

Parenting for child and adolescent health: Who is supporting the parents?

Many Australian parents lack confidence and believe they could be better parents, do not believe that parenting comes naturally and want more information and support to achieve better outcomes for their children. When they seek help, they often feel guilty and stigmatised.

The family has been described as 'the nest in which the soul is born, nurtured and released into life'. The influence of the family on the development, health and life of a person is profound and enduring. This is where we learn our health behaviours and where resilience-building starts and grows. Strong families are said to have several things in common: appreciation, open communication, time together, a commitment to promoting happiness and welfare, spiritual wellness, and ways to cope effectively with stress.

Research over the past few decades clearly shows that authoritative parenting is best - parenting that is warm, firm and accepting of the child's evolving need for psychological autonomy. However, empathy and understanding should not eliminate accountability - healthy parents say to their children, "We love you, but we have expectations". Adolescents from authoritative homes achieve more in school, report less depression and anxiety, score higher in measures of self-reliance and self-esteem, and are less likely to engage in anti-social behaviour. They also show more positive social behaviour, self-control, cheerfulness and confidence.

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David Bennett AO FRACP FSAM

Clinical Associate Professor

Head, NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health

The Children's Hospital at Westmead

National president, Association for the Welfare of Child Health