

As parents we try to balance childcare with the tasks of daily life, maintaining a relationship with our partners and working to earn a living. Sometimes it is exhausting, and we struggle to maintain our composure. The last straw can be the kids screaming at the end of the day, refusing to go to bed, whingeing and arguing with you. Perhaps you start screaming at them, desperately wanting some peace and quiet to try and collect your thoughts.

Why are they so difficult? Why do they have to play up, just when you most need them to behave?

If you take a step back, you will be able to see that when they play up the most, is when you are most stressed. Why? Because they are mirroring you. When you are stressed, you are less likely to interact with them, show them as much love, or communicate directly with them. Out of frustration, boredom and even fear, children will start 'playing up' in response to your current state.

People respond to your current behaviour and attitude and children are no different. You are one of the primary people in their life, who should be supporting them and giving them unconditional love. So naturally, when all they see is someone who is stressed, short-tempered, unhappy and unavailable, that is exactly what they give back.

It is amazing to see the difference it makes when parents spend quality time with their children. Note that I said quality time, not quantity. Watching crap on the television with your children for 4 hours is not quality time. You might as well be strangers watching a movie in the cinema. Even playing video games is preferable to watching television, at least you are competing and interacting with each other.

Ideally, you should get away from any distractions - no phones, no television, no games. This might mean going for a walk, playing football, or simply going to another room to talk. You may only have five minutes before they go to bed, or five minutes in the morning before you rush out to go to work. If you make those five minutes quality time, where you let the children know that

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you 'see' them, and they feel they are worthy of your time, it is worth far more than a parent who spends more time with them in the role of a babysitter.

I can hear many of you thinking that you simply don't have the time, you are too exhausted, you don't know where to start. I get it. This is not about blame, simply trying to help you find a way to change your life so that it benefits you, and your children.

Remember the key issue is to make time to spend quality one-on-one time with them, but it is important to remember that you can't expect them to turn around jumping for joy just because you are doing it. The pattern might take some time to change. They might be suspicious because you are paying attention all of a sudden. Don't take it personally. You are the adult and it is your responsibility to change the negative patterns.

So how do you do it? There is no one way that is right for everyone. You have to find something that works with your lifestyle and your children. You might have more time in the evening, while someone else will have time in the morning. Find the time that you can give your undivided attention to the children and keep doing it. They may act like they don't care, but it is important to know that you DO care. They might be testing you, and if you stop trying, you are just reinforcing their belief that you don't *really* care.

Here are some ideas to get you thinking about where you could schedule quality time with your kids:

1. Sit down to breakfast with your children instead of everyone rushing around grabbing what they can before running out of the door. All it takes is setting your alarm ten minutes earlier.
2. Turn off the television. The television is hypnotizing and before you know it, the whole evening has passed you by, having achieved nothing.
3. Get out of the house. There are too many distractions in the house - computer, television, games.
4. Sit down to dinner as a family - no television, no phones. Without distractions, the only way to break the silence is to *talk* to each other!

You get the idea - remove distractions and focus only on your children, whether that is for five minutes or fifty minutes.

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