



Showing Love by Taking Time

When a person takes time to be with you, it sends a very powerful message: "You are important to me." When a person has fun with you, it sends another powerful message: "I enjoy being with you." Those are very important messages! It is very important to spend enjoyable time with children.

Effective time together can come in either small or large doses. When a child does something as simple as asking a parent a question, the parent can look at the child and give a serious answer. That may only take a minute but it sends an important message to the child: "What you say is important to me." There are many such small ways in which parents can send messages of love to children.

Many things that we do with children take more than a minute. It takes some time to take a walk, go the park, read a book together, or work on a craft project together. It can help us as parents if we are prepared to dedicate blocks of time to our children. Nothing we do is any more important than being a part of their lives. When a child asks for some of our time, we can think of it as an unwelcome interruption or an invitation to be involved in the child's life. **Think of interruptions as invitations to be a part of a family member's life.**

Sometimes we can have fun with our children while doing other things at the same time. For example, sometimes we can have fun grocery shopping together. Of course it is also possible that we might also have a miserable time together at the grocery store. The difference is whether or not we use good sense and a little planning. We may not want to make an outing to the store together if either of us is tired or hungry. We might have a great time together, however, if we are in good spirits and make a game of our shopping.

There are other ways to enjoy time together. We can use travel time in the car to talk about what's happening at school. We can make meal time a fun time to talk. We can use TV or movie time as a togetherness time to enjoy carefully-chosen programs.

Make time together fun. Whether you are working in the yard together or going for ice cream, have fun. Avoid criticizing or using time together to comment on the child's problems. Use the time to enjoy being together.

Sometimes we cannot take time immediately. We all have many things happening in our lives. We have appointments, meetings, and personal commitments. Even when we cannot take time immediately to be with a child, we can assure them, "I like spending time with you. Right now I must go to a meeting. I will be glad to read you a story when I get home about 8:30."

Great time together does not require lots of money. The one thing that makes time together good for children is knowing that someone enjoys being with them doing what they love to do. For example, when you go to a museum, rather than rush through in order to see everything, a child may prefer to stop and enjoy specific displays. Wise parents slow down and let the children's interests determine the focus and pace. Many things may not get seen but more things will be enjoyed if we follow our children's lead.

Make appointments to do things with your children. When children are young, you might plan some small event with them every day. "This evening after dinner let's walk over to the park and ride the swings." As children get older they may want to go biking together, have us come to one of their soccer games, or take them out for a treat one day each week. Make dates with them to do the fun things they enjoy. There is hardly a better way to show children that you care about them than taking time to be with them.

Applications.

Look at your calendar or think about your schedule. Have you made a special place for each member of your family this week?

Think of each member of your family individually. What are some of the things that each likes to do? What are some of the fun things you have done with each person? Do you need to refine the way you spend time together so that you are doing things that both of you enjoy more?

When your child talks to you, do you take time to listen? Most of us need to make a better effort to listen to our children. When they talk to you, turn to them and pay attention.

When you make a promise to spend time with a child, do you honor that commitment? If an emergency interrupts your plans, do you apologize and schedule a new time?