



Make It Matter:

Everyday Moments, Stronger Relationships

Welcome to Summer!

This summer, we invite you to **Make It Matter** by building *simple connections and stronger families*. Whether you're exploring our beautiful natural spaces or enjoying the many built environments our community has to offer, there are endless opportunities to connect with your loved ones, recharge, and create meaningful memories.

Summer is a time for more than just sunshine—it's a season for growth. It's an opportunity to build *developmental relationships*—those meaningful connections that help young people discover who they are, develop the ability to shape their own lives, and learn how to engage with and contribute to the world around them. Through everyday moments, playing, exploring, helping, and simply being together, we can nurture trust, spark curiosity, and model resilience.

In this issue, you'll find tips and resources focused on key topics to guide your journey:

- **Embracing Boredom**
- **Risky Play**
- **Strengthening Relationships**
- **Technology**
- **Peers & Adult Role Models**

Discover more simple, everyday positive experiences, qualities and relationships that support healthy outcomes for children and youth at sparcreddeer.ca/parents.

Warmly,
Julie Masson BCYC, CCYC
 SPARC Red Deer Member



Work towards keeping your Medicine Wheel balanced:

- **North** (white): Spiritual - Taking time to pray and have faith.
- **East** (yellow): Mental - Taking time to work on having a growth mindset & positive self-talk.
- **South** (red): Physical- Getting enough sleep. Drinking water. Staying active.
- **West** (black): Emotion - Talking about how you are feeling. Checking in with family and friends.

Developmental relationships are connections that help young people be and become their best selves.

Search Institute has identified five elements—expressed in 20 specific actions—that make relationships powerful in young people's lives:

- **Express Care:** Be Dependable, Listen, Believe in Me, Be Warm, Encourage
- **Challenge Growth:** Expect My Best, Stretch, Hold Me Accountable, Reflect on Failures
- **Provide Support:** Navigate, Empower, Advocate, Set Boundaries
- **Share Power:** Respect Me, Include Me, Collaborate, Let Me Lead
- **Expand Possibilities:** Inspire, Broaden Horizons, Connect

Developmental Relationships Framework. Retrieved from search-institute.org/developmental-relationships-framework/



Image [Why I Plan To Let My Kids Get Bored This Summer](#)

Michael Ungar in his article, “**Let Kids be Bored (Occasionally)**,” shares that most folks who experience the temporary uncomfortable state of boredom will be motivated to find something stimulating to do. Dr. Ungar assures parents that the short-term experience of being bored “may be exactly what the child needs “to do” (para. 1). He goes on to say that, “**Children who experience a lack of programmed activity are given an opportunity to demonstrate creativity, problem solving, and to develop motivational skills that may help them later in life**” (para. 2).

“It’s hard to remember when our kids are bored that we don’t need to rescue them, rather we can just let them be bored. And see what a beautiful place their boredom will take them.”

Dr. Ungar emphasizes that parents influence a child’s motivation by fostering a mindset open to new experiences rather than shielding them from boredom. para. 4). As an “antidote to boredom,” Dr. Ungar suggests providing “children with an environment that lets them experience **autonomy** (the ability to work a little on their own), **control** (the right to have a say over what they do), **challenge** (a small push beyond their comfort zone), and **intrinsic motivation** (the motivation comes from inside them).

CHALLENGE GROWTH

“Push me to keep getting better.”

Notice that the antidote to boredom is not an environment that programs children or removes responsibility from children to solve the problem of under-stimulation (boredom) themselves” (para 5). **Parents can provide support with structure and creativity as children learn to navigate boredom.**

Dr. Ungar suggests **scheduling boredom**, building times where there are no planned activities into routines, cautioning that, “Simply amusing our children endlessly may actually do them more harm than good. They will never learn how to act autonomously, accept responsibility for their own well-being, seek out challenges that interest them, or learn how to self-motivate” (para. 6). Ungar cautions that constantly amusing kids may hinder their ability to self-motivate and handle life’s challenges. He concludes that the **mild discomfort of boredom is exactly what children need to thrive** (para. 12).

