



Connecting with children at different ages

Parenting works best when it matches the child's age and needs. Read the following tips to get ideas on what is going on for children of different ages, what they might need from you, and ways to get on well together.

INFANTS are learning to follow objects and people with their gaze, and make associations between what they see, hear, taste and feel. Infants quickly learn to recognise familiar faces. Infants are developing physical skills including lying on their tummy, holding their heads, crawling, standing and walking.

Connection with infants can be strengthened through play. Some ideas for play include toys in a range of colours and sizes, reading, singing, making animal sounds and peek-a-boo.

PRE-SCHOOLERS are gaining more independence to explore the world and are developing their physical skills. Pre-schoolers are also developing their language skills and may have small conversations, ask questions and follow basic instructions. However, pre-schoolers often communicate their needs through behaviour.

Connection with pre-schoolers can be strengthened through social play. At this stage children may enjoy drawing, singing and dancing to nursery rhymes, talking and reading, outdoor play, pretend play and dress ups.

PRIMARY SCHOOL AGED CHILDREN are becoming more independent in social interactions outside the family as they spend time at school. Primary school aged children are developing further social and physical skills, are learning to express emotions and are broadening their perception and understanding of the world.

Connection with primary school aged children can be developed through the interests of the child. Children this age may enjoy singing, music, reading, drawing, outdoor games and activities, such as ball games and bike riding. Find out what they like and talk to them about it.

ADOLESCENTS are undergoing the onset of puberty, leading to physical, emotional, cognitive and social growth. This may lead to frequently changing intense emotions, seeking out new experiences or risk taking behaviours. They may also experiment with their identity, leading to changes in values and preferences.

Connection with adolescents can be strengthened by taking time to talk, listen, and do activities together that interest the teenager, such as seeing a movie, playing a board game, or enjoying shared meal times.

YOUNG ADULTS are reaching a stage of independence from their caregivers with increasing levels of responsibility. At this stage many young adults are also making decisions about their career or looking for study pathways. This may involve them moving out of home and establishing themselves away from their family.

Connection with young adults can be strengthened by keeping each other informed about each other's lives, and finding an agreed level of communication. Young adults still appreciate spending quality time together, for example, sharing a meal or an activity they enjoy.

Project Air Strategy acknowledges the major support of NSW Health and MH-Children and Young People, Mental Health Drug and Alcohol Office, NSW Ministry of Health. The Project works with mental health clinicians, consumers and carers to deliver effective treatments, implements research strategies supporting scientific discoveries, and offers high quality training and education. Contact us at info-projectair@uow.edu.au or visit www.projectairstrategy.org