

THE FEED THEIR BELIEF REPORT



Promoting optimism and nurturing strengths to fuel the limitless potential in every Aussie kid

 Sanitarium™
The Health Food Company

Weet-Bix™



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This report was prepared in collaboration with Forge Wellbeing and parenting expert Dr. Justin Coulson, and released in January 2022.

The research underpinning this report was collected over a 12 month period from June 2020 to June 2021. It examines the factors that impact self-belief in children as they progress through school. The report also provides parents and caregivers with evidence-based tips to support their child's wellbeing, helping them to develop a positive sense of self, a mindset that turns dreams into reality and the inner strength to get back up when life gets you down.

Foreword

Our kids enter this world with limitless belief, an incredible superpower that fuels optimism, creativity, curiosity and courage. It helps them believe they can become anyone and achieve anything – after all, what reason do they have to believe that these dreams won't come true?

As we grow and learn more about ourselves and the world around us, reasons can start to appear. Some are external and completely rational thoughts, but arguably the biggest barriers are the ones inside our minds. These can start as little voices, reasonably questioning what's really possible, but over time with life's hurdles and experiences, they can become louder, and sadly for some, can't be ignored. When self-belief erodes, it can take with it the unique potential for greatness that exists within a child.

Caring for the health and happiness of Aussie kids is embedded in the DNA of Weet-Bix. We know that healthy habits play an important role in helping our younger generation to thrive. In fact, evidence demonstrates a good diet and active lifestyle can together have a profound impact on mood and mental wellbeing. This is why, for 90 years it's been our mission to give families quality wholegrain nutrition to start their day. Over the past two decades we've strengthened our commitment to children's health and wellbeing through physical activity initiatives like the Weet-Bix Kids TRYathlon™, our support of school breakfast club programs and by providing generations of Aussie kids with inspiring role models to look up to. It's why so many of us here at Sanitarium bring so much passion to our work and why as a mum of three kids myself, I have been so excited to see the **Weet-Bix Feed their Belief Report** come together.

Our report reveals that self-belief is being compromised, too early in life by an increasing number of influences. This is limiting the potential of the next generation to have and hold on to those big, audacious dreams that sometimes, whether through perseverance, resilience, sheer hard work or just plain luck, can and often do come true, making the world a better place because they did.



The report also reveals that optimism is down, with 1 in 5 students saying they already feel negative about their self-esteem as they enter high school. We're interested in understanding why, and working out how we can help. Since Forge Wellbeing collected the data for this report, the Australian Government has unveiled its National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, promoted as a world first. In recognition that half of all adult mental health challenges emerge before the age of 14, it will focus on supporting children aged 0-12 – a good reminder that as happy and care-free as we think our children's lives are, it's never too early to nurture their wellbeing.

I hope the tips and expert advice from Dr. Justin Coulson within our report helps every Australian parent support their child in navigating an ever-changing world, identifying their strengths and striving towards their potential - whatever that might be. Personally, I have taken great insight and am looking forward to starting the new school year with fresh perspective on what my kids need to imagine big, bold and brave dreams and keep believing in their incredible ability to turn them into reality.

Jessica Manihera

Mum of three

Head of Marketing, Sanitarium Health Food Company



“When self-belief erodes it takes with it the unique potential for greatness that exists within a child”

Meet Dr. Justin Coulson

I believe that deep inside every Aussie kid is a remarkable capacity to be excellent in something. Perhaps even powerful. Throughout my career I have spoken to tens of thousands of people about relationships in many facets of life, but especially in family life because it's these relationships that are the bedrock of children's wellbeing, and arguably wellbeing throughout our life course.

As a dad to six of my own children, and the author of six books about raising kids, I've seen the research come to life. I know that if we want to fuel self-belief and encourage resilience and optimism in our children, there are things we can do as parents and caregivers that make all the difference. It all starts with the example we set. What's our self-talk? Do we go after challenges? Do we face our fears? Do we believe in ourselves?

Next, we fuel our children's self-belief by believing in them. We tell them we know they can do it. We reassure them that if they fall, we're there to catch them and help them try again. We listen to them to show their voice matters – that they're worthy of being listened to. By being that secure, safe adult in their lives, we fuel the belief that they're good enough as they are, and that they can challenge themselves to be whatever they hope to be in life. Help build their worth and identity, and they'll build their belief and resilience.

Fuelling self-belief and resilience is achieved through meaningful connection – those minute-by-minute micro-interactions we have with our children where we tap into their lives. Whether it's over a bowl of breakfast in the morning, driving them to school, playing in the backyard, helping with their homework or tucking them into bed at night, our investment in our relationship with our children is the foundation of their feeling of worth, their outlook on life and their interpretation of the world around them.

In this report we discuss a number of ways to help children develop self-belief, identity and optimism that will enable them to thrive, both as a growing child but also as they enter adolescence and adulthood. I hope you find the report both insightful and useful as you navigate life's most rewarding challenge – parenthood.

Dr. Justin Coulson



“I believe that deep inside every Aussie kid is a remarkable capacity to be excellent in something”

Helping Aussie kids achieve their potential starts with wellbeing

Young people today face unprecedented challenges in navigating a rapidly changing world, which has been particularly uncertain over the past two years. 24-hour news cycles and social media feeds are filled with stories about climate change, pandemics, house prices, job losses and school closures, which are bound to bring a feeling of uncertainty and fear for young people.

