

insights

Wellbeing tips for primary school kids

by Dr Jodi Richardson



It's time for parents to have a clear understanding of wellbeing and how we can support our kids to cultivate their own.

Wellbeing – it's a word we hear a lot these days. We understand that it's important for our kids; but it's not always clear exactly what it is, how we know if they've got it, and how we can help them to get more!

Since the Slip! Slop! Slap! campaign of the early 80s, the media has helped to spread messages about the importance of protecting our skin from the sun, regular exercise and a diet rich in nourishing wholefoods to promote and protect our own health and that of our families.

Now it's time for us as parents to have a clear understanding of wellbeing and how we can support our kids to cultivate their own.

Put simply, our kids' wellbeing is a combination of their physical, mental, emotional and social health. And because a range of different elements contribute to their wellbeing, there are a bunch of activities we can do with them, role model for them and teach them, to improve it.



Developing wellbeing is more than ensuring the absence of ill-health, it's about taking action to adopt thinking and behaviour patterns that researchers have shown to foster flourishing physical and mental health.

It's evident from the *Australian Child and Adolescent Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing* that it's never been more important for us as parents to do so. Among 4- to 11-year-olds, 1 in 100 are depressed, 7 in 100 suffer with anxiety and 8 in 100 struggle with ADHD. Add to those worrying statistics the knowledge that 1 in 4 Australian children are overweight or obese, and it's easy to see why working on wellbeing matters.

Here are 5 practices that you can put into action to enhance your kids' wellbeing:

1. Get them outside and moving

Australian kids are some of the least active in the world, with as few as 1 in 5 meeting the recommended 60 minutes of daily exercise. There's so much we can do! Park further from school at drop off and pick up – ease the traffic congestion (cos' we all know what school parking is like!) and increase their daily exercise at the same time; stay a while after school to let the kids play; stop at the park on the way home or head outside after bags are

unpacked and have a bounce on the trampoline. Yes, I know, it's going to take some effort, but this is what really matters – and it's good for you too!

2. Create plenty of opportunities for your kids to foster positive connections with their friends, family and of course with you!

Positive social relationships not only enhance kids' wellbeing, but are key to their future wellbeing as adults as well. Time spent with friends helps our kids to develop social skills including sharing, compromise, listening and conflict resolution.

3. Keep screen time to a minimum

I know, easier said than done! Kids love screens, but we're the parents and we can work with our kids to create clear and consistent limits. Kids aged 2-5 are recommended to have one hour of screen time per day and two hours a day max for 5-12-year-olds. Assuming kids are watching appropriate material and lying on their tummies to use tablets (helps reduce neck strain), the risks of screen time largely relate to what kids are NOT doing while using them such as being active, chatting, reading, playing creatively and sleeping. Kids also need to get bored!

4. Help your kids develop mindfulness skills

Mindfulness is about paying attention in the present moment, letting thoughts come and go without getting caught up in them. That's it. Sounds easy, but like any skill it takes time and practice. It gives kids' overstimulated minds a rest! A regular mindfulness practice will also help them to regulate their attention and their emotions; and teaches them to create a lifelong practice of taking time out to become calm, content, relaxed and in the moment. I highly recommend the Smiling Mind app for age appropriate mindfulness meditations; also, a lovely mindfulness practice is to lay down with the kids, eyes closed, and take time out to breathe naturally while everyone tunes in their 'Spidey senses' to all of the sounds around them.

5. Last but not least – ensure your kids get ample sleep

Primary school kids need 10-12 hours per day. Often, what helps enormously is establishing clear and consistent routines including no screen time one hour before bed, a 'wind-down' routine which may include a bath/shower, being read a book and then quiet reading before lights out. Taking time to chat with your kids before bed or encouraging them to reflect on what they're grateful for is also a great way to help them decompress and get a restful night's sleep.



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Jodi is a happiness and wellbeing speaker and writer, and is mum to two primary school aged kids who light her up. For more great ideas on flourishing mental health for the whole family, subscribe to her newsletter at drjodirichardson.com.au and say hello on facebook.com/DrJodiRichardson. Enquiries to jodi@drjodirichardson.com.au