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Connecting Big Plans' Parents to their Communities

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The Gift of Time - Top 10 Tips

Time is among the most precious gifts a parent can give to their child. Children who receive quality time are less likely to act out and far more likely to lead a happy and balanced life. Why? Because they know how deeply they are valued. Spending quality time with your children is one of the best investments you can make in your child's self esteem, future success and well being. It can also protect your child from making bad decisions down the road, especially during the harder teen years.

Fortunately, creating special moments with your children is easier than many busy, stressed out parents might think. The secret lies in making the most of daily opportunities in your home that naturally give you more time to enjoy your family. By creating daily routines, busy parents can turn even the most humdrum activities, such as doing the dishes, laundry or dusting, into moments that allow them to connect with their children.

Many parents feel enormous pressure to make special time with their children, not realizing that often it is our day-to-day tasks that offer the best opportunities to create spontaneous moments that will be remembered for a lifetime. Simply reading a story before bed, or telling your child every night that you feel so blessed to have them in your life, takes only a few minutes and are perfect ways to create quality time with your child.

#1: Have Breakfast Together

Get up a little earlier and start your day off right by having breakfast together as a family. Make a habit of talking about the day ahead when everybody is rested. Within your breakfast routine, consider establishing a family tradition, such as a reading a positive quote, thought or short story for the day. Get the children involved in preparing breakfast. Even a small daily job, like buttering the toast or setting the table, can boost your children's self-esteem and make them feel like an important part of your family.

#2: Make Household Chores a Team Event

Children love routine and they also secretly love chores. Regularly feeding the family pet, taking out the garbage, dusting, or being your sous-chef during the evening meal, work particularly well. What seem like just chores for you can often be fun activities for younger children. And don't be afraid to start them young! Kids love to help out. Simple jobs, like sweeping the floor or transferring wet laundry to the drier, instill the importance of contributing to the household and develop a solid work ethic along with a sense of gratitude. For teenagers, more sophisticated activities, like learning to cook, buying groceries, and doing the laundry teach essential life skills. A light hearted, team approach to housework has the added benefit of decreasing the time you spend doing chores and often eliminate the need for nagging.

#3: Create a Fun Bedtime Routine

Establishing a fun bedtime routine is something children look forward to and allows you to bond with your



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children on a daily basis. Get the logistics like teeth brushing out of the way before cuddling, stories or a simple hug good-night. Remember that once you have said “good-night” to not get suckered into the “just one more story” or “another glass of water” request. Children need to go to sleep on time, so they awaken refreshed and not grumpy. Smooth bedtimes also give you much needed rest on your own or special time to connect with your spouse.

#4: Go on Date Nights

Set aside one evening per week for “date nights” spent together as a family and make it a tradition. Have dinner together, play at the park, go out for ice cream, or watch a movie and have popcorn in the comfort of your own home. Friday evenings often work best, as homework and weekend commitments don’t interfere. The goal of this time is to catch up and have fun together because families who play together often are the ones who stick together.

#5: Dust Off Your Games and Play Together

Board games and card games are a great way for the family to interact. Let your children pick the games they enjoy. Don’t be shy about creating your own games. Use ordinary objects around the house to create a fun play space—build a fort with blankets, make music with pots and spoons, create a puppet show or even a treasure hunt. Outdoor games such as baseball, hide’n seek, follow the leader or “shooting some hoops” in the driveway can provide great fun for everyone, whether you are on a team, acting as cheerleader, or simply keeping score.

#6: Plan Family Holidays and Special Occasions as a family

Involve children in planning birthday parties, social events, weekly schedules and family holidays. Children love exploring brochures and writing out holiday wish lists. If children feel they are part of the planning, they not only feel important but tend to be committed to making it a success and have a much better time.

#7: Focus on the Positive

A common complaint of children and especially of teenagers is that their parents nag too much. Just as you don’t like to be put down, your children don’t want to be around someone who is constantly criticizing (neither do our spouses by the way). Focusing on the positive is often the most effective way to reach out to your child and teen and to also have them do more of what you want and like them to do. So lighten up and make a point to recognize and appreciate your teenager or child when they are being helpful. Simply saying “thank you” can help bridge deep seeded issues that divide you from your child.

#8: Invite Conversation Instead of Demanding It

Don’t interrogate your children—talk to them. Instead of asking, “What did you do at school today?”, tell your children about your day. This is one of the easiest ways to model and invite great conversation. Teenagers in particular, need to know they can bring their problems to you. If they think you are going to freak out every time they share, they will simply stop sharing. A great way

to break the ice is by being real with them about some of your own challenges. When parents periodically share their own daily issues and open themselves up to hearing their children’s opinions, they are actively demonstrating healthy conversation. This builds trust, understanding and will make your child more open to sharing with you. One of the best times to talk is in the car. Teenagers are especially more open when they don’t have to make eye contact when discussing sensitive issues.

#9: Make Room for Spontaneity

If you look back on the best moments of your childhood, chances are the things you remember most fondly were unplanned. By being impulsive and doing the unexpected, you can create memories that last a lifetime. Spur of the moment events, like a Saturday morning pancake making contest, a dinner picnic in the family room, tenting in the backyard or a giant after school tickling fight often create a treasure chest of family legends.