Ungar, M. (2012, June 24). [Let kids be bored \(occasionally\)](#). Psychology Today

Tips and Resources

- Just like you used to schedule your child’s naps, schedule in unstructured time dedicated to creative, exploratory and independent activities. *This places boredom as a predictable and expected part of their daily routine versus an unexpected state to, “get out of,” or be avoided.*
- Work together to create a written list or jar of, “do together,” and, “do on your own,” activities. *This supports your child as they grow their problem solving skills.*
- Lego, crafts, trampoline, reading, dress-up, puzzles, etc.. are all great independent play activities! *Please note that boredom can also be enjoyed with a sibling or friend.*
- *Use of technology is most often a boredom-avoiding activity.* Exceptions would be things like looking up how-to information and then trying the DIY activity yourself versus “researching” it all afternoon without actually getting any “doing” done.
- A list of household “extras” can either steer your child into embracing boredom or putting in some extra effort around the house. Laundry, washing windows, picking weeds, we all have *that* list.
- Promote your child’s talents and hobbies by helping them improve or learn (ex: magic tricks, learn to draw, sports & chess).
- Embracing boredom by embracing what’s around you, show your pet some love!
- Practice mindfulness: one thing at a time

SHARE POWER: Let me lead

“Create opportunities for me to take action and lead.”

Many parents are focused on keeping their kids safe—but according to Dr. Brussoni, a pediatrician and child development researcher at UBC, kids actually need more opportunities for risky outdoor play. She describes this kind of play as thrilling and exciting activities where kids test their limits and take small, age-appropriate risks—like climbing trees, roughhousing, or exploring the neighborhood.

Why kids need risk, fear and excitement in play.

Research shows that **this type of play helps children become more physically active, confident, resilient, and better at managing risks.** In fact, a major study co-authored by Brussoni found that kids who engage in risky outdoor play are not only healthier and more active, but they also become better at avoiding serious injury over time because they learn their own limits (Brussoni et al., 2015).



Brussoni encourages parents to step back and give kids the space to decide for themselves what feels exciting but still safe. Trying too hard to protect kids—or pushing them to take more risks than they're

ready for—can actually do more harm than good. When trusted to explore on their own terms, kids often show they can handle more than we think.

So, what's a parent to do? Instead of constantly stepping in or setting strict limits, Brussoni recommends aiming to keep kids “as safe as necessary” (Brussoni, para 11)—not as safe as possible. **That means letting them explore, while stepping in only when there's a real danger.** To help parents find this balance, Brussoni and her team developed [Outsideplay.ca](https://outsideplay.ca), a free online tool to help parents manage their fears and make small, practical changes. **Many parents are surprised by how capable their kids really are when given the chance.**

Brussoni, M., Gibbons, R., Gray, C., Ishikawa, T., Sandseter, E. B. H., Bienenstock, A., ... & Tremblay, M. S. (2015). [What is the relationship between risky outdoor play and health in children? A systematic review.](#) *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 12(6), 6423–6454.

Brussoni, M. (2018, August 3). [Why kids need risk, fear and excitement in play.](#) *Environmental Research and Public Health*, 12(6), 6423–6454.

Tips and Resources

- Visit local parks, green and wild spaces.
- Visit [Bower Ponds](#), [Kerrywood Nature Centre](#), [Disk Golf Sites](#) and the [Outdoor Fitness Gyms](#).
- Instead of saying, “be careful,” try being more specific. For example: “notice your footing,” “that looks wobbly,” “there are thorns,” or “watch how close your stick is to _____ when you swing it.”
- Visit local [skateboard](#) and [BMX](#) parks
- Bike or stroll the [TransCanada Trail](#) system, [neighbourhood walking paths](#) or take a hike!
- *There are many benefits to walking on uneven surfaces relating to healthy musculoskeletal development, including promoting better balance and strengthening muscles. This can be on grass, sand and stones as well as inclined paths.*
- [Paddle or play](#) along our rivers and beaches - Follow all [water safety](#) guidelines.
- Check out a Play Guide for types of play and how they benefit your child's development <https://cmch.tv/moreplaytoday/play-guides>
- Set up an obstacle course in the backyard.



Positive parent-child relationships are important for all areas of children's development. By **being in the moment, spending quality time and showing warmth, care and respect**, you can strengthen your relationship with your child.

Being in the moment is about tuning in and thinking about what's going on with your child. **It shows your child that you care about the things that matter to him**, which is the basis for a strong relationship.

EXPRESS CARE: Be Warm

"Show me you enjoy being with me."

