



The Parental Involvement Connection

Home & School: Together We Can Make a Difference

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PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT NEWSLETTER

Issue XXI

QUALITY FAMILY TIME

By Skip Forsyth



Many families today are fast-paced: hurry to school in the morning, rush to soccer practice Monday afternoon, doctor's appointment Tuesday, dash to cheerleading practice Thursday afternoon, business trips, and an endless list of chores. Families are juggling schedules and struggling how to balance work, school, and family activities. Many meals are eaten from a bag in the car while racing to the next item on the agenda. While time together during the daily ritual of SUV transport is valuable, it cannot be mistaken for quality family time.

Although this blur of **busy-ness** may seem inescapable in our current society, parents need to slow-down, take control, and with the children talk about family interests and expectations. The goal is to agree to a means to improve quality family time. Here's how...

Start with a family meeting. Talk together about the things the family might do to be less hurried and more happy. Ask each person to identify the activities they most enjoy. Make a list of ideas the family might do together.

Create a family time. It may be a week night or during the weekend; it may be weekly or monthly; but it needs to be "all for one and one for all." It needs to be an important time that is not compromised by lesser commitments. Stick with it over an extended period of time and it will become valued time.

Make it fun. It is not a business meeting. It is not an intense workout. Some of the best family memories are created when the family eats together, shares stories, and laughs together. If the evening starts with a meal at home, maybe begin with dessert; or go on a picnic. Enjoy a game night or entertainment night together. Have a family car wash followed by sponge fights or a water balloon fight. Go on a "mystery ride" to a hands-on science museum or the beach or the ice cream parlor. The goal is to spend time together.

Turn off the electronics. We are attached to our cell phones and blackberries, video games and computers. Avoid electronic interruptions. Disconnect from these electronic devices and connect to the family.

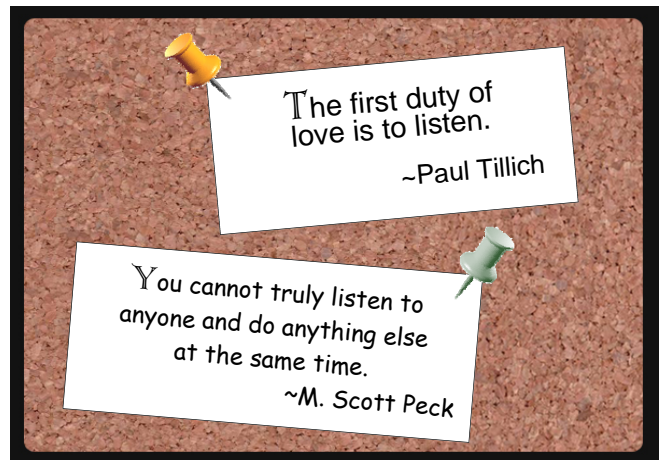
Above all, keep family first. Quality family time does not "just happen." In today's hurry-up world quality family time is the result of planning, persistence, and an uncompromised priority. Work, school, and civic commitments are each very important, but above all keep family first.



Lifetime Memories for Our Children

- Pause** with your child-when others hurry by;
- Walk** with your child-when others are running;
- Smile** with your child-when others can only find frowns;
- Listen** to your child-when others appear preoccupied;
- Talk** with your child-when others prefer shouting;
- Hug** your child-when others fail to sense the power of touch;
- Read** with your child-when others have forsaken curiosity;
- Play** with your child-when others prefer being entertained;
- Apologize** to your child-when others pretend perfection;
- Dream** with your child-when others have become too cynical.

By Dr. Anthony Witham
The American Family Institute



HOW TO RUN A FAMILY MEETING

The Family Meeting is a good way to start giving the kids more of a voice in household operations. You can use it to discuss not only discipline, but also such communal issues as laundry, allowances, bedtimes, renting movies, vacations, food, fights, etc. A good time to start is when the kids are in the primary grades in school. Don't try this when the children are three or four years old, because it will probably just aggravate you and confuse them.



Kids Will Cooperate Better

There are several reasons why the Family Meeting is a good idea. As the kids get older—and hopefully more rational—it is more appropriate that they have a bigger voice in the issues that affect them. Kids also will cooperate better when they have a say in what's going on. And finally, children need this kind of training for a later time when they have their own families.

