

# The little book of tips for fathers and father figures.



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## Brought to you by The Fathering Project

Fathers and father figures are critical in every child's life. Loving and connected dads have an enormous impact, not only on their children's lives but also on their own.

This booklet contains simple tips and advice for dads and father figures such as grandparents, stepfathers, uncles, youth leaders, teachers and coaches.

The information is for those who understand just how important they are in a child's life, and who are not afraid to reach out for advice.

We base the teachings on our research and years of experience. But the fact is, everyone's work and family situations are different, so be creative and adapt the advice to suit your circumstances.

Take the time to try these tips and enjoy a closer and more connected relationship with your children.

Visit [thefatheringproject.org](http://thefatheringproject.org) for more helpful tips. At the end of this book are some notes pages for you to add your own thoughts.

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## Your value!

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Research shows that warm, engaged and effective fathers and father figures are more likely to have children who show:

- Increased social and emotional development.
- Increased academic development.
- Increased physical activity and better health outcomes.
- Increased student connectedness with school.
- Increased self-esteem.
- Increased resilience.
- Increased social responsibility, social maturity, resilience and life skills.
- Reduced engagement in unhealthy and risky behaviours.
- Reduced alcohol, tobacco and drug use.
- Reduced bullying behaviours.
- Reduced suicide & self-harm.
- Reduced substance abuse.
- Reduced delinquent behaviour.

The references for these pages can be found here: [www.thefatheringproject.org/research](http://www.thefatheringproject.org/research)

## Benefits of being a dad

**Being involved and engaged with your kids has loads of benefits:**

- Greater enjoyment in life
- Rediscovering 'how to play'
- Special memories
- Stronger relationships
- Closer friendships with your kids as they get older
- Doing better at work
- Better connection to your community.



## Looking after you

We understand that sometimes life can be difficult and juggling commitments at home and at work can be challenging. You may feel intense pressure to protect and support your family, or maybe you're feeling uncertain because you didn't have a positive father figure yourself.

Rest assured that you are not alone in feeling this way.

Maintaining your own mental and physical health and wellbeing is important and helps you be the best dad or father figure you can be for your kids.

The tips in this book can help you to think about and plan for balance in your life so you can feel more fulfilled as a dad whilst juggling general demands of life.

As the saying goes, 'it ain't weak to speak', so always remember that talking with others about how you are feeling can help if you're struggling with any aspect of parenting or life in general.

**For mental health support or crisis counselling, please call Lifeline on 131 11 or Beyond Blue on 1300 224 636.**

**If your children need mental health support, please contact Kids Helpline on 1800 551 800.**

Other support services are listed at <https://thefatheringproject.org/about-us/support-services/>

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## Creating a healthy work-family balance

Finding the “right” work-family balance can be tricky. We all need to find a comfortable balance that includes time for all the things in our lives that we feel are important.

Life balance doesn't just happen - you have to create it by prioritising what is really important to you, taking control of your life plan, and booking time for your priorities.

Working demanding jobs with tiring hours can make caring for your children physically and mentally draining. We have put together the tips in this book to help you deal with some of the stress that comes with this significant responsibility.

Maintaining a healthy work-family balance can help you to have happier relationships, especially with your children. As a result, you can feel happier within yourself and more fulfilled at work.

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### Top tips for working out your priorities:

- Work out what is important to you at this stage of your life. Make family a priority.
  - Take care of your kids over your career. Try not to sacrifice family for work - you can't get this special time back later on.
  - If you have a partner, talk to them about the needs and priorities of the family. Talk about how much time each of you would like to, and can, contribute to care for your kids.
  - Juggling all of your roles can be stressful, so be kind to yourself with what you can achieve.
  - Manage your time. Add your priorities to a weekly calendar to create a typical week with time allocated for those priorities (picking up the kids, playing together, work, exercise, partner time, friends etc).
  - Try not to juggle too many big projects at once. Small steps done well is the best plan.
  - Don't postpone making changes to improve your life - time doesn't stand still!
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## Finding balance

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### Top tips to maintain positive mental health:

- Work out what is important to you at this stage of your life. Make family a priority.
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- If you have a partner, talk to them about the needs and priorities of the family. Talk about how much time each of you would like to and can contribute to care for your kids.
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- Don't postpone making changes to improve your life - time doesn't stand still!

