

How Much Attention Does My Child Really Need?

Wouldn't it be great if we had a dashboard for each kid? On the dashboard is an array of "dummy" indicators that tell you how full their love tank is, if their truth-indicator has a leak or when they need a little fine-tuning.

But alas, this doesn't exist. We find we must rely more on our parental intuition to determine the needs of our kids that lie beneath the surface. And frankly, that's just tougher to stick a fork in.

At an annual marriage and parent summit, one dad posed this question: "How do I diffuse the **competition** for **attention**? I don't want my **daughter** competing for attention or desiring attention so much that she'll do anything to get it."

Here are a few thoughts I have on this well stated question.

1. Kids Do What Works

Kids will lean toward what they can count on. If they can count on attention using negative tactics, they'll use those tactics every time. Why? Because it works. Even if it's not the type of attention they want, it's still attention.

2. Give Them Attention They Can Count On

A great leadership tool in life is managing the expectations of others. When you make expectations clear, you manage what others expect from you. This works wonders with our kids.

Sit down and make an agreement with your child. Agree upon a 15-minute window every day that they know they can count on—a 15-minute "date" that you set aside just for them. A time they have your attention without fail. Have a special meeting place, and be there. Don't miss it.

In fact, here are a few things to make this time a huge success:

- **Give them your undivided attention.** Turn off your phone. Remove distractions, and engage in their world for a few minutes.
- **Begin and end on time.** Whatever you do, fight to start on time. Prove they're a priority by being there when you say you'll be there.
- **Give them your words.** Your child needs to know what you think of them. This is a great time to invest your words into their heart. Start with simple phrases like:
 - "I noticed you ..."
 - "It makes me smile when you ..."
 - "I always love how you ..."

3. Set Date Nights

There are a ton of benefits to a regular date with your child. But for the purpose of this conversation, I'll keep it focused. Date nights only elevate the special nature of attention from a parent—especially the parent of multiple kids. Date nights are a break from the routine that don't have to be costly; they just have to be intentional. Use that time to know them. Ask them questions like:

- "If you could have one meal everyday for the rest of your life, what would it be?"
- "If God gave you superpowers, what do you hope for?"
- "One day you get to ask God any question you want. What question would you ask Him today?"

Let them drive the conversation. All you need to do is keep it going and enjoy it.

Investing your attention in your child today goes a long way toward letting them know they matter. Your love over time will help your child understand they matter. Your words over time will help direct their path and anchor their sense of value in the truth. Setting time aside just for them creates a conduit through which you can feed your love and words into them in a way they can grasp.

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