

SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

Fact Sheet

Having positive social connections with others has a multitude of health benefits:

Longer life span.	Increased quality of life.	Lower risk of anxiety and depression.	Sense of wellbeing.	Emotional wellbeing.
Feeling understood and encouraged	Sense of belonging.	Identity.	Increased self-esteem.	Engage with, and persist through, challenges.
	Confidence.			

Being lonely or socially isolated can have serious health consequences. The magnitude of these risks is similar to the risks posed by obesity and smoking.

Unhealthy sleep patterns.	Increase in stress hormones.	Weakened immune system.	Reduced cardiovascular function.	Increased chance of experiencing anxiety or depression.
			Premature death.	

Children Specific

Social skills enable children to have better educational outcomes while also promoting language development. Children need to learn these skills. Through play, children will learn the skills that will become their foundation for developing relationships in the future. Such skills include:

- Sharing
- Listening to others
- Taking turns
- Managing a disagreement
- Cooperation
- Empathy.

Parents and carers can help children learn about being a good friend and encourage them to make friends everyday.

TEACHING

Seek out opportunities where a child can learn what is going on and why we need to show a certain skill.

For example, if siblings are arguing over a toy, the adult could highlight the need to listen to the other person before deciding what to do with the toy.

ROLE PLAYS

Practise makes perfect! Play with children at home, making sure activities or games provide opportunities to practice different social skills.

PLAY

Play is an important part of development and assists children to build relationships with others. Encourage children to play:

- With playdates
- By talking to them about who they play with
- Asking them what they like to play.

MODELLING

Children learn through examples and observation! They are always watching, meaning every interaction an adult has with another person is a learning opportunity.

HEAD START

A child wants to join a team sport or try a new group activity but is showing reluctance/nervousness, take them to the venue and spend some time together acclimatising. This might mean going to the pool to do private lessons before joining a class or kicking a ball at the oval before first practice.

REINFORCEMENT & PRAISE

Recognise a child's efforts, even the small successes. Remind the child that you are proud of them for trying. It also helps to make new experiences exciting! Rewards are also a strong incentive for children.

DO NOT AVOID THE PROBLEM

Children will not learn if they are sitting at home. Gradually help a child to move outside their comfort zone, with support, coaching and encouragement.

PARENTS AND CARER SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Parenthood is a stressful time during which social support is critical. Social support can come from a variety of people:

Family

Friends

Colleagues

Wider Community

The primary role of social support is to foster physical, mental and emotional wellbeing; hence it is crucial for people with a new baby to have access to a support network. Without social support, people are at risk of becoming isolated.

Friends inform one's sense of identity, belonging and wellbeing. By maintaining friendships after a baby, parents and carers have support to balance their lives, they have a source of encouragement and they can be offered a different perspective. A couple of strategies to maintain friendships:

Plan ahead and pick an appropriate activity, for example

Walk with the pram or Feed the ducks



Find ways your friends can join you in this new phase of life, such as having people at your home instead of going out.



This is a time when people will have the opportunity to make new friends as well. Good ways to meet other parents include:

Joining a new parent group

A play date at a local park

Joining an online forum

Even though there are many benefits to having social support, it is important to care for oneself and the baby first. If a person is feeling overwhelmed or is not getting what they need from the people in their social network, they should not push themselves to engage with these people. The needs of the parent/carer and child must match the support being given; if it doesn't, there is a risk of psychological distress and isolation.

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