The format of the meeting is very simple. Mom or Dad (not both at the same time) is the chairperson and has the responsibility for keeping order and staying on task. Older children can take a shot at running the meeting themselves from time to time. The chairperson sees to it that the agenda is followed and that each person gets a chance to speak without being interrupted.

Everyone Can Bring a Problem They Want to Resolve

Each person in the family can bring to the meeting a problem that he or she wants resolved. Then the chairperson guides the group through the following steps:

1. One person describes the problem to be discussed.
2. Every other person gives their thoughts and feelings about that problem.
3. Next, the floor is opened for proposals for solutions; anyone can speak, but one at a time.
4. A solution is agreed upon to be tried out. It may combine different aspects of the suggestions from different people. If there are disagreements, Mom and Dad have the final say.
5. The agreed-upon solution is written down on a piece of paper that is posted on the refrigerator, or it can be written in a Family Meeting journal, notebook or computer.
6. The next person brings up his or her problem, and steps 2 - 5 are repeated.

All solutions are considered experimental. If they don't work too well, they can always be reviewed at the next meeting. Proposals should be concrete, specific and practical, but don't be afraid to make them flexible and imaginative!

WARNING! It's Not Always Easy

Sitting through these meetings is not always easy; it's a good idea to keep them under an hour so you don't go crazy. Many parents have agreed that the Family Meeting is one of the most aggravating AND effective things you can do with your kids. It sounds contradictory, but if you can get through the process, the kids do have a greater tendency to follow through with the agreed upon solutions. It's also nice that everyone has a chance to be heard and to learn some negotiation skills—an excellent preparation for marriage!

QUICK TIP: Active Listening

You are a **good active listener** if, while your child is talking, you are sincerely trying to understand what he is saying. You are a **bad active listener** if, while your child is talking, you are preparing your rebuttal.

Source:

ParentMagic Newsletter by Dr. Thomas Phelan © 2009

Simple, straightforward parenting advice and helpful tips from Dr. Phelan's award-winning, best-selling **1-2-3 Magic Parenting Program**. To learn more visit 123Magic.com.

Upcoming Workshop

International Conference on Parent Education and Parenting
February 18-19, 2010 • University of North Texas in Denton

For more information and to register:

General Conference: <http://www.coe.unt.edu/cpe/conferences>

Conference Brochure: <https://www.coe.unt.edu/cpe/2010-conference-brochure>

Registration: <https://www.coe.unt.edu/cpe/2010-registration-information>



BUILDING A RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR TEEN

Do you feel alienated from your teen? Is she gaining more independence from home and more dependence on her peers? Do your attempts to learn more about your teen's life get met with accusations of "butting in"? So how do you keep growing your relationship with your teen while still giving her space?

Youth speaker and author Michael Ross says in his book, *How to Speak Alien: Invading Your Teens' World Without Invading Their Space*, the keys to parenting a teen are love, relationship and time. The following are some of Ross' tips for developing that relationship with your teen:

Show Your Love

Let your teen know how much you love her through actions, not just words. Discover what your teen's love language is and focus on that. Whether it is showing affection or giving thoughtful gifts or even just giving an encouraging word, take the time to show your teen love in a way that is most meaningful to her.

Spend Time with Your Teen

In addition to your child's love language, your teen will also recognize love as the time you spend with them. They may fight those family commitments, but they will also remember your efforts in making them a priority in your life.

Engage in some one-on-one time with your teen and take him somewhere fun, whether it is a sports game or a favorite restaurant. Or take your daughter for a spa or shopping day, or have a "slumber party" at a local hotel for a girls' getaway.

Open Up

In addition to attempting to understand your teen, help your teen understand you. She may feel you don't understand what she's going through, but open up about what life was like for you as a teen. This might even provide an opportunity for your teen to share about her own life. You might even find some great conversation starters in talking about your life now and the challenges you face as an adult.

And as difficult as it may be, Ross also recommends being open about your own weaknesses. He says, "It's okay to admit that your actions don't always match your convictions. Too often, we think that by saying the words, 'I blew it,' we're somehow weaker. Actually, just the opposite is true. A teenager admires someone who has the courage to admit his or her mistakes."

Become a Role Model

Your teen is watching you carefully to see how you handle ethical situations and how you treat other people. So always be aware that, good or bad, you are modeling behavior for your children.



