

MAKE YOUR FAMILY STRONG BY Spending Time Together



When 1,500 school-age children were asked, “What do you think makes a happy family?” the children didn’t list money, cars, big homes, or televisions. The answer they gave most was doing things together as a family, according to Nick Stinnett and John DeFrain, authors of *Secrets of Strong Families*.

Spending time together is an important characteristic of strong families. Healthy families work, play, eat, vacation, and attend religious services together. In strong families, spending time together is not a duty to suffer through, but a joy to savor and plan on.

If you believe that life is the most valuable thing you have, then sharing a piece of your life is the most precious gift you have to offer. Few activities offer so much in return. Sharing time with your family eases loneliness and isolation, nurtures relationships, and creates a family identity.

Quantity and quality go hand in hand. Obviously some quantity of time is necessary for time together, be it good or bad. You don’t need, however, to spend every available minute together as a family. The time you spend one-on-one within the family — child with child, child with parent, and parent with parent — also is important. Equally important is time for friends, hobbies, sports, and solitude. Healthy families keep a good balance between “too much” and “not enough” time together.

Every Minute Counts!

Mealtimes

In today’s fast-paced world, mealtime is the only time some families spend together. Whether it’s breakfast, lunch, or dinner, it is important to make mealtime a time everyone in the family looks forward to. Not only is it a great time to catch up on everyone’s day, but the benefits stretch beyond the table. Research shows frequent family meals are linked to eating more fruits and vegetables, eating less unhealthy foods and snacks, lower rates of obesity, and decreased rates of food insecurity in children.

Also, children of families who eat together regularly perform better at school and feel better, have less alcohol and substance use, and have fewer behavioral problems. While other things might be contributing to





turn tedious tasks into opportunities for getting together, communicating, and playing with your family. Although doing it yourself may seem faster and easier, allowing children to help teaches them self-reliance and cooperation. When a family works together, everyone sees they have an important role in the day-to-day functioning of the family. In the long run, the work gets done more quickly, children gain a sense of responsibility, and the family grows stronger as a unit.

Outdoor Activities

Try the team approach for yard work. With everyone's help, a beautiful yard is half the work and twice the fun. Spend the time you save enjoying the great outdoors. Take walks together. Grow a family garden and allow each person to care for his or her own plant. Play hide-and-seek or Frisbee together. Spend as much time as possible with your family outside. This can be as simple as sitting on the porch together. Go camping, swimming, hiking, fishing, or turn on the sprinkler and take turns jumping in the spray. The combination of time together, a pleasant atmosphere, rigorous exercise, and quiet relaxation makes for wonderful memories.

Indoor Recreation

Except on rare occasions, time spent watching television together is not quality time. Set limits on the amount of time your family watches television. Play educational games together or even games just for fun. Talk, listen, and really get to know each other. Read together. Giving kids chances for reading aloud greatly improves reading skills, grows imagination, and sparks creativity.

these outcomes, it is important to note that family mealtimes promote a sense of family togetherness and can create a culture in the home that brings about positive outcomes in parents and children. So, make mealtimes a habit for the whole family and reap the benefits.

Family Chores

Running a household requires a lot of time. Time spent doing chores around the home can leave little for other activities. That's why it is important to make family chores a team effort. Get your children involved. Research shows that household responsibilities are an extremely important function of family togetherness. Chores provide children an opportunity to show support for each other and bring to life the "helper" in each of us. So,



School and Homework

Frequently set aside time for one-on-one discussions with each child about their day in school. This is a great conversation to have at the dinner table, when the whole family can hear. Show interest in your child's life. Set a regular quiet time each school night for homework and be there when your children need help.

Suggested Family Activities

1. Storytelling

Gather around and hear your son talk about his field trip to the zoo and his favorite animals. Hear Mom sharing memories from her childhood. See children wide-eyed with wonder as Grandmother tells stories about the old days, or as Mom and Dad tell how they met. Don't forget the "Remember when we..." stories of shared family experiences. And of course, make-believe tales can be a special delight.

2. Family Service Project

Giving of ourselves and lending a hand is the essence of a family service activity. Spend the day helping a friend paint and fix up her apartment. Offer to babysit for a young couple. Adopt an elderly neighbor and check on her throughout the year. Shovel the snow off your elderly neighbors' walks and driveway or give them a ride when they need it. Family service projects can instill in your children the importance of helping others.

3. Pick a Name

Write the name of each family member on a slip of paper and toss the slips into a hat. Let everyone draw a name other than their own. Before the week is up, each family member is responsible for doing something special for the person whose name they drew.

4. Potluck Pictures

Hold a potluck dinner for the extended family. Besides a dish, ask participants to bring along some special family photographs. After dinner, have a time for "show and tell."

5. Memory Makers

A memory maker is a unique, out-of-the-ordinary activity. For example, a father might take his teenage daughter out to an elegant restaurant. Or the family might throw a surprise "welcome home" party for an older brother or sister who's been away at college.

Sources

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