

# PARENTING STRATEGIES

Relationship Skills

Emotional Skills

Life Skills

**LIFT OFF!** READY > STEADY > GO



# Hello Parents,

From the moment our children are born, our child's wellbeing is our number one priority. We do everything we can to keep them safe and healthy, while providing every opportunity to live a full and happy life. One of the most important determinants of our children's happiness is their emotional wellbeing.

There is no doubt about it, parenting is one of the most rewarding, exhausting, and challenging roles we will play in our life. The intention of this ebook is to further strengthen the resilience and emotional wellbeing of your child and make your job as a parent easier, while giving your kids what they truly need. Evidence suggests that the relationship skills, emotional skills and life skills outlined in our three ebooks, if implemented, will strengthen your child's resilience and emotional wellbeing. To see the other two eBooks go to [www.upliftingaustralia.org.au](http://www.upliftingaustralia.org.au).

Be mindful that anything worth doing takes time and it may take 6 - 12 months for these strategies to become a normal part of your family life.

We have been sharing these strategies with parents through our Lift Off! Ready > Steady > Go programs (formerly CampOut with Kids and HangOut with Kids) and the feedback has been fantastic! We have taken the time to make the three parenting strategies ebooks as short and user friendly as possible. I know that my children have greatly benefited from these strategies which have become a normal part of our family life.

There are two self-assessment tools at the end of this ebook to further support you and your family to strengthen the emotional environment in your homes. On behalf of Uplifting Australia we wish you and your family lots of love and support.

Kind regards,

Garry Thomson, CEO Uplifting Australia.



# Healthy relationship skills

The most significant relationship our children have when they are young is with their parents. It is through this relationship that our children form beliefs and develop behaviours that they then take out into the world.

Our children need our support and feedback to develop a high quality relationship with themselves as they grow up. It's fair to say that all the strategies in this book will support you to have a healthy relationship with your children, which will ultimately help them with healthy ways of relating to themselves and others. These three strategies have a strong focus on developing great relationships.

- Spend regular one on one time with your children
- Encourage meaningful conversations
- Acknowledge your child's qualities

# One-on-one time

Spend regular, quality, one-on-one time with your children, preferably with your mobile phone turned off.

Children love this more than anything. Everybody is very busy these days and it's not always easy to find time, so it's important to make the time we do have together of the highest quality. The more quality one-on-one time you can spend with each of your children the better chance you have of strengthening your bond.

Being a single parent in particular can be challenging in lots of ways, especially managing time. If one-on-one time is not possible then we can focus on using the limited time we've got to make the small moments meaningful.

## Why is this strategy good for my child?

Spending one-on-one time with your children is a great way to increase your connection and make them feel like an important part of the family. Children love to feel special. It is the memories of time spent together that they cherish and remember, not the things we buy them.

## How to integrate this into your day:

- When you're in the car, turn off the radio and talk, sing a song, have meaningful conversations, and ask them how they are feeling.
- Have conversations about what you loved doing when you were a child and find out what it is that you have in common that you might be able to enjoy doing together.
- Make some plans and commitments to spend meaningful time with each of your children. Put them in your diary and make them a priority.



# Meaningful conversations

## Encourage meaningful conversations

Having meaningful conversations deepens your relationship and makes you closer to your child. When we open up and share real life stories and feelings with our children it builds trust and encourages them to be open with us too.

### Why is this strategy good for my child?

Having meaningful conversations will allow you to maintain an ongoing open communicative relationship that can continue into the teenage years, when it is so vital to have open trusting communication. This role models the type of relationship we want to have with our children as they become young adults and further strengthens the relationship.

When we share real life stories it is important to be completely present and show interest in what our children have to say without judging them. This way they feel valued, which increases their self esteem and confidence. This approach assists children to develop healthy ways of communicating with others. When sharing your stories be mindful that they are children so be careful not to overwhelm them with complex adult problems, keep it age appropriate. Be playful, children love to have fun!

