

# IDEAS FOR FAMILY TIME

- ❖ **Read Together or Tell Kids a Story:** Find a good book that the family can enjoy. Pick a time each morning or evening when the family can get together for 15 minutes or so and sit down to read together. You can talk about what you've read during and after reading to get discussion from everyone. Younger children especially love stories...find out how to become a great storyteller and enjoy "making believe" with your kids.



- ❖ **Volunteer Together as a Family or Do a Service Project:** Find someone in the community that could use some help. Whether it be yard work, fixing up the house, or even just someone to come and keep them company, take the family and spend some time serving. Working together as a family to help others in need can be an incredibly powerful way of building family bonds and developing a great sense of pride and fulfillment in all family members.

- ❖ **Have a Family Picnic at the Park or the Beach:** Pack a lunch, pile in the car, and head to the nearest beach or park. Enjoy food, stories, and play. Bring a kite or outdoor games. If you are at the beach, walk along the shore and collect sea shells. Try to see who can find the biggest one.



- ❖ **Take the Family On a Fishing Trip:** Since the last one was more for the city folk, here's one to bring out the "outdoorsman" in everyone. Grab a couple fishing rods, some powerbait, hooks, and sinkers, and load the family for the nearest fishing hole or stream. Sometimes it's great to find a place where you have to hike a little ways to get to the fishing hole. This gives you more time to walk and talk as a family.

# IDEAS FOR FAMILY TIME. .CONTINUED

- ❖ **Grow a garden:** It's outside and you get your hands dirty! Explore the world of gardening and find ways to involve your kids in what you decide to plant. Taking care of the garden, watching it grow, and eating the vegetables can all be a family activity.



- ❖ **Take a Vacation:** While it is great to hit the big amusement parks during summer vacation, families tend to spend more time apart than together in that kind of setting. Find out how you can plan an effective, positive and rewarding summer vacation and really be together. Use a **Family Vacation Jar**: A family vacation jar or box is a decorated jar used to save for the next big adventure. Decorated with pictures and words of places you want to visit or have visited, the jar becomes a daily visual reminder of your dreams. You can also write ideas of what you would like to do on the vacation.

- ❖ **Eat Dinner Together:** Keeping up with the lives of one another is important, especially with a fast-paced lifestyle. The more often a family gathers for dinner, the more time the family will have to strengthen their bond. When having dinner together, do not allow any distracting electronic gadgets to be turned on (e.g., cell phones, PDAs, video games, TVs, etc). Encourage everyone to talk and express their opinion. Avoid any topics that may cause conflict and do not discuss school and work unless you are mentioning recent achievements or promotions.



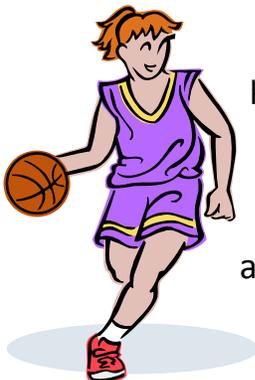
- ❖ **Play “Highs and Lows”:** If dinnertime isn't a productive time to connect with your kids, try playing this game: Go around the table, and each person shares his high points of the day, and low points. One or two or even three of each is good. And everyone should really listen.

# IDEAS FOR FAMILY TIME. . .CONTINUED

- ❖ **Sing and Dance Together:** Some families like to gather around the piano and warm up their vocal cords for a fun singing session. Some of the kids will bring their favorite instrument and they'll all have a sort of "jam" session together. It is such fun to see all the kids using and developing their talents. It can also be fun to sing in the car together. If you have family members who love to sing and dance, hold your own **American Idol Show**. Pick one or two family members to be the judges and let the rest compete to see who is the next American Idol. To make the show more real, you may want to try using a Karaoke Machine or microphone.



- ❖ **Family Video and Picture Night:** Gather up all of the loose and mounted photos that you have from when your children were little, and any videos that you have from that time. Sit down and spend an evening going through the pictures and talking about the special times from the past. Show your children your wedding album and any photos that you have from when you and your spouse were dating. Take out their baby photos and compare them with any baby photos that you have of yourself and other relatives. Pop some popcorn and laugh over the home videos of them learning to walk. Kids love to see themselves when they were babies or reminiscing about last year's family vacation.



- ❖ **Attend a Sibling's Sporting Event:** There is some sort of power in supporting others. It not only helps them feel appreciated but it also helps you appreciate the accomplishments and talents of others more. As you take the other kids to watch a sibling play sports or participate in an activity or play, it really builds comradery and brings the family together.

