

Timely Gifts

By Deb Landry

As a parent, I have found that two of the most powerful and basic ways to communication with your children is to listen and give them the gift of your time. In fact giving our undivided attention is the most important thing we can do. Combine listening with your time, both quantity and quality, you will be on your way to raising resilient, loving kids.

I find time everyday to talk with my children. I made the choice ten years ago to work from home so that I could spend more time with them. With a home office, I have the privilege to take a break when they get home from school to hear about their day. Mealtime is also very important time for us and we plan at least one meal together per day. However, with school activities and working parents, time is limited and not everyone has the luxury of quantity of time.

Another way we remedy the demands of daily life is to vacation together at least once a year with weekend camping and hiking trips mixed in. For Christmas last year, we gave the kids a gift of time, a family vacation in Maui. Both my husband and I travel for work so we love to mix business trips with pleasure. It's cost effective and we all get to experience each other's work.

When January 15th rolled around, the coldest day in two years, our family boarded a flight in Boston for a long thirteen-hour flight to paradise. We packed snacks, movies, games and books and created a private circle of fun on the plane. When we arrived at 5:30 p.m. Hawaiian time, it was pouring rain and 75 degrees. We settled into our condo and watched the rain while planning the next several days of family fun and entertainment.

To make vacations affordable, we like to rent condos for more space, separate bedrooms and the facilities to make our own meals. Not to mention, we save money on food, high resort cost, and the pool is usually right outside the door. Mom and Dad get to have some private time in their own room or by the pool is an added benefit.

Not being sunbathers, we didn't spend much time lying in the sun. Instead, we toured the island, hiked, snorkeled and surfed. A few of our favorite activities were a traditional Luau, watching surfers, twenty-foot waves and whales. Our biggest decision of the day was top down or up and what to have for dinner. We laughed, joked, talked, and dreamed of what it would be like to live in Hawaii. The family accompanied me at three schools where I read my books. We also attended a lecture my husband gave at the Hawaiian Eye conference. It was an incredible family vacation.

You will always hear me say that the quantity of time that you spend with your kids matters just as much as the quality of time and you don't have to travel half way around the world to do it.

Here are a few suggestions to help you increase the quantity and quality of family time with a few family pictures from our trip added on:

- Mealtime: Wake Up a half hour early and have breakfast together or make the commitment to have dinner together at least five times a week.
- Share. Let each child have equal time to talk about their day.
- Schedule a Family Night with no TV, telephones or interruptions.
- Play a board game
- Read, especially with young children. Read to them and as the get older, they can read to you.
- Help with homework, you may learn something.
- Exercise. Working out together is another great family activity
- Ask specific questions
- Keep the conversation light
- Tell them about your day
- For gifts, give homemade coupons for dinner, movies, and any treat the family enjoys doing together
- Pick up your teens after school and go to Starbucks
- Cook dinner and clean up together
- Go to a concert or event of their choice
- Take your child to work for a day
- Pitch a tent in the backyard or create a campsite in the family room
- Rent a movie
- Listen to music together, their music, even if you don't like it.
- Volunteer together
- Go to a movie of their choice, a date night
- Finally, get out the piggy bank and start saving for that family vacation, take lots of pictures and scrapbook them.