



# Family Relationships

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WHAT IS A "FAMILY?" A family can be defined in different ways. Some may believe a family consists of people related to each other by blood, such as biological parents, their children, and blood related relatives. Others may consider family to be comprised of people who are close and connected through commitment, respect, support, and warm positive feelings for one another, although they may not be biologically related.

While the diversity of family structure and composition may vary, most people can agree that the quality of family relationships and dynamics is of great importance.

*Why is this?* From the moment we are born, our family's words, tone, approach, affection, and actions teach us about ourselves and the world. These experiences shape our thoughts and beliefs about ourselves and our expectation of how the world will receive and respond to us. The way families experience the ups and downs of life and manage conflict often models the way we will think and move through personal struggles in the future.

*Developing and maintaining healthy family relationships and dynamics requires active thoughtfulness and intentional work.* One of the most important foundations for healthy family relationships is to ensure safety, security, and trust. Similar to a newborn baby, each and every family member will grow and develop over time with

changing views, values, priorities, and interests. With a foundation of safety, security and trust, family members can more comfortably explore, learn, grow, make mistakes, and try again. Giving each other room to grow while actively and curiously paying attention and communicating to learn about the growth, signals support and respect. Active acknowledgement and praise of people's good intentions and efforts can help them appreciate



their positive choices and growth. This can enhance their self-esteem and self-confidence and balance difficult thoughts and feelings that may accompany future challenging times. As families experience ups and downs, having open discussions and working together to navigate the situation can help manage worries and foster feelings of togetherness and hope of a positive outcome. These types of family experiences can improve members' self-esteem and support the development of positive, hopeful, and trusting views of the world around them. Family members may feel more comfortable to explore the world beyond their family, socialize more freely, learn, try new things, make mistakes, and try again.

**Here are some ways to strengthen and maintain healthy family relationships.**

**1. HAVE GOOD COMMUNICATION.**

It is important for family members to talk and listen to one another to share their thoughts, experiences, and to work together to make decisions. Give each other full attention. Face each other, look at and listen to one another, take turns to speak. Tune out distractions and interruptions.

**2. PRACTICE RESPECT AND INTEGRITY.**

Remember to treat others as you want to be treated. Help each other, follow through on commitments, and fulfill promises, big and small.

**3. EXPRESS CARE AND AFFECTION.**

Share caring eye contact, caring words, positive touch, hugs, and snuggles throughout each day.

**4. SPEND QUALITY TIME TOGETHER.**

Have at least one meal together each day without distractions or go for a walk to allow conversation to keep each other up to date with each person's life.

**5. FIND AND CELEBRATE THE POSITIVE.**

Each and every day is a special day. Point out positive thoughts, intentions, choices, and efforts to reflect people's strengths in their journey of learning and growth.

**6. WORK THROUGH PROBLEMS TOGETHER.**

Work together as a team while exercising understanding, support, comfort, and problem solving together. ■

*Dr. Jabeen Ali is a Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist who enjoys helping children and adolescents discover their strengths and continue to grow with caring support.*



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## Q&amp;A

**Q** I feel like our family is always fighting about phones and video games! How do we find the right balance of screen time for my family?

**A** Finding the right balance of screen time can be a tense, difficult process within families. With technology being a critical part of homework, social interaction, and relaxation, it seems impossible to settle on a healthy plan for your children (and maybe even for yourself).

**Here are some ideas to consider when developing a plan:**

- **Focus** on what your child is doing with screen time; the American Psychological Association recommends all social media be monitored by parents, with limitations on social media that highlights comparisons (such as TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat).
- **Initiate discussions** about what children are seeing and hearing on screens and try to understand what they like about time spent on phones or videogames.
- **Set limits** to discourage use at night to allow children to have a restful sleep.
- **Support** children in being separated from screens by creating tech-free zones in your home, such as no screens at dinner or in bedrooms.
- **Listen** and work together to find the best way for your family to be healthy, happy, and safe with screens! ■

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## Relationships with Adult Children

### *Walking the Tightrope*

ESTABLISHING A POSITIVE relationship with your adult child is like walking a tightrope without a clear destination in sight. If you lean too far one way, you fall on the side of being controlling and overbearing, but if you lean too far the other way, you fall on the side of being unsupportive and uncaring. So you walk forward one step at a time with your adult child while working to maintain your balance between these two extremes.

As I am fond of saying, "Once a parent always a parent." The job description comes without a manual and includes many roles—protector, financial and emotional supporter, guidance counselor, teacher, boundary setter and enforcer, and friend, just to name a few. It's the only job on earth where the goal is to work your way out of a job. The

quality of relationship with your adult child began the day they were born, but it is strongly influenced by your present-day interactions. **Here are a few tips to maintain a more positive relationship.**

**Stay in Your Lane:** Respect their personal boundaries while letting them live their lives as they see fit. This includes accepting and respecting the decisions they make and the people they choose to be with.

**Zip Your Lip:** Exercise restraint in giving unwelcome advice, asking too many nosy questions, or jumping in to solve their problems. Be willing to listen rather than talk. They need your emotional support, not your approval, to boost their self-confidence and bear witness to their accomplishments as well as setbacks.



**Step Aside:** Make room for others in their life. You had your turn. Now it is their turn. Let them do it their way, not yours.

**Cultivate Your Friendship:** Sharing some common activity and having fun together can strengthen your bond. But nurture your own dreams so there is plenty of space between you. ■

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## 5 Tips for Helping Children through Transitions

FOR CHILDREN, TRANSITIONS CAN feel overwhelming and lead to difficulty regulating "big" emotions. The transition into kindergarten is one that every child will experience, and it feels as though it should be a natural transition. However, your child may be having difficulty adjusting to a transition if you notice they are more easily agitated, crying more frequently, or having more difficulty separating from mom/dad.

**Here are 5 tips to try to help your child with transitions.**

**1 Start to schedule play dates.** If your child has been attending daycare or preschool, they may have close friends. It is beneficial to plan a playdate outside of school so they can see there are opportunities to see one another even when they attend different schools.

**2 Identify school schedule.**

Some children find relief in knowing what the schedule will be like at their new school. Try to talk with the school to see what a typical day

may look like and then create a visual representation of the schedule. This can help them know the routine for the school day and reduce stress.

**3 Talk about nervous feelings.**

As parents, it is easy to jump to statements such as "It will be okay" or "Once you start you will see how fun your new school is." These statements feel more comfortable because we want to take any difficult emotions away for our children, but it is better to reflect on the feelings they are experiencing. Identify that they are feeling nervous and share that you want to help them problem solve ways to work through their nervousness while they adjust to the change. It is also beneficial to share if there has been a time you have felt nervous as well.

**4 Create something special.** It does not have to be fancy. It can be something that will remind them of you when they begin to feel nervous at school. Some examples could be a friendship bracelet, a keychain for their backpack, or a bookmark.



**5 Create a coping skills toolkit.** Identify different breathing techniques, favorite fidgets, or grounding techniques that help your child feel calm. It is helpful to identify and practice coping while they are calm, before they are in distress.

If you have additional questions pertaining to transitions or want additional help through the transition, reach out to Summit Clinical Services for a consultation. ■

**Amber Beebe, L.C.S.W.,** is a child and adolescent therapist that works to empower individuals at a young age through emotion recognition and communication.