# IDEAS FOR FAMILY TIME. .CONTINUED

- ❖ **Go For a Sunday Stroll or on a Nature Walk:** Take a stroll around the neighborhood. Kids can either walk or take their bikes. On Nature Walks, families can play games, collect items for nature collages, and also identify the different species of flowers, birds and insects they find.



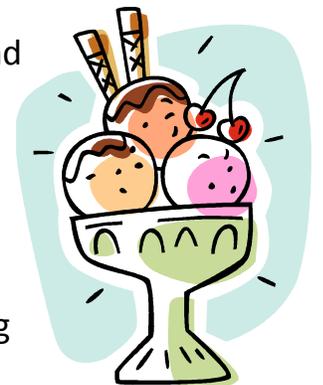
- ❖ **Attend Local Community Events:** Check out local fairs, museums, arts and crafts, and library activities.



- ❖ **Eat Breakfast Together One Morning Per Week:** Go all out! Make bacon, eggs, pancakes, biscuits, sausage, the whole shebang! You can make dinner light that night, and consider this the big meal of the day. Plan it for a day that is the hardest to all have dinner together.

- ❖ **Go to Church Together:** Sunday mornings are generally easy on everyone's schedule. The only sacrifice might be getting up before noon. But there are plenty of services that don't start until 11 am and only last an hour. Statistics show that families that attend church together regularly are closer. The old adage is "They that pray together, stay together."

- ❖ **Plan A Dessert Night:** Have ice cream sundaes one night and pie another, etc. Put it on the calendar for every other week. Plan for it when you go to the grocery store so that you have everything you need. Let each member of the family choose a dessert for one of the nights and tape the dessert menu and dates to the fridge. It serves as a reminder of the time together and gives everyone something to look forward to.



# IDEAS FOR FAMILY TIME...CONTINUED



❖ **Plan a Day Trip:** Where can you drive to in less than two hours? A theme park, a great fishing pier, a state park with trails, aquarium, museum....anything along these lines will be fun family time. Pick a date far enough out that everyone can plan around it. If your kids have jobs, they need time to ask for that day off.

❖ **Choose a Restaurant:** Pick a family favorite and plan once a month to eat breakfast, lunch or dinner there. Put it on the calendar well in advance and plan for it. Give it a simple name that everyone will associate the family date with. For example, if they have great wings, call it Wing Night. Remind everyone as it gets closer that Wing Night is coming. The idea is to have it planned and build it up as the time gets closer. Your family will recognize that it is important, just by the effort you put into it ahead of time. You can also play **Pick the Meal Wheel**. Make a spin wheel with the names of each family member. Spin the wheel and whoever the pin lands on that's who gets to pick where you go for dinner that night AND what you eat (buckle your seat belt as you may be in for some exotic dishes). The next time you do it be sure to take the last person who won off the wheel to make sure everyone gets a chance.

❖ **Pizza and Movie Night at Home:** Order pizza and pick out a movie together and watch it at home. This allows you to spend time with each other and after it is over, you can discuss what you liked about it and what you didn't like.



❖ **Get Active:** Go to the park and run laps together, ride bikes, shoot baskets, go to mini golf/driving range, do yoga, play tennis, and go skating, rollerblading, skiing, snowboarding, or hiking.

# IDEAS FOR FAMILY TIME. . .CONTINUED

- ❖ **Just Snuggle:** Every now and then, just pull your child to you and hug them. Snuggle, be affectionate, squeeze them tight. That kind of physical intimacy is important — and the day will come when they don't want to snuggle with you anymore. Take advantage of it now.



- ❖ **Spend Time at the Library:** Not only are libraries great for checking out books, they have plenty of other activities on hand. Most public libraries offer story times, cinema nights, DVD rentals, and activities for families.

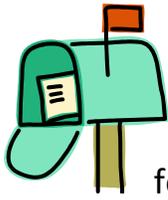


- ❖ **Family Art Night:** Pick a project, purchase the supplies together (i.e. colors, mediums etc.) Then choose the night to do a cooperative large scale art project together while listening to music. Family art night does not have to be complicated or detailed, just full of family imagination. Add a little science education by making homemade rockets. Just make the rockets for fun or add them to your July 4<sup>th</sup> celebrations. Build a scrapbook together by beginning to gather old memories (e.g., school or work documents, photographs, certificates and other memorabilia) and creating a family book of memories.

- ❖ **Cooking Dinner Together:** Love to cook? Spend an evening whipping up one of your favorite meals together. Give each family member a job in the meal preparation, so that everyone is included. Teach your kids how to make some family favorites. It will be meaningful to your children to make homemade pasta with you the way that your grandmother taught you when you were little.



