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Making time for yourself and your family

Because of the stress of a typical workweek, finding time for some fun and relaxation is usually difficult. It may even seem like making time to enjoy your life takes a lot of effort. However, finding time for yourself and your family is well worth it: The hobbies and activities you take part in together or alone often bring great happiness and help to enrich your life.

Why leisure is important

- Physical fun, like taking an aerobics class or going on a walk with a friend, helps soothe tension and clear the mind.
- Even an hour of leisure time each day is great for your body, mind, and spirit. It helps release stress and leads to a more balanced life.
- By taking time to do things that you like to do, you are better able to have healthier and more positive relationships with those around you.

How to have fun

If you've filled your life with so much work that you've forgotten how to play, take some cues from children. They easily go from one fun activity to the next, typically with smiles and laughter. Watch your child at the playground and see how he or she becomes immersed in the present activity, whether it's playing in the sandbox, scaling a climbing wall, or going down a slide. Try to have a similar state of immersion and happiness when you take time for yourself. Here are some tips to make the most of your fun times:

- Choose activities that are just for you; also choose others that involve your family.
- Schedule time for leisure in your daily calendar.
- When scheduling family time, pick sports, hobbies, or locations that everyone enjoys.
- Take time for unexpected pleasures. Occasionally, don't schedule any activity for your leisure time. When your leisure time comes, do what you feel like doing.

- Quiet times during the morning can help you get ready for the day, and quiet times at night can help you unwind. Choose meditation or other relaxing, quiet activities to de-stress.
- Try to be fully present when you're having fun. Let go of cares, worries, and stress during fun activities; know that you can address what you need to after you're done with your fun time.

Having fun solo and with your family

Some activities to do on your own:

- Try a new hobby or revive a former one.
- Join a gym or start going to fitness classes.
- Play a new sport.
- Join a book group or enroll in a class.
- Seek an artistic outlet — go to a museum and sketch or take pictures in a park.
- Call an old friend.
- Take a walk in the neighborhood or watch the sunset.

Some activities to do as a family:

- Go to a sports game.
- Go see a movie or go to an amusement center.
- Take a day trip to a special spot.
- Take family walks together.
- Have a game night.
- Visit the museum.
- Participate together in fundraisers or volunteer activities.
- Take dance, tennis, or other lessons together.
- Plan a family vacation and get the whole family involved in the planning process.

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How to establish healthy communication with your children

Communicating with your children is essential to their growth; it helps them develop good relationships with others and helps them maintain a more positive outlook on life. In addition, by establishing healthy communication with your children, you model a caring relationship and invite them to speak openly with you. As a result of frequent and consistent communication, your children will be better able to put their feelings into words and develop healthy coping, problem solving, and negotiating skills.

As an added benefit, your children won't be the only ones who learn valuable skills from communication. You'll benefit as a parent, too. By listening to your children, they are more likely to come to you for guidance, and you're more likely to know what's going on in their lives. This will help establish a strong bond that both you and your children can enjoy.

Follow these simple steps to establish and maintain healthy communication with your children:

Be available

If you're not available, your child can't communicate with you. It's important to set aside at least 10 minutes a day to talk with your child. Get into a routine that can remain consistent. That way, even with limited time, your child can rely on this routine as a consistent and dependable part of his or her schedule. For example, try to have dinner together every night and talk then. Or, at bedtime, sit and talk while you tuck your child in.

Be a good listener

If you think back to when you were a kid, you may remember that you didn't always feel understood. Your child may feel the same way at certain times, but you can help by being a listening adult. Invite your child to talk about how he or she feels, even if upset. When your child feels really listened to, he or she will feel better about the problem. Your child will know that you think the problem is important and you understand.

Show empathy and understanding

Take time to understand what your child is feeling, even if you disagree with him or her. Listen to what's expressed, restate it, and ask if you correctly understood what he or she said. That shows you acknowledge your child's feelings and you understand what's happening in your child's life.

Be a good communicator

To have healthy communication with your children, you'll need to be a good communicator. When speaking to your children, make sure that your words, tone of voice, and actions send a consistent message. It is also helpful to use words that describe and explain how you feel. For example, instead of shouting about why your child didn't finish his or her daily chores, tell your child calmly that you were upset when you saw that the tasks were not finished.

Be a good role model

Young children tend to mimic their parents' behavior. If you make a habit to speak about your feelings instead of shouting wants or demands, your children will follow suit. One of the best ways to show your children how to communicate effectively is by setting an example and modeling positive behaviors.

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