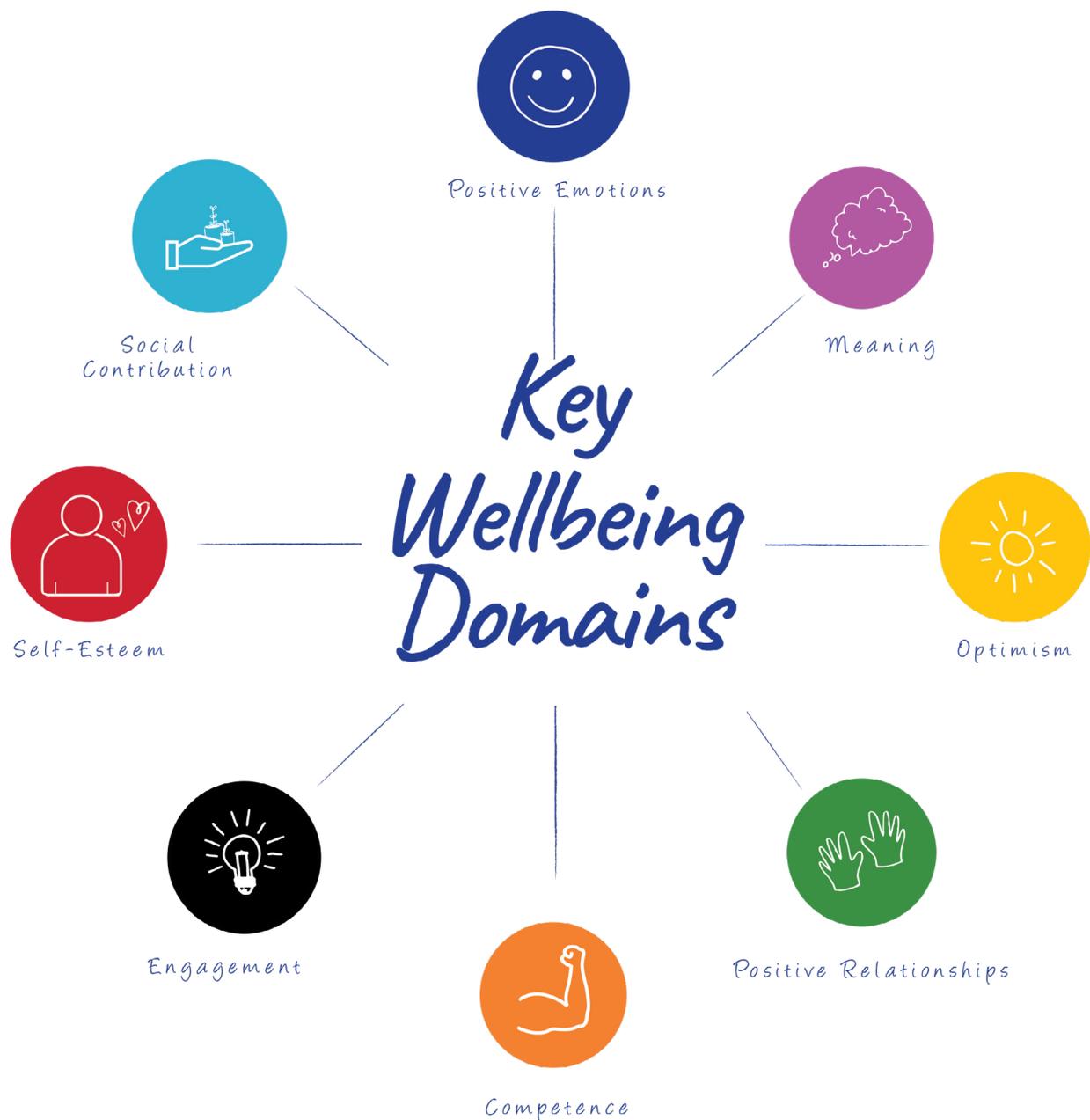
In gathering data to understand the state of children's wellbeing in Australia, we turned to Forge Wellbeing, an organisation founded in 2020 by former NRL star and dad-of-three David Gower and his business partner and friend Jason Stewart. Both men had seen first-hand the impact of poor mental health on youths and adults around them, and wanted to use their knowledge and skills to help young people develop positive self-esteem and enjoy greater health and wellbeing. The Forge approach recognises that both 'feeling good' and 'doing good' are critical in helping children feel positive about who they are.

To customise wellbeing programs for schools and help teachers and parents deliver tailored support for individual students, Forge has developed a simple, evidence-based survey to help children report on how they are feeling. Drawing from positive psychology, it asks questions corresponding to eight wellbeing domains that have been identified by leading researchers as key foundations to good mental health and wellbeing. Over a 12-month period, Forge surveyed 27,000 primary and high school students – the collective survey results provide the data points in this report, making it one of the biggest studies of its kind on children's wellbeing.

To learn more about Forge Wellbeing and find out how they can support students at your child's school visit www.forgewellbeing.com.au



-  **1. Positive emotions:** The experience of happiness, gratitude, joy and love are all indicators of positive wellbeing. Positive emotions broaden our minds and build resources for resilience and flourishing. In other words, **feeling good** is good for you.
-  **2. Meaning:** Meaning enables people to understand who they are and what they do. It allows them to connect with a future image of themselves. Finding your **life purpose** is a journey about self and doing the things that express who you are.
-  **3. Optimism: Optimistic people** tend to maintain a generally positive view of their future. Even when faced with difficulties, they tend to see the light at the end of the tunnel and this type of thinking improves their wellbeing.
-  **4. Positive relationships: Uniting & connecting** with our partners, children, families, friends and colleagues has a significant impact on our wellbeing. Positive relationships can serve as a strong positive factor for resilience.
-  **5. Competence:** There are inevitable challenges we all must face along the way. Planning what we want to achieve and having the grit to persevere enables us to **reach our goals**.
-  **6. Engagement:** Flow is an optimal state of **engagement** where people are so immersed in their activity that they lose track of time. Being able to really engage is about using personal strengths and choosing interesting challenges.
-  **7. Self-esteem: Self-esteem** refers to feelings about self. It is influenced by whether we feel we are meeting societal and cultural norms. People with high self-esteem appreciate and value themselves and are more resilient in the face of challenges.
-  **8. Social contribution: Helping others** improves our wellbeing. Even small acts of kindness enable people to empathize, nurture positive relationships and practice gratitude, contributing to a sense of purpose,



The Forge Wellbeing data shows high school student average ratings are lower in 7 of the 8 wellbeing domains, compared to primary school student average ratings. In addition, there is significant decline in average ratings from Kindergarten to Year 12 for positive emotions, self-esteem, optimism and competence, which we'll explore throughout this report.

