



The Gift of Time: Kelly Nault's 10 Simple Parenting Tips that Give Your Children More of You

Time is among the most precious gifts a parent can give to their child.

“Children who receive quality time are less likely to act out and far more likely to lead a happy and balanced life. Why? Because they know how deeply they are valued,” says Kelly Nault, parenting expert and spokesperson for the ‘Fountain Tire Gift of Time Survey’. **“Spending quality time with your children is one of the best investments you can make in your child’s self-esteem, future success and well being. It can also protect your child from making bad decisions down the road, especially during the harder teen years.”**

Fortunately, creating special moments with your children is easier than many busy, stressed out parents might think. The secret, says Kelly, lies in making the most of daily opportunities in your home that naturally give you more time to enjoy your family. By creating daily routines, busy parents can turn even the most humdrum activities, such as doing the dishes, laundry or dusting, into moments that allow them to connect with their children.

“Many parents feel enormous pressure to make special time with their children, not realizing that often it is our day-to-day tasks that offer the best opportunities to create spontaneous moments that will be remembered for a lifetime,” says Nault. **“Simply reading a story before bed, or telling your child every night that you feel so blessed to have them in your life, takes only a few minutes and are perfect ways to create quality time with your child.”**

So here are Kelly Nault's top ten ways to give your child the gift of your time:

Gift of Time Tip #1: Have Breakfast Together

Get up a little earlier and start your day off right by having breakfast together as a family. Make a habit of talking about the day ahead when everybody is rested. Within your breakfast routine, consider establishing a family tradition, such as a reading a positive quote, thought or short story for the day. Get the children involved in preparing breakfast. Even a small daily job, like buttering the toast or setting the table, can boost your children's self-esteem and make them feel like an important part of your family.

Gift of Time Tip #2: Make Household Chores a Team Event

Children love routine and they also secretly love chores. Regularly feeding the family pet, taking out the garbage, dusting, or being your sous-chef during the evening meal, work particularly well. What seem like just chores for you can often be fun activities for younger children. And don't be afraid to start them young! Kids love to help out. Simple jobs, like sweeping the floor or transferring wet laundry to the drier, instill the importance of contributing to the household and develop a solid work ethic along with a sense of gratitude. For teenagers, more sophisticated activities, like learning to cook, buying groceries, and doing the laundry teach essential life skills. A light hearted, team approach to housework has the added benefit of decreasing the time you spend doing chores and often eliminate the need for nagging.

Gift of Time Tip #3: Create a Fun Bedtime Routine

Establishing a fun bedtime routine is something children look forward to and allows you to bond with your children on a daily basis. Get the logistics like teeth brushing out of the way before cuddling, stories or a simple hug good-night. Remember that once you have said "good-night" to not get suckered into the "just one more story" or "another glass of water" request. Children need to go to sleep

on time, so they awaken refreshed and not grumpy. Smooth bedtimes also give you much needed rest on your own or special time to connect with your spouse.

Gift of Time Tip #4: Go on Date Nights

Set aside one evening per week for “date nights” spent together as a family and make it a tradition. Have dinner together, play at the park, go out for ice cream, or watch a movie and have popcorn in the comfort of your own home. Friday evenings often work best, as homework and weekend commitments don’t interfere. The goal of this time is to catch up and have fun together because families who play together often are the ones who stick together.

Gift of Time Tip #5: Dust Off Your Games and Play Together

Board games and card games are a great way for the family to interact. Let your children pick the games they enjoy. Don’t be shy about creating your own games. Use ordinary objects around the house to create a fun play space—build a fort with blankets, make music with pots and spoons, create a puppet show or even a treasure hunt. Outdoor games such as baseball, hide ‘n seek, follow the leader or “shooting some hoops” in the driveway can provide great fun for everyone, whether you are on a team, acting as cheerleader, or simply keeping score.

Gift of Time Tip #6: Plan Family Holidays and Special Occasions as a family

Involve children in planning birthday parties, social events, weekly schedules and family holidays. Children love exploring brochures and writing out holiday wish lists. If children feel they are part of the planning, they not only feel important but tend to be committed to making it a success and have a much better time.

Gift of Time Tip #7: Focus on the Positive

A common complaint of children and especially of teenagers is that their parents nag too much. Just as you don’t like to be put down, your children don’t want to be around someone who is constantly criticizing (neither do our spouses by the

way). Focusing on the positive is often the most effective way to reach out to your child and teen and to also have them do more of what you want and like them to do. So lighten up and make a point to recognize and appreciate your teenager or child when they are being helpful. Simply saying “thank you” can help bridge deep seeded issues that divide you from your child.

Gift of Time Tip #8: Invite Conversation Instead of Demanding It

Don't interrogate your children—talk to them. Instead of asking, “What did you do at school today?”, tell your children about your day. This is one of the easiest ways to model and invite great conversation. Teenagers in particular, need to know they can bring their problems to you. If they think you are going to freak out every time they share, they will simply stop sharing. A great way to break the ice is by being real with them about some of your own challenges. When parents periodically share their own daily issues and open themselves up to hearing their children's opinions, they are actively demonstrating healthy conversation. This builds trust, understanding and will make your child more open to sharing with you. One of the best times to talk is in the car. Teenagers are especially more open when they don't have to make eye contact when discussing sensitive issues.

Gift of Time Tip #9: Make Room for Spontaneity

If you look back on the best moments of your childhood, chances are the things you remember most fondly were unplanned. By being impulsive and doing the unexpected, you can create memories that last a lifetime. Spur of the moment events, like a Saturday morning pancake making contest, a dinner picnic in the family room, tenting in the backyard or a giant after school tickling fight often create a treasure chest of family legends.

Gift of Time Tip #10: Eat Dinner Together

The dinner table is one of the most important daily opportunities for solid family interaction. If schedules are getting in the way, change your schedule so you can eat dinner together more days than not. Consistency is crucial. During the meal, turn off the phone to ensure uninterrupted time, give each child time to talk about their day and make certain you are sharing too. Keep the conversation light and leave heated discussions for other times. Most importantly, make dinner mealtimes fun and cooperative.

How Giving the Gift of Time Today Can Positively Impact Your Grandchildren

By giving the gift of time to your child, you will establish a rich and trusting foundation on which to build wonderful family memories. And the value of these special times extends far beyond enjoyment of the moment. Quality time together as a family forms positive patterns of behavior, decreases exhausting power struggles and enriches the lives of every family member. If your children grow up with the countless benefits of quality time, they are likely to pass on these positive traditions to their children—to your grandchildren—ultimately, strengthening your family into the next generation.