

## Family Time Builds Strengths

"Strong families are made, step-by-step," note family life researchers John DeFrain and Nick Stinnett. "We know that poor relationships within the family are related to many of the problems in society," they proclaim. And spending time together - quality time in large quantities - has been found to be one of the important steps necessary to achieving a strong family.

"Families benefit from shared time because it eases loneliness and isolation, nurtures relationships and creates a family identity," they explain. Furthermore, strong families understand that communication simply isn't going to be good unless they have time together.

The debate over "quality vs. quantity" has raged for years but to the families surveyed by DeFrain and Stinnett, "... quantity and quality appear to go hand-in-hand.

The time they spend together needs to be **good** time; no one enjoys hours of bickering, arguing, pouting or bullying. Time also needs to be **sufficient**; quality interaction isn't likely to develop in a few minutes together."

"Quality time" can take on a variety of dimensions. Quality time means not only the entire family being together as a group, but it also requires planning opportunities for one-on-one relationships to grow.

With all the pressures on today's families, how do they make time to spend with each other? How do they manage to have weekly family time plus regular, one-on-one time with individual family members?

DeFrain and Stinnett acknowledge that one of the realities of modern life is that many activities and people compete for our attention and time. While strong families are not exempted from this shortage of time, they *have* learned some creative ways of eking out time to create memories together:

- **Share meals together on a regular basis.** Use this time to share triumphs and tribulations or just to keep up on current events. Use this time as a "family meeting" to plan upcoming events. Or simply use this time to enjoy each other. Enhance meal time by turning off the television and turning on the answering machine!

Know how. Know now.

- **Work together as a team to get chores done.** Turn lemons into lemonade by using “chores” to teach children important life skills *and* get the jobs done. Demonstrate skills and work alongside children until they master each task. One mother cherishes her time as a child spent drying dishes because it was her opportunity to interact with her mother and sisters. She deliberately put off purchasing a dishwasher so that she could continue this tradition with her own children!
- **Play together.** Whether it’s indoors sitting by a fire, reading books aloud, playing board games or putting together a puzzle or outdoors summer activities, recreation time provides an excellent opportunity for interaction with family members.
- **Limit television time.** Many of the strong families surveyed by DeFrain and Stinnett felt television was an interruption that demanded too much attention, so they had strict limits on the use of TV in their homes. Others simply tried to improve the time spent watching television by using it as an opportunity to discuss issues presented through commercials and programming, alike.
- **Celebrate special events.** Personal observances such as birthdays as well as holidays and vacations are times when family members should be together.
- **Participate in community activities together.** With all the commitments facing families today, it should be some relief to know that time spent together need not be spent in isolation! Attending activities at school, 4-H or Scouting as well as at church events are all ways that family members can show support for each other. In addition, volunteering as a family to assist with local service projects not only provides another opportunity for families to work and play together but it also lends itself to helping children develop a sense of pride associated with being a contributing member of the community.

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