Ross says that sometimes teens don't view their parents as role models because the teen thinks their parents are "judgmental and unconcerned about their lives." So if you want to be heard by your teen, be sure to be understanding, not condescending, when your teen comes to you with a problem.

And let your teen know you are always available to listen to her. Ross suggests, "Say phrases such as, 'I'm always here for you' or 'I'd love to hear about your day.' Don't apply pressure, but let your teen know you are there for him or her." In addition, resist the temptation to railroad your teen with advice. Instead, be a good listener and help your teen problem-solve with her own ideas.

The road to a close relationship with your teen may be long, but it will be worth the effort.

Visit www.familyfirst.net for more free marriage, parenting, family life and fatherhood information and resources.

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MOMS



HOW OFTEN DO YOU HAVE DINNER TOGETHER AS A FAMILY?

The benefits of eating together will last long after your meal ends. Studies show that families who eat together regularly are less likely to have children who smoke, drink, do drugs, become depressed or develop eating disorders. Their children eat healthier meals, do better in school, and are more likely to delay becoming involved in sexual relationships.

Sure, the dinner table is where food is served, but it's also where conversation is shared, values are conveyed and a sense of belonging is established. Make family meals a priority at your house.

DADS



YOU OWE THEM YOUR BEST

When Joe DiMaggio was asked why he placed such a high view on excellence, he said, "There is always some kid who may be seeing me for the first or last time. I owe him my best." If that's true in baseball, how much more important is it in fathering?

Your kids are always watching you. You do owe them your best. And your best starts with undivided attention and time. If you don't already, set up a monthly date they can look forward to for some one-on-one time with Daddy. The memories you make will last a lifetime.

These tips are found at www.FamilyFirst.net and/or AllProDad.com. Watch for "Mom" and "Dad" tips in each issue of the *Parental Involvement Connection*.

20 QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR CHILD

by Patti Ghezzi

One day your child tells you everything, from the consistency of the macaroni and cheese in the cafeteria to the hard words on the spelling test to the funny conversation she had with her best friend.

The next day...poof.

Parent: "So, what's going on at school?"

Child: "Nothing."

For many parents, the information they receive about what's happening at school ebbs and flows, especially once their kids hit 10 or 11 years of age. Even younger children may be reluctant sometimes to share the details of school life.



It doesn't mean that something's wrong or that you're somehow missing a key piece of the parenting puzzle. It may simply be that your child is asserting independence and craving a little privacy. "No one tells parents this," says Peter Sheras, a clinical psychologist and professor at the University of Virginia who specializes in adolescent relationships, family relationships, and stress. "Parents feel they are not very good at parenting."

Of course, that's not the case. You might just need to tweak your approach. "Don't interrogate," Sheras says. Kids don't want to be grilled. "Be subtle; be patient. Learn to listen intently to the words your child does offer. Watch your child's body language and demeanor. Avoid yes-or-no questions if possible, and be specific. Try escalating—starting with simple questions and gradually delving into more sensitive topics.

If all else fails, wait it out. Try again later with a different approach, such as choosing a different time of day to start a conversation or taking your child out for a burger before asking questions. In a place where she's comfortable, she might feel more talkative.

"Don't start the conversation with 'We need to have a talk,' Sheras says; That's when a child dives under the table."

Here are some questions that can help you get started.

1. "I know you were stressed out about that math test. How did it go?"
2. "I'm really proud of how well you're doing in school. What are you studying these days that really interests you?"
3. "You seem to have some good teachers this year. Which one is your favorite?"
4. "If you could make up a teacher from scratch, a perfect teacher, what would he or she be like?"
5. "When I was your age, I really didn't like social studies. I just didn't see the point in studying how people in Russia lived or what kind of languages Native Americans spoke. What subject are you really not liking these days?"
6. "What's your favorite time of day at school?"
7. "What do you think about your grades? How does your report card compare with what you were expecting?"
8. "We used to have the meanest boy in my class when I was your age. I still remember what a bully he was. Do you have anyone like that in your class?"
9. "I've been reading a lot in the news about kids picking on other kids. What about at your school? Is that happening?"
10. "I'm hearing a lot about bullying on the Internet. It sounds a little scary, but I really don't know what it's all about. Can you tell me about it?"
11. "I noticed a few new kids in your class. Which ones have you been able to get to know? What are they like?"
12. "I know it was hard for you when Kenny transferred to a different school. How's it going without your best friend around?"
13. "Who did you sit with at lunch today?"
14. "I'm sorry you didn't get invited to Sarah's birthday party. I know you're disappointed. How have things changed between you and Sarah now that you're not in the same class?"
15. "I really like the way you choose such nice friends. What qualities do you look for in a friend?"
16. "I know you really like your new friend Caroline, but whenever I see her she's being disrespectful to adults. Why don't you tell me what I'm missing? What do you like about her that I'm not seeing?"
17. "I can tell it embarrasses you when I insist on meeting your friends' parents before letting you go to their house, but it's something I need to do as your mom. Is there a way I could do it that would make you feel more comfortable?"
18. "How's it going with your activities and schoolwork? What would make it easier for you to manage your schedule and responsibilities?"
19. "I feel like I haven't talked to you in ages. How about we go for a walk and catch up?"
20. "I'm sure I do things that embarrass you. What do I do that embarrasses you the most?"

