

Efficient Parenting






Effective And Innovative Approaches For Resilient Parenting

I01 – Parent's Handbook

Project Number: 2019-1-R001-KA204-063747

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Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any us which may be made of the information contained therein. [Project Number: 2019-1-R001-KA204-063747]

Introduction



Parenthood is often described as a monumental milestone in a person's adult life. The vast majority of adult population embarks to parenthood at some point in their lives (i.e., around 89.6% worldwide, Ranjan, 2015). And while this is an extraordinary experience, new parents should bear in mind that having a child can significantly alter and shape the landscape of someone's life. Becoming a parent cannot be taken lightly and it goes hand by hand with a sense of responsibility and duty. Even though most people take upon their role as parents intuitively, incorporating their surviving instincts and innate inclination for nurturing (Durrant, 2011; Kyriazos & Stalikas, 2018), however parenthood demands a complex set of skills (Mansager & Volk, 2004; Roskam, Raes, & Mikolajczak, 2017; Sanders, Kirby, Tellegen, 2014) and with the lack of those skills or adequate support it can become extremely stressful (Crnic & Lowm, 2002; Roskam, Raes, & Mikolajczak, 2017).

Parent and child share a unique, long-term and irreplaceable emotional bond (Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, 2012), the quality of that bond according to Bowlby's (1969) body of research, largely depends on the quality of the attachment that both will develop with the age, from the early stages of a children's life. Parents have been described as "gate-keepers" of children's wellbeing which includes both physical health and social related behaviors, since through their provision, their guidance and the example they set for their children, as primal models of behavior (Pyper, Harrington, & Manson, 2016).

The quality of parenting that children receive has immense impact on their development. Scientific evidence from behavioral, social, experimental and educational studies, shows that parenting practices have a major influence on children's development (Beyers & Groossens, 1999; Howenstein, Kumar, Casamassimo, McTigue, Coury & Yin, 2015; Mansager & Volk, Roskam, Raes, & Mikolajczak, 2017; Sanders, 2003; Sanders, 2008; Sanders, Kirby, Tellegen, & Day, 2014; Scott & O'Connor, 2012) .

Nurturing, warm environments create the optimal environment for children and young people in order to flourish and reach their maximum potential. With the appropriate attention and support from parents, important skills and abilities for children's current and future wellbeing



and development can be enhanced and promoted, such as self-regulatory skills, interaction with others and communication skills (Sanders, Kirby, Tellegen, & Day, 2014). Children who grow up in such supportive, non-toxic environments are less likely to develop antisocial behaviors (Paterson & Sanson, 1999). In addition seems that effective parenting enables and supports children to develop a vast variety of abilities and skills, including improved academic performance, cognitive development, social skills, language, emotional regulation, emotional resilience and their capacity to cope with adversity, self-discipline, intrinsic motivation, mental and physical health and they seldom engage in risky behaviors (Kyriazos & Stalikas, 2018; Sanders, Kirby, Tellegen, & Day, 2014).

On the contrary a variety of family risk factors might impose a threat to the wellbeing of both parties involved, parents and offspring. Poor parenting, conflict amongst family members and marital issues to name a few, are important factors that can strongly influence children's risk of developing various forms of psychopathology, behavioral issues and learning disorders (Sanders, 2008). A lack of warm, positive relationship with parents, insecure attachment, harsh, inflexible or inconsistent discipline practices, neglect or lack of involvement in children's life occurrences, increase the risk that children will develop major behavioral and emotional challenges and problematic functioning (Sanders, 2008).

Parenting is a long-term process that lasts and abounds with skills that a person can learn through consistent practice and slowly perfect. A huge influence to all new parents is drawing from their own experience and following or choosing to dismiss the example of their own parents. Many new parents experience a dilemma between choosing for or against, the way in which they were parented as children (Mansager & Volk, 2004). For example, they may adopt more liberal policies in certain respects or they may become stricter if they feel that their own parents were too permissive in some areas. In addition, they acquire relevant knowledge on efficient parenting from professionals and/or advices received from peers and social environment.

Parenting is one of the greatest challenges and being a parent is one of the most complex social roles for any individual regardless their professional or cultural background. Parenting demands high levels of commitment, patience, compassion, time, trust, opening yourself up to love, empathy and understanding. But most of all it requires responsibility and making yourself available to new knowledge and practices (Fritzhand & Georgierska, 2019).

In the same train of thought "Parenting Styles" have been viewed with extreme interest from the scientific community, in order to define the components that result in successful caregiving and upraising of children. Parenting styles are referring to a set of parenting practices and approaches. Parenting styles and relevant terms can be conceptualized as a form of nested hierarchy within the family setting, with general parenting styles being the broader and more inclusive concept reflecting an approach to childrearing across different situations. Moreover, choosing a specific parenting style sets the tone of the overall interaction and relationship quality between the parent and the child (Power et al. 2013).



Parenting styles reflect parent's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors and are an accurate representation of parents' socialization goals for their children, as well as the emotional connectedness in which specific practices are implemented (Power et al., 2013). Parenting style is an essential determinant of children's coping mechanisms and how children behave with other adults and/or authority figures besides their own parents (Howenstein et al. 2015).

Diana Baumrind, created the Baumrind Parenting Typology on a specific set of parenting styles based on her investigations regarding parent-child interactions, whereas she suggests that parenting approaches fall under one of four categories: authoritarian, authoritative, indulgent and neglectful.

The "authoritarian" (high control, low warmth) parenting style is characterized by harsh parenting practices, including physical punishment, yelling, and commands. Children in authoritarian homes often become more withdrawn and distrustful than their peers. In addition, this model of emotionally cold or distant parent-child relationship is associated with poor academic achievement and depressive symptoms. The "authoritative" (high warmth, high control) parent exhibits firm limit-setting, yet shows is compassionate and affectionate, and these households encourage bidirectional communication from both parties – parents and children. The "indulgent" or "permissive" (high warmth, low control) parent provides few to no commands or limits to behavior, and often spoils and overly cuddles the child. Children in a permissive household are "co-owners" of the house as far as rules go, but have no responsibilities. Children with permissive parents are more likely to show poor self-control, low self-esteem, and aggression. Neglectful parenting fails to provide children with the affection or care they long for. Moreover, fails to set some rules, direction and teaching children on how to become responsible and reliable individuals. Children coming from neglectful families are likely to form insecure attachments, go through a strain of unhealthy habits and/or social connections and can be associated with many negative developmental outcomes (Fritzhand & Georgierska, 2019; Hownstein et al, 2015).

Authoritative parenting is more frequently associated with positive outcomes for the child (e.g., emotional stability, higher academic performance, fewer if any behavior conducts problems, adaptive patterns of coping, life satisfaction and overall emotional and physical health). The parents who follow this specific parenting style provide their children with clear guidance and firm direction, but within the context of a nurturing environment that enables a warm and loving relationship. Authoritative parents make sure that they establish clear rules which they are consistently enforced and positively rewarded optimally with affection and appraisal (Fritzhand & Georgierska, 2019; Kyriazos & Stalikas, 2018).

There is a clear need for balance and effective communication between parents and children as well as consistent, nurturing, bidirectional relationships to encourage positive traits and skills growth for both. Most of the parents, especially new parents strive to fill the shoes of their parenting roles so they can be sufficient in successfully meeting the aforementioned needs of their children. There is no one way to parent, when investigating suggested methods of



parenting in today's society, the number of information sources is overwhelming. However, a very important aspect that can affect significantly the relationship between parent's and children's is the notion of a "good fit". A child is not a passive component that is exclusively affected and shaped from environmental and social conditions and circumstances. On the contrary the child's own traits might affect significantly the parent-child relationship. Children influence their parents at the same time that parents influence their children and it is important to investigate further these behavioral transactions to find ways to improve the communication between parents and children (Power et al., 2013).

"Good fit occurs when the child's characteristics are adequate to cope with the expectations of the environment, thereby promoting positive behavioral adjustment. In order to achieve that a parent has the responsibility as older, wiser and more skillful in communication, to find effective ways to interact successfully with the child by also taking in account their unique set of traits and temperament. Inflexibility and punitive parenting were found to result with externalizing behavior problems (Paterson & Sanson, 1999; Stright, Gallagher, & Kelley, 2008) and on the contrary effective communication is pointed out by a plethora of evidence as the basis for a healthy relationship amongst parents and children (Beyers & Goossens, 1999; Fritzhand & Goergierska, 2019; Mansager & Volk, 2004; Sanders, 2008).

