

# Chapter 6

## Positive Parent–Child Relationships

Kimberley O’Brien and Jane Mosco

### 6.1 Parenting in the Twenty-First Century

Family relationships in the Western world have been affected by rapid social and technological changes. Parents are pressured to work longer hours while young children spend more time with alternative carers both within and outside the home. While there is ongoing political pressure in several Western countries to improve maternity and paternity leave and provide subsidised childcare, the majority of families make do with minimal economic and practical assistance when raising infants and toddlers.

Parents usually want the best for their children whatever they conceive this to be. Unlike previous generations, today’s parents are faced with an information industry offering suggestions on every angle of the parenting process. Parenting ‘gurus’ proliferate, sometimes giving different advice or emphasising different aspects of the role. Although the word ‘parents’ is commonly used, there is still an expectation that it is women who take on this primary responsibility with men being the main breadwinners. This division of labour is less and less the norm, although there are clear indications that even where women are working full time outside the home, they still do most of the work within it and take on the primary responsibility for many of the tasks inherent in parenting (Crompton 2006).

More children than ever spend time being cared for outside the family, and there are a plethora of recommendations concerning the quality of that care. Other specific issues that impact the modern parent–child relationship include work demands, greater mobility, the scattering of the extended family, family breakdown and single parenthood. There is regular media coverage on family life; from the general problems of parenting and growing up in today’s world to the need to protect children

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K. O’Brien (✉)  
Quirky Kid Clinic, P.O. Box 598, Woollahra, NSW 2025  
e-mail: kimberley@quirkykid.com.au

J. Mosco  
Bishop Druitt College, P.O. Box 8004, 111 North Boambee Rd, Coffs Harbour, NSW 2450  
e-mail: jmosco@bdc.nsw.edu.au

from abuse and neglect. This chapter explores the evidence, rather than any current zeitgeist on factors and approaches that enable parents to be the best they can be – in order to facilitate the authentic wellbeing of their children (Suldo 2009).

## 6.2 Parenting Styles

Parental responsibility for children and their development varies in emphasis across time and culture. It includes foci on physical health, spiritual development, cultural transmission, socialisation, emotional health and cognitive development. Here we explore what is of benefit to children in all domains of their development – enhancing their ability to flourish and achieve authentic wellbeing.

Parents' relationships with their children are strongly linked with outcomes (Amato 2000; Demo and Cox 2000). The most harmonious and positive parent–child relationships share similar qualities from birth to adolescence although specific practices change as children grow. Baumrind's (1967) classic research identified four styles of parenting in preschool-age families. These are:

- The neglectful *uninvolved* parent
- The controlling and detached *authoritarian* parent
- The warm *permissive* parent with low expectations for their children and weak boundaries for behaviour
- The warm, responsive and encouraging *authoritative* parent with high age-appropriate expectations and limits for their children and the provision of support to meet these (DeHart et al. 2000)

Baumrind found that preschool children in *authoritarian* households were more hostile and less independent, while *permissive* parents were more likely to raise children who were less achievement-oriented and did not develop appropriate independence or resilience. The most self-reliant, content, adaptable and cooperative children were raised by *authoritative* parents. This theory has now extended to children of all ages (Baumrind 1989; Maccoby and Martin 1983) confirming that authoritative parenting predicts healthy child adjustment (Amato 2000; Demo and Cox 2000).

Numerous 'parenting experts' have since explored positive strategies to complement this parenting style, with 'step-by-step suggestions' for raising happy kids (Hartley-Brewer 2004) and creating a 'phenomenal family' (McGraw 2004). These approaches regularly refer to positive strategies such as giving praise and devoting time, enhancing motivation and self-confidence, building respect, trust and security and encouraging independence and self-reliance. Popular catch phrases are littered within parenting literature, such as purposeful parenting: 'the modelling of good emotional and mental stability in order to be the role model your children will remember' (McGraw 2004); proactive parenting: 'we don't wait for things to go wrong before we reflect on our parenting strategies' (Walker 2010); unconditional

parenting: ‘children shouldn’t have to earn a parents approval and they should always feel loved’ (Kohn 2005) and positive parenting: ‘parents who do not overplay their role of police for civilization, lest they invite avoidable resentment, resistance and hostility’ (Ginott and Goddard 2003). A warm, responsive, supportive parenting style with high expectations is also referred to as ‘facilitative’ in some of the literature (Bryant 2001; Roffey 2011).