### How to integrate this into your day:

- Tell your children different stories about yourself, the good things, bad things, exciting and sad things that happened to you when you were a child. Make this a special thing that you do together on the weekends - when you are most relaxed and able to connect in fun ways. Your children can learn a lot from your experiences and through your stories, you become an educational resource to them.
- Make time to share your day with your family over dinner. Ask all the family members to answer the questions - "What was the best thing, worst thing, and strangest thing about your day?" One person speaks at a time and the other family members listen without making jokes or comments. Don't forget to have fun!



# Encourage qualities

## Acknowledge and encourage your children's qualities

Not all children do well at all things, however, they all have great qualities and it is important they are acknowledged and celebrated for their qualities not just for their achievements. Otherwise our children may form the belief that they are only special if they achieve something.

### Why is this strategy good for my child?

Knowing what their qualities are will help your child build confidence and feel good about who they are, which strengthens their emotional wellbeing. It also helps them become resilient, as they will learn that their qualities are a constant and cannot be taken away by another person or a negative experience. They are there when they open their eyes in the morning and still there when they go to bed. When our children see and own these great qualities in themselves they will not need the approval of others to feel good about who they are. When we truly love ourselves we do not grow up needing to compare ourselves to others or give ourselves a hard time through negative self-talk.

### How to integrate this into your day:

- Tell your child when you observe their qualities, whether it is kindness, persistence, enthusiasm or patience etc.
- Remind your children of their great qualities when life is challenging for them.
- Focus on your child's great qualities and congratulate them for all the attempts they make in life - not just the positive outcomes. Celebrating achievements is healthy but can become unhealthy when this is the only time we give positive feedback.

### For example

If your child wins in sport you could say, "I find your determination and team work inspiring, and I really admire you for that. Well done. How does this result make you feel?"

If you simply say "I'm so proud that you won!", you are not clearly describing the qualities within your child that helped them achieve that result. They will still feel good with this feedback but in the future may rely on winning and similar positive comments to feel good about themselves. It can create the belief that they are great only because they won, not because they are a great person.

Our resilience and self-esteem are impacted by what we think about ourselves. If we can acknowledge and celebrate our own unique qualities we build a healthy and balanced relationship with ourselves, which also affects our relationships with others.





# Emotional Skills

Our ability to treat ourselves and others respectfully has a major impact on our lives. People with good emotional skills get on well with others and can stick up for themselves when they need to without becoming aggressive.

They set and hold appropriate boundaries with other people, know what they are worth and tend to be treated well as a consequence.

The strategies below support you to become an effective emotional coach for your children as well as support you to learn and grow as a parent.

- Manage challenging behaviour by separating the person from the behaviour
- Support your children to express their feelings in healthy ways

# Managing behaviour

## Manage challenging behaviour by separating the person from their behaviour

Be gentle on the person and firm on the behaviour. The goal here is to teach that whilst certain behaviours are not ok, the child is always loved and treated respectfully so they can learn from the situation.

### Why is this strategy good for my child?

Separating the person from the behaviour allows us to deal directly with the behaviour while staying gentle on the person. When we do this, we can be as direct and as clear as we want with boundaries and consequences. This separation keeps our child's self esteem intact and teaches them personal responsibility. They will know that they are always loved for who they are, despite what they do. This strategy also helps us as parents to learn and grow as well as manage our own emotional impulses. Most parents get emotional and angry from time to time. When we react emotionally with anger or frustration it can be hurtful to our children. When we realise we've done this, we recommend apologising and taking responsibility for our hurtful behaviour.

### How to integrate this into your day:

- The goal here is to be gentle on the person but firm on the challenging behaviour. Remember when we need to deal with challenging behaviour use the language "You're great, but that behaviour is not ok."
- Taking responsibility for our own behaviour builds trust and restores the loving connection again; it also role models self-responsibility. Apologising for our mistakes is one of the best gifts we can give our children. When we do this, we can say, "Sorry for the way I spoke to you. My frustration was not about you, but about your behaviour and I'm sorry I spoke like that."



# Expressing feelings

## Support your children to express their feelings in healthy ways

It is very important that we support our children to express all their feelings without making them wrong for having them.

