

# 6 Strategies for a Better Relationship With Your Child

By [Michael Courter](#)

Your relationship with your child is a central factor determining your level of happiness. It is even more crucial for them because a child's relationship with their parents is an essential factor in their psychological development and the core of their self-esteem. Maintaining and strengthening the relationship with your child can be difficult for parents that are experiencing their own distress or are taxed from the demands of maintaining their lives. However, some simple strategies can make the process easier and more rewarding.

## 1. Create a recurring, special time together

The best way to create a strong, continuous bond with children is to spend quality time with them each day, even if it is for only 15-30 minutes. If you can give them your full-attention for that entire time your relationship will thrive. You can even give it a name, like "our special time together" or "Johnny's time, etc." As they grow up, they'll know that this is their window to communicate with you about something important. During this time you will want to practice your relationship-promoting communication skills.

## 2. Active listening

Active listening can strengthen and improve any relationship, including with your spouse, a co-worker or your child. This mostly involves paying close attention to someone and letting them know that. A good way to get started is to observe someone and comment on what you see in a non-judgmental way. "I notice that you really light up and smile when you do X." The key here is simply stating facts without adding anything in, asking questions, or trying to make a point. Whatever behavior you comment on is likely to increase in frequency. You will get a better response from "I see you cleaned up after yourself," then, "Why do you always make such a mess?"

With a young child you can ignite their imagination by using active listening while they play. As long as you keep watching them and letting them know what you see they will keep imagining. By commenting non-judgmentally you let them drive the story. This method can help bring any issues the child may be struggling with to the surface because children often communicate through symbolic play and they will feel special and close to you during this time.

### **3. Reflection**

Reflection is another communication technique that improves relationships. When someone is expressing something you can let them know you are listening by stating back to them what you hear. You can state it back simply to young children or paraphrase for older kids or adults. The more you reflect the more people will express to you. Usually, whatever you comment on is what they will elaborate on.

For example, if someone is telling a story that involves their grandmother and you want to know more about that relationship you can comment, “Oh your grandmother was there,” and then they will likely tell you more about her. Or you can simply repeat any feeling words to elicit the emotions involved.

An example of this is if someone tells you they were sad to say goodbye to their friend, you would pick up on the word sad and reflect back “you were sad.” Focusing in on the feeling words will deepen the intensity of what is being shared.

Using this skill effectively can get almost anyone talking and breakthrough shut off communication or impasses. When I first learned it, it worked so well I needed to find ways to turn it off or else people wouldn’t stop talking to me!

### **4. Do activities that you both enjoy**

Often, parents try to do activities that their child enjoys, but that they find boring. A father will only play with dolls for a short while until they reach their limit. This causes the parent to feel resistant to spending this time together, and they’re not as present when they are. Instead, if you choose an activity that you both enjoy, you may be surprised to find that family time starts happening a lot more frequently! It also builds a closer bond.

Think of the things you like to do and see how you can involve your child. Would you rather build models, make art, or play a cooperative video game? They might even be content to just watch you if you explain to them what you’re doing. I find this to be particularly important for fathers. Children today are often starved for attention and closeness with male role models. Be creative and find ways to involve kids in the things you like to do.

### **5. Involve them in your activities**

Young children want to do what we are doing. This is the natural way they learn. Even if it might take some extra time to do the dishes while your child splashes in the water or it might make more of a mess to let them cook with you, it will pay dividends down the road. By involving them when they are young you are setting the pattern that everyone participates in the activities to maintain the home. “In our house everyone helps out.” Relationships develop in the midst of doing things together. It doesn’t matter if the time is spent on things that are labeled leisure activities.

## 6. Pay attention to developmental shifts

Parent-child relationships can suffer when parents fail to meet the developmental needs of their child. Expecting too much from a young child or treating an older child like a younger one can lead to frustration for everyone. If you expect your three-year-old to pick out their own clothes or you expect to pick out what your 14-year-old is going to wear you are in trouble! Your child needs different things from you at different stages of their development. If your relationship with your child goes downhill maybe you need to review [Erikson's stages of psychosocial development](#). Erikson outlined broad categories of psychological stages of development across the life span that are relatively simple to understand. Reading about them can give you a better idea of what your child needs from you at their current stage and what may cause them to struggle.