## Look after your mental health

Mental health refers to our psychological, emotional and social wellbeing – it's all about how we think, feel, and behave. Good mental health and wellbeing allows you to live your life in a positive and meaningful way and cope with life's changes and challenges.

Feeling down, tense, angry or anxious are all normal emotions and it's normal to experience them. But when these feelings persist for long periods of time, they may be part of a mental health problem and this is when you should seek support.

### Top tips to maintain positive mental health:

- Don't be afraid to ask for help. Get support when you need it – don't imagine you have to cope with everything yourself.
  - Develop a support group you trust and who you are comfortable talking to and sharing your problems and issues with. Look after these relationships.
  - Develop skills to help you cope with stressful situations, e.g., relaxation techniques, anger management or assertiveness skills.
  - Recognise and accept the things you can't change. While you cannot control the circumstances, you can control how you react to them. Try to focus on the positives and reflect this attitude to your family.
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## Investing in your own wellbeing

Finding time for yourself among all your competing responsibilities can be tricky. Your children will look to you as an example of healthy wellbeing. Be sure to take care of yourself.

### Top tips for your wellbeing:

- Keep as fit and healthy as you can. Exercise regularly, eat properly, and get adequate sleep.
  - Have a broad range of interests (work, family, sport, hobbies) and spend time on the things you enjoy.
  - Invest time in your relationships and with those important to you.
  - Schedule some 'you' time. Don't feel guilty, this time is important for your health and wellbeing as a dad for your kids.
  - Pace yourself. If you feel yourself getting burned out, don't hesitate to clear your schedule, reset and recharge.
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## The BUS principle

No matter how successful you are at work, your children are truly your greatest accomplishment. So, work as hard on your fathering as you do on your trade.

Children need their fathers and father figures present and engaged in their lives. The BUS principle is a simple way to remember these important messages.

- **B** - Be There. Be available, present and engaged. Let your children know you are there for them.
- **U** - Give Unconditional Love. Tell them you love them and do it often. Even when you don't approve of their behaviour, reinforce that you still love them.
- **S** - Reinforce they are Special to you exactly as they are.

## What your kids need is 'you'

- Minimise distractions (phone etc.) when engaging with your children.
- Remind them you love them unconditionally.
- Get involved. Be an active participant in their lives.
- Listen to them. Get to know their thoughts, ideas, likes, dislikes, friends and dreams.
- Value the everyday moments. Time together at home is as important as special events.

## Unconditional love

Unconditional love is love without strings attached. Children who receive unconditional love from their dads have improved lifelong health and wellness.

- Be consistent. It's important for your child to know you still love them during disagreements. Remind them it's their behaviour you disapprove of, not them.
- Encourage open dialogue. Make sure they know, if they have done something wrong or are in trouble, they can talk to you because you love them.
- Be patient. Do not withdraw from your child when they're going through adolescence, even if they appear to be pushing you away.
- Set a goal to let your child know each day you love them, regardless of what has happened.





## New Dads

For most men becoming a dad is one of the biggest events of their life.

### Don't miss out!

For many, busy work schedules can make it difficult to get precious time with your baby.



From the hundreds of stories we have heard from older fathers, the following remains true: “When you look back on your life years from now, you won’t regret not having worked longer hours. What you might regret is not having spent more time with your kids.”

## Talk to your employer

If you are in a position to be able to have some time off after the birth, this is a very important opportunity to form strong bonds with your newborn.

