



DR LEONIE WHITE

Top Tips for Thriving Families

1 Decide who you are as a family.

Having a family vision matters, and a vision that involves connection helps families thrive. A family vision can be captured in a discussion as a couple/family, or in a collage, or a list of words/phrases (kind of like the 'our family is...' posters that you see). It can be written in a story or family blog, or found in a family theme song.

Deciding what type of family you choose to be will help with identifying and evaluating 'invitations to expectations' – those times when family, friends, associates, or social media invite you to think you and your family 'should be a certain way'. You get to choose how you are as a family, and knowing who you are helps as a compass for navigating life's changes and challenges.

Keep in mind that as your family grows and changes so too will your family vision grow and change.

2 Have fun, play, and enjoy each other.

Play is one of the most important aspects of being human and improves resilience, relationships, and wellbeing. Play revitalizes families and is important for adults as well as children and teenagers in the family.

Think about the different types of play and playful experiences that each family member is drawn to and make a list of some activities that can be shared experiences to be enjoyed together. You can also bring a playful attitude to everyday aspects of family life e.g., playing music and dancing around the house while cleaning up.



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3 Focus on connection.

Sharing and connecting means accepting family members for who they truly are, being genuinely present with them, and providing validation and connection. Genuine, quality connection and presence supports positive, healthy relationships. This doesn't mean being fully and mindfully present every moment of every day – it means making sure you find times to pause and ensure presence with family members in ways that enable connected, loving responses.

Take time each day to be present in a conversation or activity - put the phone down, pay attention, be kind and curious, and not distracted with TV or tasks. Negotiate a time for connection if your family member is trying to connect when you are in the middle of something e.g. if you are in the middle of preparing dinner and can't talk make a time to talk over ice cream after dinner.

Use everyday moments for positive connection e.g., chatting while driving to extracurricular activities.

4 Nurture children and teenagers by supporting big emotions.

We first learn about emotions from our family and this gives us an opportunity to teach our children emotional literacy and emotional regulation if we support big feelings in our relationship. It is important that there is permission to express all kinds of emotions – not to shout or get physical - but to find ways to express emotions without letting feelings take over.

Use validation and learn to be an 'emotion coach for your children and teenagers, e.g., identifying and labeling emotions.



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5 Nurture children and teenagers with connected behaviour support.

Human behaviour is strongly related to the way that we feel. Prioritizing a relationship approach will maximise opportunities for children and teenagers' capacity to learn how to manage themselves, make amends and repair relationships.

To respond in a relational way to behaviours, start by tuning in to yourself to make sure you are in the right space to be there for your young person. Then, think about behaviour support as a sandwich: the top layer is first and involves connecting with your child, the middle layer is second and involves your behaviour management response, and the bottom layer is last and involves reconnecting with your child after they have experienced your response to their inappropriate or undesirable behaviour.

6 Balance Soft and Tough Love.

Children and Teenagers need a balance of structure and support to do well. This means that it is important that there is a family structure with parents 'steering the ship', setting the expectations for the family, and then gently and consistently upholding the expectations within the family. For families to thrive parents need to be parents in ways that are respectful, reliable, safe, consistent and supportive. Rules might vary between different families but having rules is an important part of family life. Clear, fair rules that are communicated and consistently followed help families thrive.

7 Balance connection and acceptance of individual differences.

It's important to spend time together and connect as a family, and it's also important to be an individual and to honour individual differences. All family members will have their own temperament, interests, strengths, and areas for development. Sometimes family members will 'fit' easily together and sometimes the fit takes a bit of time, patience, and work. Set time aside to think about who each child really is, and how to balance being connected with accepting differences and unique individuality.



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8 Communicate openly, honestly, and respectfully.

Learning to communicate about all sorts of feelings, things that are going well, difficult or sensitive topics, and problems can be a work in progress...especially as children grow up and new topics have to be broached.

Effective communication is a powerful key to great relationships and involves a variety of aspects including: matching what is said with how it is said so mixed messages aren't sent; matching what is said with how the person is feeling so that communication is congruent and family members know where they stand; and talking in ways that separate the problem from the person to avoid shaming the person and enable a focus on the issue. Focusing on issues and skill gaps for development is more supportive and effective than relating to a person as if they are the problem.