### 6.3 Learning Parenting Styles

Parenting styles develop from a combination of the parents’ own experiences as children and the society in which they live, including the books they read, the friends they keep and their exposure to different expectations within the community (Buss 2005). Although these influences are usually found locally, ideas about parenting may accumulate through exchanges with other cultures or through extended family, such as grandparents of migrants who remain in the country of origin. This may cause conflict for parents who may need to reflect on what is the best interests of the child in the setting in which they are being raised. Parenting styles are often not questioned until something goes awry. A parent may seek help to change their child in some way and discover they need to change how they are parenting.

### 6.4 Core Principles Underpinning Positive Parent–Child Relationships

*Understanding:* All human relationships are perpetually changing. Maintaining a healthy and enduring relationship requires the ability to empathise with someone, understand their needs and appreciate their alternative perspectives. Effective parenting includes an understanding of how children develop and learn, and what motivates them. Children are also individuals – tuning into their specific likes, dislikes, sensitivities and strengths builds the ability to respond well to their needs as they grow. We must also understand ourselves – what we can expect of ourselves as parents and what support we will require along the parenting pathway (Walker 2010).

*Mutual respect:* This is vital in any healthy relationship. Parents who try to impose their own will on a child are likely to be met with resentment or a simmering sense of frustration (Kohn 2005). Respect means being willing to listen to children and look at situations from their perspective. Even if a parent has the final say in making decisions in the best interest of the child, showing that views of the child are taken into consideration reduces potential power struggles. Self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci 2000) indicates that young people need to feel autonomous, experience choice and feel listened to. Conversely, where parents use a controlling

parenting style, children may learn to try to control others through bullying behaviours (Assor et al. 2002). By acknowledging children's feelings, desires and questions, parents model ways that promote both prosocial behaviour and authentic independence. Positive parents are flexible, able to compromise and work towards mutual goals. For example, if there is a need to reorganise bedroom allocations, the whole family can discuss alternative solutions together. Although parents might make the final decision, this is likely to be more acceptable to the children when authentic consultation has taken place. With an authoritarian parent, the decision may be made without reference to anyone else in the family, who are then expected to comply, often with resentment.

*Open communication:* The quality of communication between parent and child is an indicator of the mutual respect and dignity existing within the parent–child relationship. Adults with the skills to enter the world of children in a compassionate and caring way are helping children to trust their inner reality and develop self-confidence (Ginott 1965). Parents who reflect on themselves and the relationships they share with their children are less likely to be rigid, impatient or negative. This may involve admitting they made a wrong decision or apologising for an unthoughtful comment. These interactions help children learn richer and more developed interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. A parent who listens well and is open to questions teaches the child to articulate emotions safely.

*Time:* Setting aside time to nurture the parent–child relationship is another key to continuing good communication as children mature into young adults (Sanders 2008). Simply spending time with a parent makes children feel valued and worthy of attention particularly where parents follow the young person's lead and participate in an activity the child has chosen. For those who have to compete for their parent's attention this is especially valuable (McNeely and Barber 2010). Giving children attention in the absence of distractions, such as television or competing siblings, provides opportunities for developing new mutual interests, resolving any conflict, maintaining trust, accessing emotional availability and providing close proximity for physical affection. Children also like to be included in adult activities, such as building projects and cooking. Being given responsibilities in such joint endeavours promotes a sense of connection essential for wellbeing and resilience and can foster a sense of independence and confidence – especially if the child is allowed to make and learn from mistakes.

## 6.5 Family Resilience

The literature on family resilience indicates common factors across diverse cultural and ethnic groups that are globally recognisable (Patterson 2002).

