

How to Have Quality Time With Your Kids

Leading up to Father's Day, there's a national campaign to remind fathers of the important role they play in their children's lives. It's being promoted by the White House and various fathering groups, and it uses a common phrase for its slogan: *quality time*.

I endorse this, because we need dads embracing their roles, spending time with their kids and making memories together. And time is one of the most important, basic commitments that a father makes. Quality time with your kids is a great goal.

At the same time, I hope that term doesn't give you the wrong idea as you strive to be a good dad.

Here at the National Center for Fathering, we have found that most of the great dads we interact with—the dads who really *get it* when it comes to being there for their kids—are not talking about *quality time*. They know that it doesn't usually work to schedule quality time.

Most often, the quality time is unexpected—it just happens when you're practicing a sport, riding in the car or eating a meal together, investing *quantity* time in the relationship with your kids.

If you think about it, "quality time" is an adult concept; we want to get the most done in a given time period, and in relationships it adds an extra layer of pressure and expectations.

I know what dads do; I've done it myself. We tell our children we *wish* we could spend more time with them. We *wish* we could play a game of Monopoly or ping-pong. We *wish* we could take them to the park and push them on the swing. But right now, we

can't. Our schedules are just too tight. Then we try to make up for it by doing something special.

Usually, when I hear dads talk about quality time, it's like they're making an excuse. It's difficult for them to give their kids a lot of time, so with the time they *do* have, they want to make sure it's meaningful. And when kids hear that phrase, they could easily get the message that they aren't worth more than five or 10 minutes of their father's day.

It's like approaching your daughter and saying, "OK, I have a few free minutes. Let's have a conversation and really connect." Sounds ridiculous, right? A better plan is to spend a lot of time with her; then you'll probably be available when those times arise.

Those conversations often occur when a father and child are just hanging out. And in either case, those moments can't happen unless we've built a strong relationship during the everyday, unstructured times during day-to-day life.

I urge you to think about quality time from your children's perspective. To them, what time with you is *not* quality time? They don't make that distinction. Spending an hour shooting baskets or building a Lego castle or working on a geometry homework assignment with your child may not seem like a big deal to you. But your kids cherish those moments.

There's a powerful example of this from history, found in two short diary entries describing the same day's events. Charles Adams, the son of President John Adams, wrote this: "Went fishing with my son today—a day wasted." The same day, his son Brook wrote this in his diary: "Went fishing today with my father—the most wonderful day of my life."

Our children want to know that they're important enough for their fathers to commit time in their schedule and say, "It's just you and me." Even if it doesn't end up being what *you* might consider quality time, it still could be for your child.

There are no secret weapons here; it's just a matter of putting in the time. Once you're together, good things will happen. So read a book together. Play a game. Go for a walk or a bike ride. Do a puzzle. Include your kids in your projects and errands to the hardware store or supermarket. Let them help with some tasks and projects around the house. Chances are your child will have plenty of ideas for what you can do together.

To be clear: You can and should plan special events and activities with your children. But connecting with them is more about investing *quantity* time and making a *quality effort* by giving them your full attention as often as you can. Make the most of your opportunities to connect with them whether you're fishing or fixing dinner together, whether you're playing laser tag or playing Candyland for the tenth time that day. That's when the so-called "quality" moments are more likely to happen.

Dad, invest your time and energy to be the father your children need. That's a daddy's calling and privilege.

Action Points for Dads on the Journey

- Being a great dad starts with *being there* ... showing up ... getting involved. Find one more way to be involved in your children's lives this week.
- Keep being faithful in the everyday responsibilities that too often get taken for granted: going to work to provide for your family; helping with a project; tucking in before bed; fixing a meal; attending games and lessons, etc.
- Put more thought into making everyday activities more fun for your kids. A trip to the grocery store can become a treasure hunt; an everyday chore like doing dishes or setting the table can be more fun if you make up silly songs about the activity.
- Whenever your child is talking to you, make the effort

to stop what you're doing, get down on her level and *really* listen.

- Before you walk in the door after work, take a few minutes to gather yourself, release stress and adjust your attitude. Be ready to focus fully on your kids.
- Start the habit of sending your child short, affirming texts at various times in the day.

Please share your thoughts. When have you found quality moments with your kids in unexpected places? You can leave a comment below.

Carey Casey is the CEO of the National Center for Fathering (NCF), a nonprofit organization dedicated to changing the culture of fathering in America by enlisting 6.5 million fathers to make the Championship Fathering Commitment. NCF believes every child needs a dad they can count on, and it uses its resources to inspire and equip men to be the involved fathers, grandfathers and father-figures their children need. Subscribe to Casey's weekly email tip by clicking [here](#): I want tips on how to be a great dad who loves, coaches, mentors and inspires his children.

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