- Have open conversations about your family situation and commitments with your employer, team or management. (Many of them will be parents too).
- New dads should ask about workplace policies that are “family-friendly” such as parental/paternity leave.
- Explore what government funding is available to support you during this time off.
- Talk to your human resources department if you have one – it’s what they’re there for.
- Negotiate. Explore work options around flexible work hours if this means you can spend time with your newborn.
- If you can afford to, ask your employer if there are any other employees who would be willing to pick up extra shifts for a short period of time while things settle down with a newborn in the house.

## Hands on from the beginning

Becoming a dad changes everything – it can be very daunting. It's normal to feel uncertain or scared. The only way to learn and build your skills is to get involved and just have a go. The more time you spend with your baby the more confident you will become and the more enjoyment you will get from this new person in your life.

- Bonding with you is important so even if you are busy or working long days make time to bond with your new baby.
  - Skin to skin contact is critical from day one. Your child will bond with you: your voice, your smell, your feel.
  - Get involved in everyday activities such as dressing, feeding and bathing. These create lots of one-on-one time with your baby, which is the building block of a positive relationship.
  - Learning starts early – talk and read, sing to your child. They won't care if you are not talented, they just love the sound of your voice.
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## Coping with a new baby

There will be moments when you haven't slept, the baby is crying, your phone is ringing, and it all seems so hard. But it will get better, and they grow up very fast.

Although this is not always talked about, dads can also experience postpartum depression after the birth of a child. Studies have shown that male partners can experience significant hormonal changes. Coupled with the lack of sleep that comes with looking after a newborn, it's important for you to look after yourself too.

- When the going gets tough, take a break, everything doesn't have to be perfect.
  - Slow down and get the essentials done, everything else can wait.
  - Time spent playing on the floor or watching your baby is time well spent.
  - Try not to schedule too many things in one day. Everything takes longer with a baby involved.
  - Be extra patient, supportive, and communicative with your partner.
  - Talk to other new fathers – or just other dads – about your experience and theirs.
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## Get out and about

Once your child is through the first weeks after birth, don't be afraid to take your baby out with you.

It's easier to take them out before they become mobile.

Stimulation is good for kids, and babies make great adventure companions.

- Fresh air and adventure will help babies to sleep well. The exercise is also good for you and your sleep as well.
- Taking the baby out on your own allows your partner to get some time to do other things.
- Going for a walk or drive can help a restless, crying baby settle and get sleep.



## Being there as your kids grow

It's important to take deliberate action to stay connected with your kids as they grow.

When you make the effort to stay in touch, listen and get to know your child, you are showing them that your love and support is always there.



## Switching on to family time

For working Dads, coming home from work can be a challenge, especially with younger children wanting your attention. It can often feel like you are ending one job and starting another with no break in between. You're allowed to take a bit of time to "switch off" after you knock off.

- If you commute to work, use the time to chill out. Listen to music or put on your favourite podcast.
- If you don't commute, take 15-30mins to de-stress by talking a quick walk, having a swim, meditation, singing, dancing, whatever works for you! Having this time to yourself will ensure you have sufficient energy for your kids.
- Don't be afraid to ask your kids for a bit of time to wash up and get into 'home mode' - then let them know that after that, they will have your full attention.
- Set clear boundaries around how often you bring your work into home (switch of your phone, email etc).
- If you bring your work home with you too often, it can spoil the limited time you have with your kids

## Connect every day

Every day connecting is about finding time each day to connect with your kids with undivided attention.

- Make time to connect. When you get home from work, around the dinner table, or at bedtime.
- Chat about their day, their feelings and their news.
- Put phones away and give them your undivided attention.
- Listen to your kids. Get to know their individual thoughts, feelings, likes and dislikes, friends and dreams.
- If you are working away or living apart, make time to reach out whenever possible.



## Dad dates

From bubs to teens, the 'dad date' is The Fathering Project's most tried, tested and recommended tip and it's never too late to start.

Dad dates are best practiced with one child at a time, meaning one-on-one time with no-one else and no interruptions.

