

Want Better Outcomes For Your Kids?

We know that helping kids grow up happy and well adjusted means having loving adults around, a stable family life (whether couples are separated or together) and feeling part of a community. There are huge benefits in regard to positive mental health when we have close supportive connections to the community in which we live.

Here are some easy ways to encourage your family to become better connected to the community:

Talk to them:

- Talk about what you did in your community as a child and encourage them to care about what life is like for others
- If they criticise or make fun of someone different, ask them- how do you think it would feel to be that person? Suggest what they may have experienced. Reiterate that there are lots of different people in this world and we should be grateful for what we have rather than putting others down
- Discuss what other families may be going through and ask kids how they think their family could help them
- Use ads on TV and stories in the newspaper about helping others to start conversations about the values your family holds

Model good citizenship:

- Let your children see you offering an older person your seat, helping someone with heavy bags, etc. Tell them “That’s what we do in this family”
- Encourage them to smile at people and say hello when shopping or on an outing — you may like to make a rule that when they are with Mum and Dad socialising with others it’s fine but when they are on their own they should not talk to people they don’t know
- Warn them never to get into a car or enter someone’s house but don’t put them off talking to older people, people with disabilities, or other kids on a busy street or in the supermarket
- Have them accompany you if you drop off a meal to a new parent or help someone move or move furniture — explain to kids that it feels good to do for others
- Visit people who are ill with some flowers or do a few chores for them like vacuuming and get your child involved

Give to others:

- Give small amounts to charity where you can and get your child involved
- Encourage kids to go through their toy boxes and donate something to charity, even taking things to the Op Shop benefits the disadvantaged
- If kids get two of the same item for their birthday suggest they give the other one to a friend or donate it to an Op Shop
- Give your time (that’s the most precious thing for most of us) to another family by helping them with home renovations, a garden makeover or putting on a special dinner- explain the idea of reciprocity where people look after one another

Want Better Outcomes For Your Kids?

Join in:

- Get involved on the crèche or school committees, children do so much better when their parents are involved in their lives and model a community commitment
- Attend school working bees or activity days and meet other families
- Help out at local festivals or expos or fundraising once in a while and take the kids along
- If the opportunity arises let kids have a go at things like Meals on Wheels or soup kitchens so they can gain insight into the different needs people have

Extended Families:

- Traditionally families would spend lots of time with their extended relatives including aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, etc, which creates a “mini” community for kids to grow up in. This occurs less frequently these days in Australia and so it can be good to recruit friends, neighbours and other peoples’ relatives for birthdays or get together to create a sense of community at home
- Keep in mind that you don’t have to have children to be part of a family – couples without kids or single people are still someone’s daughter/son/cousin, etc and can contribute a great deal to children’s lives
- Take a broad view of the word “family”, these days they come in all shapes and sizes and often change over time. Friends are the family we choose for ourselves.