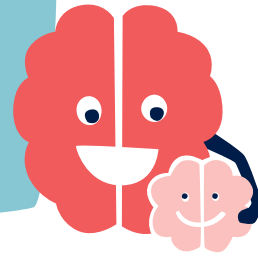


Everyday kindness and connection: *A guide for parents and carers*

Parent Resource

This resource has been developed in collaboration with highly regarded social psychologist, Hugh Mackay AO



Children are born with the capacity for kindness, just as they are born with the capacity for language. But like language, it needs to be nurtured, modelled, and encouraged to flourish. As a parent, you are your child's most powerful teacher. The everyday moments you create at home, the way you listen, the kindness you show, the connections you build, are shaping who they become.

This guide brings together Hugh Mackay's key insights into a simple, practical resource for families. Keep it on the fridge, share it with family or revisit whenever family life feels disconnected or rushed.

A special thanks to Hugh Mackay AO for his collaboration on these resources. Hugh is one of Australia's most respected social psychologists, researchers and authors. For more than 60 years, he has studied human behaviour, relationships and social change, helping us better understand what it means to live a connected and meaningful life.

Please note: This resource has been developed in collaboration with Hugh Mackay and is intended for general information purposes only. It's not a substitute for professional advice. Gotcha4Life does not offer counselling or crisis support.

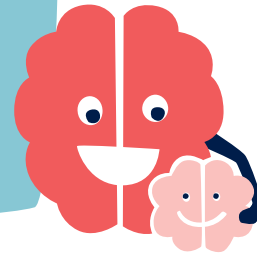
If you have concerns about your child's wellbeing, please speak with your GP or a qualified health professional. You can also explore a range of free, trusted supports and information at gotcha4life.org/help-resources.

For direct support, Kids Helpline offers free, confidential counselling for young people aged 5 to 25. Call 1800 55 1800 or visit kidshelpline.com.au.

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What do children need most? According to social psychologist Hugh Mackay AO, who has spent more than 60 years studying how humans live and connect, the answer is simpler than we might think. They need to belong. To feel seen, acknowledged, and accepted by the people who matter most to them. And that experience starts at home, in the everyday moments most of us barely notice. The way we listen, the kindness we model, and the connections we nurture are quietly shaping our children's mental fitness every single day.

Of all the things we can do for our children, Hugh argues that truly listening to them is the most powerful. Real listening means giving your full attention, resisting the urge to fix or respond, and being genuinely open to what your child is telling you. When children feel truly heard, they feel taken seriously. That feeling, of being seen and acknowledged by the people who matter most, is how belonging is built. Hugh's three-step framework makes this something any family can practise.

3-step listening framework

1

Listen to understand

Resist the urge to form your response while your child is still talking. Focus entirely on what they are saying and how they are feeling.

2

Prove you understood

Before responding, reflect back what you heard:
'So, are you saying...? Is this how you feel about it?'
This shows them you took them seriously - even if you ultimately disagree

3

Respond

Only after you have shown that you understand do you offer your own view, solution, or feedback.

LISTEN



UNDERSTAND



PROVE YOU UNDERSTAND



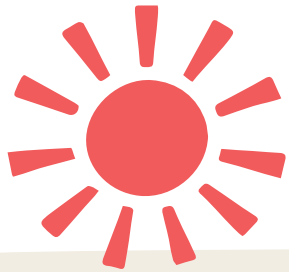
RESPOND

Small things, big impact

Hugh reminds us that belonging is confirmed when others acknowledge us: a smile, a nod, a simple good morning. These small acts cost nothing, but have a big impact. Try weaving these into your everyday life:



- Always acknowledge others—a smile, a nod, a g'day
- Make eye contact. Don't walk looking at the ground or your phone. Be open to connect.
- Put your phone down around your child and give them your full attention.
- Check in on a neighbour, a friendly wave or lemons from the tree.
- Acknowledge new people at drop-off
- Teach children to greet others



Kindness at home

Children learn how to be human by watching the humans closest to them. The kindness we show, to our partners, our neighbours, strangers, and ourselves, teaches our children what kindness looks like in practice. Hugh calls this: relentless, indiscriminate kindness. Not reserved for people we like, but offered to everyone, every day.

- Model kindness - to your partners, neighbours, strangers. Children are always watching.
- Apologise when you fall short.
- Encourage time away from screens.
- Talk about kindness and belonging at the dinner table
- Resist overpraising. Instead notice effort and encourage genuine learning from mistakes.
- Let children see you being vulnerable and honest.