

How Connected Is Your Family?

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One of the most moving advertisements that I have ever seen is sponsored by *The National Fatherhood Initiative*

. I saw it for the first time a couple of years ago in an Oprah magazine. The advertisement shows the picture of a newborn baby peacefully asleep within the folds of a beautiful pink blanket. The blanket, however, has a label that reads:

INSTRUCTIONS: DADS, PLEASE READ CAREFULLY BEFORE RAISING. If this bold warning were not enough, the label goes on to detail:

This is a Baby. It needs you. It needs your love, your touch, and your time. Spend lots of time with it. Build a birdhouse. Read a book. Go for a walk. Do homework. Play. The more time you spend, the better chance it has of growing up happy and healthy. It grows very quickly. Pay attention. Never underestimate the difference you make.

The saying is true: “a picture speaks a thousand words.” I tore out that page and have saved it with the hope of putting it in frame one day. To me the greatest impact of that advertisement is that it is such a deep reality check. Childhood is a stage that really goes by very quickly. Parents have but very little time to connect with their children. Yet, making a positive and lasting impact on our children takes time. Connection can only happen through the dedicated commitment to building a relationship of trust and respect. Unfortunately, our busy lives often distract many from establishing any connection whatsoever.

Recently some close friends of our family debated the pros and cons of a husband choosing a job which paid \$8,000 more a year. This new job would require him to be on a tight 9 am to 6 pm work schedule. The job that he currently has, although it pays much less money, allows him the flexibility of being able to personally pick his children up after school, take them to the park, help them with their homework, and start dinner before his wife gets home from work. However, he feels that in fulfilling his God-appointed role as the provider, more money would allow him the financial liberty of providing more/better for his family. Disagreeing with him, his wife

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reminded him that parenting is more than providing “things.” She felt strongly that as parents they each need to be able to dedicate more time to becoming a strong influence in their children’s lives, while they still could. She gave examples of other friends that seem to be doing much better than them financially. These friends have their own home and two cars, but their kids spend a lot of time by themselves and most of the time these children are in one trouble or the other. I am happy to report that the wife won the debate.

Somehow, we have all been duped into believing that “things” can replace the value of the time it takes to connect with each other. We have lost a sense of value for the priceless pleasures of having dinner together, sitting and reading a book together, cooking a meal together, or simply just silly talking and goofing around. We cannot connect because we seem to be distracted by TVs, MP3s, cell phones, computers, wii, and x-boxes. Today everyone in the family has his or her own gadget and dedicates their time to being in the company of their favorite gadget as opposed to being in the company of one another. We have forgotten to dedicate time in order to create an environment that will lead us to connect with our families. Some of us might have already forgotten or not even know how or where to begin to connect. In fact, the need for adjusting our level of connection within our families is quite urgent. The process of adjusting can be a difficult one because we have become used to not connecting. However, it is not impossible to re-connect and neither is it ever too late to begin to connect. The outcomes are genuinely priceless.

Answer these six questions;

- Is your family emotionally and spiritually connected to each other?
- Do your children confide in you and share with you the things that happen to them everyday?
- Can you and your children and spouse converse about your feelings, struggles, and dreams?
- Does your spouse confide in you and share with you the things that happen to him/her everyday?
- Does your family do any of these things at least 3 times in the week: Eat together? Pray together? Have fun together?
- Do you allow for no distractions (this includes the telephone) when the family is having family time together?

If you answered less than 3 No’s you are doing OK. There are some things that might need adjustment, but the general idea is there. If you answered more than 4 No’s, your family might be having problems connecting with each other. But all hope is not lost. Here is what you can do:

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1. You're still on time to connect. Take a family poll; ask everyone in the family individually if they feel connected to one another. Ask them to tell you why they do or do not feel connected. Based on their responses do step 2.

2. With your spouse or as a family, talk about the things that you will each need to readjust in your schedules to make space for family time.

3. Come up with a list of three things that you will do together as a family once a week. During this time you will allow no human or technological interruptions.

Warning: If you've never done this before don't get discouraged if at first there's no enthusiasm from your family members. Don't cut the project because teenagers whine and complain. Don't feel discouraged if your spouse is not supportive of your new idea. Don't give up. Making a connection with your family is worth all the extra effort.

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