9 Create and maintain family rituals and traditions.

Family rituals and traditions help family members feel that they belong, and support the family through times of change, growth and even challenges and losses. Family rituals create identity, connection, and security.

Choose a family ritual that does not involve spending a lot of money e.g., home-made cards for special events.

Choose some 'big' traditions e.g., particular ways to celebrate birthdays.

Build rituals into daily activities e.g., bedtime reading.

Talk as a family about what traditions you have, would like to start, or would like for marking milestones.



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10 Build and maintain positive memories.

Happy memories are good for your health and for your family. Happy and joyful memories create nostalgia, buffering against feelings of loneliness and anxiety and making people feel happier.

Create a reservoir of happy memories by:

- Harnessing the power of firsts e.g., going to a new park for a birthday picnic or trying a new recipe;
- Doing something different in your daily routine e.g., a carpet picnic instead of dinner at the table;
- Visit places that trigger happy memories e.g., a favourite beach or restaurant;
- Have a digital detox for a day or a weekend – easily achieved when camping out of mobile service range;
- Decide to be mindfully present when you really want to remember something – this means focusing on the experience for at least 20 seconds, or as long as it takes for 3 deep breaths, making the memory vivid by using all of your senses for those 3 deep breaths.

And remember to bring up happy memories, talk about them and relive them.

11 Work together to solve problems.

Thriving families learn to manage conflict in ways that preserve and support relationships; they place problem-solving on a foundation of respect, sensitivity, self-management, and connection.

Be sure to take time to tune into yourself first to make sure you are in a good enough space for the conversation. Negotiating a good time to talk e.g., making sure that tiredness, hunger, stress, public places, anger, distress, sadness aren't getting in the way of problem-solving conversations. Ensure an approach that respects others and clearly demonstrates that respect in the conversation. Set the tone by starting soft and focus on the issue rather than attacking a person.



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12 Set the tone for the family by focusing on your different parts.

As a parent, it is important to think of yourself as having 3 parts and to nurture all three parts. These parts are person, partner, and parent, and it is important to find a balance between these 3 parts.

As a person find time for yourself – for your own fun, enjoyment, connection outside the family, and self-care.

As a partner find ways to connect and honour the couple relationship.

As a parent consider your values and principles for parenting, your best hopes, and what you need in order to be the parent you want to be.

If you'd like more tips, ideas and strategies to help grow a thriving family visit www.drleoniewhite.com to find out more about the Helping Families Thrive Cards.



Based on Dr Leonie White's Clinical Practice, Family Therapy research and theory, these ideas have been carefully selected to cover key ingredients of growing healthy, thriving families, and make a positive difference to families.

Would you like to grow a thriving family?

Do you work with families to help them reach their unique potential?

Helping Families Thrive is a set of cards designed to assist families of all types as they journey through this thing called life.

These cards will help with everyday family life. From the predictable transitions and changes that occur in families, to the unexpected, unplanned, sometimes unwanted challenges, losses and misfortunes.

Divided into 6 colour petals, Communication, Fun and Enjoyment, Nurturing, Family Structure, Problem Solving and Belonging – each petal has several cards representing the aspects of the component with an explanation, description, tips, and practical ideas, as well as conversation starters to individualise the suggestions.

See website for photography attributions.
www.drleoniewhite.com



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Helping people grow, connect, and thrive on life's unique journey.

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Top Tips for Thriving Families - Reminders

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- 2 Have fun, play, and enjoy each other.
- 3 Focus on connection.
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- 5 Nurture children and teenagers with connected behaviour support.
- 6 Balance Soft and Tough Love.
- 7 Balance connection and acceptance of individual differences.
- 8 Communicate openly, honestly, and respectfully.
- 9 Create and maintain family rituals and traditions.
- 10 Build and maintain positive memories.
- 11 Work together to solve problems.
- 12 Set the tone for the family by focusing on your different parts.