

Remember to share
Realife Family Times with
your family!

Realife family times

Employee & Family Resources

Your Student Assistance Program

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The Loving Family: How to Develop Family Intimacy

Sharing four walls and a toothpaste tube doesn't automatically make a family close—or even comfortable with each other. Emotional intimacy—the loving, supportive bond in satisfying and joyful relationships—has to be developed and nurtured.

Take time to connect

Connect with your family by regularly disconnecting yourself from everything else. Frantic schedules can turn family life into a circus. Put family together time on the calendar first, and schedule everything else around it.

Whenever you're with your family—eating breakfast, commuting to school and work, cleaning the house, or doing yard work—don't let the busyness of your life distract you from being with your children or your partner. When possible, give 100 percent of your attention. Listen. Ask questions. Laugh. Get engaged.

Turn family members' activities into opportunities to connect. Keep up with who has to be where, when. Learn the names of your kids' teachers and coaches. Ask Justin about piano lessons and Jordan about karate. This attention tells children you care about their interests and encourages them to care about each other.

Be real

Nothing draws partners together emotionally like being open and transparent with each other, especially about mistakes or imperfections.

Acknowledging vulnerabilities to your children may seem more risky. But instead of losing their respect, you'll gain their trust. They'll be relieved to

know you understand their struggles. Sharing some of your foibles and fears gives your kids permission to tell you about their own problems and encourages them to come to you when they're in trouble.

Plus, they'll get to know the real you, not some "perfect parent" caricature.

Show some tenderness

Be affectionate! Don't assume your children and partner know how you feel about them because you work hard or give them gifts or whatever else you do that should "speak for itself." Children, in particular, may not understand all you do for them and why.

Look into your loved ones' eyes and say "I love you." Often. Be generous with hugs, pats on the back, kisses. Hold your children when you read to them. Hold your partner, whenever.

Be respectful

Remember how bad it felt when you were five and your parents automatically blamed you when something was missing, or treated you with condescension? At every age and every level of maturity, children need to be treated as respectfully as you want them and others to treat you.

Ask for and listen to your children's opinions. When feasible, let them participate in making decisions that affect them.

This can be especially difficult when family members' personalities are different from your own and you can't identify with their interests. Honor each person's uniqueness. Appreciate the ways your differences complement each other.

It can be equally difficult when you recognize your own less-than-perfect tendencies in your children. Instead of criticizing or ridiculing them, respect their struggles. Share some of the problems you've caused yourself over the years by not controlling weaknesses. Children *can* learn from their parents' mistakes, but only if they know about them!

Nothing tests respect like conflict. When your child throws a tantrum, sulks, or shouts, emotions can run high and even adult tempers can be lost. Demonstrate how to treat someone respectfully even when you're angry or disappointed.

Maintain reasonable limits

Children may beg to make their own decisions and control their own lives, but emotionally they need rules. Gently but firmly setting age-appropriate limits and allowing your kids to make age-appropriate choices communicates that you care about them enough to do the hard part of parenting, not just the fun stuff.

The rewards of close, supportive family relationships are incalculable. Make the effort, and experience the joy of intimacy.

Kid troubles? Call the Student Assistance Program and arrange to see a counselor. Contacts are confidential within legal limits and available at no cost to students and their family members. Call (515) 244-6090 or toll free (800) 327-4692. Counselors are on call 24 hours a day.