- Focus on connecting with your child so they know they are valued, loved and worth your time.
- Going to the park, lunch or a walk are simple one-on-one Dad Dates.
- Show your child you've been listening to them by taking them somewhere they've been wanting to go.
- Be interested, positive and encourage open conversation.
- Book it in. Make a point of scheduling this in your calendar, just like a work meeting or a job.
- Go on Dad Dates that your children enjoy, especially when it comes to teenagers. Watch sport or movies. Exercise or join a social sport's team.

## Family time

Family time is a ritual of getting the family together on a regular basis to spend valuable time connecting and having fun.

- Family time might include Sunday breakfast, Friday game night, picnics or an exercise routine. Anything that gets everyone together, to share, communicate and bond.
- Establish a regular family time when everyone is available to focus on the family.
- Get everyone in the family to contribute ideas for family time.
- Block out this family time. Don't schedule other activities during that time. Keep it as a sacred time.
- Family time can also be used for family meetings for organising the family calendar, establish agreements and rules or discussions about family topics.



## Connecting through play

In general, men tend to be pretty hands on when it comes to activities. Applying this 'hands on' approach to fathering can help support your child's social, emotional and physical development.

Strong lifelong bonds are developed between you and your kids when you create positive memories of playing together.

Fathers and father figures usually engage in more active, rough-and-tumble play with their children. This type of play (tickling, chasing and fun wrestling) encourages children to be more confident, explore, solve problems and take safe risks.

- Get back to your inner child and play with your kids.
- It doesn't need to be formal. Just go out, have fun and play with them in activities that are fun and allow them to explore their abilities and skills in a safe environment.
- If you are a single parent or have an only child, occasionally invite friends or family over to play as well.

## Ask good questions

When you ask questions that need more than a 'yes' or 'no' answer you are encouraging your kids to open up to you.

- Ask open ended questions that require more than single word answers.
- Instead of "how was school?", try "what was the best thing about your day today?" or "tell me about your day at today".
- Ask for details. Try questions like "tell me about" or "what do you think?"
- Show genuine interest. Kids know when we're faking. Try saying "tell me more about that".
- Don't force it. If you are asking too many questions your child may pull back. Notice this and leave it for another time.



## Positive attitude towards learning, work and school

Remember your kids are always watching and listening to you as a role model. Take a moment to think about what messages you send to your kids about work, learning and the importance of school. How can you make sure they are getting plenty of positive messages?

- Take an interest in your child's school. Read the school newsletter and discuss articles and events with you child.
  - Focus on the positive aspects of school. Praise your school for the good things that you see being done.
  - Ask your kids about what they have learnt at school today and ask about their thoughts and opinions on new topics they are learning about.
  - Show respect for their teachers with words and actions your child hears and sees.
  - Show interest in your child's homework and assignments, ask them if they would like to discuss anything with you.
  - Praise your child when they try and work hard - encouragement from dad will go a long way.
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## Partnering with your child's school

Dads who work full time may find it difficult to get to the school but try to take any opportunity you can to touch base with their teachers or the school community more generally.

- Introduce yourself to the teacher at the beginning of each year.
  - A partnership helps you and the teacher learn more about your child.
  - Attend the class parent meeting at the beginning of the year if you can.
  - At the beginning of a term, after the teacher and students have had a chance to settle in, make an appointment to see the teacher to discuss how your child has settled in.
  - When your child sees you and their teachers working in partnership, they see that you value their education.
  - Knowing more about their students helps teachers personalise instruction.
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## Family values

As a dad or father figure you are a powerful influence in shaping the beliefs and values of your children, both through what you say and what you do.

- Be specific about values to do with trust, honesty, integrity, respect, racism, generosity and kindness to those in need.
- Teach them to accept people who are different to themselves, e.g., kids who are from different backgrounds or differently abled.
- Develop their conscience about issues like bullying, aggression and abuse.
- Apologise to your kids when you are wrong.
- Discuss behaviour online and how our values around how we behave should not change when we go online.
- Actions speak louder than words, so make sure you live the values you teach.