Parenting has always been a demanding role throughout history. In modern, fast pacing societies, the role of a parent is constantly changing. Daily hassles (e.g everyday chores, homework, extracurricular activities, driving and/or using the commute), acute stressors (e.g., a child choking, abduction), and chronic issues (e.g. behavioral, learning or emotional disorders, chronic or serious health illness) can put a strain on parent's own wellbeing and ability to perform their roles successfully and attend to their children needs (Roskam, Raes, & Mikolajczak, 2017). The complex balance of work, family, personal and professional goals might pose a unique challenge, however with proper guidance, support and mindful cultivation of the desired skills and traits parents nowadays shouldn't shy away from the aspiration to find fulfillment in all aforementioned important life aspects.

Parents need the acquisition of updated lifelong key competencies to respond to the current and future societal demands. Achieving a stable high-quality level of parenting to children is not only linked, to positive development outcomes among children, but to parent's well-being as well, since as previously mentioned children and parent's wellbeing is interconnected (Kyriazos & Stalikas, 2018).

There is substantial evidence that Parenting Programmes based on social learning models are effective, particularly in the management of early onset issues with the relationship of parents and children (Dubroja, O'Connor, & McKenzie, 2016; Mansager & Volk, 2004; Sanders, 2008; Sanders & Morawska, 2008; Sanders, Kirby, Tellegen & Day, 2014). The approach aims to improve parent's wellbeing and to prevent severe behavioural, emotional and developmental problems in children and adolescents by enhancing the knowledge skills and confidence of parents. Positive effects have been documented many times in a plethora of studies,



investigators and cultural settings (Crnic & Lowm, 2002; Mansager & Volk, 2004; Roskam, Raes, & Mikolajczak, 2017; Sanders, 2008; Sanders & Morawska, 2008; Sanders, Kirby, Tellegen & Day, 2014).

One of the most know program world widely is the Triple-P Positive Parenting Programme developed by Sanders (1999), which aims to identify the minimally sufficient conditions that need to change in order to alter children's risk developmental trajectories for developing serious conduct problems (Sanders & Morawska, 2008). Through Triple - Positive Parenting Programmes, parents are typically taught methods and strategies on how to increase positive interactions with their children and to reduce ineffective and inconsistent parenting practices.

In addition through using the founding principles of Positive Psychology, many programmes promote the notion of "Positive Parenting" by applying an eclectic approach using a variety of methods and practices that aim to improve skills and coping strategies and improve wellbeing for both parents and children (Dubroja, O'Connor, & McKenzie, 2016; Fritzhand & Georgierska, 2019; Kyriazos & Stalikas, 2018; Sanders & Morawska, 2008).

Following their example, the consortium of EFFICIENT PARENTING Project, proposes 3 key areas to focus on, in order to elevate Parents ability to navigate through their everyday tasks and responsibilities by maintaining their welfare and if applicable eudaemonia: Psychological Wellbeing, Behavioural Management and Social Connectedness.

About this guide

Some may say "the best parents are my parents". However, we can always improve the way we relate to our children. Ideally, we would have a magic stick helping us to bring happiness to everyone in an instant. Of course, this remains wishful thinking. But a parent who feels good about her/himself and a fulfilled child who grows up next to such a parent - that is achievable.

With the help of this guide we want to empower parents with the necessary skills for a beautiful and harmonious parenthood.

Nowadays, things happen much too fast. Being a modern parent can be overwhelming most of the time. Besides taking care of and protect the family, making sure the children are fed, clean, educated, and perform well at work, - often there's no time left for personal needs. Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

The six partner organizations within the consortium of EFFICIENT PARENTING Project, had studied family relationships and give you concrete tips that you can put into practice. This guide addresses the parents who want to be there for their children in an efficient way and enjoy each other in the process. We invite you to the adventure of getting to master the art of effective parenting.



If this guide has reached to you, take advantage of everything you feel you can use and apply it at home. This guide was created for you, parents, as an appreciation of you never ending work; we hope this guide will support your efforts, provide answers to some of your questions, and offer advices that are ready to be put into practice. You'll find out how to positively approach the problems you encounter with your children and how to establish a trust-based relationship with them. Let's get started!

Psychological Wellbeing chapter will focus on teaching simple yet effective techniques in order to improve their capacity for stress management, emotion regulation and mindfulness. Self-management mostly refers to the tools and skills that parents use to enable them to alter if deemed necessary their parenting practices and become more self-sufficient. These skills include self-monitoring, self-determination of performance, goal setting, self-evaluation and critical thinking (Sanders, 2008).

Behavioral Management chapter will focus on how to effectively provide positive feedback, practice positive discipline methods and how to incorporate means and strategies that will help parents and children to amplify and cultivate favorable behaviors. Discipline is establishing a comfortable balance between the child's need of independence and the need of constraint. In addition, using discipline helps parents to teach the children how to productively participate in life, socialize and interact successfully with others around them and it is a major factor that effects the child's development as a whole (Fritzhand & Georgierska, 2019). Parents have the responsibility to find the most prosperous ways that will help both parent and children to get the most of their relationship, they can select and reinforce their own and their child's behavior they wish to change, enable and/or reward (Sanders, 2008).

Social Connectedness chapter aims to enhance skills that will improve communication and relationships quality. According to a significant amount of scientific data indicating that teaching parents more effective interaction strategies can improve developmental outcomes and decrease problematic behavior (Kaiser & Hancock, 2003). It important that through EFFECTIVE PARENTING Project we will find the right signals and language for parents to be able to initiate a communication amongst them and their children in a collaborative way and provided terminology. The next chapters of EFFECTIVE PARENTING Project will elaborate on the 3 Key Competencies suggested above, providing a brief review regarding each of them and a set of 4 Simple Activities for parents to practice in order to achieve the desirable suggested outcomes.

BEHAVIORAL MANAGEMENT



Caring for a child's education is one of the most complex, challenging, but also the most rewarding experiences life can offer. It is a great responsibility to raise a child so that he or she becomes a healthy and balanced adult, able to take his/her place in the society (Adler 2011).

When someone becomes a parent, something strange and sad happens. The moment one enters the "sacred" world of parents, they consider that they must behave in a certain way, be very serious, bear the burden of responsibility, they feel that they must always be consistent with their emotions, they must behave lovingly towards their children, accepting them unconditionally, they must put their selfish needs aside and sacrifice for their children (The Handbook of Effective Parents, Dr. Thomas Gordon 2008).

Although these intentions are admirable, they make parents less efficient in their relationship with their children.

Forgetting one's own humanity is one of the wrong step's parents take. An effective parent can afford to be authentic, to be a person with positive and negative feelings, and children appreciate their sincerity and authenticity.

But how can we become effective parents? What is important to know? What is children's behavior?

Behavior is just the external expression of children's feelings, thoughts, needs, and intentions that manifest in a particular social context.

Do we influence our children's behavior?

Often, certain patterns of behavior are learned / acquired reactions / responses from certain concrete situations. For example, if a small child wants his parents to give him chocolate, but they refuse, then the child starts screaming and getting nervous. If the screams and nervous agitation bring him chocolate, then the child learns very quickly that these manifestations lead him to the desired result.



The parent's reaction to the child's behavior is called encouragement, i.e. if you pay close attention to a certain way of behaving, with which you do not agree, it will be repeated, because the child thinks it is the fastest way to capture attention even if it is a negative attention. If, in order to receive attention, s/he has to scream or shout s/he will do these things. Why? Because the attention you give him/her is very important.

But what can we, parents, do?

1. Regulation of emotions

Most parents believe that if they had "good" children, they could keep calm. The truth is that managing our own emotions and actions allows us to be calm, as parents. In the end, we cannot control our children, but we can control our own responses to children's actions.

Behavioural Management is linked with how parents react to their children's behaviour. When a situation is at risk of becoming tense, the parent's reaction can either relieve it or arouse real anger. The quiet presence of the adult will have a stronger influence on the child than the shouting could ever have.

Parents own ability for emotional regulation is another way to teach children by example how to handle efficiently their own emotions and behaviours deriving from their emotional and mental state. . This acquisition of competencies will allow children to become emotionally balanced, responsible and respectful.

2. Connect with your child, communicate with him/her, practice active listening. Active listening is a remarkable way to connect with your children and vice versa. Using this method both parties will have the opportunity to interact and express themselves during a conversation. It is very important for parents to learn their children's mannerisms in order to correctly decode the message that the child wants to convey directly or indirectly. In fact, when both children and adults are encouraged to express themselves openly, they defuse unnecessary tension which facilitates a more open and health interaction among them.

