

Finding Time For Better Family Relationships

from the American Counseling Association

A common complaint today is how busy we all are and how little time we have even for things that really matter, often including our families.

Work obligations, school projects, aging parents, social events -- the things that eat up our time can seem endless. And the result is that we have little time to spend with family members. Instead, there may be limited communication and the start of serious problems that can be hard to recognize.

A key to improving and strengthening family relationships is to make family a priority. In practical terms, it doesn't mean ignoring all your other obligations, but rather simply including family time in your planning and scheduling, and making that a priority for all family members.

A simple way to improve family ties is to schedule regular family meetings. Even if it's just once or twice a month, it can keep everyone informed and allow for issues to be addressed as a family, rather than waiting for something to become a disaster.

It's important to have some simple ground rules for a successful family meeting. Number one is that everyone has to attend. It's also not a time for yelling, name-calling, accusing or blaming. Each family member gets a turn to speak with the goal of communicating and working out normal family problems together.

One suggestion for positive meetings is to start with each person relating something good or interesting that's happened recently. Next, go to working out everyday problems, such as chores, errands, and schedules. Give family members a chance to bring up concerns so that all can work together to find solutions.

Relationships can also be strengthened through family dinners. If yours is a typical busy family, you might need a family rule that at least once a week everybody arranges their schedules so that you all can sit down to a friendly meal. Make it special with candles and favorite foods. Get everyone involved in preparing dinner or setting the table. Steer dinner conversation toward positive things and updates on what's happening in each family member's life.

It's unfortunate that in today's busy world it often takes real effort to find the time to be with those we love the most, but it's an effort worth making. Strengthening family ties can help us really get to know and enjoy family members and to get the most from our relationships with them.

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