


Tips for Spending Quality Time With Your Child

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By Jessica Alvarado

Let's face it—life is busy! Between work and life responsibilities, the days pass us by in the blink of an eye. Many parents worry that they don't spend enough time with their children, wondering if this will lead to developmental delays. Some parents feel guilty about working full time, or experience anxiety about choosing to work out at the gym or go to dinner with friends. Social media posts from stay-at-home parents who are able to take their children to the local zoo or work on colors and the alphabet with them only add to this anxiety.

But have no despair! A recent study in the *Journal of Marriage and Family* questions the impact the amount of time mothers spend with their children has on the academic achievement, behavior, and emotional well-being of their children. This is not to negate the importance of time spent with children, but rather, to reinforce the point that quality of time is much more important than quantity of time. Children need high-quality time with parents and caregivers—that is what is most beneficial to children and what can have a positive effect on them as they grow. It isn't about endless hours of time—it's about how you choose to spend that time that truly matters.

As parents and caregivers, we can make choices to ensure time spent with our children is high-quality. Here are nine tips for busy families:

1. Have a daily “connect” time with your child. Do this face-to-face, if possible; but if this isn't an option, create a routine for doing so in other ways, such as leaving a note in your child's lunch bag, posting a note by his toothbrush, or writing an encouraging saying on a shared whiteboard in the house.
2. Create a special ritual for you and your child—something that can be done every day. For example, let your child choose and read one book with you at bedtime.

3. Tell your child you love her every day. And tell her how important she is to you and how she makes you feel.
4. Reinforce positive behavior. For example, if your child completes his chores without your asking, acknowledge it with words of appreciation—even if you don't have the chance to do so until the next day.
5. Make and eat meals with your children whenever possible. If time is limited, look for simple meals that require very little preparation, or grab a healthy snack such as an apple and sit for a few minutes and chat with your child.
6. Schedule time for doing an activity of your child's choosing. Be sure to follow through and complete the activity without any distractions.
7. Play with your child, even if it's during bath time or outside before you drop her off at preschool. Every little bit of time makes a positive impact!
8. Laugh and be silly with your child.
9. Turn off technology when you spend time with your child. Try not to text, answer calls, scroll through social media, or watch television.

Meaningful connections are about quality of time, not quantity of time. Keep it simple and connect with your child in ways that make sense for your lifestyle and relationship. Each connection has a lasting impact and provides the support and reassurance that your child needs.

Jessica Alvarado has spent over a decade in higher education and is currently an assistant professor at National University, working with students in their early childhood education programs. When not working, she enjoys spending time with her husband, son, and family.

References Brown, S. L., W.D. Manning, and J.B. Stykes. 2015. "Family Structure and Child Well-Being: Integrating Family Complexity." *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 77(1), 177–90.

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