Active listening promotes a harmonious parent-child relationship. Parents who learn to empathize through active listening discover a new type of appreciation and respect, a deeper sense of love, and the child responds to the parent with similar feelings.

3. Play with your child!

Shared fun endorses intimacy and healthy connection. Two people who often experience positive feeling when they spend time together tend to want to invest more in each other. Thus, it's important to always find time to spend some quality time playing with your children.



Three rules for raising a child:

- Reward desirable behavior and do so immediately and as often as possible
- Be careful to reward the wanted behavior
- If punishment is considered absolutely necessary, use only mild punishments.

Children learn to talk, dress, share toys, and do certain tasks because they receive parents' attention or other types of rewards from parents or other adults. It is effective for parents to frequently and abundantly reward desirable behaviors. When a child receives a reward for engaging in a particular behavior, that behavior becomes stronger and more common now and in the future. People tend to repeat behaviors for which they receive rewards. If your son / daughter has a behavior that you like, don't forget to frequently reinforce that behavior by offering rewards.

But what kind of rewards should we use? Which are the most effective?

Social rewards are most effective in reinforcing desirable behaviors in both children and adults.

List of social rewards: smile, hug, touch, kiss, verbal praise, eye contact, attention, clapping, etc. Attention, a hug or a praise are easy to offer, which is very good, because is essential to provide to children a variety of social rewards in order to reinforce appropriate behaviors that are desirable.

If your 4-year-old child gathers his/her toys in the room, puts things in order, you must appreciate him/her for the effort made, praise if you want this behavior to be repeated.

Verbal appreciation is much more effective in reinforcing child's desirable behavior if you target the behavior and not the child in general (do not use "what a good child you are", "you are a great kid").

If your child has gathered the toys in the room or put things in order, use a descriptive praise such as "your room looks very good", "you did very well collecting your toys"; a descriptive assessment is much more effective than "what a good girl you are", which is a very general statement and does not represent anything in particular, therefore the child does not know exactly how to decode this message.

Material rewards or reward activities.

Material rewards: ice cream, a favorite dessert, a ball, toy, balloons, in general objects preferred by the child.

Reward activities: playing cards with mom, favorite game with dad, walking in the park, watching a certain TV program or cartoons, going out to pizza with the family etc.

In order for the rewards to be effective, they must immediately follow the behavior.

But be careful!

Often children ask for a material reward before performing the behavior we deem desirable: "I'll watch cartoons first, then I do my homework". If we offer the reward in advance, it will not work as a factor in strengthening the behavior we want to form in our child.

Behavioral Management Activities

Synoptic Table

| Title | Objectives | Overview | Evaluation & Reflection |
|---|---|--|--|
| Connect with your child | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of communication between parent and child • Development of the skill of actively listening to the parent | When a child decides to communicate with his parents s/he does so because s/he has a need, wants something, feels uncomfortable, something upsets him/her, s/he has a problem. | This type of activity promotes a relationship of harmony and trust between parents and children; releases harmful emotions and feelings. Active listening has a catharsis effect, the problems disappear miraculously. |
| Play with your child | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared fun • Carry out play activities with the child • Use time only for him/her | A good relationship means two people who often have fun together. Shared fun feeds personal relationships. Two people who often feel good together tend to like each other more. | The child feels that you are there only for him/her and s/he feels important. |
| Reward desirable behavior and do so immediately and as often as possible | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning and consolidating desirable behaviors | When the child receives a reward for engaging in a particular behavior, that behavior becomes stronger and more common now and in the future. | People tend to repeat behaviors for which they receive rewards. If your son / daughter has a behavior that you like, don't forget to reinforce that behavior by frequently offering rewards for him / her. |
| Accidentally rewarding undesirable behavior | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extinguishing undesirable behaviors | When the child receives a reward for engaging in a particular behavior, that behavior becomes stronger and more common now and in the future. | <p>When a parent accidentally rewards unwanted behavior, the chances of this unwanted behavior occurring more frequently will increase.</p> <p>Rewarding unwanted behavior only creates a future problem for the parent and his child.</p> <p>This is probably one of the most common educational mistakes parents can make.</p> |



| Title of the Activity: Connect with your child | |
|---|--|
| Objectives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving communication between parent and child • Development of the parent's active listening ability • Developing empathy for the parent through active listening |
| Instructions: | <p>Pay attention to the needs and emotions that may underlie the child's problems. Listen to him/her! Make eye contact. Use a gentle voice. "It's the first day of kindergarten, I know it's hard for you. I'll pick you up at the end of the program, and we'll play at home and spend some special time together, okay?"</p> |
| Evaluation & Reflection: | <p>This type of activity promotes a harmonious and trusting relationship between parent and child</p> <p>Release of harmful emotions and feelings</p> <p>Active listening has a catharsis effect, the problems seem to disappear miraculously</p> <p>The child feels understood and valued</p> |

| Title of the Activity: Play with your child | |
|--|--|
| Objectives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared fun • Carry out play activities with the child • Use time only for him/her |
| Instructions: | <p>Initiating a game at the child's request The choice of the game (it can be a game of your choice with predefined rules, for example “Don't be upset brother”, the “Up-Down” / “Snakes and Leaders” game, etc.), or a game for which we set the rules We choose the materials we need -it is important to use time only to play with our child -do not take over the game -laugh and enjoy together</p> |
| Evaluation & Reflection: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The child feels that you are there only for him and he feels important • A good relationship means two people who often have fun together • Shared fun feeds personal relationships • Two people who often feel good together tend to like each other more |



| Title of the Activity: | Reward desirable behavior and do so immediately and as often as possible |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Objectives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extinguish undesirable behaviors |
| Instructions: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not use rewards regardless of their nature when we want undesirable behavior not to be repeated. • Establish a list of behaviors that we consider undesirable. For example, not to whine, not to leave their toys in disarray, come to dinner when asked, etc. <p>For example, a 5-year-old boy starts whimpering (he actually wants his mother's attention). Mom can't stand the crying and starts arguing with him (I'm tired of hearing you whine!), but she stops her activity and pays attention to the child. What did the child learn? That he can bear a little rebuke from his mother, but then he gets what he wants. So his mother taught him to whimper.</p> |
| Evaluation & Reflection: | <p>Often parents caught up in various tasks or wanting more "peace", reward the child for undesirable behavior. "Calm down! You can watch cartoons again. When I hear you crying, I feel like I'm going crazy."</p> |



| Title of the Activity: Accidentally rewarding undesirable behavior | |
|--|--|
| Objectives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of desirable behaviors • Improving the relationship between child and parent • Reducing the frequency of undesirable behaviors |
| Instructions: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a list of behaviours that you accept in your child. Do this with him/her. • Establish the list of rewards you use. These can be social or material. • Social rewards: smile, hug, touch, caress, verbal praise, clapping, etc. • Reward activities: playing cards with my mother, walking in the park, reading a story with my father, watching a TV program, playing football with my father, etc. • Material rewards: ice cream, chocolate, ball, money, a game or toy, etc. |
| Evaluation & Reflection: | <p>People tend to repeat behaviors for which they receive rewards.</p> <p>If your son / daughter has a behavior that you like, don't forget to reinforce that behavior by frequently offering rewards for him / her.</p> |

PARENTAL PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING



Parental psychological wellbeing is crucial when it comes to the social and emotional development of children, and it is a fundamental contributor that defines the quality of the parent-child relationship. Even though the parents' self-care aspect is of the utmost importance, more often than not, it is overlooked, or marginalised in order to prioritise the children's needs and/or other family responsibilities. Parenting is a difficult task and requires a large investment of physical and emotional energy, which amplifies even more the significance of self-care and personal wellbeing. Experiencing prolonged feelings of tiredness, depression and/or stress, often prevents parents from performing their parental tasks with efficiency. However, when parents take care of their emotional and physical health, they often become better equipped to deal with parenting related stress factors, sustain healthier relationships amongst all family members, and begin to enjoy parenthood overall.

According to a counsellor at Parent Line, "remember, you're a person as well as a parent. Your needs are important too! Take time out to look after your wellbeing and your whole family will benefit".

Happy parents are more likely to bring up healthy and prosperous children. Wellbeing is more than just taking care of one's self, as a member of a family unit, often unavoidably, mental and emotional states can directly impact on the whole family and its members. By investing time and effort in the parent's wellbeing, the wellbeing of children and the positive climate within



the household is often also improved. The more parents care for themselves, the more they have the capacity and awareness to tend to the children's needs successfully.

