Relationship Building and Maintenance

Just like a house, relationships require a strong foundation and consistent maintenance to remain intact.

Respectful family relationships are a great way to ensure the family is likely to rally together in tough times. Feeling connected and emotionally healthy creates a nurturing environment that benefits all family members. It gives children a role model to base their own relationships on and gives them confidence to grow and explore the process of building and maintaining a relationship in a safe family environment.

One component of managing a relationship is recognising that from time to time your relationships will experience stress. Relationship stress can be caused by many things such as conflict, disagreements, life stress and/or caring responsibilities. During times of stress, family members often just focus on getting through the day or week and forget to give their attention to just spending time together as a couple or a family.

There are many ways to take care of your relationship such as:

- Sharing your feelings with your partner or other family members and listening to their feelings;
- Sharing the daily tasks. This can be as important as the emotional support – it says ‘we are both in this together’;
- Making regular times together with your partner – this may seem hard to do but it is very important. Go on a ‘date’ together, have a movie night each week, cook dinner for the two of you and feed the children earlier.

Considerations for building a strong relationship:

*How well do you know your partner’s and other family members likes, joys, dreams, stresses, worries? Get to know each other again.*

Update your knowledge regularly – make time for “friendship talk” as opposed to “everyday talk” (such as who is picking up whom, at what time and what’s for dinner). Try to take 15 minutes a day to ask open ended questions, find out what’s happening in each other’s lives and what’s important to each other right now.

*Remember what you love and appreciate about each other – and tell each other.*

This helps everyone feel valued and respected. Try telling your partner and other family members 2 positive things that you value and respect about them. Do small things often to make your family members feel special – help each other around the house, watch a favourite movie together.

*When communicating, “turn towards” your partner and other family members.*

Respond to their bids for connection; it might be as simple as making sure you say hello to each other when you come home or smiling when you make eye contact.
**Share the power in your relationship**

Let your family influence your decisions. Showing interest in and respect for each other’s opinions make it feel like you are in it together as a team.

**Resolve conflict**

Talk about issues; bring up difficult topics in non-threatening, tactful ways. Take time out to calm down if things get off track.

**Accept that some things can’t be resolved**

Despite differences, you can find ways to respect your partner and other family members.

**Create shared rituals that reflect you as a family**

This could include routines during everyday life and during emergencies, or just simply the way you say goodbye to each other.

**Share the daily tasks**

This can be as important as the emotional support – it says ‘we are all in this together’.

For more information on building strong relationships within your family please visit [http://raisingchildren.net.au/](http://raisingchildren.net.au/) or contact your local family mental health support service.