## Positive discipline

Positive discipline is best looked at as guidance and teaching, not controlling and punishing.

- Be warm, calm and firm when talking about behaviour. Dads who discipline in a calm and fair manner show love for their children.
- Be consistent. Dependable boundaries help children know where the limits are, so they are less likely to cross them.
- Be fair with your discipline. Kids like things to be fair.
- Watch for when you child might be going to test a rule and calmly remind them of the possible consequences. i.e. “Remember, if you don’t go to bed on time tonight, you will miss out on your screen time tomorrow and that wouldn’t be great.”
- Catch them doing good things. Heap on the praise and reward for your kids when they follow the rules and do the right thing.





## Encourage an active lifestyle

- Talk to your kids from a young age about why it's important to look after your body and mind.
- Play with your kids. Play is a great way to get fit and have fun.
- As they get older exercise with your family. Plan time to be active with your kids with games at home, running, walks or cycling.



- Keep screen time to a minimum. Think about what your kids could be doing instead.
- Set yourself and your family exercise goals. You could record your steps or time you have played. Record your progress on a weekly activity chart or map how far you have travelled. Reward yourselves with something you all value.

## Kids and sleep

A 4-year-old needs about 11 hours a night, a 9-year-old about 10 hours, a 14-year-old about 9 hours.

- Set a bedtime and stick to it where possible.
- No screens in child's bedroom. Phones, Tablets, TVs and other electronic gadgets affect how easily children get to sleep.
- Keep lights low. This encourages your child's brain to produce the sleep hormone, melatonin.
- Relax with reading or stories. Once they are in bed, read a story together, encourage older children to read quietly or listen to some relaxing music.
- Use the opportunity for a quiet catch up with your child. Talk about positive things for them so they can go to sleep in a positive frame of mind without worry.
- Charge phones in a different room, older children may stay up late or even wake in the middle of the night to use social media.

## Support emotional wellbeing

- Schedule emotional check-ins. You could try having days of the week on the fridge and getting the kids to draw an emoji for how they are feeling that day.
- Help kids name their feelings. Just the process of identifying and naming an emotion can help the brain to calm down.
  - Explore emotions together. Read stories or watch videos or TV shows and discuss the characters' emotions.
  - Practise gratitude. Chat with your kids each day, or before bed and encourage them to reflect on what they're grateful for or what went well today.
    - Make sure kids get ample sleep. Try to keep clear and consistent routines including no screen time one hour before bed, a 'wind-down' routine before bed, such as quiet reading, listening to music or story time before lights out.



## Build their resilience

- Resilience is our ability to cope with change and challenge and to bounce back in difficult times.
- Demonstrate a positive attitude towards challenges yourself. Talk about them as opportunities to learn and improve.
- Support their sense of self. Help them to develop a positive sense of who they are, how they feel about themselves and what they can do.
- Build coping skills. Talk to your child about how to develop strategies for dealing with difficult situations.
- Help them to find solutions to problems. Ask questions like, "What could you do?" and "What do you think?" Try not to always solve the problems for them.
- Provide opportunities for them to build confidence by taking on challenges and encourage them to work through problems and dilemmas.

## Challenges and healthy risks

- A healthy risk pushes a child to have-a-go out at something outside of their comfort zone, but it results in little harm if they are unsuccessful.
  - A healthy risk might be trying a new sport, joining in the school play, or making a speech at assembly.
  - Encourage your children to 'have-a go' to try new things.
  - Teach your child it's okay to fail sometimes. Help your kids to see mistakes as part of learning.
  - Encourage perseverance and not giving up. When there are setbacks help them to stay positive and not give up.
  - Make a list for you and your kids to do together. Include new things that you could do with your child that would be new to you both. There is a page at the back of this book for you to make your list.
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## Support their friendships