### Why is this strategy good for my child?

When our children are upset and we show that we understand them, they feel accepted and supported by us and our relationship strengthens. Children who have their feelings acknowledged and accepted and who are encouraged to talk about their feelings in an honest and healthy way, grow up with the critical life skill of being able to manage their emotions.

If our children's feelings are not acknowledged, or are criticised, they may not learn to communicate how they feel and react in unhealthy ways. This could be hurtful to themselves and others throughout their lives. It could also create an emotional separation between you and your child, which is upsetting for everybody. Please be aware that our boys and girls are equally sensitive.

### How to integrate this into your day:

It is impossible to prevent our children from having feelings and emotions such as anger, sadness, frustration, anxiety etc, and is not our job to rescue them from these feelings. It is however, our role to support them to express themselves.

A simple model to support our children is to follow the process below. Be careful not to rush through the steps.

- 1** Be aware of your child's feelings and emotions on a daily basis. Boys and girls are equally sensitive.
- 2** Help children verbalise how they are feeling by asking them validating questions (see below).
- 3** Repeat their feelings back to them without making them right or wrong. Remember, you don't need to rescue them, just let them know you are there.
- 4** Set limits if their reactive behaviour is not ok. For example; "It's ok that you're angry but it's not ok to hit people. You need to stop doing that."

#### Validating questions

- You seem angry, are you ok?
- It sounds like you are feeling sad about that?
- I can see that you are worried?
- Are you feeling excited?

#### De-validating response

- Getting angry doesn't help anything! Don't be silly!
- Don't be sad! Smile!
- Don't worry about it!
- Calm down





# Life Skills

The development of life skills are fundamental to a child's ability to be able to excel in life. If we continue to express our love for our children by doing everything for them, as we needed to do when they were babies and toddlers, they may not develop the life skills or confidence they need to become independent and resilient adults. The strategies below deliver these life skills to your children.

- Teach skills of reflection
- Support children to solve their own problems
- Connecting privileges with responsibilities

# Reflection skills

## Teach skills of reflection

Reflecting is about having the ability to carefully consider different ideas and experiences and to learn from them. This skill is a building block for thinking things through independently which makes self-development a normal part of life.

### Why is this strategy good for my child?

Teaching skills of reflection will support your child to weigh up pros and cons and learn from life whether things go well or not. Ultimately they are learning how to think for themselves and make wise decisions. Independent thought and reflection develops self-confidence as your child learns to trust themselves. Research tells us that if you have the ability to reflect, then you also develop the ability to be rational under pressure and get yourself out of difficult situations. Later on when our children are teenagers, we want them to be able to confidently assess risky situations and make decisions that are right for them despite what their friends may be doing.

### How to integrate this into your day:

- We can use real-life situations to practice skills of reflection and learning. For example if one of your children hits their sibling, wait until the situation has calmed (which can take some time). You can then ask, "What happened?", "How did you feel?", "What was going on for you leading up to this situation?", "How do you think that made your sibling feel?" and, "If you could have your time again, how might you do it differently?" Starting reflection at a young age will assist your children to reflect naturally as they mature.
- Start conversations inspired by your surroundings or environment. For example you can use the themes, topics or situations in movies, books, your community or the news to ask age appropriate reflective questions. For example "What do you think the character was feeling and thinking that lead to that happening?" or "What do you think will happen next?". There is no right or wrong answer here and the goal is not to focus on their answer but to stimulate the brain to reflect.



# Problem solving

## Support children to solve their own problems.

It is a fundamental life skill to be able to solve your own problems.

### Why is this strategy good for my child?

Teaching children to solve their own problems increases their capacity to be resilient. This strengthens their sense of self-confidence and determination while building their self-worth. Their self-esteem benefits because they are being given independence, choice and responsibility, which can feel empowering and exciting at a young age. Problem solving skills will also allow them to think rationally when they come up against something tough.

If we don't impart this skill and continue to do everything for our children, then they may struggle to make decisions for themselves when they are older. You may also get burnt out, running around, trying to make sure they are okay, because they haven't developed the skills to look after themselves.

