

13 WAYS TO MAKE
RELATIONSHIPS
WITH YOUR CHILDREN A
PRIORITY



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WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT?

With all the good and necessary tasks and opportunities that demand our attention each day, we need to prayerfully consider what God wants us to do with our time. Balancing the important job of nurturing relationships with our children and our many other responsibilities can be a struggle. It helps to remember what God has to say about our priorities:

We must remember that we are responsible to build relationships. God has commanded us to disciple our children, and to do this, we must have strong, healthy relationships with them.

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.” (Deuteronomy 6:5-7)

We must believe God when He says that our relationship with Him is demonstrated through our relationship with people. We express our love for God by how we love those made in His image.

“And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.” (1 John 4:21)

“‘And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:30-31)

We must treasure the opportunity and privilege that God has given us to display His love as we lay down our lives for our children, spending time with them, disciplining them, loving them, and teaching them God’s Word.

“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?” (1 John 3:16-17)

We must remember that love is demonstrated through actions! We must invest time and energy building a foundation of love and trust that leads our children to welcome and value our instruction.

“Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.” (1 John 3:18)

We must remember that the season of childrearing is short! Use it well!

“So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.” (Psalm 90:12)

“As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field” (Psalm 103:15)

13 SIMPLE WAYS TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUR CHILDREN

1. Take a child with you any time you go somewhere in the car.

This gives you time to talk together. Your children will learn from you while you shop, while you minister, while you drive, and they will learn to serve alongside you.

2. Work together.

Work in the garden, the kitchen, the house together. Not only will this give you more time to talk and train your children in the tasks you perform, but it will also save you time, leaving you more time to spend with them in other ways.

3. Read books and watch movies together as a family.

Even the youngest children can enjoy looking at picture books and listening to you read aloud. Besides making memories together, you'll foster a love of learning and create some great opportunities for discussion. Watching and discussing appropriate movies together also helps your children develop critical thinking skills and godly discernment.

4. Talk with them – and listen!

Take time as you're tucking them into bed, and ask about their day or tell them a short story. Listen patiently when they want to tell you about something. Start this early, and young children who love talking with you will grow into *teenagers* who love talking with you.

5. Extend hospitality and socialize together as a family.

Minimize the time your children spend with just children their own age, and spend more time together as a family, in activities together, hosting other families in your home, and welcoming your children's friends into your home.

6. Find projects to pursue as a family.

Sharing common goals while you work and serve together will draw your family together. Find a way to serve together through your church, minister to shut-ins or retirement home residents together, start a small business together, host events for other families, help grandparents, raise animals, play music together!

7. Show an interest in your children's interests.

My father was a master at this! My security in his love and the direction of my life have both been profoundly affected by this great gift that only my daddy could give me! Sit down and listen to your daughter practice the piano, go to the softball game, build a model with your son, draw a picture together, admire the Lego constructions, give them your full attention!

8. Show physical affection to your children.

Hold their hands, hug them, say “I love you,” and hug them some more!

9. Schedule one-on-one time with individual children.

- **Pray together!** Work together on areas of temptation and sin, communicate that you are on their side, pray for each other.
- **Study the Bible together.** Teach your children how to study the Bible as you study pertinent topics together.
- **Read and discuss books together.** (*Girl Talk*, *God at Work*, *Future Men*, *Tearing Down Strongholds*, and *Thoughts for Young Men* are a few examples of the books we've read. We also read just-for-fun books together.)
- **Go for walks together.** We have found this to be especially good with our boys! They talk a lot more on a walk than they do while we're sitting together on the sofa.
- **Go out to eat together.** This doesn't have to be fancy – McDonalds or an ice cream cone can give you just as much time together as a big, expensive meal.
- **Have a campout!** When everyone was little we all “camped out” together in the living room every Friday night! We also had campout nights on the floor with individual children and impromptu summer campouts on the deck. It's amazing how much more the kids talk when we're lying there in the dark!
- **Have a monthly “Girls' Afternoon Out” or a “Boys' Afternoon Out.”** This is an idea that I was inspired to implement after reading Carolyn Mahaney's excellent book, *Girl Talk*. Once a month the girls and I just went out for the afternoon (or sometimes the whole day) and had fun together! We went to tulip and iris farms, rose gardens, tea rooms, bookstores, parks, and more, and we always had a great time!
- **Share a regular time to discuss and set goals.** We tried to do this at least once a year. It proved to be a very helpful tradition, and we were always encouraged when we looked back and saw how many goals were reached over the course of the previous year.

10. Discipline your children.

One of the best ways to communicate love to our children is to firmly, lovingly, and consistently discipline them. Proverbs 13:24 says that *“Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.”*

A child who gets his own way is not a child that will feel secure in the love of his parents. Left to himself, he will also become a child that is more difficult to love.

Welcome discipline situations as opportunities to grow closer to your children. Humbly facing our sinful hearts, rejoicing in God’s grace and the gospel that covers our sin, asking and granting forgiveness – all these actions draw children and parents together as brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Welcome discipline situations as teaching opportunities. We have much to teach our children in the few years we have them in our homes. Every misbehavior, every sin, is an opportunity to further teach them from God’s Word!

11. Call out the work you see God doing in your children’s lives.

An ounce of positive encouragement often goes farther than a pound of correction. Make a point of looking for growth and telling your children how you see God at work in their lives. You may not realize just how much this will encourage them.

12. Don’t step back too much when your children graduate or reach the age of 18.

It’s possible to pull back too much just when children are reaching an age when many life-altering decisions (vocation, spouse, etc.) are being made. Stay connected with your young adult children! Be aware of their friendships. Encourage them to live at home until God leads them into marriage. Continue to guide and offer counsel, recognizing that the relationship is changing as your children reach adulthood. Over the teenage years, we should transition out of our role as authority figures and instead become mentors and trusted advisors.

13. Thank God for your children and pray for them daily!