

Supporting kids to build respectful relationships

FOR CARERS

You play a vital role in preparing kids to develop healthy, respectful relationships. To build respectful relationships, kids need the skills to:

- engage positively with others
- develop a positive sense of self and resilience
- identify and respond appropriately to their own and others' emotions
- accept and resolve differences
- understand consent and know how to seek help
- be confident in challenging unacceptable behaviours
- build relationships based on equality and respect.

You can support kids in out-of-home care to build positive relationships through your actions and conversations.

Model respect – take time to listen; use ‘please’ and ‘thank you’; do what you say you will; be consistent in your responses; stay calm when your kids have big emotions.

Discuss unhealthy relationships - talk about the impact of excluding others; being rude or unwelcoming; being disrespectful; not listening; power imbalances; and harmful or aggressive behaviours.

Practice empathy – identify and discuss emotions; ensure you consider your kids' perspectives and discuss how you're doing this; give positive feedback when your kids are being empathetic to siblings or friends; remain calm and neutral when you disagree with your kids; discuss disagreements and support your kids to understand other perspectives.

Demonstrate how to disagree – model peaceful disagreements by staying calm, never using personal, critical or offensive arguments, and minimising defensiveness; discuss using empathy and understanding other viewpoints when disagreeing; talk to your kids about ways to disagree respectfully (e.g. using ‘I’ statements, leaving the argument if they cannot stay calm, and asking for someone else's opinion or guidance).

Teach how to ask for and give support – model asking your kids for help with small tasks, and be ready to give support when required; reinforce your availability to help when asked; let kids know if you notice them struggling, and offer support; praise kids when they ask for support or provide it to you, their friends or siblings.



Embrace diversity – support your kids to show an interest in learning about others; model respect for others, regardless of their background or beliefs; celebrate differences and help kids focus on positive attributes; discuss differences openly and without judgement, while also highlighting similarities.

Support positive communication – help your kids to understand that, without clear communication, others have trouble knowing what they are thinking or feeling; demonstrate good listening skills; support kids to talk openly, calmly, and often.

Ensure you regularly discuss respectful behaviour, with a focus on conversations about feelings, friendships and relationships. Listen actively during these conversations - this means being attentive and responsive, encouraging your child/teen to talk, and summarising what they are saying. Try not to tell kids what to do, even if they ask for your ideas. Instead, help them problem solve and come up with solutions.