Family resilience factors are described as:

- *Having a positive outlook:* such as looking for the best in a situation, acting as though you imagine that things will turn out well.

- *Having consistency of family member accord*: working consciously to reduce stress in the household and use positive conflict resolution techniques.
- *Engaging in flexibility*: being open to spontaneous plans, or changing your mind when it seems appropriate.
- *Using positive family communication*: noticing and acknowledging when children are behaving well, using positive and reinforcing language. Having many more positive than negative statements in daily interactions.
- *Practising sound financial management*: use budgets and forward planning to ensure you can meet your financial commitments.
- *Participation in shared recreation*: going fishing, swimming or baking a cake together.
- *Following regular routines and rituals*: these may include having a regular bedtime routine (game, bath, book, bed) special dinners or celebrations.
- *Being engaged in spirituality*: this may involve saying blessings before meals, engaging in regular meditation or discussing mindfulness around the dinner table.
- *Belonging to wider support networks*, such as a local soccer club, faith-based community or community garden. (Black and Lobo 2008).

These qualities of family resilience are essential tools for leading a meaningful life as well as benefiting the positive development of our children. Although the family unit has gone through many developments and changes, the depth of special meaning it has for people hasn't changed. Family life is reported to be responsible for many significant aspects of our lives, and for many people, positive family experiences are focused around love and security (DCSF 2010).

## 6.6 Parenting Style and Prosocial Behaviour

The relationship between parenting style and a child's prosocial behaviour-behaviour has been studied extensively (e.g. Eisenberg and Fabes 1998; Bierhoff 2002; Grusec et al. 2002). Parental warmth, use of reasoning and autonomy support enhance a child's ability to empathise and adopt prosocial behaviour (Clark and Ladd 2000; Krevans and Gibbs 1996) where a power-assertive behaviour management approach is much less effective – especially over time. Where parents provide children with a caring model this increases both the child's willingness to attend to parental messages and their accuracy in detecting these messages (Knafo and Schwartz 2003; Smetana et al. 2009; Staub 1979). In one example, children observed to have a warm relationship with their parents were rated by their teachers as more prosocial in that their considerate behaviour was intended to benefit others (Clark and Ladd 2000). Parents who express negative feelings toward their children are more likely to raise children with less prosocial behaviour (Deater-Deckard et al. 2001). Authoritative parents also set clear limits and standards of behaviour and utilise an approach that aims to explain and teach the preferred behaviour. This encourages learning and forgiving, allowing children to engage in problem solving and increase their independence.

## 6.7 A Focus on Fathers

Although fathers are less often the focus of parenting research, studies confirm the value of active and authoritative parenting styles for both parents.

When fathers are more involved in children's lives, children experience better friendships and more empathy, have increased educational achievement and a positive sense of self (Flouri 2005). Today's fathers are being more involved in children's lives (Gray 2006) and research suggests that engaging fathers throughout pregnancy and the birth of babies, is more likely to lead to fathers remaining actively involved in bringing up their children (May 1978). There are indications (Craig 2006; Tan 1997) that the higher a father's educational qualification, the more time he will spend with his children. The quality of that relationship remains crucial. Data from an urban Southern Visayan region supported Filipino fathers' involvement in parenting with regards to positive outcomes for school age and adolescent children. This was particularly so for boys when fathers utilised an authoritative style (Harper 2010). Although the best outcome for adolescents results from having two authoritative parents, Simons and Conger (2007) found that having just one could generally protect young people from the more negative impacts of other less preferable styles of parenting.

## 6.8 Ecological Factors That Contribute to Positive Parent–Child Relationships

To better understand how broader social systems contribute to child development, Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) developed *The Ecology of Human Development* theory. He identified four levels within nested systems. The *microsystem* (such as the family or classroom); the *mesosystem* (which is the interaction between those at the microsystem, such as a teacher and parent); the *exosystem* (external environments which indirectly influence development, e.g. parental workplace); and the *macrosystem* (the larger sociocultural context). Bronfenbrenner later added a fifth system, called the *chronosystem* (the evolution of the external systems over time).

