



# SEL Toolkit: Building High-Quality Connections Strengthening Bonds with Presence, Joy, and Meaningful Engagement

**Connection is at the heart of parenting—and it begins with the quality of your everyday interactions.**

Research shows that warm, supportive caregiver-child connections help children build confidence, resilience, and the ability to form healthy relationships.

The good news? You don't need extra hours in the day. High-quality connections aren't about more time—they're about how you use the time you already have. Strong connections rely on three key elements: energy, positive regard, and mutual engagement.

How you connect with your child shapes how they see themselves—and how they relate to others.

This easy-to-use toolkit will help you deepen your bond, bring more joy to daily routines, and foster meaningful connections at home. Use it to strengthen trust, spark playfulness, and create a more connected, supportive family life.

## **This toolkit is for YOU if:**

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- You feel disconnected from your child in the busyness of everyday routines
- You want to be more present and engaged during family interactions
- You struggle to notice and celebrate your child's (and your own) strengths
- Conversations with your child often feel surface-level or task-focused

## **This toolkit is for your FAMILY if:**

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- Your child seems reluctant to open up or share feelings
- Family time feels more like “being together” than truly connecting
- Your child has difficulty forming or maintaining friendships
- Joy, playfulness, and genuine connection feel limited in daily life

## **Questions?**

Visit [www.thinkgiveproject.org](http://www.thinkgiveproject.org) or reach out to us directly.

We hope this toolkit sparks meaningful connection in your family.



## Tool 1: VIA Character Strengths Assessment

### Parent/Guardian + Child Together

A simple way to build self-understanding and mutual appreciation in your family



### Do you ever wish you could see the best in yourself and your child more clearly?

The VIA Character Strengths Assessment is a free, research-based tool that helps adults and children discover their top character strengths—like kindness, creativity, or perseverance.

Research shows that focusing on strengths boosts well-being, resilience, and relationships. When parents and children learn to name and celebrate each other's strengths, it builds empathy, reduces conflict, and fosters deeper connections. With practice, the VIA survey helps children feel seen and valued, while giving parents a practical way to model appreciation and perspective-taking.

### How To Do It

- **Take the Assessment.** Parents/guardians and youth (ages 10–17) complete the full VIA Character Strengths Survey at [www.viacharacter.org](http://www.viacharacter.org). For younger children, parents/guardians fill out the Parent Assessment of Child Strengths.
- **Review Results.** Notice your top strengths—the ones that come most naturally to you. Encourage your child to do the same.
- **Share.** Discuss which strengths feel most accurate. Ask: How do you use this strength in daily life? How does it help you? When is it hard to use? Be open to both positive and mixed reactions.
- **Appreciate Out Loud.** Affirm each other's strengths when you see them: "I love how creative you were," or "Your perseverance helped you stick with that."

Nobody uses their strengths perfectly all the time. But practicing strength-spotting helps families grow closer, build confidence, and connect with more joy—and the research backs that up.



## Tool 2: Value Your Strengths

### Parent/Guardian + Child Together

A follow-up activity to deepen family connections through the VIA strengths



**Do you want a simple way to strengthen family bonds by appreciating what matters most to each of you?**

This activity helps families build stronger connections by reflecting on and sharing their most valued character strengths. Research shows that reflecting on valued strengths deepens self-understanding, strengthens emotional connection, and builds resilience against stress. This practice also aligns with strengths-based parenting, which emphasizes open communication, affirmation, and respect for autonomy.

By sharing reflections, parents and children learn to appreciate each other's values and unique qualities—creating a stronger sense of family connection.

### How To Do It

1. **Choose Your Strength.** You and your child each pick one top strength from your VIA results that feels most important right now. Example: You might choose perseverance, while your child chooses creativity.
2. **Reflect Briefly.** Write about why this strength matters and how it shows up in your daily lives. Example: "My perseverance matters because it helps me finish tough projects at work," or "My creativity matters because I love inventing new games."
3. **Share.** Take turns explaining your chosen strength and reflection. Listen closely without judgment. Example: Your child might say, "I feel creative when I make up stories;" you might say, "I see your creativity when you use Legos."
4. **Appreciate.** Thank each other for sharing and name where you notice that strength. Example: "I loved your creativity when you decorated your room."

Nobody connects perfectly every time. But taking time to reflect on and share your strengths creates more empathy, respect, and joy—and the research backs that up.



## Tool 3: Scribble Drawing

Parent/Guardian + Child Together

A playful way to spark creativity and connection through art



**Do you want an easy, no-pressure activity that helps you and your child connect with joy?**

The Scribble Drawing activity is a simple, judgment-free way to bond through creativity. All you need is paper and crayons or markers. You and your child take turns scribbling, then find shapes or images hidden in your marks. You can color them in, turn them into drawings, or even create a short story together.

Research shows that play-based activities like this boost positive emotion, creativity, and shared joy. Experiencing fun and imagination together builds stronger emotional bonds and high-quality connections between parents and children.

### How To Do It

1. **Scribble.** Each person takes a sheet of paper and scribbles freely for about one minute. Don't worry about making it "look good"—there's no wrong way to scribble!
2. **Discover.** Trade papers and look for shapes, animals, or objects hidden in each other's scribbles. Circle or trace what you see.
3. **Create.** Add colors and details, or invent a story about what you've discovered (e.g., "This shape looks like a dragon—let's make it breathe rainbow fire!").
4. **Appreciate.** Share what you enjoyed about each other's creativity: "I love how you turned my scribble into a rocket ship."

Nobody makes perfect art—and that's the point. By focusing on fun instead of outcomes, you create space for laughter, imagination, and connection—and the research backs that up.



## Tool 4: Mindful Nature Walk

Parent/Guardian + Child Together

A simple outdoor activity to connect, reflect, and enjoy nature together



### Do you want a relaxed way to strengthen your bond while enjoying the outdoors?

The Mindful Nature Walk activity helps families connect through curiosity, mindfulness, and playful exploration. Collect natural treasures in paper bags while walking together, then share and reflect on what you find. You can even turn your finds into art, stories, or other creative projects.

Research shows that mindful, nature-based activities promote emotional openness, positive interactions, and mutual regard—all key elements of strong family connections. Spending time outdoors together encourages curiosity, calm, and meaningful engagement, which strengthens bonds and creates lasting memories.

### How To Do It

1. **Walk and Collect.** Take a slow walk with your child. Collect natural items like leaves, stones, and flowers. Notice textures, colors, and smells along the way.
2. **Reflect.** After your walk, look at your treasures. Talk about what you noticed or how the items make you feel. Example: "I love the bright yellow leaf—it reminds me of summer," or "This rock feels smooth and calm in my hand."
3. **Share and Create.** Swap items and use your collections to make art, tell a story, or even build a small nature display together. Example: "Let's make a story about the journey of these leaves in the wind."
4. **Appreciate.** Notice how your child sees the world differently, and celebrate the moments of curiosity and calm you experienced together.

Getting curious about nature and sharing what you notice leads to stronger connections, joyful moments, and deeper appreciation between parent and child—and research shows it works.