It was evident to the Efficient Parenting consortium during the *Research* and *Focus Group* phases, that the vast majority of parents seem to experience strong feelings of guilt when they decide to put aside time only for themselves and their personal needs. Hence this section is dedicated to kindly remind parents, that their wellbeing is vital, not only for their own wellbeing, but in order to safeguard their children's overall wellbeing and happiness. When parents neglect their own physical and emotional needs, they become stress-prone and somaticize the uncomfortable emotions, and often might find themselves feeling overly irritable, depressed or experiencing feelings of hopelessness. In addition, by incorporating in their routine behaviour that promotes wellbeing they become positive models for their children as well, indirectly teaching them how important is to nourish physical, mental and emotional needs.

On the same note, it's important to clarify that "wellbeing" is more than just a good physical condition, it also includes mental, social and emotional welfare. Wellbeing is a scientific term for happiness that refers to how individuals experience the quality of their lives (Seligman, 2002). The notion incorporates three distinct components that include life satisfaction, positive affect and negative affect (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2009). It's the overall feeling of happiness, self-efficacy and contentment that individuals experience in regards with the way they perceive themselves and life in general. When it comes specifically to parents, according to Parent Line (2018), wellbeing includes:

- Successful Stress Management and to be able to cope with everyday stresses,
- Having a sense of purpose and generally enjoying life,
- Self-Regulation Capacity and being able to successfully manage negative emotions,
- Feeling connected to the community,
- Having supportive, strong, healthy relationships,
- Being able to do and enjoy things that are important to the individual.

Psychological Wellbeing Activities

Synoptic Table

| Title | Audience | Overview | Evaluation & Reflection |
|---------------------------|--|--|---|
| Personal Manifesto | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self - Awareness • Self - Presentation • Motivation • Inspiration • Goal – Setting | <p>This Individual Activity will help to pin down your core values and beliefs, the specific ideas and priorities you stand for, and how in general you plan to live your life serving the purposes you value as most important.</p> | <p>Through creating your own Personal Manifesto, you will establish a clear idea and written representation of where you are at the moment, where you would like to be and most importantly why. This acts as both a declaration of personal principles and a call to action.</p> |
| Mindfulness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wellbeing • Coping skills • Self-regulation | <p>This is a scientifically proven meditation technique that combats stress.</p> | <p>Mindfulness is a therapeutic technique that can help with managing and preventing feelings of depression, stress, anxiety, or discontent. It enables parents who practices regularly to live a more attentive, appreciative, and vibrant life</p> |
| Journal writing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotions • Self-regulation • Self-awareness | <p>Keeping a journal can help express and put in order feelings and thoughts.</p> | <p>Expressing through writing helps boost mood, enhance sense of wellbeing and reduce symptoms of depression</p> |
| Staying active | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical health • Stay Active | <p>By eating small, frequent, nutritious meals and exercising regularly increases blood flow and enhances energy and eliminates stress and depression.</p> | <p>Stay active by making exercise part of your weekly routine</p> |

| Title of the Activity: | Personal Manifesto |
|-----------------------------|--|
| <p>Objectives</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A “manifesto” is a statement of ideas and intentions. A “Personal Manifesto” describes your own core values and beliefs, the specific ideas and priorities you stand for, and how you plan to live your life. • A manifesto is a statement that points out where you are, where you would like to be, and why. This acts as both a declaration of personal principles and a call to action. • This Activity aims to enhance the following: <i>Self- awareness, self- presentation, critical thinking, decision making, motivation, inspiration, goal setting.</i> |
| <p>Instructions:</p> | <p>Variation 1</p> <p><u>Material:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A4 paper or a Personal Notebook - Pen / Pencil <p><u>Implementation Procedure:</u></p> <p>Write down your own Personal Manifesto. To get started you start by reflecting on the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are your strongest beliefs? • What makes you passionate and what inspires you? • How do you want to live your life? • Which relationships you consider to be important? • How do you want to define yourself? • What words do you want to live by? <p>Variation 2</p> <p><u>Material:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cardboard - Printed Activity Sheets - Glue - Scissors - Implementation Procedure: - Give a printed copy of each Activity Sheet to every participant: - Traits - Activities - Values - Quotes <p><u>Choose:</u></p> <p>10 Traits - that describe you more accurately</p> <p>7 Activities - you enjoy / gives you inspiration</p> <p>5 Values - you want to live your life by</p> |



| | |
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| | <p>3 Quotes - that mean something to you or inspires you in some way</p> <p>Cut them out from the Activity Sheets and glue them to the Cardboard with that order. At the end you will have a Board containing your most important values, beliefs and what inspires and motivates you. It will be a representation of how you want to live your life by and what are your true dreams and aspirations for the future.</p> |
| <p>Evaluation & Reflection:</p> | <p>A Personal Manifesto can be a powerful tool and it can evoke self-awareness and a call for action. It can help a person to address a disconnect between the what and the why and can provoke real change. It's particularly helpful for those who aspire to lead and to contribute.</p> <p>Will help you focus on your true personal and professional aspirations and break down the steps you need to take in order to achieve success. You can reflect on this and visit the Personal Manifesto again whenever you feel is necessary, since a manifesto requires depth and intense introspection.</p> |
| <p>Reference:</p> <p>McNulty, E. J. (2016): Retrieved from https://www.strategy-business.com/blog/Forget-the-Resolutions-Write-Your-Personal-Manifesto?gko=d24dc</p> <p>Additional Recourses: Appendix: Personal Manifesto</p> | |

| Title of the Activity | Mindfulness |
|-----------------------------|--|
| <p>Objectives</p> | <p>Making the notion of “Mindfulness” a family priority and focus on activities that bring peace of mind and amplify engagement and flow.</p> <p>Find below a scientifically proven meditation technique especially designed to eliminate stress.</p> |
| <p>Instructions:</p> | <p><u>Material:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peaceful and quiet environment that makes you feel safe <p><u>Implementation Procedure:</u></p> <p><u>Step 1:</u> Close your eyes and breathe through your nose and mouth. Take around 10 long deep breaths or as many as you need to reach a level of calm and stillness.</p> <p><u>Step 2:</u> In your mind’s eye, picture a certain place that makes you feel safe and calm. Now imagine you are there. Observe your surroundings. What do you see? Touch something and observe the sensations. Can you notice any distinctive smells? Can you hear any sounds in the background or near you?</p> |



EFFICIENT PARENTING

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| | <p>Step 3: If your mind wanders, gently bring your attention back to the present moment. Observe your emotions and become aware of how your mind and body is affected by your emotions and mood.</p> <p>Step 4: Share this experience with the other members of your family and bring to their awareness to all the benefits they can gain from setting aside just a few minutes per day in practicing mindfulness.</p> <p>Alterations: Try the “mindful walk”. Whilst walking around, try to pay attention to your breath and the way the ground feels under your feet. Observe your surroundings. What do you see? Touch something and observe the sensations. Can you notice any distinctive smells? Can you hear any sounds in the background or near you?</p> |
| <p>Evaluation & Reflection:</p> | <p>Mindfulness is a therapeutic technique that can help with managing and preventing feelings of depression, stress, anxiety, or discontent. Individuals who practice regularly mindfulness experience a more vibrant life and enjoy prolonged feelings of happiness and gratitude.</p> |

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Title of the Activity: Journal writing</p> | |
| <p>Objectives</p> | <p>Keeping a journal can help express and put in order feelings and thoughts.</p> |
| <p>Instructions:</p> | <p>Variation 1: Parent perspective</p> <p>Material:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Personal Notebook • Pen / Pencil <p>Implementation Procedure:</p> <p>Write down your own journal from a parental perspective. To get started you begin by reflecting on the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What you love most about parenthood? 2. What was the most challenging for you as a parent? 3. Write down a few memories amongst yourself and your children? 4. Write a few traits that you admire the most in your children? 5. How have you grown as a parent? 6. What have you done for yourself this week? 7. What experience do you hope to share with your children in the future? 8. What small victory did you celebrate today as a parent? 9. What surprised you the most about being a parent? 10. What is your favourite part of being a parent? |
| <p>Evaluation & Reflection:</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expressing through writing helps to boost mood, enhance sense of wellbeing and reduces symptoms of depression and/or anxiety. • Consistent journaling can provide clarity of thoughts and feelings. |



| Title of the Activity: Staying active | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Objectives | Stay active and healthy by making exercise part of your weekly routine. |
| Instructions: | <p><u>Material:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work out equipment that you may have at home • Household objects <p><u>Proposed Implementation Procedure:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Go for pre or post dinner walks 2. Make a game out of household chores 3. Home base workouts into other activities 4. Make TV commercials breaks into brief fitness /workout routines 5. Have a weekly sports night 6. Walk or run for charity 7. Team up for gardening 8. Walk your pet |
| Evaluation & Reflection: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eating small, frequent, nutritious meals and exercising regularly increases blood flow, enhances energy and eliminates stress and depression. • Physical activities endorse motivation, determination and goalsetting, qualities that help individuals to become generally more successful. |



