

The importance of family quality time for families and children with special health care needs

Why is family quality time important?

According to a report by the A.C. Nielsen Company, parents spend only 39 minutes per week in meaningful conversation with their children. Spending quality time with children has significant effects on their well-being, including better grades, reduced substance abuse, improved mental health, and social competence.

Teens report feeling lower stress, happier, and more engaged when they eat meals with both parents and/or in the company of their father (Offer, 2013). Additionally, teens who engage in leisure time with parents were less stressed, more engaged, and generally have a stronger parent-child relationships (Crouter, et al., 2004: 159). These findings support the importance of both parents in promoting the well-being of their children.

What is quality time?

When families do not have a lot of time to spend together, the quality of time and the activities become important. Quality time is a period of time dedicated to the whole family doing activities of the

child's choice. Unfortunately, finding this special time daily sometimes leads to significant stress and guilt for working parents.

Having a conversation is the key to strong family relations. Studies of children's views of family time (Christensen, 2002; Daly, 2001) suggest that children identified everyday routines and time hanging out with parents as desirable family time. This is true whether it is one-on-one special time, family time, or everyday interactions around chore and family activities. Turn off the TV, cell phone, computer, and other distractions and **talk** while cooking, eating, and cleaning. Playing together may be the best use of a busy family's time and can lead to higher satisfaction and feeling of well-being.

Ways to increase quality time

Everyday moments

- Occur in the course of everyday activities
- May include other family members
- Are brief with focus on conversations, shared interests, and caring moments

Daily routines

- Pick your kids up from school. Turn off your cell phone and talk to them



- Cook meals together
- Eat at least one meal together each day.
Eating together often leads to healthier foods and fitter children.
 - Ban phones and TV during dinner
 - Do not use dinner time to give out lectures or punishments
 - Play *Best and Worst Part of the Day* where each person gets a chance to talk about their day
 - Ask specific questions about the day and activities
 - No arguing!
- Work together on homework and help answer their questions

One-on-one special time

- Schedule the time, 15–20 minutes
- Allow no distractions like TV, phones, or other kids
- Spend one-on-one time with your child regardless of whether your child has behaved well or badly that day
- Allow your child to choose the activity

Family time strategies

- Go to the movies, out for drives, or to watch outdoor sports/games
- Play cards, board games, or do a puzzle
- Exercise together
- Read books aloud

Family hobbies

- Try out fishing, hiking, or camping
- Do a project together! Build something,

make a craft, write and illustrate a book.

When working on a project together:

- Make sure it's something you and your child want to do
- Set realistic goals. Take into account your child's age, skill level, and attention span
- Find ways to help your child be involved safely
- Make a schedule if it will take more than one session

References

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Wyoming Family to Family Health Information Center

<http://www.uwyo.edu/wind/f2f/>

Wyoming Institute for Disabilities: 1-888-989-9463

UPLIFT–Federation of Families: 1-888-875-4383



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