Reconnect with children

Experts recommend parents make an effort to build relationships, and even the smallest gesture can be a winner

PSYCHOLOGIST Gordon Neufeld’s work, and his book Hold On To Your Kids, emphasises the critical importance of children’s relationships and attachments to their parents.

How we relate to our children matters. How many of us parent with “relationships” in mind? Too often our tendency is to parent with “managing behaviour” in mind. Children are more than their behaviour and it is important that we parent in response to relationship needs, in ways that cultivate a connected relationship with our children, and in ways that nurture, preserve and restore child-parent relationships.

Too often, the pressures of busy lives mean we create experiences of separation instead of bonding experiences. So how can we build stronger connections with our children to ensure they feel loved, safe and secure?

I have been reading a lot about wholehearted loving, living and parenting. At the core of the research related to this is the idea of connection and feeling a sense of connectedness.

As well there is a lot of emphasis on living in the moment and being present. Children have a natural capacity to live and play in the present moment. When we make time in our busy lives and join them, even briefly, it can make a positive difference to their sense of belonging and connectedness and to their relationships with us.

Cultivating play and laughter, song and dance, fun and light-heartedness in our daily interactions with our children can build heart connections and strong attachment relationships. As one myself, I know that working parents in particular struggle with finding and forging quality time with their children, and sometimes we think that quality time has to be about finding a big chunk of time.

However, there is research that highlights the value of micro-moments of loving connections – that is, building bonds with our children through tiny but frequent loving and playful acts of care and connection.

Parenting author Maggie Dent (www.maggiedent.com) believes the more micro-moments of connection we cultivate in our homes, the happier everyone will be.

She suggests nurturing moments of connection through strategies such as:

■ Non-verbal messages of connection, like high fives, thumbs up, smiles and winks.
■ Symbolic gestures like blowing and catching kisses.
■ Cultivating bed-time rituals, such as “three things that went well in my day today were...” or “I love you more than...”.
■ Retelling fond family stories and memories.
■ Leaving notes or funny pictures in school lunchboxes or on the bathroom mirror.
■ Creating moments of fun, lightness and laughter.
■ Taking a small bite out of your child’s toast or sandwich.
■ Hiding loving messages around the house.
■ Joining children and enjoying children as they watch their favourite show.
■ Engaging in spontaneous hugs, cuddles and tickles.