

Your Child Needs Community — Here's How To Create It.

Over the past few decades, we've systematically dismantled the social structures that once supported families. The extended family networks, neighbourhood connections, and community institutions that previous generations took for granted have largely disappeared, leaving parents isolated and children without the diverse adult relationships they need to thrive.

This is the result of specific cultural and economic shifts over a sustained period of time. It's been orchestrated this way. Increased mobility for work, suburban design that prioritises privacy over connection, the decline of community institutions like churches and local clubs, and the rise of screen-based entertainment have all contributed to what sociologists call "social fragmentation." We've traded community for convenience, and our children are paying the price.

What We've Lost

The traditional "village" wasn't perfect, but it provided something crucial: multiple adults who knew and cared about each child. Kids had access to different perspectives, skills, and ways of being in the world. They saw how various adults handled conflict, showed affection, and navigated challenges. This diversity of adult models was particularly important for boys, who benefited from seeing different expressions of masculinity—from the gentle grandfather to the skilled tradesman to the thoughtful teacher.

Today's children often have access to far fewer adult perspectives in their daily lives than children in previous generations (and certainly than children raised in literal villages). This places enormous pressure on parents (and teachers) and limits children's understanding of what it means to be a healthy, contributing adult.

The Male Role Model Gap

One of the most significant losses in this social fragmentation has been the presence of positive male role models in children's lives. With fewer extended family connections and community involvement, many boys grow up seeing limited examples of healthy masculinity. They may encounter male teachers, coaches, or family friends occasionally but lack the consistent presence of men who can model emotional intelligence, responsibility, and care.

This gap is particularly pronounced in single-parent households, but it affects all children. Boys need to see men who are nurturing, who express emotions appropriately, who contribute to their communities, and who treat others with respect. Girls need these models too, to understand what healthy relationships with men look like.

Rebuilding our village and creating community is necessary for our children - and it means intentionally creating spaces where positive male role models can naturally interact with children. It may be through mentorship programs, community activities, extended family connections, and neighbourhood relationships.

Four Practical Steps to Rebuild Community

1. Map Your Current Network

Take inventory of the adults who currently know your child's name and care about their wellbeing. If it's fewer than 5-6 people outside your immediate household, your child could be missing out on the benefits of community connection. Start by strengthening relationships with neighbours, extended family, and other parents in your child's activities, like the parents of their friends.

2. Create Regular, Low-Pressure Gathering Points

Host or organise “gatherings”. Instead of elaborate events, focus on predictable, easy-to-join activities. Host a monthly potluck dinner, organise regular park meetups, or start a walking group. The key is consistency and low barriers to entry. People need to know when and where they can find community.

3. Practice Intentional Neighbouring

Learn the names of families within a three-to-five house radius of your home. Introduce your children to these neighbours and encourage brief, friendly interactions. When someone moves in, brings home a new baby, or faces a challenge, show up with practical help. This is how we create a web of mutual care.

4. Engage with Community Institutions

Even if traditional institutions have declined, new ones are emerging and old ones are eager for new members and participants. Join community gardens, local sports clubs, volunteer organisations, or activity groups. Bring your children when appropriate so they see you contributing to something larger than your family unit.

Making It Sustainable

The goal isn't to become the neighbourhood social coordinator or to create perfect community harmony. It's to normalise connection, contribution, and care as regular parts of life. Start with one relationship, one regular activity, or one small act of neighbouring.

Your children are watching how you engage with the world beyond your front door. When they see you building relationships, contributing to community life, and treating neighbours as people who matter, they learn that isolation isn't inevitable - it's a choice. And so is participation and connection.

The village won't rebuild itself, but with intentional effort from families like yours, we can create the connected communities our children need to thrive.

For more practical strategies on building community and raising resilient children, visit happyfamilies.com.au or listen to podcast episode #1309 "[All the Lonely Parents, Where Has the Village Gone?](#)"



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