



HOW TO...

develop positive supportive relationships

Quality relationships are important for resilience. Supportive relationships help you through tough times, deal with stress and help you to enjoy the good times. Building a supportive relationship requires effort and commitment but the rewards are amazing and long lasting.

1. **Smile when you talk to mom or dad**

Greet mom (or dad) in a positive, warm and friendly, respectful way whether by phone call or message. That shows you are genuinely happy to 'see' her and to be talking with her.

2. **"I see you" – connect with mom as if you are making eye contact**

Show warmth and affection in the tone of your voice and the words you use. Paying attention to details (e.g. what she looks like today), reading her emotions, all show that you are focusing on her and "seeing" her. Seeing mom allows you to empathise with mom - empathy is important to building good relationships because it involves being sensitive and understanding the emotions of others and responding in appropriate ways. (Watch this video: [Listening with empathy Brene Brown](#)).

3. **Learn her name** (and the rest of the family).

If you do not know mom, learn how she likes to be addressed and how to pronounce her name correctly. Also learn names of the family members and especially baby's name.

4. **Declare your intentions and commit to supporting mom**

Explain why you are contacting mom; that you want to build a supportive relationship with her during this time of her child's life. Explain that you want to partner with her and support her through this important stage of being a new mother. Show that you want to do this from an authentic space and that you look forward to it. Explain what she can expect from you – how often you will contact her, over what platform and how she can communicate with you if she is needing extra support.

5. Commit to supporting mom

If you want to build a supportive relationship, it requires commitment. Explain how long you will be visiting for. What is your commitment?

6. Empathise with mom

Empathy is important to building good relationships because it involves being sensitive and understanding the emotions of others and responding in appropriate ways. Notice the feelings, expressions and actions

7. Start with the positive

Be as encouraging and positive as possible – while staying authentic. Give positive praise first. Notice the positive and affirm it regularly and often.

8. Your language is powerful

Be aware of your choice of words and how much your use of words communicates. Be careful not to make assumptions. Learn to ask open-ended questions and understand that sometimes mom might not want to share information. (Look at this resource for [Conversation starters](#).)

“One of the basic needs of people is to be understood. When you listen to what people say you learn about them and better understand them. Being listened to makes people feel respected, valued, affirmed, loved, appreciated -- understood. Failure to listen comes across as indifference. If people don't feel you care, they will either clam up or stay superficial.”¹

9. Listen!

Listen, really listen, and then listen some more. Listen to truly hear, understand, and 'see' mom. Good listening is active, not passive, by paraphrasing or summarising what you heard. By asking open-ended questions for clarification and deeper understanding.

10. Give your full attention

Focus and pay attention, do not multitask whilst on a call or chat with mom; find a quiet spot to call mom.

11. Honesty, openness and trust

Build your relationships on a bedrock of honesty and trust. Both parties trust that the other is speaking from a position of honesty. Communication is driven by compassion. You care about mom and you want the best for her. This allows you to speak openly, knowing that she will see positive intention in your words, whether she agrees with them or not.

Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.

James 1:19

He who answers before listening -- that is his folly and his shame.

Proverbs 18:13

setting boundaries skills

1. Perspective-taking

The “Golden Rule of Friendship” – “Treat others the way THEY want to be treated” – In order to do that you must move your attention from inside to outside of yourself. You must learn to take the perspective of mom, learning to think about and view the world as she does, but from an objective distance.

2. Respect mom’s right to make her own choices & decisions

You offer your advice without condition, so she is free to decline it. She needs to make informed choices. She needs to own the decision and she will have to own the consequences. Be honest to respect her decision and support her even if you disagree.

3. Do not accept responsibility for her life

“A supportive relationship allows you to help another person to live their life to the best of their ability. It does not require you to live their life for them. You can help them to determine the appropriate course of action in any situation but if you try to take that action for them, you are crossing the line into being controlling rather than supportive.”² “You can support them through a tough period without taking ownership of their consequences.”²

4. Believe in them

You can help mom see that she is capable of more than she is currently achieving. You can believe in her during those difficult times when she struggles to believe in herself. Believing in people can really move them to act.²

5. Base relationships on equality

“In a supportive relationship, you will consider others as equals though you may have to disagree and act against their wishes. The consideration and respect you afford them will ensure that the relationship remains, healthy, even after disagreements.”²