



# Helping Your Child Build Healthy Relationships

by Jane Baumchen

## NORTHSTAR COMPASS

*Navigating  
Toward Better  
Emotional  
Health*



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## THE VALUE OF RELATIONSHIPS

The ability to establish and maintain healthy relationships with others is foundational to success in most areas of life. If you get along with your boss and co-workers, you probably will succeed in your career. If you connect intimately with your spouse, you will have an easier time establishing a successful marriage. If you communicate effectively with your children, you will be a much more effective parent. One of the most important responsibilities for parents is teaching their children positive social and relational skills.

## TEACHING THROUGH EXAMPLE

Since we teach our children through example, the first step in helping children build healthy relationships is to model that skill for them. If relationships are a challenge for you, the first step in helping your kids is to get help yourself. Attend a class, see a counselor, or read books on the subject. It is never too late to learn good relationship skills.

## BUILDING EMOTIONAL HEALTH

Helping children deal with their feelings in appropriate ways will enable them to grow up emotionally healthy and mature. Parents can help the child express joy by laughing, giggling, and doing

fun activities together. Role-playing, including props for younger children, can help children begin to understand another's perspective.

Reading aloud can help children vicariously experience emotions of the characters in the story and build empathy with others. For example, an older child might identify with feelings of loss and grief, as the boy *Old Yeller* (Fred Gipson) deals with the loss of his pet dog. A younger child may enjoy *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* (Judith Viorst). By talking about the book after reading it, parents can help children verbalize their feelings.

## MODELING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Emotionally healthy parents model healthy living skills for their children.

This includes taking care of himself or herself as a person, forming adult and family friendships, and building strong family ties.

Routines and traditions can help children develop a sense of belonging to their immediate and extended families. Parents can also model compassion by helping in the community through volunteer experiences such as collecting toys or food for those in need, raking for the elderly, or simply donating outgrown items.

## PRACTICAL IDEAS TO BUILD FRIENDSHIPS

For very young children, parents can help their child develop friendships by establishing connections with families with children of a similar age. Having other families in your home and going places together helps children learn



to appreciate and value relationships. Scheduling supervised play dates is fun for the child, but also helps establish important social connections.

## SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL ROUTINES

By caring for a young child's emotional and social needs, and modeling through encouragement, parents can build independence and self-esteem as their child grows more capable of caring for his own needs. Parents can offer choices to help children learn to make decisions.

Establishing regular routines of rising and getting ready, chores, rest time, play, social activities, and meals can help children become independent. Parents can provide creative outlets and physical activities as part of their week by playing games that encourage critical thinking and social skills.

Building and maintaining simple daily routines, and helping children become and stay organized, can help build a sense of security, leading to increased self-confidence, an important piece for healthy relationships.



## RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNICATION

Good communication skills are critical for healthy relationships. Eating meals together is a wonderful time to build communication skills. Younger children enjoy practicing speaking in turns by putting a wooden spoon on the table at mealtime. One person begins by holding the spoon, designating it is their turn to talk for a predetermined time limit. The speaker shares something fun that happened in their day. Everyone else is encouraged to listen. A follow-up question time may follow, inviting the speaker to expand on their day or topic. The spoon is then passed to the next person at the table for their turn until each person has had a chance to speak. This can be especially useful for families with large age differences and also assures equal time for quieter or younger children. As children grow, they will learn to listen and respect each other.

## WAYS TO HELP YOUR CHILD DEVELOP HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

- Use your child's name
- Affirm your child
- Practice listening to help them feel valued
- Encourage them when they make a good effort
- Model authentic, enthusiastic greetings
- Show kindness
- Spend time together
- Help them label and express their emotions in a healthy manner
- Find something your child enjoys and explore a new skill or hobby together
- Ask open-ended questions—What do you like about your family? What would you like to do on our next play day? What is a friend?
- Help build positive character qualities—kindness, honesty, joy, acceptance, etc.

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS



**Jane Baumchen** has a BA in early childhood and elementary education and taught preschool through grade six, including working with special needs, Montessori, and early childhood family education. She enjoys building relationships with churches, schools, clinics, hospitals, and community organizations.



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He received his Master's Degree from Wheaton Graduate School, his Doctorate of Psychology (PsyD) from the Illinois School of Professional Psychology, and his Certificate in Co-Occurring Disorders from Adler Graduate School. He serves frequently as a seminar leader, and has taught workshops in the USA, Canada, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, South Africa, and India.

He is the author of *Journeys* and *Destinations*, two books on co-occurring disorders treatment, and the co-author of *Finding Hope Again: Overcoming Depression* with Dr. Neil T. Anderson.

*This information in this publication is not intended as a substitute for professional help or to be used as a diagnostic tool. If you have serious difficulties with anxiety, depression, or other mental health issues, please seek professional help.*