However against the backdrop of some worrying data, there are some promising trends emerging, with most children reporting positive relationships with parents, caregivers and friends. They're also highly engaged in mental health conversations, which brings with it the ability to provide empathy, care and support for others who may be experiencing wellbeing challenges. This compassion appears to extend through to their positive social contribution scores. With evidence demonstrating that there are wellbeing benefits associated with doing good for others, the next generation are already evolving to meet the challenges of our ever-changing world.

Nurturing Self-Esteem



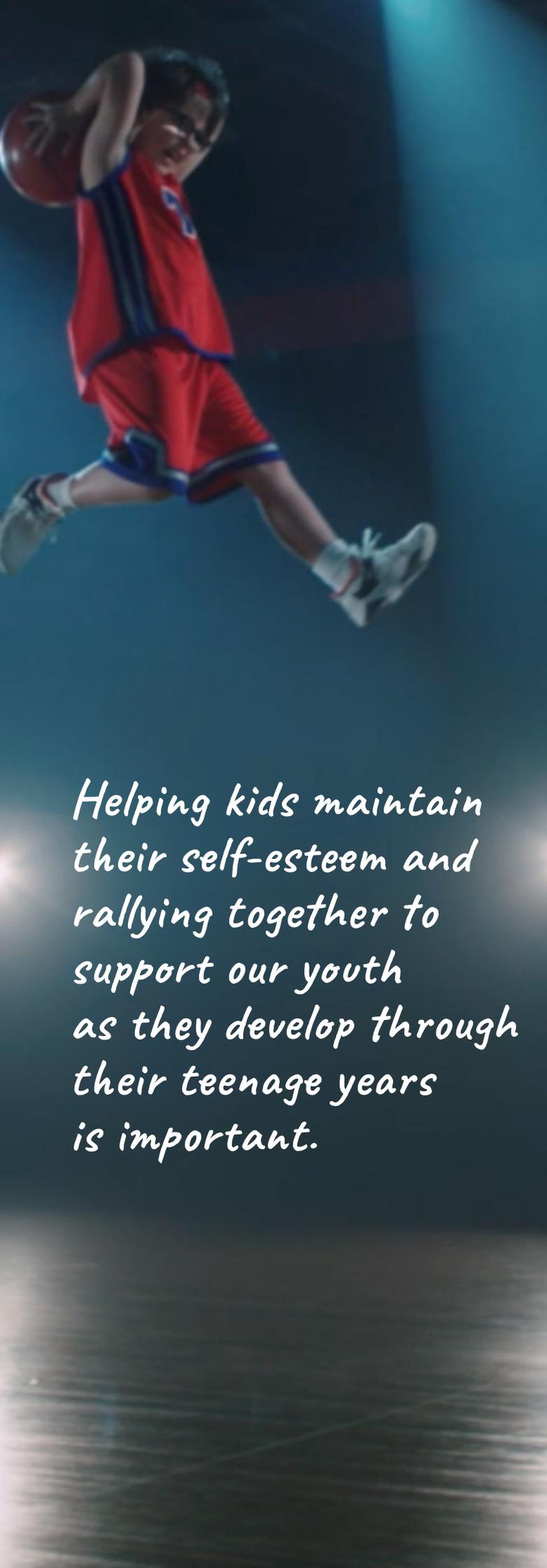
Self-esteem is the extent to which humans value themselves, and this changes as they develop, learn and engage with life.

Positive self-esteem builds confidence and allows children to try new things, take healthy risks, act independently, take pride in their accomplishments and help others where possible². Negative self-esteem can impact the quality of life in ways such as having negative feelings, problems with connecting with others, a fear of giving things a go, a fear of judgement and low resilience³.

As self-esteem develops and changes frequently overtime, it can be challenging for parents or caregivers to navigate this, particularly for those who may struggle with their own⁴. Major factors that affect self-esteem in adolescents include school adjustment, family harmony, social support, body-image, depression and problematic behaviour such as underage drinking, physical altercations and illegal activity⁵.

For high school aged kids, declining self-esteem is one of the biggest wellbeing challenges they face. While all eight domains decline throughout secondary school, self-esteem has the largest decline, with a 15% drop in students who say they feel positive about their self-esteem between the start (Year 7) and end of their high-school years (Year 12). The average for girls is also lower than boys, with only half of girls in secondary school saying they have positive self-esteem, compared to 68% of boys.

Almost one in five students already feel negative about their self-esteem when they enter high school, so proactively addressing and supporting self-esteem early on is critical.



Dr. Justin's Tips to Maintain Self-Esteem

1. Relationships

Relationships matter more now than ever and there are two key relationships that should be fostered:

- Friendships – it's important to encourage children to have and maintain friendships throughout school years as it promotes continuity in people they can confide in and share positive experiences with.
- Parents – Having regular check-ins will help parents have a sense of their children's thoughts and emotions so any changes can be spoken about. Self-esteem also comes from knowing they are loved and belong to a family that values them.