### How to integrate this into your day:

To support your children to solve their own problems follow the steps below. This process can be applied to most situations ranging from lost clothing to being bullied.

- 1 Clearly identify and assist your child to name the problem.
- 2 Explore how they are feeling. E.g. "How does that make you feel?".
- 3 Ask them to identify all the possible options for solving their problem, add a few only if they get stuck. Accept each option as a possibility regardless of how far-out it is. The more options at this stage the better. Have fun with it!
- 4 Ask them to choose an option from the list. E.g. "Which option is best for you?"  
Ask them to take their best guess regarding what the most likely outcome will be if they do this.  
E.g. "What do you think will happen if you do that?"
- 5 If they are still happy get them to follow through.
- 6 If not, go back to the list and choose another option.
- 7 Make a time later to review how it went.  
E.g. "Great, go for it and we will see how it goes in a few days".



# Privileges & responsibility

## Connect privileges with responsibility.

By the time your children are teenagers, they need to learn the natural laws of life and understand the connection between privileges and responsibilities.

### Why is this strategy good for my child?

Put simply, if your children learn the relationship between give and take, they will be able to develop realistic expectations of an outcome based on the amount of effort they have offered. This will allow them to clearly map their goals, make good decisions and become self-responsible.

It is important to balance this because if you give them too much responsibility and not enough freedom they may rebel against you. If you give them too much freedom with no responsibility they may struggle to independently fulfil commitments. Balancing this also cultivates self-discipline in our children, which is a key trait in helping them to achieve and reach their potential.

### How to integrate this into your day:

- It is a good idea to start teaching your children the connection between privileges and responsibility by clearly outlining them.

For example: You may tell them if they tidy their room, then they get to go to the movies. If they don't tidy their room, then they miss out. So it's up to them if they go to the movies or not. It's important here to establish the agreement up front so your child can make the choice and then clearly see the result of their decision.

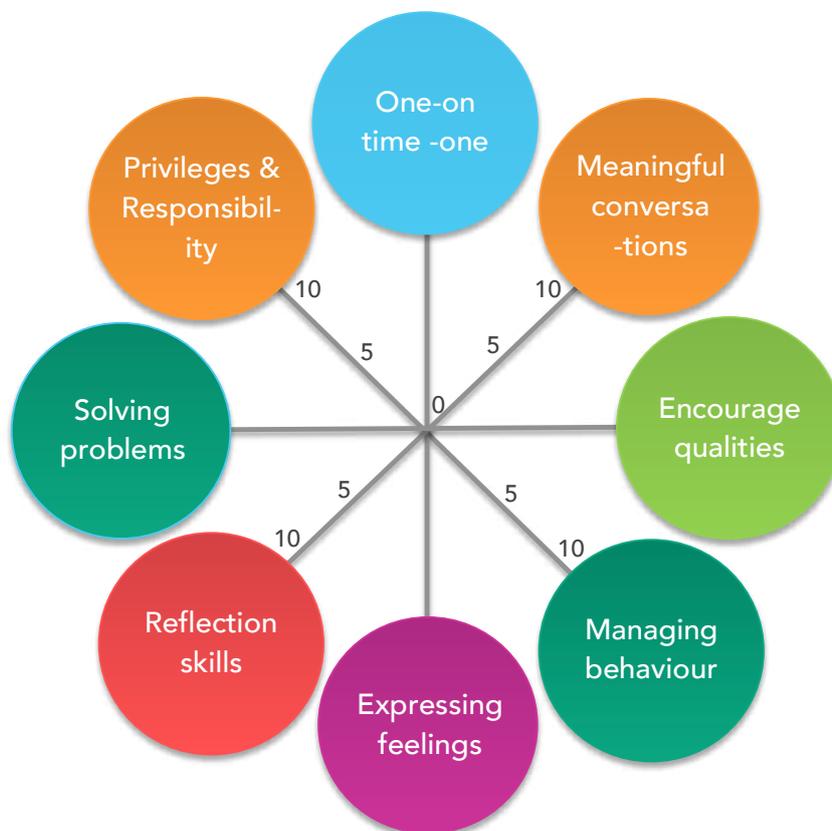
If they want dessert then they must eat their vegetables. Again this is best negotiated before dinner as it's about creating a learning experience for your child rather than using blackmail.

