

Building Family Time! *By: Alix Hall, M.S. Child Development*

As the economy tightened our wallets, the holidays are over, and family saving plans begin, many of us are cutting back on entertainment expenses right now, but having family fun needn't go out the window. Finding new ways to enjoy daily activities, use items/games/equipment you already own, and finding low cost or free activities can help keep you, your family and friends connected, active and entertained. It's all about redefining 'FUN' **and** going back to your childhood roots.

[Parenting. 101 - Focusing on what really matters](#)

Re-consider your priorities

The down economy provided parents with the opportunity to pass along life skills to their children, that will help them become independent, creative and capable adults. It may sound simplistic, but one key to being in a more positive mood is to structure your day so you do more things you enjoy. It's how you spend your time, not your money, that counts. Sooooo, no funds for a housekeeper, for instance, do you really need to be the one to clean the house? Think about how clean your house really needs to be -- do you need to make the beds, or is bed-making time better spent drawing pictures with your kids? More importantly, get the whole family involved in the jobs/chores it takes to keep a home & family running. Kids need to know they are important, contributing members of their family. It's never too early or too late to give your child jobs and responsibilities. Working on a chore provides opportunities to practice and acquire new skills, makes children feel useful, and teaches them appreciation for the work that has to be done and for those who do it. Helping kids develop new skills like growing their own garden, cooking with you, car repair/washing, taking care of the family pets, and organizing closets and garage is a great way to make them more self-reliant and possibly discover something they will enjoy.

One of the first things to do is have a discussion with your child (ren)-hold a 'Family Meeting' for children ages 3 and up. Explain in simple terms, that things will be different now-we do not have as much money to spend on extras or special items/activities, as we used to because; Mom/Dad . . . must take extra time off work and not get paid, . . . lost their job/got laid off, the house costs more, etc. . . fill in the blanks for your situation. Nothing too scary - no long lecture, just the basics of what they can expect: no/few new toys, need to choose one extra-curricular activity (such as karate **or** gymnastics-not both), less eating out at restaurants, more family time with creative activities that save money. . . lastly, that you need to work together as a **family** to get everything done.

Volunteering is another way for you and your child to spend time together - help others/groups who need it and learn the value and joy in helping others. Volunteering in your community shows your child that little things you do **matter** big time to those who need it! You are modeling a very important value---that of **Community!**

Discovery Tree Schools would love to have any parents experiencing a "furlough" day off (or any other day) to volunteer in our classrooms, it's a GREAT way for you to spend time with your child, observe our **excellent** teachers and participate in daily learning activities – (did you know that 80% of our staff have their degrees????) - we are very proud of our staff and think you will be impressed also!

Go with the flow - Time seems to slow down when you're doing what you enjoy, whether it's gardening, reading with your kids or running laps. People who experience this level of engagement -- which psychologists call "flow" -- are happier than people who rarely do. And you're lucky to have a master of it right before you: your child. To you and me, every leaf and ant is pretty much the same, but not to a toddler. So try to actively notice things as your child does -- the ant dragging a piece of bread, for instance.

Bringing more of your best qualities -- your strengths -- to the often mundane tasks of child rearing can also help you feel more engaged. One of my strengths is humor, I was making grilled cheese sandwiches for my grandkids one day, and I started talking like it was a cooking show: 'Now I'm browning the bread, now I'm applying a thin layer of butter, now for the big FINISH-a pickle!' It transformed a mundane task into something we could all enjoy.

Savor the moment -One way to nourish positive emotions is to take a moment to appreciate, well, the moment. Just map out two-or three-minute activities that you can do that day to relish that time. In the morning, for instance, instead of trying to do ten things, take your cup of coffee to the window, and sip it while your child plays in an Exersaucer. Notice what's going on. Will it change your life? No, but you'll probably feel calmer.

My friend Cary has an even shorter way: "Take ten seconds every hour to look at what you're doing from a higher place." While you're at it, appreciate what a wonderful child you have -- those chubby cheeks, that toothless smile -- and share that joy with someone who'll rejoice in it with you.

Take the long view-Having a sense of perspective will also improve your attitude. "It gives you more patience, and it **certainly** awakens you to the preciousness of the moment, which is fleeting," says M.J. Ryan, author of The Happiness Makeover. She remembers the times when her daughter wanted to sit on her lap and watch a video. "Yes, I had other things to do. But I said to myself, 'How long will this last?' I'm grateful for that time with her."

Reconnect with your partner/friends -A supportive group of friends and family is one of the cornerstones of a happy life, and for many parents, the center of that social circle is their partner or special friend. That's why it's so important to keep the lines of communication open, especially during stressful times. Oftentimes when we're stressed we think 'I can deal with this relationship later,' however, we need our support systems everyday. A healthy and realistic goal might be to ask, 'What are some small, manageable things we can do to keep our connection strong during this rough time?'" It can be as easy as going food shopping together. Once you make little steps, it's easy to move on to bigger ones, like a night out.

Say thanks - Feeling grateful is a mood booster. It can be as simple as saying thanks to each other every night or finding new ways to acknowledge others. Another effective way is to put what you're thankful for down on paper: Write the three best things that happened today. Experts say that if you do that every day for two weeks, your feelings of well-being will increase.

Free or Low Cost Activities:

- *Go to Museums, local Zoos & Parks*
- *Ride Light Rail to a Touristy Location*
- *Go on Nature Walks-then explore & make crafts with your treasures*
- *Cook/Bake with your children*
- *Play Flashlight tag – Play Tag, Hide N Seek, ball games, duck-duck-goose, etc. with your child*
- *Wash the Cars/Bikes/Lawn Furniture together*
- *Get Rolling -go biking/skating/wagonning on trails*
- *Plant a garden/flowers – tend each day*
- *Build 'Indoor Forts' w/couch cushions, sheets, etc.*
- *Shadow Puppets & Shadow Dancing*
- *Blow Bubbles-Run thru sprinklers-Create art*
- *Be a kid again – Enjoy yourself & your child!!!!*

Submitted By: Alix Hall, M.S. Owner and Executive Director of Discovery Tree Schools, and an Educator, Consultant and Author on Early Childhood and Parenting Education.