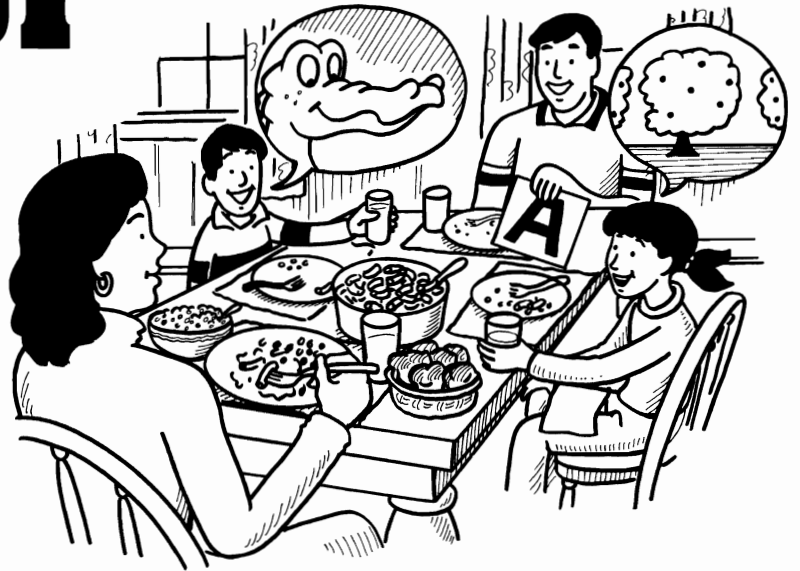


Time for Family



When you spend time with your children talking, playing, and relaxing, you strengthen your relationship and help them do better in school. But for many families, busy schedules get in the way of enjoying each other's company. Meet the challenge with these ideas for making time for family.

Work with your schedule

Find creative ways to spend time together throughout the day. Start by thinking about your family's obligations and activities, such as homework, meals, errands, classes, and chores. Then, consider these ways to build bonding time into each part of the day:



- Play with your child when he finishes his homework. Fill a recipe box with quick activities so you'll always have an idea on hand. *Examples:* Have a free-throw contest in the driveway, play a word game on the computer. When your youngster's homework is done, let him pick an index card from the box, and do the activity together.
- Keep the conversation going during meals. Choose a letter of the day, for instance, and ask everyone to bring a topic to the table that begins with that letter. On "A" day, your son might discuss a video he watched about

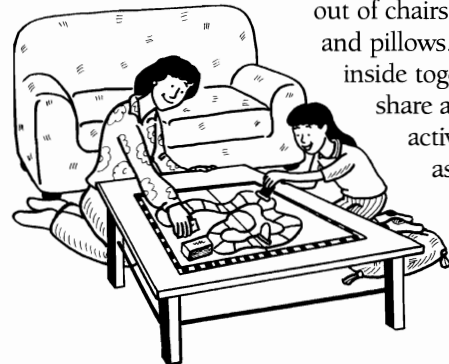
alligators, or your daughter might say she wants to go pick apples.

- Turn car trips into adventures. Storytelling can be done anywhere, and it builds language skills and imagination. While driving to soccer practice or the bank, have everyone look around and take turns making up a story. Invent details about a person you see, a place you pass, and something interesting that might happen. For example, maybe the mail carrier is an alien from another planet and he's lost in your neighborhood.
- Replace solo activities with family ones. Instead of signing just your youngster up for karate, look for a family class. Your parks and recreation department or public library probably offers a variety of free or low-cost family programs. Your child will enjoy being with you—and she'll see that adults can learn something new, too.
- Make a game of out of cleanup time, and show your youngster that teamwork pays off. For example, play "Beat the Clock." Have each person choose three things to put away (toy cars, books, art supplies). Set a timer for 5 to 10 minutes, and race to finish before it goes off.

Make every moment count

A minute here, a half hour there—try these unexpected ways to fit quality time into busy days:

- Start the day together. Set your youngster's alarm to go off a few minutes early so you have time to talk over breakfast. You might ask him if he had a dream he remembers. Or find out what special classes he has that day (art, music) or what he's learning about in science. Fill him in on your own plans ("I have a 10 o'clock meeting, and then I'm going to lunch with my boss"). Making a quick connection first thing will set the tone for the day.
- Get down on the floor and play. You might build a house of cards or play a board game. Or surprise your child by helping her make a tent out of chairs, sheets, and pillows. Crawl inside together, and share a quiet activity, such as reading.



- Let your youngster know you're thinking about her by leaving notes she can find. Write a riddle on a napkin, and tuck it into her lunch bag. (Give the answer at dinner.) Or draw a funny face on a sticky note, add a greeting ("Good morning, sunshine!"), and stick it on the cereal box for your child to find at breakfast.

- Share a snack. Have hot cocoa with marshmallows, bake oatmeal raisin cookies, or set out a tray of hors d'oeuvres (example: cheese and cherry tomatoes on a toothpick).

- Pay attention to your youngster while you're in the car together. Turn off the radio, and don't answer your cell phone. Instead, talk about what you see as you're driving ("Look—there's a new bagel shop!").



- Go for after-dinner walks. Carry a camera and take turns snapping pictures of the sunset, interesting clouds, or pretty rocks.

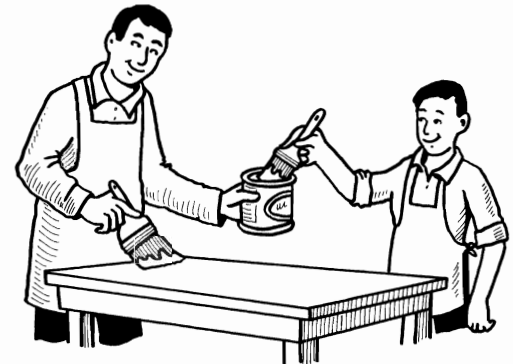
- Choose a theme for the month, and plan one related activity each week. During "Animal Month," for instance, you could make a bird feeder, volunteer at a shelter, and visit a zoo.

evening, Sunday afternoon), and write a specific activity on the calendar:

- Watch an old home movie, or make a new one. You might videotape your family singing or dancing, visiting relatives, or doing their best jumps into a pool or lake.

- Organize outdoor games like tag, kickball, or badminton. Or try something unusual, such as Sardines. One person is "It" and hides. Each person who finds her quietly squeezes into the hiding place, too. The game ends when the last person has managed to find and get into the hiding place.

- Do home projects. You might work together to sand and paint an old table. Or collect cardboard tubes from paper towels and wrapping paper and tape them together end-to-end to create a giant marble run.



Plan weekly dates

Add family time to your weekly to-do list. You'll send your youngster the message that spending time with him matters to you. Choose a time that's convenient for everyone (Thursday

All together now!

New families take time to bond. You can make the process easier for your blended family with activities like these:

- Start a scrapbook for preserving memories of your times together. You can include photos, ticket stubs, and other souvenirs. Let each person make his own page and tell the rest of the family all about it.

- Play "Fast Facts" to get to know one another better. On separate slips of paper, each person can write three facts about herself that other family members might not know. *Examples:*



"My favorite color is orange" or "I once had a pet lizard." Choose one person to collect the facts and read them aloud without naming the writer. Try to match each one to the correct family member.

- Celebrate your family. Have a party, and play games like musical chairs, pin the tail on the donkey, and limbo. You can even give yourselves a family gift. Choose something you can all enjoy, such as new sporting equipment or tickets to a community play. Then, make a date to use the gift together.

Home & School CONNECTION