APPENDIX FOR ACTIVITY 1:

List of Traits

| | | |
|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| LOVABLE | FREE-SPIRITED | COOPERATIVE |
| TOLERANT | POLITE | SERIOUS |
| DETERMINED | PLEASANT | CONSISTENT |
| HUMOROUS | ATTENTIVE | TIDY |
| CREATIVE | HONEST | FORGIVING |
| ASSERTIVE | PRUDENT | STABLE |
| POPULAR | PRESENTABLE | RIGHTEOUS |
| STRONG | CALM | HEALTHY |
| ACTIVE | OPTIMISTIC | RESPONSIBLE |
| FAIR | SOCIABLE | PATIENT |
| PERKY | THOUGHTFUL | FRIENDLY |
| INTELLIGENT | ORGANIZED | HAPPY |
| RELIABLE | DARING | |

List of Activities

traveling
walking
camping
reading
watching tv
being outdoors
dining out
racing cars
cooking
singing
writing
sports
organizing
seeing a movie
designing
woodworking
gardening
crafts
landscaping
crafts
debating
volunteering
decorating
shopping
teaching
working on car
hiking
giving
fishing

painting
talking
researching
golfing
remodeling
programing
sailing
sky diving
knitting
cleaning
shopping
making a film
photography
going to spa
voice lessons
driving
scuba diving
working out
meditating
dancing
learning a new language
attending seminars
running a business
keeping a journal
entertaining guests
horseback riding
learning

LIST OF VALUES

FREEDOM

LOVE

WEALTH

RESPECT

JUSTICE

WISDOM

PEACE

BEAUTY

HEALTH

HONESTY

SUCCESS

FUN

FAITH

CHARITY

RELIGION

EQUILIBRIUM

RELIABILITY

FRIENDSHIP

EQUALITY

PATRIOTISM

POLITENESS

TEAMWORK

LIST OF QUOTES

“Keep your face always toward the sunshine and shadows will fall behind you.”

Walt Whitman

“The world is full of magical things patiently waiting for our wits to grow sharper.”

Bertrand Russell

“All you need is the plan, the road map, and the courage to press on to your destination.”

Earl Nightingale

“The glow of one warm thought is to me worth more than money.”

Thomas Jefferson

“Once we believe in ourselves, we can risk curiosity, wonder, spontaneous delight, or any experience that reveals the human spirit.”

E. E. Cummings

“The power of imagination makes us infinite.”

John Muir

“Try to be a rainbow in someone’s cloud.”

Maya Angelou

“I believe that if one always looked at the skies, one would end up with wings.”

Gustave Flaubert

“A No. 2 pencil and a dream can take you anywhere.”

Joyce Meyer

“The most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt with the heart.”

Helen Keller

“Lead from the heart, not the head.”

Princess Diana

“To succeed in life, you need three things: a wishbone, a backbone, and a funny bone.”

Reba McEntire

“Life's most persistent and urgent question is: What are you doing for others?”

Martin Luther King, Jr.

“I've failed over and over and over again in my life and that is why I succeed.”

Michael Jordan

“One day or day one. It's your decision.”

Unknown



“Embrace the glorious mess that you are.”

Elizabeth Gilbert

“Your true success in life begins only when you make the commitment to become excellent at what you do.”

Brian Tracy

“Action is the foundational key to all success.”

Pablo Picasso

“Success comes from knowing that you did your best to become the best that you are capable of becoming.”

John Wooden

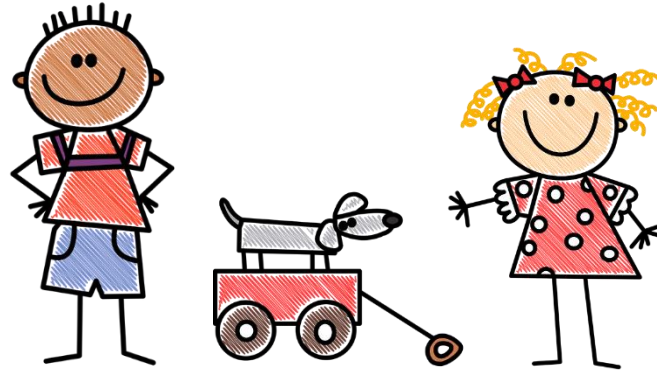
“Our prime purpose in this life is to help others. And if you can’t help them, at least don’t hurt them.”

The Dalai Lama

“We’re here for a reason. I believe a bit of the reason is to throw little torches out to lead people through the dark.”

Whoopi Goldberg

SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS



We are naturally very social beings. We need meaningful interactions with a range of people to fulfil our social needs. In fact, socially connected people are said to have more meaningful and lasting relationships with their loved ones, families and friends (Synergos, 2014).

So, what is social connectedness? Social connectedness is a measure of how people come together and interact with other people, and it relies on the quality of your interactions as well as the quantity of them (Pappadopulos, 2018). This does not mean that you must simply count your followers on Facebook and Instagram or post more often. Social connectedness relates to your interactions with your children, your partner, your siblings, your parents, your friends, and your community.

Social connectedness is important for the wellbeing of adults, as your social interactions are what help you to shape your sense of self and find out who you are (Gossling, 2017). To help you increase your social connectivity skills as a parent and as an individual, we are going to explore social connectedness from the following perspectives:

- Communication with your children
- Building relationship skills
- How to receive emotional and practical support from family, friends and community

Social Connectedness Activities Synoptic Table

| Title | Objectives | Overview | Evaluation & Reflection |
|--|---|--|--|
| Communication with your Children | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-assessment of communication • Increased awareness • Effective communication skills • Willingness to change | <p>This activity will help you to evaluate your communication methods with the people in your life. It also provides you with some fun activities to help you to have better communication with your children.</p> | <p>Through this activity you will become more aware of the effectiveness of your current communication practices and gain an appreciation for better and more effective communication with your children.</p> |
| Building relationship skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced relationship skills • Self-evaluation • Assessment of relationships | <p>The activity will get the whole family involved in creating healthy relationships with one another. It will allow you to evaluate what areas of your relationships need building and provide you with an opportunity to strengthen those relationships.</p> | <p>Through this activity, you and your family will have a greater appreciation for the time and work involved in creating healthy relationships and will have a greater appreciation for the relationships you have established.</p> |
| The Intercultural Game per Families | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overcome stereotypes • Improve communication skills with other cultures • Self – awareness • Team building | <p>This group activity will help families overcome their stereotypes on different cultures and improve the dialogue and communication with the closer circle of friends and the surrounding community</p> | <p>Through this activity all members of the family will reflect on the cultural stereotypes which every day surround their life and overcome them. Evaluation is made jointly with other families in a round circle and expressing feelings after the game</p> |
| The “E” game | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show how people think and communicate differently • How to deal with communication barriers • Improve communication with other people | <p>This group activity will help families improve the dialogue and communication with the closer circle of friends and the surrounding community and understand the mechanisms of communication</p> | <p>Through this activity all members of the family will reflect on the difficulties in properly communicating and will reflect on the right way to set up a conversation and avoid misunderstandings.</p> |



Communication with Children

What is Communication?

Communication is the transfer of information from one person, place or group to another. There are many forms of communication; verbal, non-verbal and written communication. Verbal communications come in the form of conversations, whether face-to-face or through a phone call. Non-verbal communications can also vary in their delivery and can be very subtle. Body language and facial expression, our choice of clothing, the way we present ourselves are all forms of non-verbal communication. Lastly, written communications are as expected delivered in the form of the written word and can be sent to you by text message, email, letter, articles in the newspaper and magazines, infographics and billboards, as an example. (SkillsYouNeed, 2020).

Communication is open to interpretation, meaning that communication can often be misunderstood. This issue occurs most often in written forms of communication, however non-verbal cues can also cause issues leading to the misinterpretation of communication. To combat this, it is vitally important that we try to be effective in our communication with others. Successful communication is achieved by being mindful of your audience. While this may seem like a simple tip it really has quite an impact. Choosing the correct form of communication, tempering your language and checking for feedback are steps that can help to avoid misunderstandings with communication (SkillsYouNeed, 2020).