#10: Eat Dinner Together

The dinner table is one of the most important daily opportunities for solid family interaction. If schedules are getting in the way, change your schedule so you can eat dinner together more days than not. Consistency is crucial. During the meal, turn off the phone to ensure uninterrupted time, give each child time to talk about their day and make certain you are sharing too. Keep the conversation light and leave heated discussions for other times. Most importantly, make dinner mealtimes fun and cooperative.

Reprinted with permission from The Family Resource Facilitation Program (FRFP).

WINTER FUN

On those winter days when it’s too cold to go outside, plan for some family game time. There are many good commercially made games you can get. However, it can be more fun to make your own family game.

Winter Tic Tac Toe

Choose two winter objects to draw. A snowflake, a snowman, a mitten, or a star are just a few examples. Draw/colour eight of each of the two objects of your choosing and cut them out. On a separate sheet of paper draw your tic tac toe template. Now each person can take a turn placing their winter object on the template. The first person to have three of their objects in a row wins the game. Have fun playing winter tic tac toe together as a family!

Variation - if it is nice enough to go outside, draw a tic tac toe board in the snow and play with sticks (make x shapes) and pinecones or other items found in nature.



Photo by Kindra Clineff.
Featured on www.redtedart.com/snow-day-activities-outdoors/

Family Literacy Day 2017

Family Literacy Day® is a national awareness initiative created by ABC Life Literacy Canada in 1999 and held annually on January 27 to raise awareness of the importance of reading and engaging in other literacy-related activities as a family.

Taking time every day to read or do a learning activity with children is crucial to a child's development, improving a child's literacy skills dramatically, and can help a parent improve their skills as well. Barbara Reid, award-winning Canadian author and illustrator, is the Honourary Chair of Family Literacy Day!

Learn at Play, every day!

Taking time each day to engage in a learning activity will improve your children's skills dramatically and also provide an opportunity to keep parent's skills sharp.

Here are some fun activities from ABC Life Literacy Canada for your family to Learn at Play together:

- **Home Restaurant:** Spice up mealtime and have kids create a menu by drawing food items or using grocery store flyers – kids can take orders too!
- **Map it!** Pretend your family is anywhere in the world – on a world map, point to a location. Find out more about that county. What language do they speak, what is the weather, what sports do they play?
- **Grocery Hunt:** Write a grocery list with your child and let kids find all the items in the store – a fun way to do the grocery shopping!
- **Where's that Shape:** Have a shapes scavenger hunt by taking turns to find shapes indoors and outdoors. Then together make each shape with your body – kids and adults work together.
- **Game Anyone?:** Playing a board game is a fun way to learn together as a family.

Find more ways to Learn at Play as a family at www.FamilyLiteracyDay.ca. You can celebrate learning together on Family Literacy Day this January 27, but you can practice family literacy every day!

“Food For Thought”

For Parents and for Practitioners Who Work with Families

Have you noticed how the world has changed and how busy our lives have become? The realities of the modern world pressure families to always be on the go. Many parents work long hours and find impossible to find ways to sit down and eat together. We often bring work home physically and emotionally. Our children are often overscheduled with too many activities often with activities and events that they don't really care about or enjoy. Digital media is everywhere in so many forms – computers, smart phones, the Internet are amazing but they can also suck away our valuable time and isolate family members from each other. It is more now than ever that thinking about family time as learning and bonding time is so important! How can we ensure that we take time to eat as a family, play together, read and talk together? Are there ways to balance our work responsibilities and reserve time for each other?

Do we need to sign up our kids for every sport, volunteer for every committee or and answer every e-mail and text that arrives during our non-working hours instantly?

Do we really need to visit our Facebook page every day?

Can we make a commitment to share mealtime together as a family every day and while at the table, not have the TV on or sit silently and instead talk about our day?

What can be done to connect family members who are separated by distance? How can grandparents share time with their distant grandchildren?

How can we make sure that we cook together, make sock puppets and then use them to put on a show, play board games together, tell a story together and grab a good book and gather the whole family on the couch and read something wonderful?

How do we do this learning? Is it all about setting blocks of time allocated for family learning? Or does it begin with the questions such as “How was your day?” or “Mom do you think I would look good with green hair?” With 15 minutes a day or no formal day or time on the calendar?

Imagine the world 10 years from now. One can only imagine it will be more fast paced than ever, that families are going to be even busier, even more distanced geographically and even less able to connect to one another. To ensure that all our children and adults have the essential skills of the 21st century, we need to better recognize and acknowledge the value of family learning!



Let's celebrate Family Literacy Day
on January 27 and every day!

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In the Kitchen with Preschoolers








Not only is this recipe yummy, but it is easy enough for preschoolers to do all of the work. Cooking is a great way to introduce early math skills (counting, weight, measurement, time) and early literacy skills (following step-by-step directions).

Tip: To help a child measure liquid ingredients, you can place a rubber band at the correct amount on the measuring cup.

To find out how to make this recipe with a classroom or group, visit <http://playtolearnpreschool.us/banana-bread/>

Banana Bread



1 Mix sugar and butter.  1¼ cup sugar ½ cup butter	2 Add eggs and milk.  2 eggs ½ cup buttermilk	3 Mash 3 ripe bananas. Add to the bowl.  Add 1 teaspoon vanilla.
4 Mix in dry ingredients.  2½ cups flour 1 teaspoon baking soda 1 teaspoon salt	5 Mix well.  Pour batter into a greased loaf pan or muffin pan 	6 Bake at 350° for 30-35 minutes. 

Graphics from Charlotte's Clip, Krista Wallden and Teaching in the Toggass

Play to Learn Preschool

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