- Ask about and find out who your child's friends are and learn their names.
  - Get to know the parents of your child's friends and open up regular communication with them.
  - Have casual conversations with your kids about friendships. Talk about topics such as - What makes a good friend, what is the difference between being popular and being a good friend, how to look after your friendships.
  - Encourage your child to explore new friends outside of school through activities such as hobbies, sport and music to expand their friendship groups.
  - Monitor your child's online social media use and time spent online. Make sure your children are not socialising late at night.
  - Support opportunities and safe environments for your children to spending time with friends.
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## Agreements and boundaries for older kids

- If you have a range of ages in your house, not all rules will be the same. In addition to the ground rules set some situation agreements or rules that apply to each age group.
- Agreements are a great way of giving older kids and teenagers more responsibility within the safety and support of the family.
  - Ask your older kids to suggest appropriate agreements and consequences and then negotiate what you think is fair.
    - Be firm, fair and consistent in applying agreements and consequences once they have been established.
    - If they break a rule or agreement calmly remind them of the agreements you made and why they were agreed to, then move to the consequences that apply.



## Talking about difficult topics

If you have something difficult to talk about, try using some of these tips to get you through.

- Suggest you go for a walk or sit side-by-side to talk. Side-by-side in the car can be a good time too.
- Calmly let them know what you want to talk to them about. Keep your emotions in check.
- Acknowledge discomfort “I know this may be hard to talk about, but there is nothing that we can’t talk about together”.
- Be calm and listen without interrupting when they are talking.
- Have an open and honest discussion and come up with some actions going forward.
- Especially with older children, you don’t have to always solve their problems, they may just need a hand to work out how to deal with the problem.
- Reassure them that they can always talk to you no matter what the situation.

## Side by side chats

The best communication between fathers and their children often occurs when they are side-by-side, such as, driving together, walking together, cooking or doing the dishes.

Side-by-side talking times are particularly good for having tricky conversations.

- Make it clear that your children can talk with you on any topic.
- Use the time to keep up to date with what is happening in their lives.
- Be open and ready for topics that are difficult for your child to talk about.

If you are able to do this sometimes, many dads report school drop off and pick up as one of the best times to connect side-by-side with their kids:

- If you can't walk, drive your child to or from childcare or school. Put their bags and technology in the boot and turn music off to limit distractions.
  - Show interest and walk them to the classroom when possible. See where they sit, meet their friends and teacher, and spend a bit of time with them.
  - Take them out occasionally for an after-school snack or treat and check in on how they are going.
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## Family rules

When you are consistent with your rules in a warm and caring way this helps to reassure your kids that you are there to protect them and support them if they make a mistake or are at risk.

- Involve all family members when establishing your family rules. Set age-appropriate rules and agreements for each child.
  - Keep it simple: Set some ground rules that are easy to follow and apply to everyone.
  - If kids have two households, set the rules and expectations for each household so the kids will know what to expect.
  - Communicate as much as possible with your co-parent to agree on behaviours, house rules and fair consequences.
  - Explain the purpose of each rule. Rules help kids to learn to know what you expect from them.
  - Set good routines through rules about screen time, and good habits like brushing teeth and eating their vegetables.
  - Set consequences with your children. Consequences that are agreed upon by you and your kids are more likely to be effective. Plus, you can say “Well, we all agreed on the consequences”.
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## Guiding teenager behaviours

- Be clear and consistent. Teenagers gain strength and self-respect from parents who are clear and consistent in their expectations and willing to discuss reasons for their decision.
- Give love and support. Teenagers still need and usually react positively to parental love, support and guidance.
- Allow competent teenagers to take responsibility when you see them handling situations well.

- Praise their efforts. When your teenager displays good self-management skills let them know you have noticed and are proud of them.
  - Step in if you need to. You can show respect for your teenager's feelings and opinions but should reserve the right to limit some of their actions if you feel they may be at risk.



## Peer pressure

A peer group could be a class at school, members of a team or a group of friends. Friendship groups are usually developed from within these peer groups.

