

Healthy relationships

We're providing options for dads to have healthy relationships with their partners.

A healthy relationship is founded on honesty, respect, trust and equality¹. A healthy relationship leads to confident, supported and happy parents – which is great for kids!

It also means dads end up spending more time with their kids, kids are emotionally better off, and mums feel more supported and are more likely to be better mothers².

Our Support for Fathers national survey asked dads, families and support services what you think we should be talking about³.

You told us a healthy relationship between a dad and his partner is about:

1. sharing parenting roles
2. supporting each other
3. making time for each other
4. positive communication
5. knowing each other's parenting styles
6. teamwork.



We look at this in more detail below, where we give examples of how dads can do all of these things and also have healthy relationships.

SHARING PARENTING ROLES

Dads can talk to mums/partners and figure out who does what, to make sure their kids have all that they need. So how do dads and mums/partners share roles?

Examples might include:

- household chores
- kids' school, kinder or childcare drop-offs and pick-ups
- kids' bath times and bed times
- kids' sport, music lessons or play dates.

SUPPORTING EACH OTHER

We're talking about dads providing support to their partners when times are challenging but also when times are good.

Here are some ways dads and mums/partners can support each other.

- Check-in on how things are going today or this week.
- Listen to each other.
- Be honest about feelings and thoughts.
- Make the relationship a priority.
- Work together.
- Celebrate the relationship.

MAKING TIME FOR EACH OTHER

Dads can take time out of their day to think about their relationships and figure out which parts are working well or not working well.

They can try the following steps.

1. Reflect – think about their relationships today, this week or this month.
2. Learn – talk about what they noticed about themselves.
3. Grow – work out where they might need to improve or try something new.
4. Thrive – if something worked well, keep it up.

POSITIVE COMMUNICATION

Healthy relationships are based on open, honest and respectful communication. This means being open and honest in the way dads talk and behave with their partners and families.

Communicating not only helps to meet dads' needs, but it also helps dads to be connected in their relationships⁴.

Positive communication is about:

- listening to each other
- being clear about thoughts and feelings
- talking and behaving in ways that are respectful
- body language matching what is being said
- being on the same page.

Doing these things well goes a long way to improving the health of a relationship.

**KNOWING EACH OTHER'S PARENTING STYLES**

Which parenting styles are used depends on the scenario and the moment in time between a parent and their child/ren. Different parenting moments offer up opportunities for different parenting responses.

Dads and their partners can work out their own parenting styles by:

- talking about their own parenting strengths and gaps
- reflecting on their child/ren's needs every day or week
- matching parenting strengths to the child/ren's needs
- sharing the roles evenly
- working together to address and turn around parenting gaps.

TEAMWORK

A great way to look at families is as teams. Every family member plays a role and has a responsibility to ensure a healthy family.

Parents lead the team and the relationship between them is pivotal. Here are two ways to think of the family as a team.

Sports team

- Coaches – dads and mums/partners
- Players – kids
- Venue – family home
- Trainers – grandparents, aunties, uncles, babysitters or friends
- Supporters – neighbourhood or local community

Work team

- Team leaders – dads and mums/partners
- Employees – kids
- Workplace – family home
- Support staff – grandparents, aunties, uncles, babysitters or friends
- Investors or funding body – neighbourhood or local community

Coaches and team leaders provide guidance, supervision, learning opportunities and step in when necessary.

Coaches and team leaders work together, learn each other's strengths and weaknesses, use open communication and engage respectfully to provide leadership to the team.

¹ *Building healthy relationships*. (2018). Healthdirect Australia. Retrieved from www.healthdirect.gov.au/building-healthy-relationships.

² *The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children*. (2006). USA: Department of Health and Human Services.

³ *Support for Fathers National Survey*. (2019). Melbourne, VIC: Relationships Australia Victoria.

⁴ *Relationships and Communication*. (2018). VIC: Better Health Channel. Retrieved from www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/relationships-and-communication.