contact.
- **Listen patiently.** All people think faster than they speak. And kids with less experience expressing themselves need time to find the right words.
- **Ask questions** to show your interest.
- **Notice nonverbal messages.** “Your voice sounds a little sad; are you OK?”



Start Conversations

Here are some fun and simple ways to help your child practice effective communication:

- **Play TV Talk Show Host.** Let your child interview you and then be interviewed.
- **Ask *how*, *why* and *what if* questions** that can't be answered with just *yes* or *no*.
- **Share a memory.** “I was thinking about the day we went to visit Grandma. What would you like to do the next time we can go?”
- **Play What Comes Next.** Bring up a topic of conversation. Your child must think of a question that relates to the topic. Then switch.

Discuss Friendship

Talk with your child about friendship. Explain that it is more than just liking someone. A good friend:

- **Is supportive** when someone is sad or upset.
- **Would never ask a person** to do something wrong or unkind.
- **Would never do something wrong** or unkind in order to be liked.
- **Respects and enjoys people's differences.** A good friend doesn't need the other person to be just like them.



Boost Cooperation

Teamwork is a vital skill in school and in life. To promote cooperation, encourage your child to:

- **Practice.** Provide opportunities to cooperate at home. Prepare a meal together. Work together on chores.
- **Take turns.** Explain that it's not OK to insist on being first or always getting your way. Your child needs to consider other people's ideas and needs.
- **Make and carry out a plan.** Working with others depends on each person knowing what to do and following through.
- **Keep trying.** Sometimes things fall apart when you work with another person. Teach your child to talk it over, make a new plan and try again.

Teach Conflict-Resolution

Whether it's a fight with a friend, an argument with a family member or a misunderstanding with a teacher—conflict occurs in all children's everyday lives. Help your child express feelings in ways that lead to better relationships. Encourage your child to:

- **Avoid put-downs and name-calling.** Demonstrate how to use “I messages” to explain how your child feels about the situation instead of “you messages” that blame the other person.
- **Listen to the other side.** Your child should hear the other person out and try to understand their point of view.
- **Think before acting.** Many times, a situation gets out of hand because people allow their emotions to control their actions.
- **Consider a compromise.** No one likes to lose. Your child is more likely to resolve a conflict successfully by looking for a solution where everyone gives a little and gets a little, too.
- **Ask for help when needed.** Sometimes it takes a mediator to resolve a conflict. A parent or teacher may be able to help.
- **Stand up for the rights of others** who may have been wronged in the conflict.
- **Be willing to apologize** when your child is at fault.