Positive parent-child relationships are built on **quality time. Time together is how you get to know about each other's experiences, thoughts, feelings and changing interests.** Quality time can happen anytime and anywhere, in the middle of ordinary days and situations. It can be a shared laugh when you're bathing your toddler or a good conversation in the car with your teenage child. **When you spend quality time with your child, you're showing that you value and appreciate her.** You can take advantage of quality time to communicate powerful positive messages with your smiles, laughter, eye contact, hugs and gentle touches.

Try to plan some regular one-on-one time with each of your children. Children have different personalities, and some children might seem to need less time than others – but they'll all benefit from special time with you. Even in the early years, **developing trust and respect** is important. **Your child will feel secure when they learn they can**

trust their primary carers to meet their physical and emotional needs.

Raising Children Network. (n.d.). *Positive relationships for parents and children: How to build them.*
<https://raisingchildren.net.au/newborns/connecting-communicating/bonding/parent-child-relationships>

Tips and Resources

Keep Connected offers families ideas, activities, and experiences to help build strong family relationships. keepconnected.searchinstitute.org

Ideas to do together:

- Hikes or nature walk
- Ice cream bike rides
- Star gazing
- Sprinklers and water guns
- Tie dye your socks or an old t-shirt
- Scrapbooking
- Board games
- Movie nights
- Building forts
- Make smoothies or popsicles
- Science experiments
- Scavenger hunts
- Back to school prep
- Bubbles and kite flying
- [Red Deer Market](#)
- [Downtown Red Deer Market](#)
- Backyard camping & picnics
- Learn how to skip stones
- Share practical life skills, cultural practices and interests you enjoy: fixing a bike, sewing, baking, construction, fishing, volunteering or gardening.

Please phone or look up hours of operation, and fees online before going.

- [Ellis Bird Farm](#)
- [Discovery Wildlife Park](#)
- [Sunnybrook Farm](#)
- U-picks
- [The Central Alberta Regional Museum Network](#)
- Aquatic centres & spray parks
- [Discovery canyon](#)
- [Mini Links Golf](#)



"Children learn as they play.
More importantly, in play,
children learn how to learn."

-O. Fred Donaldson

In her article, [Summertime, Playtime](#) (2018), Leah Shafer asks the question, "How can we encourage social, independent and guided forms of play while keeping safety concerns and work schedules in mind?"

Shafer describes how in play, children practice solving problems, navigating physical and social environments, and test out how to show care, what is wise, and what is safe. Shafer quotes Ben Mardell and his expert opinion on play and intellectual, social, emotional and physical development,

"My take is that **any activity can be play or not play. The secret sauce is *playfulness***" — the ability to see a situation and be curious about it, realize it can be enjoyable, and take agency over it. "It's like 'A Spoonful of Sugar' in Mary Poppins. Even cleaning up can be fun, if you have the right mindset" (para 5).

PROVIDE SUPPORT

"Help me complete tasks and achieve goals."

Shafer goes on to say that not all types of play encourage development, sometimes play is just zoning out or can actually be teasing and annoying. Shafer gives parents three indicators of playful learning to look for: **choice, wonder and delight**. She describes these in the following way:

"Choice looks like kids setting goals, developing and sharing ideas, making rules, negotiating challenges, and choosing how long to play. **Wonder** looks like kids exploring, creating, pretending, imagining, and learning from trial and error. **Delight** looks like happiness: kids smiling, laughing, being silly, or generally feeling cozy and at ease" (para 12).

Shafer provides [suggestions](#) on fostering a playful household while cautioning that, if your children have come to depend on technology, formal programs and tight schedules, they might initially fight it, complain of boredom and retreat into technology before rediscovering the joys of play.

[How much screen time is too much screen time?](#)

While recognizing the importance of academics and extracurriculars, Mardell describes summer as "**a time to build other muscles, physically and emotionally, and in terms of leadership, resilience, and self-sufficiency.**" So register in soccer, day camps, hockey academy and art class, but also look for opportunities (within structured programs or at home) to build, create and experiment.

So leave unplanned moments in everyday life. "When every moment of a child's day is planned, what can get lost is the "openness and flexibility for new insights or creativity to arise, or for the imagination to run wild, or for kids to play with everyday objects in unique ways."

