

Parental wellbeing

Parenting can be one of the most rewarding roles you will take on in life. However, it can also be one of the most stressful.

Research has found that most families experience many changes and challenges and some of these can be very stressful. These may include changes in your relationship with your partner, job changes, financial difficulties, health problems for yourself or someone in your family, and the death of a family member or loved one. Your children may experience difficulties at school, or be bullied, which may place an additional strain on the family.

All of these challenges can have an impact on you, your partner, your children and your ability to cope with parenting. It can make life seem overwhelming.

Here we talk about ways that you can cope with the challenges that may arise for you and your family.

Start with good communication.

Good communication with other members of your family, such as your partner, and your children, forms the basis of a strong family foundation. Being able to talk, without conflict, about a wide range of issues in your relationship can make you feel more supported and positive in your relationship. Modeling good communication skills, and listening to each other, is also important for your children, as they learn how to communicate with others by watching you.

Seek support during tough times.

When there are changes or challenges in life, it can seem difficult to cope with everything on your own. Stressful events can happen throughout life and during these times, reaching out for support from

others can help you handle them. Some people are fortunate enough to have family members or close friends that they can turn to for support – someone to look after the children for a little while, someone who can help with the cooking or cleaning. It is important to ask these people for help if you need it. You shouldn't feel ashamed to ask for help – remember that they may need your help one day too. If you don't have family or friends to turn to, there are other support services within the community that can assist, you can often find these on the internet, or you could make a time to see a social worker at a local community health centre.

Sometimes you, or someone else in your family, may need extra support from a counselor or psychologist to get you through your difficulties. Your GP will be able to refer you to someone who is appropriate for you.

During challenging times your children will learn from you how to cope and get through. It is a great start for them if they see that you are able to get support from others to make it through.

Understand how everyone is reacting.

Everyone reacts differently to life's challenges. And children can respond very differently to adults.

It can help you to understand how everyone is coping if you do a little bit of research on how adults and children deal with different stressors.



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A good example of this is looking at how children deal with grief. While an adult is usually able to verbally express their sadness around the death of someone close to them, children may express their grief through their behaviour. They may withdraw and not want to talk much about it. Or they may start acting out, becoming angry and getting into trouble at school.

Learning more about how different people, and how children, may react to challenging times can relieve some pressure and anxiety for you.

Look after yourself.

Looking after yourself may seem difficult when there is so much else going on in your family. However, during challenging times it is especially important to keep yourself strong and healthy.

Eating sensibly, getting a good night's sleep and doing some light exercise, such as going for a walk, can help you to feel healthier and more positive.

Taking some time for yourself is also a way to regain some energy for yourself, so that you can meet the needs of your family as well as face current challenges.

Do positive things together as a family.

During challenging times it can feel as though there are so many negative things happening in your family. This can make it even more important to take some time out to do some nice things together as a family. Sharing positive experiences can strengthen the bonds in a family and can give each person an extra boost to help them through.

Doing positive things together does not necessarily need to cost money. Your family could go for a walk in the neighbourhood, go to the park or play a game together.

Using as many of these strategies as you can may make a real difference to how you and your family are able to cope during challenging times.

For more information:

Trauma and Grief Network

www.tgn.anu.edu.au

Raising Children Network

www.raisingchildren.net.au

Kids Helpline

www.kidshelp.com.au

Kids Matter

www.kidsmatter.edu.au

Lifeline

www.lifeline.org.au