2. Familiarity with the school

With children spending a third of their day at school, a sense of "school belonging" is vital. Children who experience this belonging, experience more positive developmental outcomes than those who don't have a sense of social cohesion and meaning at school. They do better at school, have stronger, better friendships, have better mental health, and transition to adulthood in healthier ways.

3. Build competence and strengths

Parents can support building their child's competence and strengths by encouraging their children to participate in extra-curricular activities and pursuing their passions, so they continue to learn and develop new skills and talents.

4. Healthy habits can help

Encouraging a holistic approach to health and wellbeing from an early age will help maintain a child's self-esteem. This approach includes things like being physically active and having a healthy diet, to pursuing interests and engaging with school, to starting healthy habits and participating in household responsibilities.

Helping kids maintain their self-esteem and rallying together to support our youth as they develop through their teenage years is important.

Promoting a Positive Outlook



A positive outlook⁶ is about looking for the good opportunities in a situation rather than the bad. But it's important to note, it's not about looking at the world through rose-coloured glasses or not being realistic about the trials of life.

The Forge Wellbeing data reveals a decline in students' positive emotions as they progress through high school, with an average decline of 35% from Kindergarten to Year 12. 91% of Kindergarten-aged children rated positive overall for positive emotions, compared to only 50% in Year 12. Sadly, 1 in 10 high school students responded that they did not feel positive at all.

Promoting and inspiring a positive outlook amongst children and adolescents is incredibly important as it will help them grow and develop lifelong resilience, optimism and self-belief.

Girls and boys in Kindergarten ranked the same in positive emotions, however there's a clear contrast between their positive emotions as they progress through to Year 12, with boys feeling more positive than their female counterparts in every year of high school.

Dr Justin suggests that there are a number of influences in society today that are affecting these students, which in turn leads to a decline in positivity, optimism and self-belief in students.

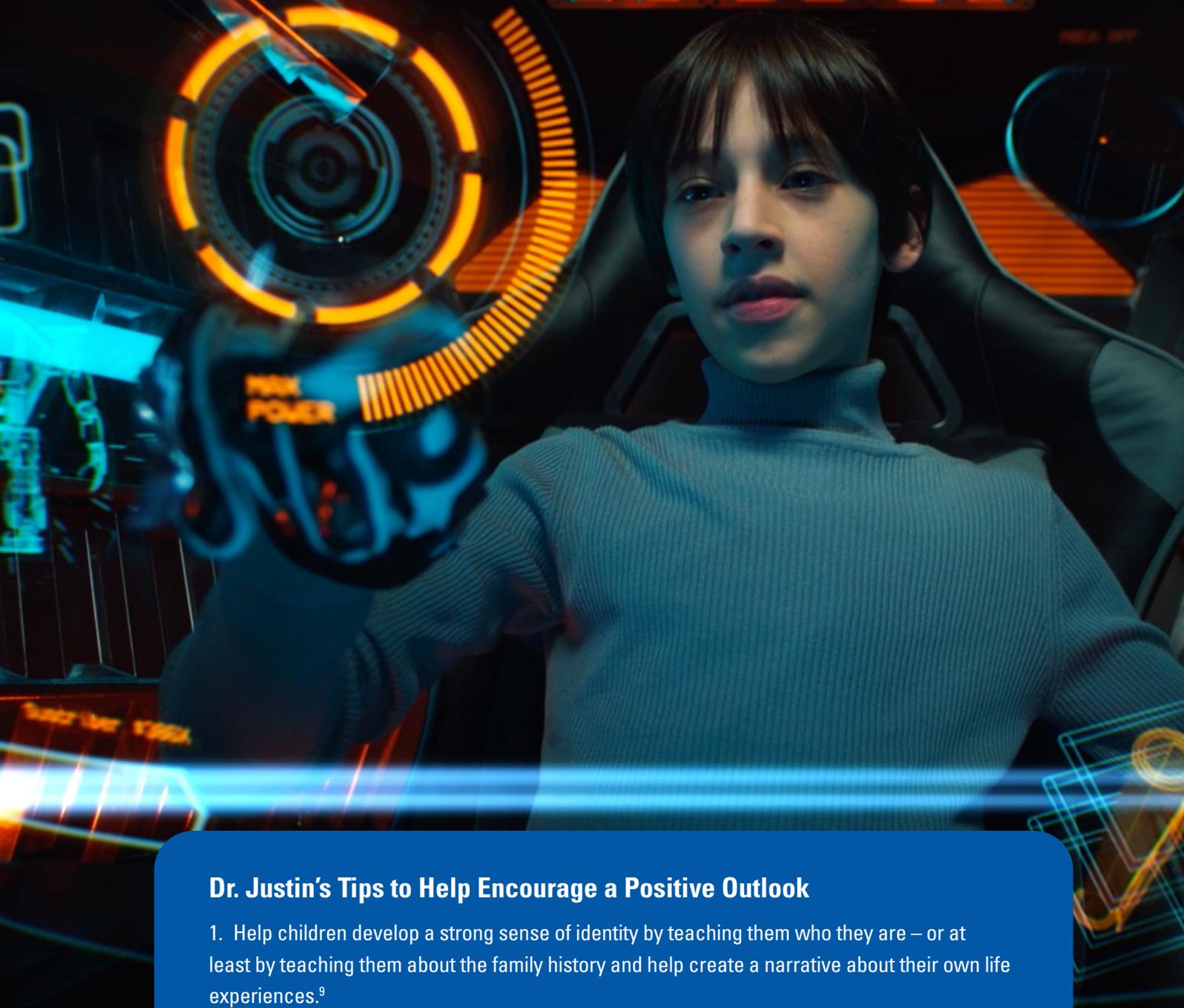
- **Increasing awareness of social comparison:** comparing clothes and other personal belongings to friendship groups and whether they're in the 'popular' or 'cool group'. It can also extend to an increase in sexual pressure, as students feel the need to imitate what they believe their friends are doing or even what they're reading or seeing on social media or on TV.

