

Why community connections are good for children

When your child is connected to extended family, family friends and people in their neighbourhood and community, they have:

- a sense of belonging to a place and community
- opportunities to learn about getting along with others
- people to go to when they need help
- a network they can use to learn about different jobs, skills and so on.

Strong social connections can also boost your child's confidence and lead to new friendships.

Different community connections have different benefits for your child.

Connections with extended family and family friends

Extended family and family friends can strengthen your child's sense of belonging. Some of these people are in your child's life because you've chosen them. Others are related to you and your child.

These people might celebrate family occasions like birthdays with your child. Or they might take an interest in your child and their achievements. For example, your child's grandparents might celebrate your child's successes, like when your child wins an award at school or in sport.

Being in touch with other adults and families also helps your child see that not all families are the same. This gives your child a sense that there are many different values, routines and ideas in the world.

And when parents are under stress, family members or family friends might help and support your family. For example, they might pick up your child from school if you're sick or delayed.

Neighbourhood connections

Being familiar with people in the neighbourhood can help your child feel that their neighbourhood is a safe and friendly place. When you're walking or riding bikes around your local streets, just saying hello or waving to your neighbours creates this friendly feeling.

Other people your child might see or talk to in the neighbourhood include school crossing supervisors, doctors, librarians and police officers. You could point out these people when you see them so your child gets to know who they are.

Connections with local organisations

Your child might be involved in organisations like sporting clubs, music or art societies, religious organisations or volunteer groups. These can give your child opportunities to build skills, follow interests and 'give back' to the community. They're also ways for you to connect with other parents.

Helping children make community connections: tips

Here are ideas for helping your child connect with extended family, friends and people in the neighbourhood and community:

- Make opportunities for trusted relatives or family friends to have time with your child. Check with your child that they're OK with this and enjoy their time with these people. If your child feels forced to spend time with someone, this might not be a positive experience for them.
- Walk or cycle to a local park and let your child play on the equipment. Being out in your neighbourhood gives you and your child the chance to meet new people.
- Get involved in community events and take your child along with you. Working bees at school, community gardens, fetes and festivals give you and your child an opportunity to connect with people who are working together.
- Show your child that connection goes both ways. When you work with others and help them, they'll do the same for you. For example, you might collect your neighbours' mail when they're on holiday, and they collect yours when you're away.
- Look at photos of family and friends with your child to spark their interest in the relationships that are important to your family. You and your child could even work on a [family story book](#) together.
- Model social skills with people in your community. This can be as simple as saying 'hello', 'please' and 'thank you'. Your child will watch the way you talk with people and follow your example. And this helps your child learn how to get along with people.

Child safety in the community

It's essential for your child to feel safe around people in their community, and there are some adults you might not want your child to connect with.

Always meet and talk with adults who'll be in contact with your child away from home or school, and share relevant information about your child with other parents. This might include your child's allergies, likes, dislikes and additional needs.

It's also a good idea to encourage your child to tell you about adults that they're coming into contact with – for example, a new helper at their sports club. And make sure your child knows that if someone makes them feel nervous or uncomfortable, they need to tell you about their feelings.

When your child is starting a new activity in the community, it's important to find out how the organisation will look after their safety and wellbeing. For example, you can check whether the organisation is using the [National Principles for Child Safe Organisations](#).