

Family Time Together



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How important is it to spend time together in a positive way as a family? Scientific research on building family strengths has shown consistently that “working and playing together” or “spending positive family time” are among the most critical factors in developing strong family ties. Shared time is among the most important gifts that family members can give each other.

A father shared the story of sitting down after a day’s work in his favorite chair and reaching for a book. To his surprise, the book had disappeared – in fact, a whole stack of books was gone! He complained to his wife and young sons, asking them if they’d seen his books. His two boys answered yes and responded that they’d hidden the books. When asked why, they said “so you can’t read them – and we’re not giving them back till you promise to spend some time with us!” The father got the message: *It’s one thing to say you value family time, but it’s another to actually give time to your family.*

Families come together to share time in different ways based on their habits, needs and abilities. Does your family spend time

playing cards or family games, such as Monopoly, Trivial Pursuit or checkers? Games are a fun way to interact with one another and build connection. Parents, teens and other family members have many ways to connect with each other. Such connection time is “family time,” or shared experiences that create memories and result in positive feelings of togetherness.

Every family member can benefit from finding special ways to connect. Some families like to watch movies, ride bikes, go fishing, play ball or have a special meal together. The most important thing is that connection is taking place between you and your teen during these activities.

Some questions to ask yourself might be:

- How does my family spend time together?
- Is connection taking place during this time?
- Does my family feel connected?

Thinking about these questions is important to make sure that you are spending high-quality time on connecting with your teen in a fun and positive way.

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High-quality Connection Time

Family members can plan and schedule family time, or it can be spontaneous and unplanned. As children get older and become busier, setting aside special time with your teen can be helpful. This will let you connect with your teen. High-quality time is more likely to occur when you and your teen have time that is not interrupted to simply be together and build your relationship. To make sure you are having high-quality time together, avoid any distractions. High-quality time lets you focus on spending time alone with each other.

You have many activities you can do to spend high-quality time with your teen. Consider the following ideas and then list two or three ideas of your own.

- Watch the sunset
- Talk about the best part of your day
- Play a game together
- Go for a walk together
- Tell jokes to each other
- Tell five things that you love about each other
- Make a fun snack together
- Have an outing together to somewhere special
- Share favorite memories with each other
- In the spring, pick fresh flowers together
- In the summer, have a picnic together
- In the fall, rake leaves together
- In the winter, build a snow fort together
- Work on a project together
- _____
- _____
- _____

Making a Connection Schedule

Some days are really busy and we feel as though we have no time to spend making connections with each other. This might be a good reason to make a “connection schedule” or a “time together schedule.” A connection schedule is a brief weekly calendar that lists one regular activity a day that you can do to spend some time and enrich your relationship. A connection schedule also will create a routine for you and your teen.

Routines are important to build structure. Have your teen help make a schedule with you. Having each family make a schedule that will fit with the members’ lives is important. Just remember to spend high-quality time together each week!

Also remember that all families are different. Each family has different interests, just as each family member likes to do different things. Take turns finding the things they like to do. Encourage your teens to make a list of ways they would like to spend time connecting with you. You also can make a list. After the lists are complete, make a schedule of when you would like to spend time together.

Here's an example of a high-quality time schedule. Create your own in the column on the right.

Day of the Week	Activity for Time Together	Activity for Time Together
Mondays	<i>(Example)</i> Movie night – your teen gets to make the popcorn and pick out a movie that all will enjoy.	<i>(Your Family Schedule)</i>
Tuesdays	Get up early to watch the sunrise together.	
Wednesdays	At dinner, talk about something you really want to try someday.	
Thursdays	Watch a sport night. Pick a game that is being played at the park – soccer, baseball, basketball – and go together to watch or even play.	
Fridays	Make your own pizza (from scratch) night.	
Saturdays	Picture night – grab a photo album and talk about when you were young. This is a great time to share memories together.	
Sundays	Lunch with other relatives or friends; invite family over for a meal together.	

Finding something that works for your family is important when scheduling time and activities together.

Having something scheduled every day might not be possible.

Having you and your teen spend time alone with each other or just individually also is important.

Relaxing by yourself is good and it is good for your teen, too!

Questions to Build Connection With Your Teen

Teenagers may change quickly in a short period. Sometimes after being separated or apart for a period, teens and caregivers can lose some of their feelings of closeness and connection. Or, your teen might have changed while you were separated. Asking your teens questions about their life, ideas and interests is a great way to rebuild this sense of connection. This helps show your teens that you value what is important in their life. Asking your teens questions allows them to open up with you. This can create trust and comfort for your teen.

Here are 20 questions to ask that can help you start building a deeper and stronger connection to your teen:

1. What is your favorite movie?
2. What are your friends like?
3. What are you doing in school?
4. What is your favorite song?
5. What is your best birthday memory?
6. What are five things you are afraid of?
7. Who is your best friend and why?
8. What do you want to be when you grow up?
9. What is your favorite thing to do?
10. Do you like mornings, days or nights better?
11. What is your favorite food?
12. Who is your favorite movie star?
13. Do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend?
14. Who is your favorite teacher?
15. What is your favorite sport?
16. Do you like spring, summer, winter or fall better?
17. What is the best thing anyone has ever said to you?
18. What is the worst thing anyone has ever said to you?
19. If you could be any other person for one day, who would you be and why?
20. What are your hopes for our relationship together?

Let your teens ask you some of the same questions, or share your answers with them. This lets your teen learn more about you as well. These questions can lead you into many different conversations to learn more about each other.

Additional Help Available

If these suggestions are not working for your family, seek additional help through other resources. Valuable resources include your support systems, such as family, friends, neighbors and community professionals.

Helpful information always is available in books, newsletters, classes and through family counseling or therapy. Counseling can provide families with additional tools to overcome difficult times.

Helpful Phone Numbers

North Dakota Helpline
211 or (800) 472-2911

Badlands Human Service Center
(888) 277-7525

Or call your local office of the NDSU Extension Service to find phone numbers for agencies that can assist you. Regional Parent Resource Centers also have information available to help provide phone numbers of other agencies to assist you.

Helpful Resources for Parents

Brotherson, S. (2003). *Building a strong family* (Issue No. 1 in Family Connections newsletter series). Fargo, N.D.: NDSU Extension Service. Available online at www.ext.nodak.edu/extnews/famcon/famcon-1.pdf

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Keeping our family together means doing what's best for each individual and what's best for the family as a whole. On our own, we each make waves. Together we form an ocean too vast and strong to be separated.