- **Increasing pressure to perform academically:** 67% of Australian students report feeling very anxious even if well prepared for a test, compared to the international average of 56% (64% for girls and 47% for boys)⁷. This pressure can lead to students comparing themselves to their peers as well as feeling the pressure from teachers and sometimes parents too.

- **Growing concern in body image:** this is particularly prevalent amongst females, as their bodies go through a hormonal change⁸ with puberty, which can lead to a lack of self-esteem and positivity.

- **Breakdown in a family dynamic:** this can have an impact on children's mental health, highlighting the importance of having a stable family and home environment.

- **Awareness of global concerns:** this is particularly common in today's climate, with young Australians feeling the effects and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change.



Dr. Justin's Tips to Help Encourage a Positive Outlook

1. Help children develop a strong sense of identity by teaching them who they are – or at least by teaching them about the family history and help create a narrative about their own life experiences.⁹
2. Continue to provide developmental opportunities such as trying different hobbies to develop their passions and strengths.¹⁰
3. Have a strong sense of belonging in three core domains: family, peers, faith or cultural group.
4. Reduce academic pressure by encouraging pursuit of interests rather than grades, and developing a range of interests.
5. Take a strengths-focused approach to parenting. Try to focus on the good attributes and contribution of your child rather than weaknesses and shortcomings.
6. Healthy diet, quality sleep and good levels of physical activity also contribute to positive mindset, with a growing body of evidence demonstrating how healthy active lifestyles can actually boost mood and enhance mental wellbeing.

Leaning Into Strengths to Fuel Engagement



Strengths help unleash the potential for excellence that are inside all humans. Strengths are cultivated by developing an awareness they exist, finding ways to access them, and making the effort to both expand them and utilise them every day¹¹.

When a child, or a person of any age, does something they enjoy, it releases dopamine. This makes a child feel joy and a sense of accomplishment. It also keeps them focused and motivates them to continue developing their talents in their particular interests or passion.

Every Aussie kid has their own unique combination of strengths, and studies have found that children have greater wellbeing when they have parents who identify and encourage their strengths¹². Using a strengths-based parenting approach and fostering passions will help increase their engagement throughout their school years.

The Forge Wellbeing data shows that engagement declines between Kindergarten (79%) and Year 6 (69%), and then again between Year 7 (79%) and Year 12 (68%), as the curriculum becomes routine and exam focused. Forge Wellbeing finds the 10% increase between Year 6 and Year 7 is mainly due to students being introduced to a more diverse curriculum in high school.

Dr Justin's Tips on How to Discover and Explore Your Kid's Strengths

- 1. Maintain an open dialogue:** have conversations with kids and offer them experiences that facilitate their ability to use their strengths. It can be as simple as a conversation as to what hobbies they'd like to explore or what new activities they're keen to try.
- 2. Support their ideas:** give them a range of opportunities to explore their ideas as this will help them feel encouraged to always be curious and continue ideating.
- 3. Encourage them to try new things:** development of competence in a broad array of arenas without an emphasis on early specialisation, as this is linked to lower wellbeing across the lifespan.
- 4. Find peers and mentors who share similar interests:** an active exploration of activities where relationships can be built with peers and mentors will allow them to share their passions with others and feel a sense of connection and belonging.
- 5. Promote autonomy in decisions:** allow them to make choices around strengths development so that the child feels part of their own journey when it comes to discovering and allowing their strengths to flourish.

By exploring passions, there's an opportunity to identify a child's strengths and unlock their potential.

Dr. Justin's Tips to Maintain Engagement

1. Lean on personal strengths: encourage kids to lean on their personal strengths and choose challenges and curriculum that interests them. As the curriculum becomes more diverse when students enter high school, students should turn to their passions and strengths to improve engagement.

2. Put less focus on grades: whilst there may be societal pressure through school years for performing well, specifically for grade-related outcomes towards the final years, it's important parents help minimise this pressure by not adding to it.

3. Participate in group activities: focus on participating in school groups and activities that promote a sense of community, connection and contribution, such as playing in a band or joining a drama club.



Maintaining Optimism



Optimism is defined as generally having a positive view of the future. Even when faced with difficulties, there's still light at the end of the tunnel. This type of thinking improves things like mood, self-esteem, confidence and importantly, hope. This differs to positive outlook, which is defined as having a positive attitude towards life.

When children do not feel hopeful, they too often feel hopeless. Hopeless children set fewer goals and their view of the future dims. Often they doubt themselves and their capacity to accomplish anything of value. This in turn affects their approach to school and to life, as well as reducing their resilience and impacting their wellbeing.

The Forge Wellbeing data shows that 3 in 4 school aged children feel positive about themselves and their lives, but optimism does decrease as they mature and question aspects of life. 84% of Kindergarteners have a positive overall level of optimism, compared to 60% in Year 12.

It's important to help kids maintain their optimism and self-belief in their younger years to then set them up solidly for high school.

Taking a strengths-based approach and using positive parenting styles, helps to build resilience in children.