Shafer, L. (2018, June). [Summertime, playtime](#). Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Tips and Resources

- [Playtime, Downtime and Family Time](#): Parenting tips for teens and children
- The Family Digital Wellness Guide will give you a quick overview of your child's stage of development and how it relates to the media they use. cmch.tv/familydigitalwellness
- Do you question how media affects the health and well-being of children and teens? Ask the Mediatrician and check out some FAQs mediatrics.com/submit-a-question.
- Try scheduling tech time so children and youth know *when, and when not*, to expect permission.
- [S.P.O.I.L.](#) a screen-free system for prioritizing those activities which have the largest positive impact on child development.
- Play video games and look at social media **with** your child. Ask what interests them about the platforms and who they follow. Discuss conduct.



Neufeld, G., & Maté, G. (2013). *Hold on to your kids: Why parents need to matter more than peers*. Ballantine Books. Retrieved from <https://drgabormate.com/book/hold-on-to-your-kids/>

Helping your child develop strong peer relationships and adult role models.

Many parents worry that their children will become “followers,” making choices based on what is popular or socially accepted among their peers. However, it’s important to recognize that children are born wired to follow—but they are meant to look to *you* and other *nurturing adults* for direction. As Neufeld and Maté (2013) explain, “The secret of parenting is not in what a parent does but rather who the parent is to a child. When a child seeks contact and closeness with us, we become empowered as a nurturer, a comforter, a guide, a model, a teacher or a coach” (para. 13).

EXPAND POSSIBILITIES

“Connect me with people and places to broaden my world.”

Strong, healthy adult-child relationships serve as a powerful counterbalance to peer pressure. Moms, dads, guardians, and caregivers—your presence matters. The time you spend with your child is important, but *how* you are during that time—**attentive, emotionally available, and connected**—is what makes the biggest difference.

Tips and Resources

- **Arrange playdates at your house or in the community.** *Simple, unstructured time together helps kids build friendships naturally.* Set out some board games, art supplies, or sports gear and let fun unfold.
- **Plan a “make and take” activity.** Make an extra batch of playdough, cookies, or a craft/game kit, then invite a friend over to do the activity together. Or drop off and send photos or video call to share the experience and express gratitude. *Kids learn generosity and creativity side by side*
- **Create a backyard or local park challenge.** Set up a scavenger hunt, obstacle course, or water balloon relay and invite friends or neighbours to join in. Add music and snacks to make it a mini-event.
- **Play a sport with others.** Organize casual games like soccer, basketball, pickleball, or capture the flag with family friends or neighbours. *Family-vs-family matches are great for bonding and laughs.*
- **Do a kid-swap** with someone you trust and enjoy a shared interest or hobby with your niece, nephew, grandchild, neighbour’s or friend’s kids for a few hours. *Gardening, carpentry, music jams, or nature walks are all great options.*
- **We all eat.** Grab some firewood, invite friends, and visit one of the City of Red Deer [picnic sites](#). You can even borrow a “[Picnic Pak](#)” of games. *Time around a meal makes space for conversation and connection.*
- **Start a “Family & Friend Day.”** Discuss as a family what activities you enjoy together, —like a hike, movie night, or pizza-making party—then invite another family to join. *Kids bond, and adults connect too.*
- **Or Explore your community together.** Visit the local library, museum, rec centre, or trail system with another family. *Shared discovery makes relationships richer.*



Check out our community partners to learn more about the **40 Developmental Asset® Framework** and identify how you are *already* fostering the positive experiences, qualities, preventative measures, and relationships that will **help your child grow up healthy, caring, and responsible**. These assets are protective factors that have been consistently shown, by research, to buffer youth from risk. The more assets a child has, the higher the probability that child will not be involved in behaviors such as teen pregnancy, school dropout, substance abuse, delinquency, or violence.

Why Relationships Matter: Looking to deepen your impact as a parent, caregiver, or community member? Check out this short [video](#) from **Search Institute** highlighting the **Five Elements of Developmental Relationships**—practical ways to help young people grow, thrive, and feel truly supported. Whether it's through expressing care, challenging growth, or sharing power, every interaction counts. 👉 Watch here: searchinstitute.org/resources-hub/relationships-matter-the-five-elements-of-developmental-relationships



Sylvan Lake SPARC
(Strengthening Positive Assets
and Resiliency in Communities)
<https://www.sylvanlake.ca/en/public-services/Growing-Great-Kids.aspx>



SPARC-Red Deer
(Strengthening Positive Assets
and Resiliency in Communities)
<https://sparcreddeer.ca/>



Innisfail Youth Positive Assets
Coalition (YPAC)

The inclusion of organizations in this guide does not represent endorsement of programs, nor does exclusion indicate disapproval.