

Family Time

In our fast paced culture creating family time is a challenge for most of us. Our schedules are so crammed full of activities or we are so drained by the weekend it's hard to find the energy or make the time to spend together. Family members can be sitting beside each other engaged in totally different activities or in other rooms of the house texting each other when they need something. I'm sure you all know this is not the family time I'm referring to. Family time is when family members spend time interacting with each other with no interruption from the "outside world." The paradox is that although for most families quality time is hard to arrange, yet we need it in our society more than ever. So many other influences pull at our children to get their attention.

In the not so far distant past people worked long hours to get chores done (imagine the crank laundry machines or making dinner from scratch.) While it took people much longer to do what we can do in the blink of an eye now they still spent time together as a family. They did not have the distractions that we have today. They were in many cases their own entertainment. I personally would not want to give up the technology that frees up my time. Technology is a wonderful thing, yet it's side effects to relationships can be detrimental if ignored. While technology is developing it's important to recognize that in moving forward we will need to be creative in making time with each other so that the connections are not lost. It's easy to become so focused on our lists, or down time that we lose sight of the big picture. In big picture time is one thing that cannot be purchased or regained.

Research has shown that families who spend time together are ahead in many areas. Children are better adjusted when families play together and eat meals together. I have met with many families and have found these to be some of the reasons families give up on regular family time. Parents may believe that if they can't eat together everyday then there's no point. Parents may believe that all the activities the kids are involved in are important to self-esteem. Parents may not know how to spend time with the kids, as the pattern is to watch TV rather than talk or play games. Parents are too tired, or kids would fight it as they want to play on the computer or do their own thing. Coordinating family time feels overwhelming. I have found that when parents learn the skills of implementing and protecting family time they find the effort worth it.

I want to encourage you to be creative in setting aside time. Remember not to get stuck in thinking that just because you can't do the Beaver Cleaver dinners or the Sunday drives weekly doesn't mean you can't have family time. You can set aside pockets of uninterrupted time. If you can't possibly eat together five days a week, rather then give up spend the energy focusing on making two days work. Families may have to give up activities for the short run, yet in the long run it will pay big dividends to your relationships as the kids grow.

The key is to be intentional about when and how to spend the time. Setting priorities for the family. Being consistent by setting boundaries around the time together. Allow all

family members who are old enough to help with ideas for family time. Remember there's no such thing as a perfect family, so be realistic in your expectations. Connectedness doesn't just happen. Family connection helps kids feel more secure and cared about, and it helps them learn your values. There are many resources on family activities that don't cost a lot. Here are a few ideas:

If you have younger children take walks and help them identify leaves, flowers and birds.

Make a tent with blankets in the family room and tell stories.

Talk about when you were a kid how things have changed.

Play out the Bible stories.

Have daily or weekly family devotions.

Have a picnic in the living/family room.

Make fun snacks they you can eat together. (for example, blue Jello with candy jelly fish) there are also many healthy snack recipes to make together even for very young children.

Have a dinner with candle- light and flowers.

Have rules around your family time or meals that protect it like no phones at the table, no answering the phone and no TV.

Have a comedy night where kids tell jokes. (there are kid friendly clean joke books)

Put up a real tent in the backyard, and have a camp out.

Use fruits or veggies to make faces on children's plates before they eat them.

For more suggestions go to the library, or look up family time on the internet.

One Dad and author compiled 99 ideas for free family fun. The author is Mack Thomas and the Title of the book is "99 Ways to Entertain your Family for Free."

I encourage you this week to be intentional and find at least one way to have fun with your family! God Bless,

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