

What helps create a strong family and how do strong families affect New Zealand's well-being?

The Oxford dictionary defines 'strong' as "able to withstand forces, pressure or wear" (*Oxford University, 2025*). In the current world we live in families are surrounded by pressure in many forms. With correct principles in place strong families can be created. This would benefit New Zealand's current and future well-being.

Creating a strong family needs to start from birth. Based on neuroscience research we can recognize the huge impact the first 1,000 days can have on an individual (*Morreau, 2020*). *Wallis (2020)* places emphasis on the importance of forming reciprocal relationships in children in their first 1,000 days. These relationships affect continuing development later in life. *Yates (2015)* expresses that a strong start from birth, from strong bonds being formed, is what children need for success later in life. This view is also supported by Psychoanalyst *John Bowlby (1907-1990)* who described in his 'Attachment theory' the importance of forming bonds with individuals from birth (*Berger, 2020*). Knowing this, Parents and caregivers should be intentional in forming reciprocal relationships with the children in their care.

Love should be the most important factor in one's effort to create a strong family. Love is not only a feeling. Love is a choice which needs to be made every day. In Colossians 3:14, love is described as something we "put on...binding all things together." Parents and caregivers can never show too much love to their children.

Support is another element fundamental in building a strong family. Pressures of life can come in the form of tragedies and unforeseen circumstances. Because of this families need a loving support network. "It takes a village to raise a child" (*Reupert, 2022*) is a well-known proverb full of truth. Having been raised in a family who suffered loss and now living and working with a family whose Father passed away, I have seen this to be true. Support and assistance can look different for each family. We weren't created to live life alone. This also relates to parenting and raising children. It is important that Parents and caregivers aren't afraid to ask for and accept help.

Distractions and many things around us seeking our attention are included in the pressures of life. If allowed, these distractions can draw families away from giving the care and attention their children need. Jim Elliot (*Proffitt, 2023*) wisely said "wherever you are, be all there". Sadly this is becoming rarer to observe with parents and caregivers often giving the children in their care divided attention with a phone or device in hand. This can be prevented through setting boundaries, only being on one's device when necessary.

Reflecting on these few principles in creating strong families we can see how this would benefit New Zealand's well-being. Previously mentioned, relationships formed with children from having strong attachments with their family would result in children who are self assured and confident. Children today are the next generation who need to be capable of making decisions. In contrast, statistics show how sadly a large percentage of crimes committed today involve individuals not having grown up in a stable environment (*Housing first*, 2025). Suicidal rates are also alarmingly high as a result of individuals suffering from mental illnesses (*Te Whatu Ora*, 2024). Knowing this, Families should be encouraged to put their families first. I do believe the future of New Zealand starts with the family.

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