

From Time to Quality Time: Making Every Moment Count



Couples and families often look for ways to find more time together and to make better use of that time. Most people struggle to find enough time in their day for everything. In fact, according to Dr. William Doherty (2001), those that care about each other often feel starved for time together.

When considering how to increase time together, individuals often reference two kinds of time: quantity of time and quality of time. While quantity of time refers to the total amount of time spent together, quality time refers to giving someone his/her undivided attention (Chapman, 2004). This generally implies doing something together rather than just sitting in the same room doing individual activities (e.g., browsing the Internet or reading a book). The following ideas are suggested ways to maximize time with loved ones through transforming moments together into quality time.

Create a Positive Atmosphere

How individuals greet or say goodbye to loved ones sets the tone for what follows. Set aside other concerns and give full attention to greetings and farewells. Create a special phrase or way to greet each other that has special meaning in the relationship (Doherty, 2001). Making hello's and good-bye's special shows that the relationship is a priority. Regardless of the challenges of the day, when individuals make an effort to smile, be positive, and give their best selves to those they love during their initial greeting, they can set a tone for more positive interactions in the time they have together (Walker, Darrington, & Weeks, 2009).

Connect with Conversation

Self-disclosure helps build emotional intimacy with others. Self-disclosing means that all participants involved are sharing their thoughts, feelings, ideas, and desires with each other. Quality conversations focus on taking turns listening and learning about the other person. Asking open ended questions and listening can help participants to feel closer to each other and better support each other and cope with challenges that arise (Gottman & Silver, 1999).

While sometimes it can be helpful to engage in lengthy discussions, conversations can also be as simple as asking about one important thing that happened that day or sharing one thing they appreciate or admire about each other. Establish a time each day to check in with each other, even if it is for 10 minutes.

Leave Work at Work

It can be difficult to come home from work and not think about work. Many people stress over tasks they need to do at work while they are spending time with their families. When this happens the time they are spending is not really quality time because their attention is still focused on work and not on connecting in relationships; and because of this, loved ones may not feel as important as the job. One way to relieve this stress and build relationships with others at the same time, is to vent to a partner and let go of the stress before engaging in other activities together (Doherty, 2001). Another approach is to focus on being in the moment, which may help to drown out thoughts of work.

Unplug

Technology can be a great way to stay connected with loved ones that are far away, but it can also be a distraction to quality time together. In order to better enjoy quality time together, decide together, as a couple or family, boundaries for electronic devices (Doherty, 2001). For example, some families set time limits on computer, video games or smart phones or turn them off entirely at dinner time.

Make the Everyday Tasks Count

Help each other with making dinner, folding laundry or cleaning up the yard. These opportunities may not be as exciting as a night on the town but they can give opportunities to connect with conversation and to lighten each other's load (Parrot & Parrott, 2006).

Make the Moment Memorable

Quality time can sometimes be found in very small increments of time. Take advantage of 5 minutes and make a memorable experience happen! For example, stop to watch the sunset, swing at the park on the way home from running errands, or make a silly face on each other's pancakes just for fun (Parrot & Parrott, 2006). Be silly and laugh together. Take a picture of the fun to make it even more memorable. Couples may also choose to go to bed at the same time in order to have a few moments together before bed.

Physical Affection

Touch is an essential part of love and can build relationships with others (Bowlby, 1979). It is very easy to get into a routine of things and forget about giving a hug or a kiss to loved one; and while some individuals may prefer more physical affection than others, most people enjoy at least an occasional moment of affection (Chapman, 2004).

Cuddle time can be an especially effective form of physical affection in romantic relationships (Townsend, 2010). Cuddle time is not intended as a precursor to other physical affection, but rather provides an opportunity for giving undivided attention to a partner while connecting through touch and sharing positive conversation including feelings, memories and things that are appreciated about a partner.

Long Distance Connections

Even when couples or families don't have much time together or live apart from one another, they can still spend time connecting in other ways. For example, individuals can leave a small note where a loved one can find it, or send a text or email of encouragement or appreciation (Parrot & Parrott, 2006). Online technology can also bridge the distance through online video chat programs such as Skype™ or FaceTime.

Play Together

Couples and families can benefit from experiencing new activities together and spending time together having fun (Markman, Stanley, Blumberg, Jenkins, & Whiteley, 2004). Play can increase positive feelings that are associated with those who were also involved in the experience and helps individuals to create positive memories and build connections with each other.

While spending quality time as a family is important, couples can also benefit greatly by planning and going on regular date nights together. Having fun is a great way for couples to remember why they are together in the first place and to increase their feelings of love for one another (Doherty, 2001).

While playing together is probably easiest in person, those in long distance relationships can still play together. For example, couples or families could do activities together over the Internet such as playing a game while videoconferencing.

Summary

While there never seems to be enough time for everything, regardless of the amount of time couples and families find to spend together, utilizing some of these techniques can help individuals ensure they are making the moments count by creating quality time together.

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