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Benefits of Family Meals

Besides being a great way for family members to connect, eating meals together also helps teach children which foods are good for them and how much they should eat. Studies show that family meals have many other positive effects on children, including:

- Higher intake of essential nutrients
- Less snacking on unhealthy foods
- Positive effects on the learning processes, including increased focus, better school performance, improved language skills development and a higher level of vocabulary
- Reduced depression and anxiety
- More positive sense of self
- Better resistance to negative peer pressure
- Less likelihood of using alcohol or drugs

Family meals are a great time to provide excellent examples of values and manners to your children. It is as easy as displaying the manners yourself and sharing stories that demonstrate the values you place importance on.

For even more benefits, get your kids involved in shopping for and preparing family meals. Cooking builds self-esteem and teaches important skills, such as math, reading, science and fine motor abilities. In the kitchen, you can experience quality time together, create closer bonds and cherished memories—and improve the quality of your meals at the same time.

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Building Relationships That Matter

Sometimes relationships are taken for granted: We are busy with our own lives and issues, and we can forget to let the people we care about know how much we appreciate them. However, all it takes is a little effort and creativity to keep relationships alive and fun. Try the following ideas for relationships with family members, co-workers and friends.

Family

Your children look to you for guidance, acceptance and love. Use these tips to let your children know how special they are to you:

- Slip a little note into their lunch boxes, telling them how terrific you think they are.
- Every now and then, buy that special lunchtime snack they love, and sneak it into their lunch boxes.
- Turn a trip to the doctor into a mini field trip. After the appointment, go to the zoo, an historic part of your town or a children's museum.
- Every now and then, let your children decide what to serve for dinner, and help them to prepare it.
- Tell your child that he or she is loved often. It is vital to children's self-esteem.
- Turn a meal into entertainment. Make pancakes in the shape of a heart or a Mickey Mouse head, arrange food to spell out people's names, make meals with a theme, or eat in an unexpected place.
- Design a treasure hunt in your house with scattered clues that lead your children to little cards or trinkets.

Friends

Strong friendships, based on trust and respect, will survive the test of time. However, that doesn't mean your friendships shouldn't be fun. Use these ideas to keep your friendships strong:

- Listen when a friend mentions an item he or she has wanted; surprise him or her with it at a later date.
- Make it a rule to update your personal phone book every six months; it gives you a chance to catch up with old friends.
- Send a nice card for no reason other than to let your friend know how special he or she is to you.
- Don't shop for the holidays only in November and December; instead, purchase items you know a friend would enjoy, and save them for holiday gift giving.
- Think of a fun event or trip you and a friend experienced together; call him or her up and reminisce.

Co-workers

You spend a lot of time with people at work. Try these ideas to indicate how much your co-workers' relationships mean to you:

- Make their favorite foods as a surprise.
- Go to the dollar store and buy some fun toys for co-workers to keep on their desks.
- If you see a television show or magazine article that would interest a co-worker, email them a link to the show or bring in the article.
- Take on a job responsibility that a co-worker does not enjoy doing.
- If someone helped you out, let his or her supervisor know with a quick email.

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Being Active Together

When seeking ways to get your kids moving, focus on things you can do together. As the parent, you should model the behavior you want to encourage in your children. When your children see you being active, they are more likely to copy your behavior. Here are some tips:

- Plan active outings.
- Make new routines. Take a walk every night after dinner or shoot hoops instead of watching TV.
- Encourage outdoor play with active toys like balls, jump ropes, skates, sprinklers, bubbles, chalk and squirt guns.
- Get everyone involved in active games like catch, Simon Says and charades.
- Buy inexpensive pedometers and compete to see who takes the most steps.
- Set limits on screen time. If your children enjoy video games, try ones that require movement, such as dance and fitness games. Have the entire family play the games together.

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