



Trauma
Care

Newsletter

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Time with Children

TraumaCare

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People may wonder if kids have gotten off track these days. You hear it all the time from the older generations. They think that kids these days simply aren't as disciplined and respectful like kids used to be. You may have even noticed a change in your own child's behavior and have wondered what the problem is.

Before we get too analytical about your child's behavior—whether bad or indifferent—we have to take a quick peek at our own lifestyle. Let's ask a few questions. Do we work a lot? Do we work too much? How often are we home? How many times have we engaged our child this week?

Everyone's circumstances are different. One thing I am not trying to do is point the finger at anyone by saying it's all parents' fault that we don't spend more time with our kids. In some cases it may be, but we have to be realistic too. In this economy our bosses are placing more of a demand on us and many parents have to work two or more jobs just to make ends meet. One thing to remember, in times of stress, our kids need us more than ever and we should try everything possible to help keep the connection.

So, do we spend enough time with your kids?

Well, of course there are plenty of great kids in this world, but the world has become a busier place. Everyone works so much that it is hard to just let go, clock out, and get your butt home so that you can spend some quality time with the kids. Sometimes our busy, hectic world reflects in our children. Kids who are listless, have no interests, or who do poorly in school likely have parents who don't spend much time with them.

It is important to understand that half the battle of winning our kids over and helping them progress through life is just being there for them. They need to see our strengths, see our weaknesses and how we handle different situations. Our kids' eyes are always on us, and it is up to us as parents, to lead them until they are able to do so themselves.

I feel that spending one on one time with your children each day is invaluable – even if it is only 15 or 20 minutes, totally uninterrupted, one on one quality time can make an enormous impact on children.



Tips to help create more family time and less stress

Wake up earlier

If you find yourself losing touch with your kids, wake up 15 minutes earlier every day. You won't notice 15 minutes of lost sleep, but your child will certainly notice the extra 15 minute with you. Spend the time cuddling in bed, reading to the child or drinking a cup of chocolate milk together. You might think that 15 minutes isn't a lot of time at all, but to a child it can make all the difference in the world.



If you have more than one child, assign each of them one night a week where they get to stay up 15 minutes later than the rest of the kids. Use these extra moments to create some special one-on-one time together.

Cook ahead

If you find yourself in the kitchen from the time you get home from the office until you put dinner on the table, start cooking ahead in bulk. Spend Sunday afternoon preparing a week or two's worth of meals, then freeze them, freeing up some extra time during the week. While you're in the kitchen, allow your kids to help out. Older children can chop vegetables, stir the pot on the stove or run the mixer, while younger ones can help by washing the salad or setting the table. Make cooking a family experience, where you can sneak in a little time together and your kids can talk to you about their day.

Take a day off

You have vacation and sick time at work for a reason. If you aren't saving up for a long vacation this year, take off a day every now and then instead. If school is in session and it does not cause too many missed lessons, allow your child to miss the day, so you can spend it together.

Sleep in late, cook breakfast together, head to the zoo or park, then go out to eat. At home, you can read together, learn their latest video game, or just veg out on the couch and watch a movie. You don't have to do anything special or expensive to make your children feel loved.



Unplug

The computer is probably the biggest time-waster for adults (and kids) in the evening. After dinner, get off the Internet, turn off the TV and unplug your cell phone. Get back to basics with family game night, go for a family walk together or head to the ice cream parlor for a scoop or two. Spend a little quality time with your kids and spouse -- updating your Facebook status or checking your e-mail can wait until morning.

Kill the TV, or at least dismember it. Members of Family Life First tell us they turn off the TV during meals. The result, not surprisingly, is better table talk and a less circus-like atmosphere at dinner. Sitting down to watch a particular show or video can be a great way for families to relax together, but having the tube on in the background just adds another level of noise and stress. Or consider this: No TV Monday through Thursday nights. More time for homework, reading, talking, playing.

Make it a date

If you still can't find enough time to spend with your kids, put it on your appointment calendar. Since you can find room for that client dinner or your nail appointment, you can find a timeslot for your kids. Make a date with your kids at least one night a week -- and don't cancel, unless it's an emergency. If your kids are involved with sports and extra-curricular activities that take up every night of the week, you might be overscheduling them. Allow them to pick one sport (or activity) per season, rather than sign up for everything and anything.

Just say no to overscheduling. Limit your kid's afterschool activities. This may be harder for some parents than kids to consider. You want Johnny to continue with piano; he really wants to make the hockey team. How to choose?

Think of it this way: Teaching kids to make choices is an essential part of your job as a parent. All these activities build skills, giving children a sense of what they can *do*, but time spent with family gives them a sense of who they *are*. Try using this approach: "You have to give up something (piano or hockey) to get something (peace of mind or time to breathe)."

Limit Yourself

As a parent, you too have your limits. Basically, you get one evening out during the week. Mom has a book club or a yoga class. Dad's playing squash. Simply put, you can't "be there" for kids when you're not around. The rituals that build closeness -- bedtime stories, cuddles in front of the fire or a favorite TV show -- can't happen when Mom and Dad use the front door like a revolving door. P.S. Mom & Dad: This doesn't preclude a "date night" for you guys! Keep the Love Train on track by scheduling a quiet evening for two now and then.

Dinners

Have set dinner times....even with busy parents it is vital. Have a standard agreed time, e.g. 6:15 p.m. standing mealtime -- at dinner no discipline issues are discussed and no phones get answered.



Catch Some Winks

Not kidding with this one: Get some sleep! Lights out by 10 p.m., 11 o'clock at the latest. When you feel rested, you feel calm. If you lucky to be a half day mom or stay at home mom, nap with the kids. So pay bills in the morning, and turn on the radio to catch the news you missed from the night before.

TGIF Fun Night

Friday night, heralding the end of the work-week, is one of the best times to focus on family. While others wait in line for tables at overcrowded restaurants, grab a takeout pizza and head back to the ranch. Let kids take turns each week setting the agenda: Video? Monopoly? Scavenger hunt for loose change?

Plan a picnic

During the spring and summer time, kids love to be outdoors with their family.

Grow a garden

It's outside and you get your hands dirty! What can be better than that for an activity? Explore the world of gardening and find ways to involve your children in this interesting and positive activity.





Spending quality time with your kids provides them with the opportunity to be heard, to learn and to be loved. It allows you and your children to make connections that will last a lifetime. So next time, you tell your child, "Not right now," think about it for a second. An unmade bed or pile of dirty laundry can wait -- your children won't be little forever.

If you want your
children to turn
out well, spend
twice as much
time with them,
and half as much
money.

-Abigail Van Buren

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Play Therapy * Counselling * Trauma Counselling

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