TIPS TO MAINTAINING OPTIMISM

- 1. Ask them about their hopes and dreams:** dreams give kids a sense of purpose as well as excitement, which will help drive motivation and optimism.
- 2. Support kids in pursuing what works for them, rather than what works for the parent or caregiver:** kids can sometimes have lofty or ambitious plans and goals, if it works for them and makes them positive and optimistic then that should be encouraged.
- 3. Encouraging a sense of belonging/social wellbeing and strong relationships:** this is central to shaping who children are and who they can become. Once confident in this area, they are then able to form¹³ strong relationships, which will not only help them in their friendship circles but also for future relationships as they mature both personally and professionally.
- 4. Develop self-efficacy through developmentally appropriate risk-taking and competence building:** for example, when we ask a child, 'can you do it?' and they say 'yes', they are demonstrating self-efficacy. They believe that their action will lead to a desired outcome. Parents or caregivers should only become involved in doing things for children if they genuinely need help – such as if they are tired or stressed. When we go beyond involvement and become over-involved, we reduce self-efficacy.
- 5. Support autonomy:** this is built on encouraging children and teens to act for themselves in harmonious and integrated ways. That means they choose for themselves how they reduce pressure and are consistent with what they want to do¹⁴.



Investing in Meaningful Connections



High levels of positive involvement from family and friends help children flourish, as relationships drive a sense of belonging, confidence and self-belief.

The Sanitarium Little People Big Lives report found that it is important for children to experience and witness loving and respectful relationships, which can promote positive mental health and behaviours that are helpful for the child's wellbeing and life satisfaction¹⁵.

Promisingly, the Forge Wellbeing data shows that 91% of primary school students and 80% of secondary students feel positive or very positive about their relationships, including friends, family and other people in their lives.

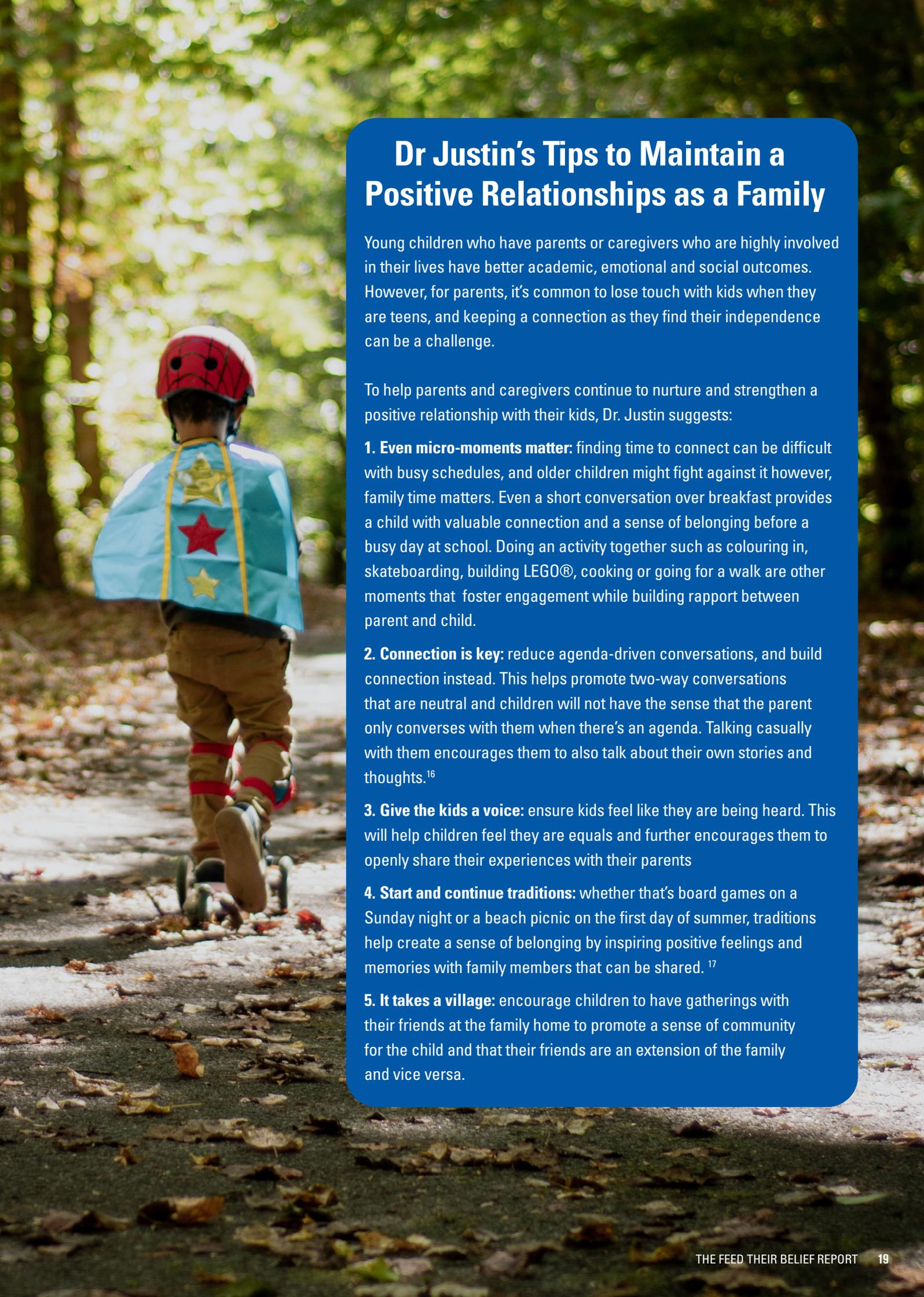
Dr Justin's Tips to Maintain Positive Friendships

When it comes to friendships, these relationships are critical for a child's self-esteem. When they have good friends, they have a sense of belonging and a sense their friends care about them, which in turn helps them feel good about themselves.¹⁸

To help children maintain positive relationships with their friends throughout their school years, parents can:

- 1. Organise activities:** encourage get-togethers and participation in wholesome, developmentally appropriate activities.
- 2. Build a wider network:** build friendships in multiple contexts so if the relationship with one group declines, there are other friends to lean on.
- 3. Foster the positive friendships:** encourage the friendships that are important to your child for example, if there is a particular relationship that brings a child joy, even if they're from different schools.¹⁹
- 4. Admire good qualities in peers:** if parents see their child's friends do something positive, they should discuss it with their child and explain why they admire this kind of behaviour and also talk about other qualities that build good, strong friendships.²⁰



A young child is seen from behind, riding a tricycle on a paved path in a park. The child is wearing a red Spider-Man helmet and a light blue cape with yellow stars and a red star. The path is covered with fallen leaves, and the background is a lush green forest with sunlight filtering through the trees.