- Positive peer influence can be really healthy for your child if it's encouraging them to do the right things.
- Talk to your child about peer pressure, healthy and unhealthy groups so they know the difference.
- Let them know:
  - "If you are being encouraged to act in a positive way, that feels right, or to do something that doesn't hurt yourself or anyone else, it will probably be okay".
  - "If you are being encouraged to do something you know is wrong, or you feel uncomfortable about then you need to think carefully about your choices".
- A good rule is if it makes you feel bad about it, it is probably bad for you.
- Talk to your child about things they can say if they feel pressured, such as 'Sorry, I can't do that', or 'I don't feel like doing that'.

## Drugs and alcohol

- Start from an early about things that are healthy and unhealthy or bad for their bodies. This prepares for conversations later about topics like smoking, drugs and alcohol.
- Talk with your kids (even pre-teen) about drugs and the dangers, and their awareness of drug availability and use in their area, school or peer group.
- Ask your children what they know or have heard about drugs.
- Establish a clear and consistent family position on drugs, smoking and alcohol.
- Provide information, not threats. Love, encouragement and listening are far more effective.
- Help kids deal with pressure, it is OK to say, 'no thanks, I will pass'.
- Be aware of new drugs, what they are made from, their impact and symptoms of a user. The following link has more information:

<https://kidshelpline.com.au/parents/issues/teens-using-drugs-and-alcohol>

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## Talking about sexuality

- If your children are young, remember the more you open up good communication early, the easier it will be to talk about more 'tricky' topics later.
- When you believe your child is at an appropriate age, begin discussion around physical and sexual development.
- It's important that you provide positive affirmation and acceptance as your child is experiencing changes, and carefully remind them that you understand – you experienced changes of your own.
- Talk to them about what's right and wrong and what is acceptable.
- Let them know that you will be there for them, no matter what.



## Bullying

- Talk to your kids about what bullying is. That it's when someone is doing something to them again and again that is making them feel hurt, upset or afraid.
- Let your kids know it's always okay to ask for help if they are afraid, upset or can't deal with a problem themselves.
- Tell them to calmly walk away from the bully and to talk to a trusted adult as soon as they can. Not to show they are upset or angry, this is probably what the bully wants.
- Don't encourage them to fight back. This often makes the situation worse.
  - Discuss how to solve social problems. Ask questions like, "Do you ever see kids having problems with each other at school? What would you do if this happened to you?"



## If your child tells you they are being bullied:

- Listen to your child. React in a calm and supportive manner. Although upsetting, remain calm.
- Acknowledge that bullying is wrong, and that your child is upset by the experience.
- Talk about options, working out a plan to help the situation. With older children ask how they want you to help.
- Sometimes older children don't want you to jump straight in. Decide whether it is safe for your child to try dealing with the bullying themselves or if you need to take the lead.
- Remind your child that the bullying is not his or her fault. Work together to make the situation better.
- If it is happening at school, make an appointment to meet with the school to work in partnership.



## What if my child is bullied online?

- Make sure they don't respond. Responding to the bullying brings attention to it and can cause it to become worse.
- Block the person who is bullying straight away.
- Check their privacy settings social networking site profile is set to private.
- Keep a diary of what is happening and when. Save the evidence of the bullying e.g., screenshots.
  - Report the bullying to the site's service provider to have it removed.
    - Inform your child's school. Bullying usually happens within the child's social network. Your school can help with advice and support your child while at school.



## Children's cyber safety

- Keep digital devices in communal areas that can be supervised. Check regularly what your child is viewing. Set time limits that balance time spent in front of screens with offline activities.
- Know your children's digital friends. Ensure the digital friends are people they know in real life.
- Set parental controls and privacy settings. Install and regularly update filtering software to block unwanted content, pop-ups and restrict access to specific pages.
- Warn against sharing passwords with anyone other than you and your co-parent. Ensure strong passwords on devices.
- Try to stay up to date with changes in technology.