Each system contains roles, norms and rules that can powerfully shape development. Although the biggest impact on children is centred around what happens in the home, parents also make important decisions external to family interactions for their children, including which educational philosophy, sport or political party to embrace.

Empirical research suggests that strong and stable relationships in the family home have the greatest impact on a child's happiness and healthy development (DCSF 2009). As 'the conductor of the family orchestra' (Harold 2001), positive adult relationships set the tone of children's family experiences as does the level of marital accord (Walsh 1998, 2002).

Parents who are happier in their relationships participate in more positive relationships with their young children (Simons et al. 1993), so it is not surprising that there is a strong association between the quality of the partners' relationship and better child outcomes (Coleman and Glenn 2009). Children report that the experience of parental conflict is stressful for them, and as a result children can withdraw, become anxious or aggressive (DCSF 2009).

Even in families where parents have separated, when the adults involved manage to work co-operatively, children cope better (Rodgers and Pryor 1998). It is the quality of the relationship with the non-resident parent rather than the frequency of the contact that is important (Gilmore 2006). Positive and consistent parenting with regards to behaviour, support and involvement, is linked with increased academic and behavioural outcomes (London Economics 2007).

Children's happiness also depends on the relationships they witness between other adults residing in their home environment, such as grandparents or alternative carers (DCSF 2010), and the relationships these adults have with them. It is the quality of the relationships not the form of family unit itself that is important.

Children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to the impact of tension between adults and to the reactions or mood swings of carers experiencing stress or tiredness. Parents exhibiting erratic or extreme responses to their child's behaviour are likely to trigger fear, confusion or mistrust within the parent–child relationship. Children's wellbeing depends on the adults in their life being reliable and predictable, providing guidance, meeting both emotional and material needs as well as setting reasonable limits on behaviour. Finkenauer and colleagues (2004) reported that when children from Holland shared sensitive and personal information with a parent, they reported increased family contentment.

As internal family dynamics are impacted by external factors including alternative care arrangements and extended working hours for parents, we need to consider the impact of factors beyond the immediate care-giving environment.

## 6.9 Parent Support

The more supported parents are, the better placed they are to support children and to parent more positively (DCSF 2010).

There are key developmental periods and pressure points where additional education and support are most beneficial. These include the steep learning curve of becoming a new parent, of managing the toddler years, starting school and during the transition at adolescence from child to adulthood. Educational programmes on positive parenting skills can be successful in supporting parents at these times (Moran et al. 2004; de Graaf et al. 2008)

When parents are able to access practical support such as flexible work practices, assistance with caring for children during holidays, times of ill health, or attending school occasions, children benefit. This relieves stress and enables parents to be more involved in their children's lives.

## 6.10 Developmental Aspects of Positive Parent–Child Relationships

### 6.10.1 *Bonding and Attachment – The First 9 Months*

Parents begin their journey before their child is born, with quality health care for mind and body during pregnancy and birth. Stress reduction and extra support at this stage can make a difference to how a mother feels about her role and this in turn may impact on how she responds to her baby.

Securing a healthy and enduring attachment with a child occurs between birth and 9 months (Ainsworth and Bowlby 1991). These early months and the baby's first experiences of the world are crucial. Babies respond to the levels of responsiveness of their carers. Between 6 and 10 weeks there is engagement with the social smile (Sroufe and Waters 1976), by 3 months babies are smiling when they are socialising and interacting with other people (Ellsworth et al. 1993). When parents are playful with their child they can influence a baby's reactions (Repacholi 1998).

According to Bowlby's Attachment Theory, infants require a close and continuous care-giving relationship with a supportive and stable parental figure in order to thrive both physically and emotionally (Bowlby 1973; Ainsworth et al. 1978). In some cases, the bonding process between mother and baby is disrupted through separation, deprivation, depression or bereavement. For infants living in alternative care, primary attachment figures are still essential in the development of security, trust and self-worth (Cassidy 1999; Verschueren and Marcoen 1999). It does not have to be the biological mother.