Why is Communication with Children Important?

We often think about the children in our lives as little people who are on the road to being grown-ups, still working on growing into fully fledged adults and becoming members of society. However, children are already members of society and should be thought of as “human beings in their own right” (UNICEF, 2011). As part of children’s rights, set out in a charter by the United Nations, children have a right to be heard and for their communication to be taken seriously.

Communication is vital for your child’s development. Children need to be able to communicate their needs, but they also need to learn how to listen to communication from others and learn how to be social beings themselves. All of this can be achieved through effective communication in the home (Communication Trust, 2011).

How effective is your communication with your children?



Communicate Effectively with your Children

The methods you use to communicate with your children will of course vary depending on their age and their capabilities. Tools and tactics that works for a three- year old will not work on your teenager. That said, research has shown that there are 8 core aspects to having effective communication with your children (Miller, 2020). These core fundamentals of communication are as follows:

- **Empathy:** Practicing empathy enables the development of listening skills and helps children to understand what it means to have respect and patience for others. To do this, you should actively listen to your children, focus on what they are saying and pay attention to their body language. Instead of instantly reacting, acknowledge their feelings and offer consolation and understanding to your children. If there is an issue that needs to be dealt with, try to see the situation through their eyes and remember what it was like to be in their shoes.
- **Establishing the 'Pause':** Introducing a pause after speaking gives your children time to interpret the communication and identify what they need to take from it. It will also teach them the importance of giving others some time to speak.
- **Introspection:** This encourages children to take time to look at themselves, and practice self-understanding and self-evaluation. Allowing children to think about their issues and try to solve the problem by themselves or know that they can ask for advice this will help to promote self-sufficiency.
- **Established routines:** Through the introduction of routines and regular procedures, children learn to understand non-verbal communication and will look for non-verbal cues. Help children to understand that there are certain times where it is not appropriate to communicate how they feel – for example, discourage shouting over others and disrupting activities with inappropriate communication.
- **Conversation skills:** Practicing conversation on a regular basis helps children to be more comfortable with casual conversation. Mealtimes and trips in the car are the perfect opportunities to encourage your children to communicate about their day.
- **Respectful vocabulary:** This encourages children to be mindful of who they are speaking to and teaches them that certain vocabulary is or is not appropriate for conversation.
- **Taking turns:** Not only does this improve self-regulation skills, but it also helps children to understand that the other person may need to communicate something to them and will help them to be more active listeners. Active listening is an important element of communication.
- **Practice:** As the saying goes, “practice makes perfect”. Create a setting for regular communication with your children, and act as a role model for effective communication. Your children will learn more about how to communicate and be respectful when speaking to others from the example you show and by your actions and your words.



What are the Benefits of Effective Communication with your Children?

As we have already discussed, communication has a significant impact on the development of your children. The developmental benefits of communication for children include the following competencies:

- Self-efficacy, or increased sense of self
- Increased empathy and compassion for others
- Greater emotional intelligence
- Healthier mental wellbeing
- Assertiveness and confidence (Miller, 2020)

The benefits of successful communication with children can impact parents too.

The benefits to parents include:

- Stronger relationships with their children
- Increased social interaction
- Less behavioural issues with their children
- Building trust with their children
- More positive information through good communication skills means less worry and better adjusted children



EFFICIENT PARENTING

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| <p>Title: Study your communication skills</p> | |
| <p>Objectives:</p> | <p>The aim of this activity is to help parents to assess the effectiveness of their current communication practices and help them to discover new methods to improve their communication skills for better interaction with their children.</p> |
| <p>Instructions:</p> | <p><u>Materials:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pen - Paper - (Other resources may be required depending on the activities chosen from the appendix) <p><u>Implementation Procedure:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consider your communication skills with your children and your partner and evaluate how successful each communication attempt was. To help you analyse the success and effectiveness of your communications, ask yourself the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Who started the conversation? Where did it occur? ○ What was the goal of the conversation? Did you achieve it? ○ What tool for good communication did you use with your child? Was it successful? 2. Keep a record of your observations for one week. At the end of the week, review your notes and identify areas where communication needs to improve. Consider the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Are there issues with instructions being followed? ○ Does your child take part in conversation with you when you are trying to engage them? ○ Are there any behavioural issues you wish to change? For example: shouting over one-another, not giving others the opportunity to speak. ○ Can any of the eight core fundamentals of communication help you to solve these issues? 3. Depending on the age and developmental stage of your child choose an activity outlined in appendix 1 to help you to engage with your child in a more effective manner. |



EFFICIENT PARENTING

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| Reflection & Evaluation: | <p>Successful communication between a parent and a child is incredibly important to the well-being of your child. However, effective communication will also result in happier parents too. In completing this activity, you have assessed how valuable your communication methods are, learning about the practices that work and those that do not, have given you the confidence to continue on the road to become an efficient parent. You have been able to identify areas for improvement and have implemented some of the activities in appendix 1 below to improve your communication skills. To reflect on this activity, ask yourself the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Did you identify communication practices that you wish to change?○ Did you successfully implement new activities for better communication with your child?○ Has communication improved between yourself and your child?○ Do you think there are further improvements that you can make? |
|-------------------------------------|---|

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Additional Recourses:

Appendix 1 – Activities to Improve Communication for All Ages

From Toddlers to Kindergarten

Below are some fun activities to help young children practice their communication skills (Miller, 2020):

- **Guess the object** - Put a small object into a box, making sure the child cannot see it. Allow them to put their hand in the box and feel the object. The aim of this game is to encourage your child to use their words to describe what they are feeling and giving them time to guess what the object might be.
- **Playing telephone** – A game of make believe through a pretend phone call can help children to speak more freely. Children see adults on the phone all the time and are usually eager to copy what they are seeing.
- **Show and tell** – This activity can be particularly useful for children just starting school. Help them practice using full sentences to describe their chosen item or tell their story. It is likely this activity will be repeated in the classroom, so practicing presentation skills from a young age is excellent for their development.

From Kindergarten to Pre-Teens

Outlined below are a few fun activities to help your pre-adolescent children learn more about communication (Miller, 2020):

- **Emotional charades** – The aim of this game is to help children to understand body language and non-verbal cues. List a variety of emotions on individual pieces of paper. Fold the pieces of paper and put them into box or container. Each child must pick one out and act out the emotion on the paper, while the others playing must guess the emotion.
- **20 questions** – You will need to pick a topic of focus for this game. It may be movies, or favourite songs, or famous people or anything that traditionally interests your family. Taking movies as an example, list a variety of movies on individual pieces of paper and place them in a box. One person must choose a piece of paper and the other players can ask 20 “yes”/”no” questions to guess the movie. The aim of this game is to help children to assimilate the information they receive, and practice asking well thought out questions.
- **Finish the story** – Start a story and let your child create their own ending. For example, “once upon a time in a faraway land” - Now let your child get creative and continue on with the story using their own words and using their imagination to finish the story. This is a great way to get your child to interact in a fantastical and fun way.
- **Role playing** – Role playing is an excellent activity to help children learn new vocabulary and is proven to help children develop empathy. Setting roles for children in



the place of a teacher or parent can also help them to gain perspective and understanding of a situation and help them to show tolerance and respect to others especially those in authority.

Teenagers

Lastly, see below a few interesting activities to get your teenagers communicating (Miller, 2020):

- **No more fillers** – Have you ever noticed when you are speaking to another person the amount of times you say “eh” - “um” - “ah” in a sentence? Play a game with your teenager where you each have to talk for two minutes without using fillers. If you use one, you have to stand up and are eliminated from the round. Play a few rounds to see who wins. You can make this a daily activity after dinner, make a leader board, and the winner at the end of the week picks their favourite treat, or has first choice on the movie you will watch together. This encourages free flowing communication with your teenager and encourages them to think before they start speaking.
- **Directions in pairs** – You will need a blind-fold and some objects or items to hide for this activity. Hide two items in the house. The aim of this activity is to work as a team, one person is blind-folded while the other is giving them directions to the hidden item. The team who finds the item first is the winner. In carrying out an activity like this, you are encouraging teamwork while also instilling the importance of communication among the team.



Building Relationship Skills

What is a Relationship?

In the dictionary, a relationship is defined as the way in which two people interact with each other. A relationship represents the feelings and behaviours two or more people have towards one another, the connection amongst a family, or the close romantic emotions people have for another person (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020). However, we know that relationships are more complex than this simple definition suggests. Relationships come in all different shapes and sizes. There are family relationships, working relationships, friendships and intimate relationships.

