

Points to Ponder for Parents

Positive Relationships

Relationships matter. The people we grow up with, the people we admire and the people we let into our lives all have a powerful influence in shaping who we are.

Friendships are important relationships in your child's life. Learning to socialize with others is part of a young person's normal development. Every young person has to learn how to fit in with a group while still holding on to their own values and identity. When you help your child to develop confidence and security, they will be better equipped to deal with the pressures that can come from belonging to a group of peers. They'll have the strength to support positive friendships, and to say no to things that make them uncomfortable or that they believe are not right. This contributes to building resiliency.

Here are a few ways you can teach your child to develop and participate in positive relationships with others.

Be a Positive Role Model.

Role modelling is a part of every parent's and caregiver's role. It's not always easy being a role model for another person. But it's important to keep in mind that what you say and do is one of the biggest influences on your child. Somebody's watching you!

- Think about how your behaviour affects your child. You can't always be calm and cheerful—nobody is. Besides, your child needs to see that you can express real feelings in a healthy way. If they see you handling anger appropriately, they'll learn from you. If they watch you celebrating special occasions without alcohol, they'll learn something. If they see you facing difficult times without trying to escape through alcohol, other drugs or gambling, they will remember. As they grow up, they'll learn by your example. And they will have your example to follow in years to come, when they are coping with the challenges of adulthood.

Resiliency is the ability to bounce back from difficult circumstances.

- Talk to your child about some of your own life experiences when you were their age. For example, tell them about someone who made a big difference in your life.
- Tell stories about family members or friends who have shown courage, kindness, humour or determination in their lives. Talk about the people you still think of as role models now that you're an adult.

Talk About Feelings.

When we don't talk about feelings like loneliness or anger, these feelings hang around. They can get bottled up until eventually they spill over in some other way. Your child may become sad, withdrawn and unwilling to socialize. Young people who cannot express their feelings in healthy ways will find other ways to cope with those feelings, such as being unkind, obsessively using extra-curricular activities to escape from their feelings, or even using substances or gambling.

It may be hard to have an open discussion with your child when they feel rejected and lonely. It's especially hard when you aren't sure what you can do to help. But just listening can be a big help. It tells your child that their feelings are important, and that you're willing to share those troubles. When you encourage your child to recognize feelings and talk about them, they will gain a better understanding of their problems. It also helps them to think about other people's feelings and problems.

All feelings are valid. It can be tempting to tell your child how you think they should be feeling, but it is more validating to ask them how they feel and why they feel that way. Allow them to "vent" their feelings, and let them do most of the talking. They will feel better just knowing that you care enough to listen to them. When you take time to listen and encourage your child to express their feelings, you're building a trusting relationship that will help your child to know they can count on you for support.

Build Your Child's Self-confidence.

Young people who can face the world with confidence will be more likely to make healthy choices, and less likely to turn to alcohol, other drugs or gambling to ease the way in social situations. It is never too soon (or too late) to talk to your child about getting along with others, respecting other people's feelings, appreciating the value of real friends, and understanding their own worth as a unique person.

- Let your child know that it's important to be a leader sometimes. Young people will have a better self-image and feel more confident in a group when they have responsibilities and are able to assert their independence.
- Encourage your child to do a kind deed for a senior, a neighbour or someone in the family. When your child reaches out to help another person, they will feel a sense that they can make a real difference in their family and in their community. Good deeds give young people a reason to feel proud of themselves, confident in their own abilities, and considerate of others.

Resiliency comes from being connected to people, finding common interests and participating in a community. That's why developing healthy relationship skills is so important to becoming resilient! A young person with strong family support and well-developed social skills and abilities, such as decision-making skills and self-confidence, is a young person who is more likely to avoid ever having problems with alcohol, tobacco, other drugs or gambling.