Gerhardt (2004) highlighted the importance of 'love' in healthy infant brain development. By this she means the extent to which a baby needs are met and ways in which these are met. Emotional nurturing and responsiveness to an infant's attempt to make connections is fundamental and when these needs are unmet there is a rise in stress and levels of cortisol, which has implications for future development. Gerhardt explored how a baby's earliest relationships shape their nervous system and how the development of the brain can affect future emotional wellbeing with particular reference to the way children (and adults) later respond to stress.

Summarising the empirical research on secure and insecure attachments, Sroufe and colleagues (2005) conclude that the beneficial effects of secure attachments are observed in harmonious parent–child relationships and in satisfying, close friendships at later stages of development. A parent's ability to assess a situation from the child's perspective enhances attachment and a positive parent–child relationship (Velderman et al. 2006). A mother's ability to respond promptly to signs of fear, stress, tiredness and hunger for example are fundamental to secure attachment. Research suggests more empathic parents are better able to form close, mutually responsive relationships with their young children (Kochanska 1997).



### ***6.10.2 Toddlers in Today's World***

Toddlers are busy people, responding to physical play, seeking out parental affection, and learning new skills. Parenting that results in shared positive affect – when both parent and child experience positive emotions – has broad adaptive consequences for development, including children's security, early morality and eagerness to imitate parents (Kochanska and Aksan 1995; Aksan and Kochanska 2004). Proactive and responsive parenting, which 'tracks' the child during the day, allows adults to anticipate child needs, notice subtle cues such as tiredness and ensure safety, including encounters with peers. This helps toddlers cope with distress before it becomes intense.

Mothers' internal knowledge of attachment seems important. Vaughn et al. (2007) found that in three sociocultural groups, the mother's ability to create stories rich in attachment themes about everyday events predicted children's ability to use their mother as a secure base when at home, coming to her when they were distressed or needed support. Maternal responsiveness to distress is linked positively with the development of empathic abilities and prosocial behaviours in young children (Davidov and Grusec 2006). For young children in care, quality care can be determined in part by the carer's ability to be responsive to the child's needs.

Early childhood is a time to experience autonomy and become more independent. Some children do this with passion. 'No, me do it' every other minute can be frustrating for busy parents. Children are also naturally curious and want to explore in areas that parents may see as risky. This boundary pushing can involve seemingly challenging behaviours. The key is to recognise this developmental stage and not misinterpret the behaviours as 'naughty', disobedient or disrespectful. Having a clear and structured response to issues of challenging behaviour supports parents to maintain positive parent–child relationships.

Understanding their child's temperament can help parents have realistic expectations. Fearfulness in shyer infants can be reduced by warm, supportive parenting that lowers cortisol (Gunnar et al. 1997). Other strategies include using regular routines and rhythms and responding to needs of the child as they arise. As well as setting age appropriate guidelines, distraction, imitation and modelling reinforces desired behaviour as does noticing when the sought after behaviour is practised.

Parenting can at times hamper healthy development even though intentions are caring. The phenomenon of anxious parents hovering over their own children is sometimes known as 'helicopter parenting' resulting in 'bubble-wrapped kids'. Risk-taking is inhibited and children lack opportunities to explore their own capacities, particularly in terms of physical play. Occupational therapists (Jackson-King 2010) have identified delays in developmental milestones, such as walking, running and climbing due to these inhibitions. Gill (2007) also gives evidence that children's restricted experiences of childhood are hampering their natural development as parents are fearful of the potential risks involved in exploration and

experimentation. Children need encouragement to test out their growing capacities. Too much restriction not only impairs physical wellbeing but also ultimately children's social and psychological wellbeing including their relationship with their parents (Nelson 2010).

