

Hi From the School Nurse

Here is an article I would like to share about the importance of showing your children how much you love them. It is written by Maggie Dent. For more articles by Maggie visit www.maggiedent.com.

Tiny moments of connection with kids matter

Most parents would never question that they love their children wholeheartedly — even when their little darling has done a lipstick drawing on the wall, won't eat their vegies or sleep in their own bed. Even though we might get annoyed, we still love them absolutely.

However, children don't always feel our love because 'love' is a difficult concept for children and even teens to grasp. In a way, children see love as connection!

Many people talk about having **quality time** with their children and, while that is a good thing, it might only come around once a week — or once a month in our busy society.

I am more inclined to recommend micro-moments of loving connectedness or building 'love bridges' which happen often, rather than just focusing on quality time created by an adult at a time convenient to them.

Children live in the **present moment** and when we come and join them, even briefly, in that amazing place it makes their hearts sing. When we can come to them and share in their childlike view of the world, children know we love them.

Many parents who have to work tell me how they struggle with feeling guilty that they are unable to spend a lot of time with their children. The same goes for those who work away from home like FIFOs (fly-in-fly-out workers) in our mining towns and those in the military services.

There are many ways, some really tiny, that build a heart connection.

Dr Gordon Neufeld (Developmental Psychologist) believes so much of the way we live our lives today creates experiences of separation for our young children, rather than experiences that connect and bond us with our children, which he calls bridges. It is a different way of explaining 'attachment' or the innate need of every child to feel strongly bonded to a significant caring adult.

When this occurs repeatedly, children's trust in us is broken and the relationship will be weakened. I have renamed Neufeld's bridges "love bridges" — which build stronger heart connections with our children to ensure that they feel safe and secure within their families.

If you can keep in mind that, when you are dealing with challenging behaviour in your child, your priority is to work at the relationship first and the behaviour second; this will ensure that you will be on the right track to use discipline in a way that benefits everyone. And when children feel connected they are less likely to need to act out to gain power or attention.

So how can you build love bridges with your children?

- Wink at children, make funny faces, high fives or thumbs up – non-verbal messages of connection.
- Parents can give small symbols to hold onto in their absence like kisses in the child's hands.
- Create a unique bedtime ritual
- Create a small jar of captured kisses.
- Create an imaginary giant protector/guardian angel to watch over your child.
- Have a picture of you with your child in a locket or plastic sleeve they can keep in their bag.
- Record readable stories or bed time rituals on smart phones if you're away.
- Leave notes or funny pictures in their lunch box or on the bathroom mirror.
- Create moments of lightness and laughter often.
- Hide special messages around the house when you go away.
- Spontaneously join them in drawing or colouring in.
- Join them on the couch randomly to watch their favourite show.
- Engage in spontaneous hugs, cuddles and tickles.

Children who feel loved through a strong heart connection will feel safer and more secure in their world – even after they have been disciplined or sanctioned for breaking boundaries or being mean and unkind. They will also be calmer and this allows them to behave better and learn better

The more micro-moments of connection we add into our homes, the happier everyone will be. So step over the pile of washing, ignore the unanswered emails and go build some love bridges with your kids – it is never too late!

As an adolescent told me once: "I would prefer it if my parents opened their heart more than their wallets."

For any questions or queries regarding any health issues please don't hesitate to contact me on 97770406 or tracie.bremner@health.wa.gov.au

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