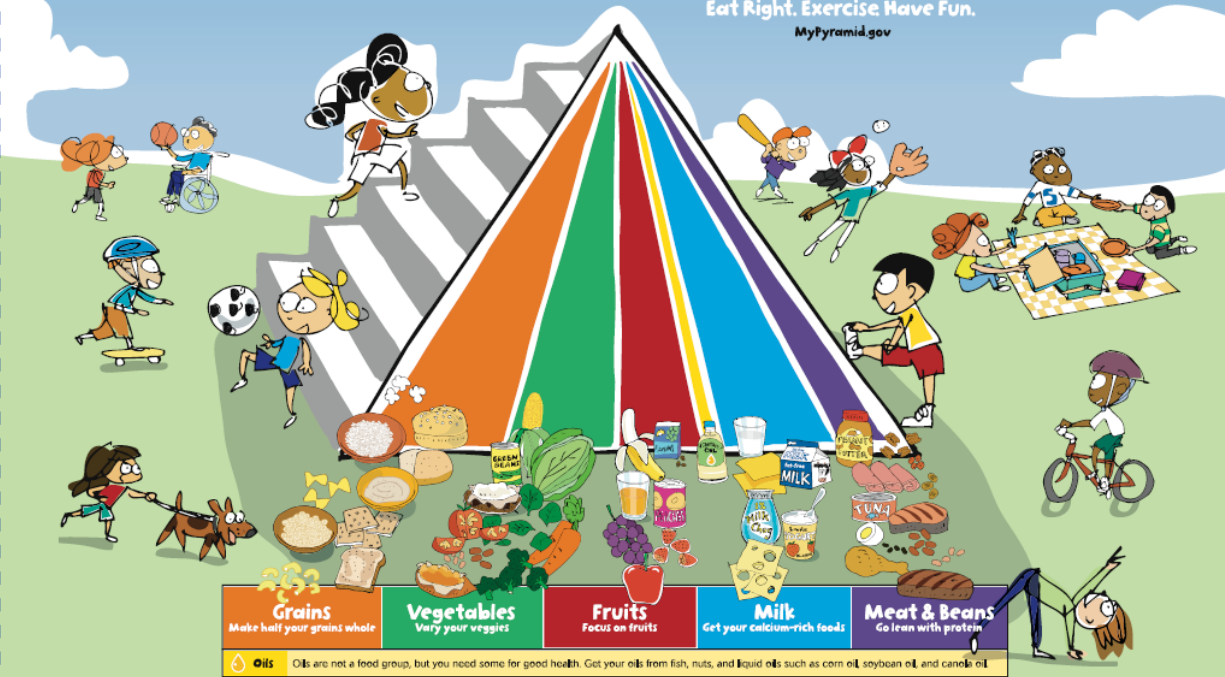
Talking with your child should be an ongoing process. Keep the dialogue open, and be available so your child can find you when she feels like chatting.

One final piece of advice from Sheras: "Keep talking even when you think your kids aren't listening," he says. "Your children are listening whether they act like it or not."

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MyPyramid ^{For Kids}

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Grains
Make half your grains whole

Vegetables
Vary your veggies

Fruits
Focus on fruits

Milk
Get your calcium-rich foods

Meat & Beans
Go lean with protein

Oils Oils are not a food group, but you need some for good health. Get your oils from fish, nuts, and liquid oils such as corn oil, soybean oil, and canola oil.

