

The Importance of Family Time, by Joanne Baum, PhD.

How do you have a “family” in the true sense of the word if everyone is running in their own direction? You can’t “connect” with your spouse or your children if everyone is involved in activities and nobody takes the time to sit down, eat a meal without the help of the television background sound and actually take a look at each member of the family and talk. Talk? you ask...WHAT’S THAT? It’s probably what you used to do when you and your spouse were dating. It’s probably what you did when your infant was developing into a toddler and you’d share the funny things your child accomplished that day--like rolling over. It’s probably what you did when your children first became involved in sports or projects like Odyssey of the Mind. But often, when the activity is not so unique (they’ve been doing them for years) you lose some interest, or you can’t quite get your enthusiasm up. It’s time to sit down and ask yourself, why not?

The answer is usually found in your own preoccupation’s--whatever has your interest at the moment...And I would argue that in our society today we all tend to run a little too much too fast leaving a big void in the intimacy department. I’m talking the verbal intimacy department--the good old family sharing--is it a fantasy? I’m here advocating that it doesn’t have to be. Families can sit down together, at least a few nights a week and share about themselves and their day.

I often see families where the parents complain that the kids don't share with them anymore. When I ask the parents when is the last time you shared something about your day, about a frustration you're dealing with, or an exciting thing happening at work, the parent can't remember. How are children to know or trust that you really want to hear from them if you don't role model it for them?

And another pet peeve of mine. How are families supposed to communicate with the television on? I know a lot of families attempt that but I can't get over the TV stimulus as a distraction and a detractor. It is more than white noise in the background. Doesn't it say the family isn't important enough to merit eliminating this other thing --the TV program? I see it as a quiet (or not so quiet) discount of the family members by the person or persons who most want it on. It's a message of "What you have to say, or who you, are is not really worthy of my full attention because I also want to pay attention to this TV program." And over time, that message is damaging to a person's self-esteem and sense of worth.

This column is, in essence, an attempt to advocate for quiet, stay at home family dinners and family evenings where each person takes a few minutes to share a thought, a feeling, or an experience with everyone else. It can be a time to have some fun playing a game together. It can be a time to share and be listened to. It's a time where family members can take turns telling each other what they like and appreciate about each other. Sometimes, families I work with pick a name out of a

hat and then they tell that person something nice about them. Sometimes each member has to tell every other member something nice. This exercise can be fun--it may sound hokey--but for families that haven't communicated easily in a long time it's a good beginning point.

Joanne Baum, PhD, is the author of *Got the Baby Where's the Manual!?!? Respectful Parenting from Birth Through the Terrific Twos*. You can find more information on her website: www.respectfulparenting.com. Or you can call 303-679-1949 or 800 519-6003.