### ***6.10.3 Positive Parenting in Middle Childhood***

As children develop to school age and beyond, the same key concepts of warmth, support, high expectations, boundary setting and responsiveness remain critical to effective relationships. When family life has supported children positively in early childhood, this stage of middle childhood (6–11 years) can focus on mastery of skills and increased peer interactions both in school and home, as physical, social and cognitive abilities increase. Across cultures, children this age take on greater responsibilities in the family. In Malawi, when Ngoni children lose their first teeth around 6 years, this indicates their new role. Boys move away from family groupings, independence is encouraged and children are now held accountable for their behaviour (Read 1968; Rogoff 1996)

Parents assist children in developing both independence and competence by teaching skills around the house and monitoring schoolwork. Parents who are firm but have reasonable expectations of behaviour and standards and support children in meeting these, this helps children feel good about their developing skills (Dekovic and Meeus 1997; Feiring and Taska 1996). A controlling style reinforces children's non-competence, either through having things done for them by adults or by belittling their efforts, whilst a permissive style encourages a false sense of self, leading the child to doubt themselves as they get older (Damon 1995). Positive communication is important. Letting children know that it is ok to make mistakes strengthens children's ability to bounce back and try again.

Although parents remain highly influential at this time, peers are also increasing in focus as a key area of feedback for children. Many spend more time with their siblings than with their parents (McHale and Crouter 1996). While most parents strive to maintain a positive relationship with their children, there is greater variability in the degree brothers and sisters get along. Evidence suggests that problematic parent–child relationships go hand in hand with more hostile sibling relationships (Brody et al. 1994; Easterbrooks and Emde 1988), whereas the most positive sibling relationships typically evolve in households with positive parent–child relationships. There is a bidirectional influence between positive relationships within the family and prosocial behaviour outside the family. Parents who encourage and foster cooperative and pretend play between siblings are more likely to raise children with greater social understanding and enhanced social skills in peer group situations (Downey and Condrón 2004). Positive dynamics between all family members is not only dependent on the parent–child relationship, but also related to how much parent's foster positive relations between siblings in early/middle childhood.

### ***6.10.4 Journeying Towards Adolescence and Beyond***

Adolescent development involves complex changes in many areas. Young people are not only maturing physically and biologically, they are increasingly using abstract thinking to explore their understanding of the world and their own identity. The transition from child to adult involves freedoms and responsibilities associated with this bumpy terrain and the parent–child relationship often needs to change in response. These changes are often linked with the cultural milieu. For example Hispanic adolescent boys' relationships with parents were found to improve, as this reflects the cultural traditional status of male roles in the society (Molina and Chassin 1996).

Fuller (2008) points out that the frontal lobes are the last part of the brain to fully mature. This leaves adolescents primed for emotions, romance and running away but not so much for planning, being in control of impulsive reactions and thinking ahead (Dahl 2004; Geidd 2004). Parents can assist their offspring create cognitive pathways that support positive, helpful thinking and learning habits. One way of doing this is to develop co-regulation, in which young people are increasingly encouraged to make their own decisions about things that affect them (Masten 2004). This needs to start in middle childhood and gradually increase as they grow towards adulthood. Rather than tell their teenager what to do, parents ask questions about the things that need to be taken into account, consequences of different decisions and how these help to meet long term goals, not just short term outcomes. This encourages thinking rather than impulsivity and helps the young person feel parents are listening to them. Although teenagers may still make what adults consider to be 'bad' decisions at times this approach leaves the door open for continuing conversation.

Not surprisingly this period of time can be confusing for everyone. It is helpful for parents to be aware of teenage development so interactions are based on realistic expectations. Studies identify adolescents asserting their independence as one of the greatest sources of conflict within the family unit and the greatest threat to an otherwise positive parent–child relationship. In a large cross-sectional study that spanned ages 6 through 18 years, Loeber et al. (2000) found that positive aspects of parenting decreased markedly through middle adolescence.

