

Advice for parents

Choose respect: How you can support your child to develop respectful relationships

Your child is learning from you!

Your child is learning from watching you. The best way to encourage respectful relationships is to role model them yourself.

- Are you calm when you speak to others?
- How do you manage your own strong emotions?
- When you need to complain do you do so assertively or aggressively?
- Do you demonstrate in your actions and words that you accept different cultures and beliefs?
- Are you respectful of other people online?

How you relate to your child will have a huge influence on how they relate to others. Children will not learn to respect others if they do not feel respected themselves. When dealing with negative behaviour and sibling disputes try to remain calm, clear and consistent.

Empathy

Young children do not have a fully developed sense of empathy (the ability to understand how others may be feeling). You can support this by talking about your own feelings and naming their feelings, or guessing at what they might be. Try to create an environment where all feelings are accepted, even difficult ones like sadness and anger. Encourage your child to express them in appropriate ways, for example, taking deep breaths when angry or cuddling a favourite toy when sad.

Reading stories together is an excellent way to boost empathy skills. Whilst reading you can discuss with your child what they think the characters are feeling. You can extend this with role play or by using puppets.

Early social skills

Young children are just starting out in the complex world of social relationships and they need the support of their adult caregivers.

Find moments for practicing social skills such as turn taking or saying 'please' and 'thank you', through playing board games together as a family, or practice using simple role play, such as playing 'shop'.

Instead of seeing conflict and immature social skills (such as snatching toys) as negative behaviour, re-frame these as opportunities for learning, and help your child practice these skills.

Friendships and relationships

Show an interest in your child's friendships and encourage positive social interaction. With older children, be cautious not to intervene too much. Allow them to experience the ups and downs of friends and to seek your guidance as required.

Read books and watch age-appropriate television shows and films with strong friendship themes. Discuss what being a 'good friend' and being 'respectful' means to them and to you. With older children this could also be an opportunity to discuss respect, boundaries and consent in relationships and what healthy and unhealthy relationships might look like.

Conflict

Support your child to understand that getting on and falling out with others is normal - you can still be friends even if you do not always agree or do not want to play together. Help them learn to disagree respectfully and negotiate with their friends. They may need your help with specific words that they can use in difficult situations, eg. "I'm busy now. Maybe we can play later", instead of "go away". You can practice these through role play - talk about the difference between passive, aggressive and assertive communication.

When conflicts arise, gently coach your child to problem solve and find their own solutions. You may need to help them to:

- identify the feelings that resulted in their behaviour

- think of more appropriate ways of managing those feelings
- consider the other person's viewpoint and be accountable for their actions
- think of a way to put things right with the other person

Model ways of dealing with conflict appropriately. For example, walking away to calm down or practicing deep breathing.

Assertiveness

Model assertiveness in your interactions with others and encourage your child to do the same. Use 'I' statements to express your needs and practice posture and assertive body language, eye contact and saying 'no'.

Discuss what bullying behaviour looks like and what they could do if they witness an incident of bullying. Encourage them to become upstanders and speak out.

Part of a team

From an early age, create a sense of belonging, and a home environment that focuses on working together. For example, involve children in activities such as cooking dinner, or laying the table. Make sure that this is part of normal family life rather than something done for reward.

Help children learn how to compromise, working together with others to come up with a solution that meets everyone's needs, "how can we work this out together?"

With older children, you could encourage involvement in the local community eg. looking out for elderly neighbours, undertaking voluntary work. Think about 'random acts of kindness'.

Promote activities that involve teamwork. Extra-curricular activities such as Guiding or Scouting, and some sporting activities may help with this.

Play games that involve cooperation rather than winning and losing.

Celebrating difference

Help children become aware of, explore and question differences in gender, ethnicity, language, religion and disability. For example by reading

books about children in other countries, listening to diverse music, sampling food from other countries. Avoid stereotyping, such as saying that certain toys or clothes are for boys or girls. Answer your child's questions honestly and accurately. 'Check-in' with your own language and behaviour to ensure that it isn't prejudiced or derogatory.

Encourage your child's self-respect and self-esteem. Support them to value their uniqueness, and the special qualities and skills that makes them, 'them'.

Online

Talk to your child about their online world and show an interest in what they are getting up to online. Encourage them to communicate on social media with as much respect as they would do face-to-face. Discuss what they could do if they saw something they were not comfortable with online.

If you have concerns about your child's relationships with others, speak to the school staff. We will have activities or programmes that they could put in place.