Benefits of Having Healthy Relationships

Why are relationships so important to us? As human beings, we have a need and want to be close to other people. This need for interpersonal connections is what drives us to form relationships, and research has shown that having and maintaining positive relationships have an impact on our overall health and wellbeing. There are five overall benefits to your wellbeing from maintaining healthy relationships (Becker-Phelps, 2013):

- **Live longer:** Research has shown that people who have had a lifetime of healthy relationships are more likely to live longer, adding that the impact of socialising and sharing experiences with others is more beneficial to your health when compared with those living in isolation.
- **Live a healthier life:** Having relationships and social connections has been linked to lower blood pressure, higher functioning immune systems and quicker healing. Your relationships may also be encouraging you to live a healthier lifestyle, with research showing that people are more likely to eat healthily and exercise regularly with a friend or loved one.
- **Reduce stress levels:** The expression, “a problem shared is a problem halved” is appropriate here. Research has shown that people who are in intimate relationships feel the psychological effect of stress less, with the idea that their partner can help shoulder some of the burden, or that their partner will give a different perspective and reduce the overall stress.
- **Greater support in life:** Similarly to the previous point, your relationships act as additional support for you in dealing with the triumphs and downfalls in life. Not only do your relationships help lessen stress, but they can also be a great source of information and guidance when needed.
- **Being part of something:** As mentioned before, we often crave being connected to people. In establishing healthy relationships, we are creating our own communities and family units, giving people a sense of belonging.



Is Your Relationship Healthy or Unhealthy?

Your relationship, whether it is with your family, friends or partner, can go through good and bad times. Often the ups and downs balance themselves out and maintain a regular healthy relationship. It can be difficult to identify when relationships turn from being healthy ones to unhealthy or even toxic connections. The best way to make this assessment is to examine the feelings that you have for yourself as a result of the relationship. Depending on the type of relationship, a healthy relationship will make you feel some or all of the following: Confident, loved, needed, appreciated, respected, valued, positive about yourself, and comfortable in yourself.

On the other hand, an unhealthy relationship may leave you feeling unloved, worthless, unappreciated, angry and confused, depressed, scared or hurt (HSE, 2019). There are other signs that your relationship may not be healthy for you or the other person. Making you feel inadequate, making you feel guilty, jealousy of other people in your life, changing yourself to make them happy, the need for constant communication with you are all examples of how relationships can become toxic. Here are some steps to help you deal with an unhealthy relationship (HSE, 2019):

- **Talk to someone** – seek help or guidance from a professional who can help you determine the unhealthy issues in the relationship.
- **Communication** – speak with the other person in the relationship and try to understand what the root cause for their unacceptable behaviour is, why your relationship has turned unhealthy.
- **Walk away** – It is important to know what your limits are and to walk away from the relationship or friendship when it is right for you.
- **Establish boundaries** – set out the boundaries and limits that you feel comfortable with in the relationship. This is especially important in the case of work relationships and friendships.
- **Be patient** – it may be the case that your friend, loved one, colleague or family member is having a particularly difficult time. Try to be patient with them and give the other person time to adhere to the boundaries you have set.

Creating Healthy Relationships

It is clear that healthy relationships can have a lasting impact on our wellbeing. It should be your priority to make sure that a relationship is good. However, there is another hugely important reason to work on having healthy relationships, and that is the effect it has on our children. Time and again, it has been suggested that children learn mostly from their parents and guardians. In providing your children with an example of a healthy and happy relationship in the home, you are helping them to learn the skills relating to personal acceptance, affection, friendship, shared responsibilities, and gratitude (Fields, 2019).



How do you create a happy and healthy relationship? There is no simple answer to this question. There are a vast array of tips and hints to help people successfully develop their relationships with others. While some may work for you, the same suggestions may not work for others. There are common threads that connect all the suggestions for a healthy relationship, and they are as follows (Webb, 2013):

- **Communication:** In the previous section, we examined the importance of communication and what it means to communicate effectively. Effective communication can have a significant impact on the success of a relationship. Communication is not the practice of people talking “at” one another, but rather the practice of talking “to” one another and suggests that both people have understood the communication correctly. It is important that people in a relationship of any kind, are clear in their communication to each other and are conscious of non-verbal cues. Remember, the non-verbal communications can be as powerful as the verbal or written kind.
- **Actively listen:** You need to fully engage with the other person in your relationship, this means when they are communicating you should be actively listening. Active listening is the practice of paying attention to what the person is telling you, embracing the information and asking important questions to maintain the conversation.
- **Respect:** Showing your partner respect is hugely important in any relationship. To fully respect your partner, you need to acknowledge them as a human being, understand their past experiences, and pay attention to what they are trying to communicate to you. You should also be considerate of opinions and appreciate the differences between you rather than trying to mould them in your image.
- **Manage emotions:** In any relationship, there are of course going to be times when emotions run high. While it is important that your emotions are dealt with instead of ignored, it is important to manage your emotions. This is not always an easy task, and often we react first and think back on it later. In times of conflict, you may wish to take a step back to evaluate your feelings before trying to resolve the issue. In times of stress, you may need to take time for yourself to identify what your needs are from your loved ones supporting you.
- **Give your time:** Time is a commodity, especially for parents. However, giving your time to your relationship is very important to help your family unit thrive. It may be as simple as taking the time to check in on a friend or family member or giving some free time to help your partner complete a task. In giving time to your relationships, you are demonstrating that they are important to you. Just make sure you also give some time to yourself.
- **Develop trust:** For most people, when they think of trusting an individual or partner, they think about a scenario where the other person will ‘wrong them’ in some way. For example, you may overhear someone saying, “I trust my partner not to cheat” or “I trust my employee not to steal”. However, developing and demonstrating trust in a relationship is more than these sentiments. It is vital to the success of the relationship that you trust one another. Trust can be shown in giving each other time to themselves, not feeling the need for constant communication. You can trust your partner to carry out



simple tasks, manage the family finances, look after the children etc. The most important form of trust in a relationship is in knowing the other person is there for you.

It can be challenging for parents to transfer this knowledge about healthy relationships into practice with their children. Below are some ways in which you can implement the skills above into your everyday interactions with your children to develop healthy relationships with them (Markham, 2017):

- **Every day should be a hug day** – being affectionate with your children is proven to help establish close relationships.
- **Play together** – we know parents are busy with the tasks of running a household, work and parenting itself, but give your children your time and play with them. Give your child the chance to laugh, get creative and relieve some anxieties.
- **Bedtime cuddles and chats** – giving your children your time and being affectionate with them in a safe space will encourage them to open up to you about their fears and stresses.
- **One-On-One time** – creating a time during the week for just you and one child can help to strengthen the ties between you and your child. Make sure to savour the moment and enjoy the quality time with them. This can help children to feel special and loved, especially when they have a number of siblings.
- **Show up when you say you will** – not only does this encourage trust between you and your child, it also reinforces the importance of keeping your word and maintaining promises.

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| Title: Building healthy relationships with your family | |
| Objectives: | The aim of this activity to encourage the whole family to work on strengthening their relationships with each other. This activity will allow you to understand what areas of your relationships need to be improved and will give you an opportunity to create healthier relationships with your partner and children. |
| Instructions: | <p><u>Materials:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A4 Craft card paper –in a variety of colours - Poster size card/ craft scrap book - Glue - Colours – markers/pens/crayons/pens - Phone – for taking pictures - Printer – printing pictures <p><u>Implementation Procedure:</u></p> <p>This is a fun activity for all the family to take part in. You are going to create a “Family Fun Time” poster with your partner and children. To achieve this, you will use the skills you have learned from research above, creating family activities to help relationships in your family unit to flourish. The main purpose of this activity to make memories together and document it on a fun poster or scrapbook. You can implement this activity for one week, two weeks, one month – whatever you prefer. Below is a list of steps to help you achieve this:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Set tasks – all family members are going to work on building their relationship skills. To help with this, set each family member a task. You may ask your oldest child to have story time with a younger sibling. You and your partner may decide that this week you are going to have a date night. Whatever the tasks may be, make sure every family member has an activity with every other family member with the goal of spending time together. 2. Set a theme – make the activity more fun and create themes to coincide with your relationship building activities. For example, if the theme is the “great outdoors” then all activities to build relationship skills need to have an outdoor theme. Other |