# IDEAS FOR FAMILY TIME. .CONTINUED



- ❖ **Make a Family Mailbox:** Kids love getting mail and as long as the mail isn't bills, parents love mail too. Add some zip to your family communications by creating a family mailbox. Great for leaving messages of encouragement, love, and support for fellow family members.
  
- ❖ **Build a Fort:** Dig through your basement or garage and even possibly visit your local appliance store for old cardboard boxes. Get old blankets, markers, and paint and build and decorate a fort. If you have enough boxes and enough people, split into teams and have a contest to see who can build the biggest and best fort. After the fort is built you can use it to hang out in or play in.
  
- ❖ **Hiking, Biking, and Exploring:** How about an adventure into the outdoors? Take advantage of some of the great national parks and hiking trails and spend your day hiking, exploring, and picnicking. There are many trails where you can even bring the dog!



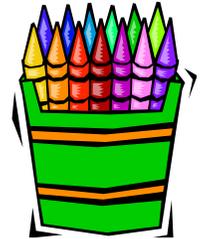
- ❖ **Dinner Date or Surprise Lunch with Mom and Dad:** Finding quality one on one time with each child can be very difficult. One way of fitting this quality time in is to plan a special breakfast or dinner out with each child either once a week or once a month. Get a sitter for the other children and just take one child at a time. This will give each child the opportunity to spend just with you and feel special at the same time. Or why not surprise your child for lunch one day at school? If your school allows it, join the child for lunch in the cafeteria or better yet pack a quick picnic lunch to share at a nearby park. Don't tell them ahead of time you are coming. This makes the lunch all the more special.

# IDEAS FOR FAMILY TIME. . .CONTINUED



❖ **Go to the Movies:** This seems a little overplayed but it can still be a good time. Especially if your family is not one to go out much, it can be a treat to take the whole family to the theater and watch a wholesome movie together. Talk about the movie afterwards, what each family member's favorite part was, worst part, who was the best actor... etc.

❖ **Coloring:** Yes sit down with crayons and a coloring book and color a picture together. You can exchange pictures when you are done.



❖ **Backyard Campouts:** Backyard camp outs are a great way to get the camping experience without the hassle of packing. Pitch your tent in the backyard, get your sleeping bags out, and roast your marshmallows over the coals of an inexpensive charcoal grill. You can tell ghost stories, talk, and look for some of the great constellations in the sky.

❖ **Breakfast Treat:** Beat the summer heat by having your outdoor fun early in the morning at the park. Pack a simple breakfast of muffins, yogurt, fruit, and juice boxes/water, and head to the nearest park. Let the kids run and play. Another option is to wake up a little bit earlier to get breakfast out before school starts. It can be the local bagel shop.

❖ **Play Dress Up:** Gather old clothes and add to the collection by buying weird and unusual outfits and accessories from thrift stores and garage sales. Store the clothes and props in a trunk. Props can include briefcases, purses, jewelry, shoes, books, canes. Encourage kids to be creative and act out plays together or have lip sync contests. Get out the video camera.



# IDEAS FOR FAMILY TIME. . .CONTINUED

- ❖ **Letterboxing:** Letterboxing is a treasure hunt hike that families take in search of hidden letterboxes. Using clues found on the internet (most letterboxes are hidden in a park or central community location), families set out on a hiking adventure in search of the hidden letterbox. Once the letterbox has been found, families then use the pen to leave a message in the logbook along with an image from their personal stamp.

- ❖ **Family Game Night:** Let everyone choose their favorite games, set out snacks for dinner and play for a few hours. Some classic favorites include games like Monopoly, Connect Four, Battleship, Candy land, Sorry, and Life.



- Try newer games such as Elefun, Cranium, and Guess Who. Don't limit yourselves only to board games. Get everybody off the couch and try a rousing game of charades or a homemade version of Pictionary. Act out game shows such as "Deal or No Deal" or "Jeopardy". Let the kids work on making their own games or trivia question one week, then play those games the next week. Some video games especially suited for family play are "Super Mario" for Wii, "Viva Pinata" and Hasbro's "Family Game Night." It could also be fun to have a mystery dinner and game night of Clue where each person dresses up as their character.

- ❖ **Grab Bag Ideas:** Let luck decide how you will spend your weekend together. Have every member of the family write down some weekend activity ideas on pieces of paper, and put them into a jar or bag. The next time you are stumped for something to do, reach in and pull out a piece of paper.



- ❖ **Watch a TV Series Together:** Find something that the whole family likes to watch. A lot of times reality and similar type shows are a favorite (Survivor, American Idol, Dancing with the Stars, etc.).