

Why talk to your child about values and relationships?

Research from Harvard tells us that nurturing and dependable relationships are essential to human development from birth. Strong and secure attachments support children to develop a range of competencies that contribute to successful relationships, including understanding emotions and commitment.² Parents and carers are the first and most stable relationship for most children. We know that children and young people want to talk with their parents and grandparents about relationships. 85% of young people felt that learning from a parent/immediate family was important to feel prepared for future relationships.³ However, recent polling from the Sex Education Forum found that young people are not having as many of these conversations with parents as they would like.⁴

Talking about values early opens-up lines of communication as children develop and have relationships with a wider range of people. Values lie at the heart of our relationship behaviours and choices. The [Ofsted report on sexual abuse](#) showed that many young people are experiencing incidents of sexual harassment and abuse at school, and these situations are so commonplace that a significant number do not even report them. If young people are subjected to these incidents in school, it follows that some young people are abusing others. Parents have a role here in talking with their child about the characteristics of healthy relationships and the values that guide choices, behaviours, and actions. You can also support their child to recognise behaviour that conflicts with their values, oversteps their boundaries and/or is abusive and encourage them to report this.

Values and the media

Media messages from news, TV and film, advertising, internet, and social media surround us and whilst we can choose to limit our exposure, it is difficult to escape the influence on our daily lives. Polling by fastn found that 61% of young people agreed the media influences their peers' expectations of relationships.⁵ What are the relationships shown in the media your child consumes? Are they representative of the variety of relationships people in society have? Do they show the range of healthy values that people may hold around relationships? 42% of young people ranked unrealistic 'perfect' relationships in the media as a significant challenge for forming and sustaining relationships.⁵

So, what can you do as a parent to provide some balance? Advertisements, TV programmes, news items and song lyrics provide a great opportunity to start conversations with your child about values and relationships. For example, take a popular song and explore the lyrics with your child, what values are being promoted? Does your child agree with these or not?

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that every child has the right to **reliable** information from a variety of sources, including the media. Support your child to take action to challenge media messages that promote unhealthy attitudes towards relationships or are not representative. This could be – for example – through appropriate use of social media, writing to news outlets or companies regarding representation and advertising, or campaigning.

Exploring values with your child

Every day is an opportunity to explore values and relationships with your child, regardless of age. Below are some ideas to promote exploration around values:

Use stories

With younger children, storybooks give a way in to talking about values through exploring character's feelings, actions, and consequences. Talk about the characters in the story and ask your child to identify what values they think are important for them. Ask your child to consider if they are similar or different to the characters in the story and if they would have taken the same course of action.

Encourage reflection

Support your child to reflect on their actions and decisions using open questions, for example: How did it feel to make that decision? What were the consequences of your choice? What would you do differently next time? How did it impact the other people involved? Explore the links to their values. This reflective process helps to promote independent thinking.

Be a role model

Reflect on your own behaviour, how well do you demonstrate your values in your everyday interactions? Remember your influence and be mindful that your child will look to you to be their role model. Encourage your child to find healthy role models that promote values they aspire to or admire.

Show you are fallible

Talk with your child about times when you have felt conflicted about your values or when you made the wrong choice. Explore the feelings and consequences involved. Talk about how our own values may sometimes conflict, we may prioritise one above another. Life isn't about being perfect!

Share your faith

If you are a person of faith, explore with your child the values around relationships taught by your religion.

Support diversity

Talk with your child about similarities and differences in values and how this may impact on relationships. This may be particularly relevant when they are experiencing conflict in relationships, for example changing friendships. By exploring diversity, we allow children to consider what is right for them and recognise others may or may not share their values.

How else can you support?

Effective engagement between parents and schools has the power to model strong values and healthy relationships that benefit everybody. Better relationships with peers, parents and teachers supports students to be more receptive learners and improves their life chances.

Parentkind's [Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools](#) formalises a whole school approach to parental participation with a clear and effective framework. It is a flexible and adaptive model but relies on schools and parents taking a coordinated approach and working together to optimise its effectiveness. Exploring the Blueprint and its Five Key Drivers will give parents lots of ideas on how to participate in school life, support their child's learning and contribute to helping school communities to address some of the issues raised in this resource. For regular updates on how parents can support and have a say on your child's education sign up to Parentkind's [Parent eBulletin](#).

Other resources

- [NSPCC](#) – lots of information about relationships for secondary age young people.
- Your child's school – learning about relationships is a statutory part of school learning through the [R\(S\)HE curriculum](#). Ask your child's school what your child will be learning about values and relationships at school so you can support them at home. You could also signpost your child's school to this free teaching [resource](#) which explores values and relationships.
- [Parentkind](#) have a range of resources to support parent and school relationships, including [Talking to your child about dependable relationships](#).
- [Family Links The Centre for Emotional Health](#) have a range of free resources to support parents.

Footnotes

1. [Reframing Relationships: How the media can support young people to form and sustain healthy dependable relationships](#)
2. [Young Children Develop in an Environment of Relationships – Harvard](#)
3. [Fastn/Survation Polling of 1,012 young people aged 16-25 in England, June 2022](#)
4. [Young People RSE Poll 2021](#), Sex Education Forum, 2021
5. [Fastn/Survation Polling of 1,024 young people aged 16-25 in the UK, September 2021](#)

Acknowledgements

Produced by Catherine Kirk and Fastn on behalf of Parentkind and Family Links: The Centre for Emotional Health.
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Parentkind give those with a parenting role a voice in education. We invest substantial resources in representing parent views on their child's learning to local, regional and national governments and agencies because evidence tells parental participation in education benefits all children in all schools and society as a whole.

 **FAMILY
LINKS**
The Centre for Emotional Health

Family Links is a national charity dedicated to the promotion of emotional health for all. We offer high-quality training and resources for professionals working with families, school and university staff, and employees in the workplace.