- It is important to stick to the consequences or our children will not learn the link between privileges and responsibilities. So make sure you only makes suggestions you are prepared to act on.



# Self-reflection tool

Read each parenting strategy and mark on the wheel below where you feel you best fit for each strategy. "10, you do this lots" is on the outside and "0, you don't do this much", is on the inside.



Now, think about these strategies and consider what you would like to keep doing, stop doing and start doing in your family. Starting to use new strategies can take some time to do, so don't expect it to happen overnight!

I would like to:

Stop doing...

Start doing...

Keep doing...

# Self-awareness tool

Research informs us that the behaviours below either improve or erode our children's self esteem and social competence. It is not a complete list, but it is a good guide. Read through the lists and tick which ones are true for you. You may have ticks on both sides which is normal.

## Am i off track?

- Shouting at children.
- Teasing children or other family members, making fun in a humiliating way, using the mask of humor to justify giving negative messages to people.
- Putting children down (E.g. You're stupid, dumb, useless).
- Withdrawing love, giving the silent treatment, ignoring children for long periods of time.
- Being too busy to spend time with your children.
- Not caring about how your children feel.
- Not being considerate and not caring when children are upset.
- Treating other family members poorly.
- Leaving your anger unchecked and taking it out (verbally or physically) on children and other family members.
- Not apologising or taking responsibility for the hurts you cause others.
- Being addicted to alcohol, drugs, gambling etc. and not seeking assistance.
- Enabling your children to become very overweight or obese.
- Negative messages about body image.

## Am I on track?

- Separating the child from the behavior. Remaining soft on the person and firm on the behavior and using a calm voice.
- Making a habit of acknowledging your child's positive qualities.
- Being kind and affectionate with physical and verbal messages.
- Support your child to express their feelings in healthy ways.
- Spending one on one time with your children and quality time with your whole family on a regular basis.
- Asking how your children are feeling
- Noticing when your child needs a hug and some love and understanding. Providing them with what they need.
- Remaining respectful and caring to all family members.
- Dealing with anger in ways that don't affect your family. E.g. Seeking help from a professional or close friends and having strategies like removing yourself from the family until you calm down.
- Taking responsibility for how you make others feel. E.g. Listening to feedback, saying sorry and then changing your behaviour.
- Keeping yourself healthy and role modeling a quality life to your family.

Read back through your ticked boxes and get a sense of which behaviours you are proud of and where there is room for improvement. Now that you have a level of awareness around your preferred behaviour read back through the Parenting Strategies for a relevant approach.

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Parent Line      NSW 1300 1300 52      ACT 02 6287 3833      QLD & NT 1300 30 1300  
VIC 13 22 89      TAS 1300 808 178      SA 1300 364 100      WA 1800 654 432

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Lifeline      13 11 14

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Beyond Blue      1300 224 636

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National Sexual Assault, Family Counseling & Domestic Violence Helpline      1800 737 732

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We would like to acknowledge the generous support of everyone who helps us deliver this meaningful work to the community.

#### Key Partners



#### Merchandise Partner



#### Schools + Families

Thank you to all the schools and families that are participating in Lift Off! programs (formerly CampOut with Kids and HangOut with Kids). You are helping to build a generation of more inspiring, authentic and emotionally intelligent young Australians. Please share this information with your family and friends - we ask that organisations contact us for permission to use this information.

The Lift Off! Parenting Strategies were developed by Uplifting Australia, a not-for-profit harm prevention charity that develops programs and resources that improve the emotional wellbeing and resilience of children and families.

This book was written by Garry Thomson, Sarah Binet and the Uplifting Australia team.

[www.upliftingaustralia.org.au](http://www.upliftingaustralia.org.au)