

## Stay Connected to Your Children

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If you haven't already noticed, it's more than a little easy to get caught up in the stress of daily life. What this might mean to you is losing some important aspects of living, such as interacting and connecting with your family. If you've had a lousy day, the last thing on your mind is to sit down and talk to your children. Most likely, you'd rather disappear into a hot shower or bath, watch TV, get on the computer, or gaze off into space while listening to your favorite music. Unfortunately for many people, those stressful days are more common than not, and so it may be easy to lose touch with those whom you love the most.

Your children might be feeling some anxiety and worries of their own, and might also want to disappear into their own world for a few hours. While it's important to give each other space, it's also just as important to communicate and exchange ideas and thoughts with those you love.

### Hold a family meeting

One thing you might consider is to start having family meetings. Discuss the need for family meetings with your children. Try to hold the meeting at least once a week - either during the week or on the weekend, depending on your schedule. Make sure that the time you decide upon is good for everyone.

Once you've all agreed on the time, stick to it. Establish where your meetings will take place, and what will be discussed. When you begin the meeting, write down some proposed discussion topics on a piece of paper so that everyone can see them.

Have your children come up with topics of their own. Some discussion topics might be household chores, interpersonal issues, homework, dinner, TV or computer time, bedtime changes, allowance, curfew, and anything else you can think of that would be pertinent to your family.

Be sure to make some ground rules, including:

- Only one person at a time can speak. You can have a chance to respond to someone once they are finished.
- Respect each person's point of view. No criticizing, name-calling, or joking at someone else's expense.
- Know when to let go. If an issue appears to be going nowhere and is causing friction, let it rest and bring it up again at another meeting.
- End positively. The meeting should end on a high note, with everyone acknowledging their affection for each other another in some way.

## Eat together

Make sure you eat dinner together. Sometimes your schedule might not allow this, but try to do it anyway, whenever you can. Sit down at the table, and just talk.

You might find that you don't have much to say. That's okay - in time, you will. And even if there are nights when you all just sit and eat in silence, you are still connecting in a profound way. Eating together for at least one meal per day helps you feel closer as a family, and will get your children to talk to you about things that happened to them during the day. And you might find yourself opening up to them, too.

## Say good night

Tuck in your children when they go to bed. Even if they're teenagers, you can peek in to say good night. It helps them feel secure, and adds to the power of the ritual or routine, which makes any child happy and safe. Spend as much time as you can with them before they turn in.

If your child seems like he doesn't want to talk, then just say good night and give him a kiss or hug before you leave his room. But if he seems open to you, then stay and talk with him. Bedtime is a good opportunity to connect, because you're winding down, relaxing more than any other time of day. Bedtime is great for those fun, intimate discussions, and can be a great occasion for playful banter, or quiet affection.

## Play

Play with your child. Play is a powerful tool for togetherness, and brings you and your child closer. Let her choose something that she'd like to do. If she wants to go out and shoot some hoops, then do that with her. If she wants to sit and draw, or ride her bike, or play a board game, then do it.

Playing anything with your child, on her terms, lets her know you respect and care about her, and that you like to spend time with her. Your children will be much more willing to open up to you, if you play with them.

## More tips...

- In your family meetings, it might help to have a "talking stone," or other object, which is held by the person who has the floor. This helps solidify the rule about one person talking at a time, because if someone has the "talking stone," then no one can say anything until it's relinquished. By doing this, you can be sure that there are no interruptions – (or at least, not as many)!
- When you enter your house after a busy day, try to shake off any external issues you might be bringing home to your family. It might be difficult to forget the problems of the day, but there's a danger in taking out your frustrations on family members. As hard as it may be, leave your workday attitudes and dilemmas where they belong – at work.

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