

Twenty Minutes Quality Time

It is recommended that parents should spend at least twenty minutes undisturbed time with their child every day. You may say 'I spend more than this' and if you do, that's great - but you need to check if you are really giving them twenty minutes of quality time. This means no answering the phone, no watching TV – but just being present with your child. Other parents will say 'I don't have twenty minutes, I have too much to do' - but if you tried giving your child twenty minutes every day for one week you would find you would actually have more time for other tasks as your child will be more content and secure. They will be less likely to whine and demand, less likely to show off in front of visitors as they will feel valued and respected.

The following are some things you can do to try and introduce the twenty minutes to your family:

- Some children may be bursting with news when they come home from school. Plan your day so that you can sit and listen to them at this time.
- Children need lots of cuddles and kisses to thrive. They need to be told they are loved, that they are beautiful. Take the child on your knee to read a story or watch TV. Don't take it personally if the child doesn't want a cuddle when you offer it. Your timing might not be just right and the child may be too absorbed in something else.
- Try and arrange to have at least one meal in the day when the whole family sits at the table together to eat. This helps you all to keep in touch with each other, especially as the children get older. It gives parents the opportunity to hear what is going on for the children at school and at play outside the home, and it's also a time where plans can be discussed. The family develops a sense of togetherness and it may very well be one of the valuable memories they will share with their children in the future.
- Children value the time you spend with them far more than the money you spend on them. This is why you will hear adults today complaining that their fathers never took them to the football match, or no one read bedtime stories to them when they were young. It is when you are spending time with them that children are likely to tell you what is troubling them.

- When they get to about six years old children love to have special time out with a parent, on their own. It won't matter much to the child where you go or what you do. Just do your normal shopping at the supermarket and take the child to a café afterwards for an ice cream and a chat. To start the conversation try asking an open question such as 'What would you like to talk about?'
- When the child starts telling you their story listen carefully, don't interrupt them or make judgements on what they tell you. If the story gets a bit convoluted ask them to clarify the parts which confuse you. If they tell you things you are not happy to hear ask them calmly what they think of the situation they have just described and gently correct if necessary. The child will really value this time, which is emotionally nourishing for both of you.
- Other ways of giving positive attention are to read or tell stories to the children. Allow them to help you to do important jobs around the house. When they are playing quietly it is good to just sit and watch, don't interrupt them, just watch. They will include you in a game if they want to but whether they do so or not, they will feel loved by your attentive presence.
- Parents are afraid of spoiling their children because they all know how obnoxious and selfish a spoiled child can be. To spoil is to 'give in' to a child's demands time and time again. The child learns to expect their demands to be met and when they are not the child reacts badly. Giving your children positive attention when they are not demanding it is not spoiling them, it is respecting them.