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| | <p>suggestions of themes could be, a book club, animals, board games, superheroes and princesses,</p> <p>3. Get creative – use the coloured card paper to decorate your poster or scrapbook. This month is could be “Mother appreciation month” so each family member could write one thing they love about their mother on a piece of coloured card and stick it on the poster/scrapbook. Stick on your cinema ticket stubs, the recipe you followed to make cookies, the picture your children drew together – any memorabilia from the week of activities. Print pictures of the family together.</p> |
| <p>Reflection & Evaluation:</p> | <p>Healthy relationships in the family home are very important for the wellbeing of the parents and the children in the household. This activity was designed to help you and your family become more aware of each other and your relationships, and to promote family time to help your relationships to thrive. Has this been a successful process? To help you answer this question, below are some self-evaluation questions to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have your relationships with your children improved? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How? ○ What activity helped to improve it the most? ○ Did this approach work with all your children? • Has your relationship with your partner improved? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Why/why not? • Did this activity help to strengthen the relationship between your partner and your children? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Why/why not? • Will you continue to implement this activity next month? • What changes would you make to the implementation to improve the results/get more family members involved? |

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How to receive emotional and practical support from family, friends and community

Efficient Parenting is strictly connected with improving the skills of parents of communication and relationships building. Teaching parents more effective interaction strategies can improve developmental outcomes and decrease problematic behaviours (Kaiser & Hancock, 2003). This is why effective communication with children and communication skills for building healthy relationships with the closer community (the so-called support circle: Family and relatives, friends, the community in general) is fundamental. Receiving emotional and practical support from family, friends and community is now more important than ever. If we think about the recent health emergency and the radical changes in parenting (smart work and school and kindergartens closure for instance), it is very important for a parent to be able to get emotional and practical support from family, friends, community and the connection with the parenting role is quite straightforward.

Through effective parenting, parents need to use the right signals and language to be able to initiate a communication among them and their children in a collaborative way and with proper terminology. At the same time, parents need to communicate effectively with the circle of people who can give emotional and practical support. In recent years, the “multi-cultural family” type is increasing all around Europe, so it is important to take into consideration the intercultural skills that families need to develop to communicate with the external environment.

Of the two activities included in this section, one is dedicated to families living in a multicultural environment. But what do we mean by “intercultural communication”? **Intercultural communication** is a discipline that studies communication across different cultures and social groups, or how culture affects communication. It describes the wide range of communication processes and problems that naturally appear within an organisation or social context made up of individuals from different religious, social, ethnic, and educational backgrounds. In this sense, it seeks to understand how people from different countries and cultures act, communicate and perceive the world around them”. (Wikipedia)

Receiving emotional and practical support from family, friends, community includes many benefits for parents and children:

1. Parents working away from home can benefit from the support of family, friends and community services for families (kindergartens and schools) to spend more time together and improve the quality of their relationship.
2. Children have continuous support in their growing phase and can widen their relational life.



3. Communities services to family are fundamental for the proper functioning of a modern family.

How to build/improve the communication skills of parents to engage with family, friends and community to get emotional and practical support?

- Role-playing and building scenarios can be beneficial to parents in order to increase their communication skills with the closer environment.
- Case studies and good practices can inspire parents in the difficult task to communicate with children and external groups.
- Peer-to-peer techniques can be useful to support Efficient Parenting among families which very often communicate and cooperate to support each other.
- Games to increase the intercultural dialogue skills of parents are appropriate in a society which is changing towards multi-culturalism and migration.

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| Title: The Intercultural Game for Families | |
| Objectives: | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Overcome stereotypes 2. Improve communication skills with other cultures 3. Self – awareness 4. Team building |
| Instructions: | <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Flip-chart sheets - Pencils/crayons/markers/coloured pens <p>Implementation procedure:</p> <p>Families gather in a comfortable space, possibly on open air. A minimum of 3-4 families from different countries is required. The families work in team. The facilitator gives the family the materials for the activities: flip charts/pencils/markers/coloured pens</p> <p>Then the facilitator asks some questions to the families:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is bringing the kids to school in the morning? • Who is cooking lunch and dinner? • At what time the family wakes up? • Who is preparing the breakfast? • At what time the kids go to bed every night? <p>Considering the nationalities of all participating families, each family must answer acting like a family from another country and noting down the answers for each question in a flip-chart sheet. So, family components should impersonate people answering in Spain, for example, if they are Italian and vice versa. Then each family writes down the answers, also using coloured pens and markers. They have 20 minutes to write all the answers.</p> <p>After all participating families have answered all questions, each family presents the flipchart with answers and possibly drawing to all family members gathered in a circle. Each family impersonating another family will explain their answers and will compare them with the family</p> |



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| | <p>from the country it is impersonating. For instance, the Italian family acting like a Spanish family will ask the Spanish family whether the answer is correct or not.</p> <p>After every family has presented the answers, the facilitator will highlight the stereotypes emerged from the answers of the impersonating families and will start a common reflection on the stereotypes emerging from all answers.</p> |
| Reflection and Evaluation: | <p>Through this activity the all members of the family will reflect on the cultural stereotypes which every day surround their life and overcome them. Evaluation is made jointly with other families in a round circle and expressing feelings after the game.</p> |

Reference: N/A

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| Title: The “E” game | |
| Objectives: | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Show how people think and communicate differently 2. How to deal with communication barriers 3. Improve communication with other people |
| Instructions: | <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A4 sheet or flip-chart paper - Markers - Chairs set up in a circle <p>Implementation procedure:</p> <p>The facilitator writes a large, curvy letter “E” on a piece of flipchart paper and place it in the centre of the circle. They ask participants to describe exactly what they see on the piece of paper, from where they are standing/sitting.</p> <p>Depending on where they are in the circle, they will either see an “M”, a “W”, a number “3” or an “E”. Participants can then move places so that they see the letter from a different perspective. This is a useful activity to highlight the fact that people see things very differently, according to their own specific perspective. Alternatively, put a person in the centre of the circle and ask those around to describe exactly what they see from their perspective.</p> |
| Reflection and Evaluation: | <p>Through this activity the all members of the family will reflect on the difficulties in properly communicating and will reflect on the right way to set up a conversation and avoid misunderstandings. Families will also reflect on the fact that people see things in a different way and from their own perspective so communicating with the community is a delicate task if families want to get support from external sources.</p> |

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You can count on us

About the Efficient Parenting Project

This handbook aims to build the capacity of parents to become more resilient and efficient in their parental role and is part of the **EFF**ective and **INN**ovative approa**CH**es for resil**IENT** **P**arenting project, funded by the Erasmus + programme of the European Commission.

Efficient Parenting Project Aim

The Efficient Parenting project aims to improve parents' capacities so they can more efficiently meet the complex needs of their role. This project aims to develop innovative materials that parents can use in their daily lives to foster resilience for both them and their children.

Project Overview

The project also aims to build the capacity of parents for delivering high quality parenting, thus increasing parents' and children's wellbeing and development. Horizontally, the project focus is on supporting individuals in acquiring and developing basic skills and key competences, improving and extending the supply of high-quality learning opportunities tailored to the needs of any adults who might need extra support.

The Efficient Parenting project recognises the need for building the competencies of parents to be more resilient and efficient in their parental roles. The implementation of the project at a transnational level will enable partner countries to learn from each other. Developing or monitoring existing strategies and policies in Adult Learning cannot be achieved without the exchange of information and the identification of successful practices among the various EU countries.

Please visit the project website here: www.efficientparenting.eu

Project partners



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The Rehabilitation Foundation “Speranta” has an experience of over 27 years in services of support and rehabilitation for disabled and special needs children and young people, information, counseling and support for their parents, involvement in inclusive education. We developed and run accredited training programs for teachers in mainstream and special education to promote the right to education and implement teaching strategies to support disabled children’s inclusion in the educational system. FAS has set up a new community-based service for young people and adults in institutions who want to live in the community.



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The Rural Hub was first established as an association in 2012. It was set up by a group of education, training and rural development professionals as a response to the impact of the economic crisis on small rural villages and towns in Ireland. The Rural Hub has been providing a wide range of community development courses to local residents to support greater community involvement and enhanced social inclusion to target growing isolation. It targets a major part of its actions at people on the margins of society and economy like early school leavers, lone parents, recently arrived migrants, people living with a disability, active retired groups and senior citizens.



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The Centre for Creative Development “Danilo Dolci” is a non-profit association involving young people and adults, which mainly acts through projects in the educational field carried out in cooperation with schools, universities, institutions, associations and social groups both at local and international level. Our organization born from the educational and working experience of the great pacifist Danilo Dolci and his collaborators that operated in Trappeto and Partinico, two small towns near Palermo, and in all the region of Sicily.