

INSIGHTS

Seven ways to be a positive influence on children and young people



Parents and teachers influence children most during their first twelve years of life. We have less influence over teens as they become increasingly independent and look to their peers for guidance and approval.

The following strategies will help ensure that you have a positive influence on children at any age.

1. Be available

Nothing says “You matter” more than a busy parent giving a child undivided attention. Research has established that children whose parents are emotionally present for their kids have better social, academic, and wellbeing outcomes than those whose parents aren’t available.

2. Be warm

Sometimes we can forget that our children are people too – particularly when they’re irritable, tired and obnoxious. By responding to kids warmly (even when you don’t feel like it), you show that you value them as people. A gentle touch, a smile, or soft words bring warmth to a relationship, and increase the likelihood that you’ll be listened to and be a positive influence on their lives.

3. Listen, but don’t fix

Parents can fix sore knees, broken hearts, messy friendships, and even some difficult homework projects. But kids generally don’t need adults to fix them. They just want us to ‘get’ what they’re going through. When you see the world through their eyes, you are more understanding – and more likely to be listened to when they need us.

4. Set limits

Nothing says “I love you” more than a firm and clear “No!” from mum or dad.

“No, you can’t say that to your sister. How can you make things right?”

“No, it’s not ok for you to stay out until midnight. You’re 14.”

“No, I don’t feel right about you having your smartphone/tablet/laptop in your bedroom. Ever!”

Children and young people will often argue with you, but setting limits means that you are having a positive influence on your children. The trick is to not become too authoritarian or you’ll simply drive unwanted behaviour underground.

5. Play

Playing games and laughing together binds us close to our kids. Through play you build a relationship of trust with that facilitates our ongoing positive influence.

6. Be grateful

Grateful people are happier, healthier, have better relationships, sleep better, have more income, are less materialistic, achieve better academic outcomes and are more energetic. By being grateful you'll be a positive influence in the lives of your children. Say thanks often – and mean it.

7. Love them and show it every day

We're always correcting our kids or telling them what to do. Pick this up, put that away, get off the computer, pack your bag, tidy up your room, and so on... and that's before 7.30 in the morning! Our ratio of negative to positive statements can often be the wrong way round. So find opportunities to tell your kids such things as:

- “You really make a positive difference around here.”
- “I am amazed at the exceptional effort you make at...”
- “I love you – no matter what.”

Your time with kids is short. By setting a positive example, you can be a positive and lasting influence in your children's lives.



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Dr Justin Coulson helps families be happier. His Goalcast and TEDx positive parenting videos have been viewed by more than 100 million people. He is the author of 6 books about creating flourishing families and raising resilient children. Justin and his wife, Kylie, are the parents of 6 daughters. Find the Dr Justin Coulson's Happy Families podcast on Apple Podcasts and Spotify. For further details visit www.happyfamilies.com.au