



# Quality Family Time Activity Tips

## Plan for It

Set aside at least one block of time during the week to spend quality time with your family, and guard it like it's Fort Knox. Whether you choose one night a week, or an afternoon of the weekend, plan your other activities around it, and make sure your kids plan their social and work calendars around it as well. Then seek ways to have family time by planning day trips and family vacations throughout the year. Keep an eye on your community bulletin board for special events in your area that would be meaningful to your family.

## Spontaneity Rules

Planning for quality family time is essential, but don't shove it all into one neat little package and then ignore it the rest of the week. Sometimes the best memories are when you take advantage of spontaneous opportunities. Did someone just lose his first tooth – and he bravely pulled it out himself? Head over to the ice cream parlor to celebrate. Take advantage of longer-than usual car trips of more than 15 minutes to talk, make up stories, or tell each other your funny dreams from the night before.

## Key Ingredients

**Togetherness:** Dad's softball league may be a fun family outing, but you aren't really spending quality time with the *family*. Dad is on the field, Mom's chatting with friends, and the kids are scattered all over. Quality family time is only possible when you are doing something together.

**Fun:** One family's idea of fun will be different from another's, so plan *your family* time according to what your kids enjoy. Your kids might love a quiet afternoon bird watching in the pine forest. Or they might consider a game of "sprinkle mom and dad with pine needles" more fun, accompanied with echoing laughter through the pine forest, scaring away all of the birds.

**Age Appropriate:** Little ones need family time too, but their needs are vastly different from teenagers. In some ways the toddlers are easier to please than the teens; it doesn't take much to entertain a two-year-old, but the teen is easily bored with everything. Let your kids *share* in the planning of family night as they grow, and be open to their ideas, even if they don't coincide with your interests.

**Talk:** In a relaxed and positive atmosphere, your kids will be more prone to talk with you about what's really going on in their heads. You'll have the chance to find out who they are, and who they want to become. Take advantage of these precious moments, but don't turn it into a chance to deliver a lecture.

**Listen, try to understand, and share advice if they seek it.** If issues come up that need to be discussed, let them know you want to talk about them privately, but preserve family time as a happy, non-threatening occasion for everyone.

### **The Great Outdoors**

Every kid loves to play outdoors in a safe environment. Unfortunately, due to safety issues, most children today are not allowed to play outdoors by themselves, much less roam beyond their own yard to explore the surrounding neighborhood, parks or woods. Make the outdoors your family playground when the weather allows.

The possibilities for outdoor play are nearly endless. Take walks, bike rides and nature hikes. Go outside to catch some fireflies, butterflies or just watch the sunset together. Go stargazing armed with a celestial map and red flashlights. Play Frisbee, badminton or volleyball while you barbecue, or stay up past bedtime to play games in the dark like "Kick the Can" or "Capture the Flag." Roast marshmallows over the fire pit and sing silly songs. Pack a picnic and head to the park.

### **Lights Out**

Have some ideas on file for the odd time when the electricity goes out. Hide and seek with flash lights, storytelling, board games by oil lantern, and candlelit dinners are all activities you can do with or without electric lights.

### **Simple Traditions**

Sometimes the smallest moments are the most treasured. Reading books together is enjoyable for any age, and most kids never grow out of wanting their backs rubbed before lights out. Holiday traditions are also treasured, and you should establish at least a few that you keep every year. Expect your kids to groan a little during their teen years about a few of your family traditions (Dad's yearly Thanksgiving hike at dawn, or your weekly visit to church), but you can fully expect them to honor some of your traditions by establishing them as their own when they grow up.

**Do you want to give your children a happy childhood? Then push aside some of those activities that keep you all so busy, and make room for quality time with family. Store up the memories now that your family will be talking about for the rest of your lives. If you make quality family time your priority, you will convince your children that these were, indeed, the best years of their lives.**