★ Find your balance between food and fun ★ Fats and sugars — know your limits

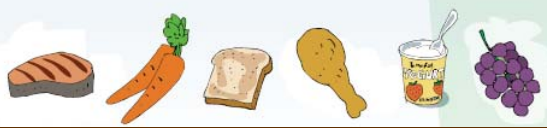
TIPS FOR FAMILIES

EAT RIGHT

- 1 Make half your grains whole.** Choose whole-grain foods, such as whole-wheat bread, oatmeal, brown rice, and lowfat popcorn, more often.
- 2 Vary your veggies.** Go dark green and orange with your vegetables—eat spinach, broccoli, carrots, and sweet potatoes.
- 3 Focus on fruits.** Eat them at meals, and at snack time, too. Choose fresh, frozen, canned, or dried, and go easy on the fruit juice.
- 4 Get your calcium-rich foods.** To build strong bones serve lowfat and fat-free milk and other milk products several times a day.
- 5 Go lean with protein.** Eat lean or lowfat meat, chicken, turkey, and fish. Also, change your tune with more dry beans and peas. Add chick peas, nuts, or seeds to a salad; pinto beans to a burrito; or kidney beans to soup.
- 6 Change your oil.** We all need oil. Get yours from fish, nuts, and liquid oils such as corn, soybean, canola, and olive oil.
- 7 Don't sugarcoat it.** Choose foods and beverages that do not have sugar and caloric sweeteners as one of the first ingredients. Added sugars contribute calories with few, if any, nutrients.

EXERCISE

- 1 Set a good example.** Be active and get your family to join you. Have fun together. Play with the kids or pets. Go for a walk, tumble in the leaves, or play catch.
- 2 Take the President's Challenge as a family.** Track your individual physical activities together and earn awards for active lifestyles at www.presidentschallenge.org.
- 3 Establish a routine.** Set aside time each day as activity time—walk, jog, skate, cycle, or swim. Adults need at least 30 minutes of physical activity most days of the week; children 60 minutes everyday or most days.
- 4 Have an activity party.** Make the next birthday party centered on physical activity. Try backyard Olympics, or relay races. Have a bowling or skating party.
- 5 Set up a home gym.** Use household items, such as canned foods, as weights. Stairs can substitute for stair machines.
- 6 Move it!** Instead of sitting through TV commercials, get up and move. When you talk on the phone, lift weights or walk around. Remember to limit TV watching and computer time.
- 7 Give activity gifts.** Give gifts that encourage physical activity—active games or sporting equipment.



HAVE FUN!



TEACHING YOUR KIDS THE ART OF LISTENING

"Did you hear what I just said?" It ranks right up there on the list of a mom's Top 10 Most Frequently Asked Questions. When it comes to communication, your child's listening skills are just as important as his ability to express himself. Learning to listen well will be invaluable, not only in his school years, but ultimately in his relationships and career life as well.



So how do you guide your children to better listening? Start by modeling good listening yourself. Be available to your kids when they want or need to talk. Listen twice as much as you talk, and resist the urge to interrupt. And watch for non-verbal cues as the conversation flows. Once they see what a good listener looks like, they can begin to understand and employ the same techniques.



www.FamilyFirst.net

**Be a good listener.
Your ears will never get you in trouble.
~Frank Tyger**

GETTING YOUR KIDS TO PICK UP

by Dr. Thomas Phelan

The 55 - Gallon Metal Drum

This idea was described to me by a woman I spoke with on the phone many years ago. She told me that picking up around her house had never been a problem. This resourceful mother kept a 55-gallon, metal drum in the garage, which was right next to her kitchen. Whenever she would find anything of her children's that was out of place, she would simply put the items into the metal drum.



This procedure had become so routine with her four boys, that whenever one of the kids couldn't find something of his, he would simply look in the drum. For example, her second oldest came running into the kitchen one day and exclaimed, "Mom, I can't find my gym shoes. Are they in the drum?" "Yes," was mother's reply, and the incident was over.

You say you don't happen to have a 55-gallon drum handy or your kids couldn't reach in there if you did? A large box will do fine.

Source: **ParentMagic Newsletter** by Dr. Thomas Phelan © 2009
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Title I Statewide School Support/Parental Involvement Initiative



<http://www.esc16.net/dept/isserv/title1swi/index.html>

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