Dr Justin's Tips to Maintain a Positive Relationships as a Family

Young children who have parents or caregivers who are highly involved in their lives have better academic, emotional and social outcomes. However, for parents, it's common to lose touch with kids when they are teens, and keeping a connection as they find their independence can be a challenge.

To help parents and caregivers continue to nurture and strengthen a positive relationship with their kids, Dr. Justin suggests:

- 1. Even micro-moments matter:** finding time to connect can be difficult with busy schedules, and older children might fight against it however, family time matters. Even a short conversation over breakfast provides a child with valuable connection and a sense of belonging before a busy day at school. Doing an activity together such as colouring in, skateboarding, building LEGO®, cooking or going for a walk are other moments that foster engagement while building rapport between parent and child.
- 2. Connection is key:** reduce agenda-driven conversations, and build connection instead. This helps promote two-way conversations that are neutral and children will not have the sense that the parent only converses with them when there's an agenda. Talking casually with them encourages them to also talk about their own stories and thoughts.¹⁶
- 3. Give the kids a voice:** ensure kids feel like they are being heard. This will help children feel they are equals and further encourages them to openly share their experiences with their parents
- 4. Start and continue traditions:** whether that's board games on a Sunday night or a beach picnic on the first day of summer, traditions help create a sense of belonging by inspiring positive feelings and memories with family members that can be shared.¹⁷
- 5. It takes a village:** encourage children to have gatherings with their friends at the family home to promote a sense of community for the child and that their friends are an extension of the family and vice versa.



Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds

Research demonstrates there is a level of interconnectedness between physical health and mental wellbeing, including growing evidence on the positive role of a healthy diet and active lifestyles on both children's bodies and minds, but perhaps we don't need science to tell us this. When you feel healthy, you feel bright and energetic, ready to face the day and more confident in your ability to overcome the challenges it may hold. Quite simply, when you feel healthy, you feel good.

For children, a healthy diet, active play and quality sleep are three of the most critical foundations for optimum growth and development. Inherently, these behaviours provide physical health benefits but as the **Sanitarium Little People Big Lives Report** discovered, they offer mental health and emotional wellbeing benefits too.

Eating Well

A healthy diet helps kids grow and function to the best of their potential²¹. It also plays a key role in helping us stay well throughout our lives. But food is so much more than just fuel and nutrients for our bodies. Food is an important component of the social cohesion in our lives. Mealtimes provide opportunity for connection and conversation with family and friends and a stage for parents and caregivers to model build positive habits and attitudes towards food.

Tips for Eating Well:

1. Encourage children to eat healthy foods in line with the Australian Dietary Guidelines, including plenty of fresh vegetables and fruit, legumes, wholegrains, nuts and seeds – most kids fall well short on the recommended daily servings of these foods.
2. Limit consumption of discretionary foods and drinks that are typically high in added sugars, saturated fats and salt.
3. Enjoy meals as a family, involving children in both food preparation and mealtime conversation to foster connection and a sense of belonging and identity

Food also plays an important role in cultural identity and is a central part of many celebrations. Teaching children about the significance and preparation of cultural foods helps them develop a sense of belonging as well as appreciation for food²². Plus involving children in food preparation has some benefits of its own – not only will they be developing critical life skills that support healthier eating behaviours, but cooking engages creativity and serving others provides children with a sense of pride²³.



Furthermore, recent studies on the gut-brain axis (the line of communication between the digestive system and the central nervous system) reveal that the foods that help our gut microbiota thrive also appear to enhance our mood and mental health²⁴.

Moving More

Active play and exercise are beneficial for children's physical health and mental wellbeing, but current trends that steer children away from movement and towards the couch, are increasing the risk of overweight and obesity and reducing exposure to educational and social opportunities – in turn, negatively impact self-esteem.

Less than a quarter of Australian children currently meet the minimum physical activity recommendations for their age groups²⁵. For children aged 5-12 years old, the recommendation is for 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity exercise each day²⁶. Good levels of physical activity are associated with the prevention of non-communicable diseases in addition to bone and joint health and muscle strength, among a long list of other physical health benefits.

Tips for Moving More

1. Provide children with as many opportunities as possible to engage in physical activity and discover what they enjoy.
2. As children's physical skills and confidence develop, organised sport and similar physical activities might suit them. If not, don't worry – simply spending time outside in natural environments is associated with better wellbeing²⁹.
3. Even something as simple as a family evening walk or daily use of public transport encourages the formation of healthy habits that support better physical and mental health as children grow up.
4. To help build self-esteem, look to expose your child to age-appropriate physical challenges delivered in fun and safe settings where the child can participate in the activity without fear of failure. Accomplishment of the challenge builds the 'can-do' muscle inside a child's mind which will give them confidence for future activities that stretch their physical capability while promoting belief in themselves.

Good levels of physical activity are associated with the prevention of non-communicable diseases in addition to bone and joint health, and muscle strength, among a long list of other physical health benefits. But it gets even better! Physical activity is associated with better school performance, reduced levels of depression and anxiety, better mood and adoption of other healthy behaviours²⁷.

All this makes moving more vitally important for developing a positive sense of self, of belonging and of wellbeing. Making physical activity enjoyable should always be the goal. In fact, exercise in itself releases feel-good chemicals like endorphins and serotonin that help improve mood. But don't under-estimate play's incredible cognitive, social and psychological benefits²⁸, all of which contribute to better mental health.

