



Helping your child build positive relationships and manage conflict

It's human nature to want to feel loved, valued, and noticed by others, so it's hardly surprising that there's a direct link between our relationships and our health and well-being. As a parent/caregiver, you play an important role in helping your child to develop healthy relationships.

In addition to modelling healthy relationships through our interactions with our children, this resource provides practical guidance to support the development of healthy relationships.

Note: While we use the term “child” throughout, we recognize that the child in your care may be a teenager or young adult, and that you may be caring for more than one child.

How can I help my child develop healthy relationship skills?

It starts with your parent-child connection. Developing a strong, supportive relationship with your child helps them to feel loved and safe. Finding time for play, listening to your child, providing validation, and repairing conflict when it arises shows your child the foundations of a healthy relationship. To learn more see [Building a strong supportive relationship with your child](#).

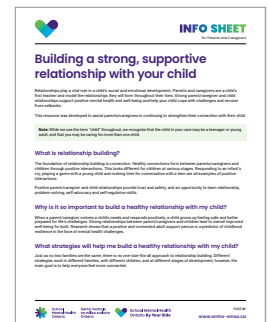
Being able to:

- name emotions
- pay attention to the feelings of others and put oneself in another's shoes
- communicate effectively
- cooperate with others, and
- deal with conflict

are all important and necessary to build healthy relationships.

Here are some ideas to help your child build these skills:

- **Encourage your child to express their feelings in keeping with their stage of development.** For example, share a situation that invoked a particular emotion (e.g., happy, sad, excited, upset, etc.) Now, invite your child to do the same. Ask them how it makes them feel? Encourage your child to name their own emotions throughout the day (e.g., “It looks like you are feeling happy that we are going to play outside; how does that make you feel?”).
- **Respect your child's feelings.** Don't assume how they're feeling, ask them. Try to let them experience the emotion they are having without jumping in to fix it. Help them to communicate their emotions.
- **Help your child to understand their own, and other people's feelings.** Draw together and ask your child to draw people feeling different ways. Talk about why the characters might be feeling the way they are.



How can I help my child to navigate conflict?

It is normal for relationships to have conflict at times, and part of a child's social development is learning how to manage conflict with peers.

- **Tackle feelings first.** Help them identify a feeling and ask them to reflect on why. Validate and accept your child's feelings. Tell them, "I understand you're upset, and I know how that hurts your feelings".
- **Pinpoint the source of conflict.** Help your child get to the root of the issue so they can resolve the problem.
- **Brainstorm solutions.** Empower your child to come up with their own ideas. Encourage them to step back to see the whole picture so they don't jump to conclusions.
- **Help your child communicate their feelings about the conflict.** Teach them to use "I" statements: "I felt sad when you said that at my party" is more helpful than "You said that because you don't like me!" Putting the focus on "I" and not "you" removes shame and blame in the other person.
- **Role play with your child.** Act out the situation and the conversation to help them feel more confident.

Understanding how to develop healthy relationships can also help your child to notice signs of unhealthy relationships. It is important for students of all ages to understand and identify when their experiences in schools require intervention and support from staff. Support your child in understanding what behaviours are unacceptable, including bullying, harassment, and any forms of discrimination. If you feel that your child is experiencing bullying or harassment at school, it is important to be an advocate or support their self-advocacy by informing school staff of concerns.

Helpful resources

- <https://smho-smso.ca/parents-and-caregivers/what-is-social-emotional-learning/>
- <https://www.prevnet.ca/bullying/for-parents-and-caregivers/>
- <https://kidshelpphone.ca/get-info/healthy-relationships-vs-unhealthy-relationships>

References

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