The life tasks of adolescents are to explore, take risks, become more autonomous and develop their own unique identity. The task of parents is to keep their child safe, on the pathway to healthy wellbeing and coach them well for adulthood. Conflict is therefore often part of the journey. The research also points out, however, that positive relationships with parents can act as a mediator for outcomes of wellbeing (Hayes et al. 2004). Even in this heavily influenced peer environment parenting practices and family belonging do still have a significant effect on wellbeing outcomes for young people (Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider 2001) during this intense developmental stage.

Promoting resilience strategies enables young people to maintain a sense of belonging to the family and reassured that their views matter and are taken into

account. This can include having meals together and celebrating birthday and family customs. Spending time with teenagers on their own (Ashbourne and Daly 2010), engaging positively with their friends and encouraging them to actively engage with a variety of people and other organisations are all effective strategies. Adolescents also learn about themselves and relationships from parents who attend to their own wellbeing and social life, including caring for their adult marital relationship.

The parent–child relationship continues to change as adolescents mature. For young adults who chose to leave home and become more independent, there is another shift as both parties explore new roles, such as friend or mentor (Peel 2003). Dornbusch et al. (1987) suggest that authoritative parenting maintains its effectiveness across the developmental journey and is particularly valuable during the adolescent stage in its more democratic nature.

## 6.11 Cultural Influences on Parenting

Although some literature discusses differences in parenting practices across cultures, ethnic and religious groups, research also indicates some similarities. One such area is that of parental support. Adolescents across diverse groups showed that different parental support can elicit the same meaning in young people from other cultural backgrounds, indicating that instrumental support and emotional support are connected. For example in countries where money or education may be rare and valued, this is seen as an example of parental support by adolescents, whilst in another country, quality time with one another may be rare and valued, and this is seen as parental support (McNeely and Barber 2010).

Just as every parent–child relationship is different, parents from different racial and ethnic communities may attach different priorities to different aspects of parenting. For example, according to Spicer (2010), African–American parents are less likely than Hispanic and white parents to see routines and discussions of feelings as centrally important in the earliest years, whereas white parents are more likely than African–American and Hispanic parents to see setting and enforcing rules, comforting an upset child, and encouraging a child to persist in difficult tasks as important. In all cases, the majority of parents in any population endorse the importance of supportive parenting behaviours, but these subtle differences may indicate potential targets for increased dialogue and understanding on how parents can shape early social and emotional development.

In a literature review of intercultural marriages, Crippen and Brew (2007) found that cultural differences can become amplified when parenting children, each developmental stage potentially triggering new conflicts. Addressing these cultural differences ensures that children have a way to express their feelings and assist with identity formation. When culturally assertive behaviours are expressed in a helpful and respectful way, the parenting process itself can be the medium for passing on the cultural values and practices between parents and children (Keller et al. 2004). Other benefits of intercultural parenting (Vivero and Jenkins 1999) are promoting ‘broader,

stronger, social and cognitive skill sets, greater interpersonal flexibility and less ethnocentric attitude’. Johnson (1995) noted that these challenges and diversity led to family resilience in the areas of creative problem solving and drawing on strengths to overcome difficulties. Again, the conscious choice of parenting style can focus on the positive things that unite us, resulting in a healthier and stronger family.

## 6.12 Conclusion

A wealth of evidence points to a positive, balanced and facilitative approach to parenting as fostering a constructive and effective relationship between parent and child, leading to the best outcomes for children and young people. This warm and caring approach accompanied by high expectations and clear boundaries, supports the journey of development from the key attachment period in infancy, to the school-age years and into adolescence. Positive parenting encompasses the flexibility to respond to each unique stage with mutual respect and open communication. Throughout different cultures and ethnic groups, taking the essence of this facilitative approach provides a compass for navigating the way to wellbeing for parents, carers and children alike.

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**Kimberley O’Brien** is a child psychologist and Director of the Quirky Kid Clinic in Sydney. She is currently completing her Ph.D. at Monash University.  
Contact: kimberley@quirkykid.com.au.

**Jane Mosco** is a psychologist and school counsellor working at Bishop DrUITT College, Coffs Harbour. She also works in private practice with children and their families in Bellingen.  
Contact: jmosco@bdc.nsw.edu.au.