Quality Sleep

Getting a good night's sleep is critical for growing bodies and developing minds. Sleep helps regulate the chemicals in our brain that transmit information, so poor sleep affects a child's cognitive performance, memory and mood, whilst also increasing their risk of gaining unhealthy weight, all of which can impact self-esteem.

Providing conditions conducive to sleep can help children sleep well. However light stimulus from electronic screens, emotional stress and sugary or caffeinated drinks late in the day, can make it difficult for children to fall and remain asleep. Adults too! A large scale study of 9 year olds found that sleep duration between 9 and 11 hours was associated with better behaviour, mood, feelings of wellbeing and physical health³⁰. Teenagers are recommended to get 8-10 hours of quality sleep.

Good sleep enables healthier food choices and physical activity behaviours³¹. So it's unsurprising that decreased sleep duration in children has been linked to increasing rates of obesity in children³². There's much talk of the modern child's sleep debt, however parents and caregivers play an important role in providing environments that help children get to sleep and learn sleep behaviours that will serve them for life.

Tips for Getting Quality Sleep:

1. Remove all electronic devices from bedrooms.
2. Set regular bed times and wake up times.
3. Keep bedrooms dark, quiet and at a comfortable temperature.
4. Create rituals like bedtime stories, calm music, quiet conversation or mindfulness activities that signal it's time for rest and prepare the mind for sleep.

For more information on the impacts of screen time and advice for your family
<https://www.sanitarium.com.au/little-people-big-lives>

The Trouble with Screen Time

Screen time can negatively impact children's mealtimes, physical activity, sleep quality and meaningful connection to the people around them. Despite some positive benefits including connection with friends, and opportunities for learning and engagement, screen time poses a significant challenge to the health and wellbeing of many Aussie kids.

1. Have clear rules for screen times, including time limits.
2. Plan enough offline activities to help children offset their online time.
3. Locate devices in a shared or visible space.
4. Parents should be mindful of their own device use and model healthy screen time behaviours.



Conclusion

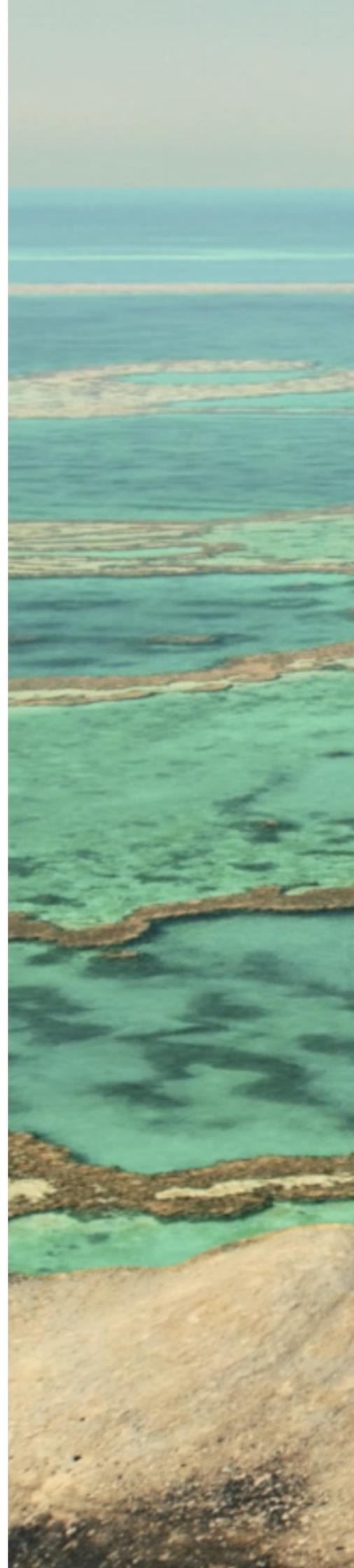
In this report, we set out to find out how Aussie kids are feeling about themselves and their optimism for the future, set against the backdrop of an unprecedented period of turbulence and change that has tested even the most resilient of us grown-ups.

While many of us look back at childhood with fond memories of simpler times, childhood is changing and there are new threats to health and wellbeing that are helpful to understand in helping our kids navigate their way to a big life that embraces their potential.

Wellbeing is a complex topic, so we're thankful to Forge Wellbeing and Dr Justin Coulson for the insights, evidence and advice they've contributed to this report. While there is much to consider, it becomes clear that we must take a wholistic approach to helping children thrive. This approach recognises that physical health, mental health and emotional wellbeing are intertwined. It's also clear that parents and caregivers play a critical role in ensuring children's health and wellbeing is maintained, because regardless of their age they look to us for guidance, support and clues on their own identity – even in those moments we might not be looking back at them.

Here are six key takeaways:

- 1. Inspire self-esteem:** relationships with friends and parents, having a sense of familiarity at school and encouraging a healthy lifestyle are all key.
- 2. Spark positive emotions:** help children develop a strong sense of identity and belonging and encourage strengths and opportunities.
- 3. Fuel engagement:** support their ideas and encourage them to try new things by promoting autonomy and find peers and mentors who share similar interests.
- 4. Maintain optimism:** reduce pressure and focus on enjoyment, giving kids something to look forward to with the support of positive relationships.
- 5. Encourage and demonstrate positive relationships:** encourage friendships in multiple contexts, and demonstrate positive, respectful adult relationships.
- 6. Healthy bodies, healthy minds:** help foster a healthy approach to diet and physical activity, remembering mealtimes and time spent together playing or exercising provide opportunities for parents to model positive lifestyle behaviours while also building connection which benefits the whole health of the child.





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