Download the **Beacon: Cyber Safety App** from the App store. This App is designed for adults to help keep children safe online. You might also like to check out the excellent resources at the Australian Office of the eSafety Commissioner <https://www.esafety.gov.au/>

## Travelling or separated Dads

We understand that many Dads are away from home for hours, days and sometimes weeks at a time. This can place a significant burden on your family life. With a little extra effort – you can successfully manage both.

### Talk about it...

*“I don’t think I ever talked to the kids enough about why I was doing, what I was doing or what it was all about, for that matter. I just tended not to talk about my work with them, possibly to protect them from being swamped by it. I’m sure I overcompensated”  
- A travelling dad*



## Travelling dads

If you are travelling for work or you have shared care arrangements with another parent, your children will want to understand how long you’ll be gone for, where you are going and what you will be doing all day:

- Explain how long you’ll be gone in terms your child can understand. If your toddler is three years old and still doesn’t have a grasp of the days of the week, telling her you’ll be back together on Friday won’t compute. Instead, say something like: “I’ll be home in three sleeps”.
- Help children anticipate change. Remind kids you’ll be leaving or separated from them a day or two before it happens.
- Sometimes they may not seem interested, but the reality is that these conversations help them learn more about the world they live in.

## Be consistent

For many children (especially younger kids), a parent leaving home can be very unsettling. Kids find it easier to adapt to the situation when things like their routine doesn't change too much, whether the travelling parent is home or away.

- If you have a partner:
    - Set shared goals. Stay united when it comes to issues about kids. Set your rules, expectations, and your discipline styles for the kids.
    - Be clear with the children that you both have the same rules and expectations, no matter where you are.
  - If you are separated from your co-parent:
    - Create a shared 'parenting plan' that contains agreed upon routines, procedures and rules such as bedtime, discipline etc.
    - Routines and rules are very important to children as these give them security between the two parents and their households.
  - Stick to the same schedule:
    - Try not to upset the usual routine when you return home.
    - Don't be tempted to let your kids get away with more when you get home to make up for being away. This inconsistency can make it hard for your partner or co-parent when you go away again.
- 

## Stay in touch

- Before you leave, write a few short notes and put them around the house so your kids can find them while you're gone. You can put them in their lunch bags or under their pillows.
  - Regular, everyday conversations are great – and you may notice this more when you go away.
  - Keep in touch with your kids through technology and apps. Call and read a bed-time story or ask about their day.
  - Keep an up-to-date calendar of events so you don't miss anything while you're away. Stay updated on what is happening in their lives. Ask about how an exam went or how they performed at the school assembly, sports carnival or performance.
  - Let your kids know that you have remembered what is coming up and that you will be thinking of them, even though you can't be there.
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### About The Fathering Project

The Fathering Project is a national, not-for-profit organisation transforming children's lives by educating, supporting and empowering Dads.

Children with an effective father or father figure have significantly better social, mental, physical and academic outcomes. We help put kids first by delivering evidence-based interventions and providing education and wrap around support services to improve father caregiving and create healthier, happier and more resilient children, families and communities.



### We're here to help you!

Fathering is a big and important job, so it can be helpful to have other dads and father figures for you to share stories and experiences. The Fathering Project helps build connection, knowledge and skills with:

- Opportunities to get involved in fun activities with your children and with other fathers and father figures.
- Tips and resources to add to your fathering experience with opportunities for personal development, leadership and mentoring.

For information visit [www.thefatheringproject.org](http://www.thefatheringproject.org) or follow us on Facebook, Instagram or Youtube regular tips, updates and fun opportunities to get involved.





**“Being part of The Fathering Project has definitely improved my relationships with my children. I make sure I spend time with them doing what they want to do, and I’ve actively made sure they know I am there for them if they need me”**

- Tom, a proud dad of three.

The tips in this book have come from the most recent published evidence around fathers’ impact in parenting, education, and health of children as well as from interviews with thousands of fathers and father figures.

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