

# Spending Quality Time with Your Child

More parents are working out of the home and may have less time to spend with their children. What's most important is the quality of the time spent together; whether it's two hours or an entire day, that time should be enjoyable, worthwhile and precious!

The time you spend with your child differs from day to day. If your time is limited, you might find it helpful to set aside a certain time of the day for the child. Children, like most of us, prefer to have a schedule. You might say, "After dinner, from six to seven, will be our time alone." In this way, the child can look forward to that special time.

During this time alone you could:

- Play with your child, letting him choose the activity.
- Talk with your child and really listen to her ideas and feelings.
- Share a hobby or special interest with the child.
- Read a book together.
- Exercise together.
- Take a walk around your neighborhood.
- Visit a playground, park or library.

Foundations for future parent-child relationships are established very early. Try to keep this special time "special" by not allowing interruptions. This special time should be fun and enjoyable for both the parent and the child.

You don't have to always play with children to have quality time. Young children want to be able to do things that are important and they want to be good at something. A child who sees parents busy around the home wants to join in and be part of the family. Giving guidance will enable him or her to do a job correctly and foster self-confidence.

Here are some simple chores you can share with your child:

- Fold towels and washcloths.
- Match socks.
- Sort laundry in piles according to color or owner.
- Measure laundry soap in cup.
- Help prepare meals: peel carrots, measure ingredients, wash vegetables.
- Water and take care of plants.

You probably know some of your child's individual interests. Spend time getting to know your child better and learning about his/her likes and dislikes. You may want to introduce something completely new to your child, like cooking or coin collecting. Share your own interests with your son or daughter. Talk about your own childhood and how things were different and the same.

You may feel that you don't know enough about certain things, like playing a musical instrument, to teach your child. Why not learn along with your child? It's good for children to see that their parents don't know everything.

Quality time can include reading and storytelling. Reading a book together is one of the most satisfying and stimulating experiences adults and children can share. Books open doors for new ideas and interests and for parent-child discussions about important issues. Reading and storytelling, accompanied by closeness and hugging, offers a special kind of intimacy that is hard to match.

Parents and school-age children can also play cards and board games together. Keep the spirit of fun in the forefront by minimizing winning and losing.

Watching television together is okay when both parent and child are too tired for talking or playing. However, television is no substitute for parent-child interactions and should generally be turned off during quality time or together time.

Remember that it is not the quantity of time spent with your children, but the quality of time that is spent together that is important.

Source: Pennsylvania State Cooperative Extension.