

How to help kids feel good and have fun

Our tamariki need the basics of life – like food, warmth, shelter and clothing – but we ultimately want them to feel loved, secure and happy. So how can we foster their self-esteem and help them feel good?

Have fun together

Any time you play with your children and trigger their imaginations is positive – even if it's just for 10 minutes a day. Every little bit counts!

Encourage creativity

Develop their imaginations by setting up a range of objects and seeing what they come up with. E.g. cardboard boxes, dress up clothes, sellotape, paint, pipe-cleaners, autumn leaves, a blanket over the table, a dance party. Actively encourage your tamariki to 'play' and let them know you enjoy this time too!

Role model happiness

Show them joy. Be playful or even silly in your interactions and talk about what makes you happy. Children tend to follow our lead and copy what we do, so this will help them tune into their positive emotions and have fun with you and others.

Use music

When needed use upbeat music to boost your mood and theirs! Dancing may be required... the combination can be a real feel good fix!

Go old-school

Keep screen time to a minimum and provide toys that encourage imaginative open-ended play. E.g. building blocks, Duplo/Lego, toy kitchens, dollhouse, musical instruments, colouring-in books, dress ups.

Say yes

Try to say 'yes' a lot more than you say 'no'. If your child asks to do something, try to frame your answer to sound like a 'yes'. E.g. If they ask to go outside when there are still jobs to do, instead of: "Not now! We need to finish tidying up." Try: "Yeah, that sounds like fun! First we'll tidy up and then we can go outside."

Think: role models

Keep an eye on what your tamariki are watching, so you can manage their comparisons with fictional TV and YouTube kids.

Offer praise and compliments

Few things will be more important in deciding your child's future than their sense of self-worth. So acknowledge and praise specific things that make your child and whānau special. You might compliment:

- special skills (e.g. drawing, good ideas, skating, singing)
- character strengths (like kindness or a good sense of humour)
- their attempts to try something new, give things a go and persevere.

Show your love

Give hugs, high fives and back rubs, hold their hand, pat their shoulder – show your affection and do things they enjoy! Leave notes in their lunchbox or on their pillow. Describe special shared memories. Make heart-shaped sandwiches. Display photos. Ignore the phone for them. Call when you're away. The little things all add up.

Use a kind voice

Another way to show your love is through your language and tone. The way we talk to and about our tamariki is really important. Talk to your child the way you like to be talked to. Connect before you correct and limit the amount of commands you give. Allow them times to just 'be'.

"JOY IS THE RESULT OF HUMAN CONNECTION" (THE SCIENCE OF PARENTING)

Be their greatest ally

Listen attentively – even to the boring, repeated stories! Laugh at the not-so-funny jokes and acknowledge their big stuff, even if it's not big for you. E.g. "Oh no, your stick broke, it was special. What can we do?" (We promise that if you practice this, it'll feel normal soon!)

Find their super-power

Encourage all the things your tamariki love doing, even if it's not what you're into. While we may love rugby, they may love ballet. It really doesn't matter, as long as they feel good doing it. These small things (like joining the netball team or drawing) may seem trivial, but they could become their favourite passions, the way they find calm or even their careers!

TAKE TIME FOR YOU, TOO!

AS A PARENT, WE OFTEN FEEL GUILTY TAKING TIME FOR OURSELVES. BUT IT'S VITAL YOU FEEL GOOD AND HAVE FUN TOO. CHECK OUT OUR TIPS AT [ALLRIGHT.ORG.NZ/PARENTS](https://allright.org.nz/parents)

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For our favourite kids' books, resources and tips, head to allright.org.nz/sparklers/kids