

The Relationship is the most important thing

*"I believe regardless of what type of caregiver role you are, whether your young person is troubled (if you want to use that word), or a child who doesn't fit the norm, or if they're a normal kid who just goes through life: **The relationship that you have, is the most important thing!** Because without a good relationship with your young person, I think it's going to make any difficult conversations or situations 100 times harder."*

Family member's perspective:

We are a group of family members and loved ones of young people who have experienced difficult times. We have all had times when we've judged ourselves and thought it was all our fault. We've reassessed every word, everything we've done, or parenting style we've adopted. Through all of the challenges we learnt that the one thing we can control is the relationship we build with our young person. It makes it easier to have those really hard conversations when you have that foundation. So, if there's something that needs to be rectified, to fix that and try to build the relationship, to do what you can to heal: that would be the place to start.

Worker's perspective:

As a youth worker I care a lot about doing what I can to support the important people in a young person's life. I've noticed many family members who talk to me might feel like they can't get anything right. However, whenever I hear even the smallest thing that tells me this person is trying to connect, trying to preserve their relationship with the young person, I tell them how great this is! Youth workers know how much can be achieved through relationship. We also know how it's not always easy to see straight away how valuable this is. Sometimes our efforts to be consistent, caring and connected don't get the response we want from a young person, or maybe any response. But we know to hang in there because young people are noticing how we treat them and when there is someone they can feel safe and accepted with, it is incredibly valuable for getting through tough times.



Young person's perspective:

As a young person who's been labelled "problematic," I believe it's important for families to remember that showing up with a non-judgmental presence could be what helps your young person get back on track. Whether they're struggling with mental health challenges or trying to make changes related to substance use, the young person in your life is likely already juggling a lot. It's important for them to have people they can trust and go to for the support that they need.

One of the things I found most difficult when I lived home with mum was the constant feeling of guilt that I was letting my family down due to my ill mental health symptoms. I understood a lot of the conflict came from a place of concern and worry, but what I really needed was warmth, care, and unconditional love from those I loved and looked up to. I needed their belief in me—to trust that I could overcome challenges if I had the right support and tools

My advice to family and caregivers is to take care of yourself and reflect on your values so that you can approach your young person with empathy and understanding, and to offer that same love to yourself. Ultimately, the most important thing is that your young person knows they matter to you, and that you're committed to supporting their health, well-being, and ability to thrive. This is where your focus should go.





CHECKLIST OF CONNECTION

Because it can be difficult for us or anyone else to see all the little things we are doing well when some big and scary things are happening in our young person's world, we wanted to create a checklist. This checklist is for loved ones of young people to help remind you of the things you can do every day, which you have control over and that will make a huge difference, even if you can't see it right now. We've called it our 'checklist of connection.' Have a go looking through the checklist to notice the things you (or other family/important people) have done to remind yourself of the things you can always focus on and try to do more of. You can tick off an item, write in more detail about what you did, and even add your own personalised items to the list.

Tick every one completed today	PART ONE: When things are calm	How many times?	Comments on what I did
	Offered to do something together: a walk, watch a show, go to get food		
	Started a conversation about something that is not a concern or worry about them		
	Shared a laugh with them		
	Listened to something they wanted to tell me without judging		
	Tried to understand and be curious about something they care about/is important to them		
	Sat in silence with them		
	Did an activity together (anything!)		
	Noticed something they did that is caring or kind or responsible or helpful (whatever may be important to them or you)		
	Owened up to something I didn't do well		
	Went for a drive together		



Tick each one completed	PART TWO: When things are chaotic	How many times?	Comments on what I did
	Stopped myself before saying something hurtful or unkind		
	Displayed acts of caring, concern or comfort towards them		
	Stood up for what they needed with a person or system		
	Gave them space		
	Asked for help from someone else		
	Stayed calm and didn't pressure them		
	Asked them to tell me what they need		
	Hung in there/survived!		
	Noticed one good thing that came from a difficult time		
	Reminded myself that they are distressed and not necessarily angry at me		
	Took them away from the situation/outside		
	Wondered what might be going on for them. Had a go at thinking curiously.		
	Tried to just sit back and observe. Is there something they can see I may not see.		
	Little kind things – sometimes you just want someone to take care of you		

