



## Making the most of family time

Family time is precious, nearly everyone agrees with that statement. Between school, work and every other commitment we have in our lives, its sometimes difficult to find quality time to spend together as a family.

We all have different memories from our childhood. The things we tend to remember with the most warmth are those special moments, like burying your dad in the sand at the beach, or planting a special garden with your mum. The time that we set aside for our family now, are the memories that your kids will hold forever – that's why making the most out of your family time should be at the top of your priority list.



### Plan for Family Time

To make sure you really do have quality time with your family, its important to schedule activities and family time. Make a weekly block of time that is set aside for family activities. It doesn't matter what activity you choose to do, as long as everyone understands that this is time that is set aside to be together. You may just choose to watch a DVD together, or you may plan a picnic at the beach – whatever you do together, make sure that everyone understands the importance and value of that special time together. Remind everyone during the week about your scheduled time together to avoid change of plans and last minute cancellations.

### Turn off the phone!

We're all so attached to our mobiles these days, but there is a time to just turn the phone off. Make it a rule that phones are switched off during family time. That way you won't be distracted by your best friends latest news, and the kids wont spend the day texting everyone they know.

### Turn daily routine into family time

Even the smallest moments can count as quality family time. Every day when I collect my kids, we have the same conversation. "what was the happiest/funniest/best thing that happened at school today". It took a while to get the kids to participate in this conversation, so I always started with my own story. I found the kids were really interested in my day at work, and after I told my story, they were much more eager to contribute. Now they jump in the car busting to tell me the best thing about their day.

### Eat together

Start the day with a family breakfast – it may mean getting out of bed 15 minutes earlier, but spending that time around the table talking about the days plans and events will help keep lines of communication open.



Turn off the television at dinnertime and spend half an hour eating and talking together. Turn on the answering machine and enjoy each other's company. This is a great time to plan family activities and keep up to date with what is happening in everyone's lives.

If the kids are old enough, get them to help plan and prepare dinner. The kids are much more likely to enjoy dinner together if they have contributed to the menu choice and the preparation of the meal.



### Create your own family traditions

Kids love routine, and having simple family traditions helps to create a secure and happy home life. Your traditions can be silly or easy things like pancakes for breakfast on Sundays, silly little family songs that you made up, car games or just daily conversation pieces at dinner (ie what was the best thing that happened today?). Teenagers may squirm and feign embarrassments, but they will secretly enjoy these family traditions. My siblings and I still laugh about silly family traditions we had as kids. My mum had games she would make us play in the car and my dad used to make up silly songs from TV commercials. They seemed so dumb then, but we can still recite the words to dad's ridiculous little songs now.

### Turn wasted minutes into magic moments

The other day I had my young son with me while waiting for the mechanic to do some repairs on the car. I had a list of things to do while we waited, so I rushed around to the bank and supermarket with my son. We got back to the mechanic, who told us we had another 15 minutes to wait. There was a box of toys and a pile of magazines in the waiting room, and they seemed the obvious choice. Instead, I took my little boy outside, and we lied down on a patch of grass and made animal shapes out of the clouds. If we look hard enough, we can find little blocks of time in our day to bond with our families and make magic moments out of otherwise wasted minutes.

### Let your family know how much you value family time

Don't forget to tell your family how much you enjoy spending time with them and how important that time is to you. Let them know what it is about them that you enjoy and value. It's easy to say "I love you" or "we need to spend time together" but it's much more effective if you give reasons for those statements. Telling your child the reasons you like spending time with them (you love their sense of humour, you feel proud watching them play sport etc etc) helps to build self-esteem and helps them to reciprocate the appreciation of your time together.





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