

Tips for Keeping Children Involved with Parenting Time Activities

By Scott David Stewart

If you could help your child live a happier life, and grow up to be a happier adult, wouldn't you try to make your parenting time more memorable? Every moment you spend with your child is an opportunity to build and strengthen your relationship. If you're wondering how to go about doing that, here are a few tips to help you along the way.

TIP #1: Stick to the Plan.

When you pick up your child at the parenting time exchange, *you should have a plan on how you'll be spending your time together.* Maybe you've arranged to go for a desert drive on a Saturday afternoon with your daughter, or planned a Sunday matinee with your son. Make sure you follow through on your plans because, if you don't, your child will learn to expect broken promises and disappointments from you.

TIP #2: Exercise Good Time-Management.

We all get distracted from time to time, and sometimes little chores end up taking a lot longer than we anticipated. When it comes to parenting time with your child, though, you really need to prioritize and make good time-management decisions. *Don't become so involved in your projects, or work, that your parenting time slips away from you.* Life doesn't always follow our plans, but don't be quick to reschedule your parent-child activities for something else that could be done another time.

TIP #3: Avoid Leaving Your Child Routinely With Others.

When you have parenting time, don't routinely drop your child off at a friend's or family member's home so you can be free to do something else. Not only will that practice become tiresome for your friends and family, your child will catch on quickly that you're not really interested in spending any one-on-one time with him or her.

TIP #4: Let Your Child Lean on You.

You need to remain strong so your child can always lean on you, or rely on you. No matter how mature you believe your son or daughter is, if you're struggling with personal issues, *don't turn to your child for advice as your best buddy.* Doing so will only make your issues your child's issues. If you need emotional support, then you should seek help from an adult family member, a close friend, your pastor, or a family counselor.

TIP #5: Memorialize Good Times.

When memories are refreshed, conversations ensue, and happy times are revived and relived. Creating a scrapbook is an easy way for a child to express his or her memories of the events and activities enjoyed during parenting time. By saving little mementos like event tickets, promotional brochures, winning ribbons, score cards, and so on, combined with photographs and a short write-up, the happy times are captured in a memory book. And memory books become keepsakes that your grandchildren may one day see.

TIP #6: Plan to Have Fun.

When it's your turn to spend social time with your child, make sure you have an area in your home ready for fun times. Create a relaxed environment with access to board games, toys, and comfortable child-friendly furniture so you can both kick back, talk, and enjoy each other's company.

TIP #7: Share a Special Meal Together.

Plan for at least one special meal together during your parenting time. Try keeping the television and computer off, too. Set aside an hour, share a meal together, and be a family.

TIP #8: Create an Activity Fund.

You might consider setting some money aside in an activity fund, to pay for outings that you and your child will enjoy together during your parenting time. *Being creative doesn't mean you have to empty your bank account once a week.* If you set aside money for a day-trip to the zoo, for example, bring a picnic lunch instead of dining at a restaurant. For most parents, planning a trip, maybe to the Grand Canyon, means planning well in advance and putting the money aside over a longer period of time.

Parenting time means relationship-building time for you and your child. So make the best use of the time you have together, and enjoy each other's company to the fullest.

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