



Engaging Children and Youth for Success*



The impact of positive caring adults on children and youth cannot be overestimated. As parents and community members, everyone has a role to play in fostering the well-being of children and youth in our communities. By fostering healthy relationships with children and youth, we can model healthy and positive relationships and help them develop valuable skills.

Healthy relationships provide children with: a sense of security and stability; a sense of being valued and belonging; support and guidance to learn essential skills; and the ability to manage stress.

Connect Positively

- The healthiest force in the lives of children and youth is their connection with adults.
- Children often need help to talk about important things in their lives such as school, friends or peer pressure. Often they need someone to listen and not rush in to rescue.
- Reinforce it is okay for children or youth to speak to a trusted adult.
- Unless the conversation requires the intervention of a third party, such as the police or school official, treat what children say as confidential in order to build trust. Allow the child or youth as much control as possible in dealing with the situation. Help them discover and explore how they will get help or resolutions for the situation. Be present or available for the child or youth.
- Engage children and youth with open-ended questions that will elicit conversation versus 'yes/no' or one word responses, such as "Tell me about your day" versus "How was your day?"

Help Develop Empathy and Respect

- Healthy relationships are based on good communication. This involves not only language but understanding, respecting, and caring about how another person feels.
- Help children understand their feelings. Talk about how they feel when someone says hurtful things. Let them know you understand. Children need help to understand the feelings of others. Encourage them to watch for facial expressions and body language and to respect the feelings and views of other people. Discuss their perceptions. Encourage them to help those who may not feel included and to put themselves in the shoes of others who may be affected by their actions.

Remember Positive Parenting Works

- Positive parenting requires parents to be supportive, warm, and encouraging while also being firm, consistent, and fair.
- The best gift parents and adults can give children and youth is their time. Show that they enjoy devoting time. Show that their time and energy can make a difference. Recognize the value they offer. Encourage youth to take part in community projects.
- Create opportunities for children and youth to be successful. Help them find out what they are good at. Help build confidence in their skills and abilities. Be active together, choose something youth like and can do; comment on a job well done or recognize an act of kindness; and acknowledge when they meet a difficult challenge with perseverance.

Relate Age Appropriately

Expectations and rules change as children become pre-teens and teens. As youth they may want more independence. It is helpful to adopt adult ways of communicating. Whatever their age, encourage open discussion, and allow them to voice what is important to them. Invite them to be part of the problem-solving and decision-making process.

- Be Supportive: Guide, do not dictate. Youth want information to make their own decisions.
- Be Patient and Available: Do not be discouraged if your first offer is turned down, as youth will often come around when they feel up to it.
- Be Open: When they come to you, listen, listen, listen!
- Be Understanding: Youth learn and grow through failure and mistakes – the important issue is how youth and their support systems respond to setbacks.
- Be Empathetic: Do not belittle the feelings of youth or be patronizing. Their feelings are real and important to them, even if what they are going through does not seem like a big deal.

Accept Mistakes as Learning Opportunities

- We learn from making mistakes. Ask children what can be learned from a mistake. Try to focus on the learning. Learning from mistakes helps to improve themselves and their relationships. Try to help the child understand why the mistake happened and how it could be avoided in the future.
- Apologies are important for young children and youth to learn. Helping young people focus on the apology can keep them from justifying their mistake. Children can learn about heartfelt apologies and practice at home.

* Adapted from Council of Ontario Directors of Education *Parent Tool Kit: Relationships: What Parents Can Do To Help Their Children Develop Healthy Relationships*