

The function of a family--regardless of its structure--is to nurture the growth and development of each of its members. Participating in simple family activities leads to greater emotional bonding and communication as well as increasing the family's ability to adapt to difficult situations.

● eat Family Mealtimes-It's not just about the food

Children need routines in order to feel safe and see the world as predictable. Routine family meals allow us to bring the family together. They create opportunities to connect and share ideas, plans, dreams, and laughs.

Family meal times don't have to be fancy, or limited to dinner or home. Sharing a meal at a restaurant, or a peanut butter sandwich in the park can be good times to sit and talk. Breakfast or lunch on the weekends can also provide a more relaxed atmosphere for connecting with each other. The key is to make meal time a pleasant, conflict-free zone, free from TV, phones, and other distractions.

Make meal preparation a family affair: when food preparation is fun and inclusive, meals are more likely to be shared and eaten together. By helping children connect food and fun with togetherness, you create powerful memories around mealtime.

Did you know?

A 2011 study at Columbia University found a relationship between frequent family dinners and a decreased risk of children smoking, drinking or using other drugs.

Reading for Life-long Learning read ●

Did you know?

According to the *National Center for Education Statistics* children who are read to at home have an advantage over children who are not. Their reading proficiency and math scores tend to be higher.

Start reading to children from infancy as a way to introduce them to the written word and form strong, lasting bonds. Choose at least one scheduled reading time a day. For younger children, before bedtime or after a nap is a great way to establish routines and help with transitions. For older children, have them read to you or with you as you read on your own; then share what you've read with each other. Reading before bedtime is a great way for adults and children to wind down from a busy day and get into healthy family routines.

Make reading time a fun activity and put less emphasis on the "learning" aspect. Having books readily available at their level will help spark children's interest. Let children help make up the ending or guess what is going to happen next. This encourages them to use their imagination and problem solving skills.

Letting children see you read for enjoyment or read along with them reinforces that reading is a life-long activity that crosses generational lines.

● play The Healing Power of Family Fun

Family bonds have to be formed and strengthened over time. Family fun activities are important in helping children build lasting memories of their childhood that can carry them through stressful times and into adulthood. What stories do you want the children in your care to be able to tell their children? What memories do you want them to have as part of your family?

Happy childhood memories can help children strengthen self-esteem and overcome future challenges. Giving children those happy childhood memories will help provide a solid foundation to become the people you want them to be as adults. Beside the old fashioned games like, Go Fish and Old Maid, Monopoly, and Chutes and Ladders, a variety of simple games are available for free on the internet.

Did you know?

Playing games helps teach children important language and negotiation skills, as well as basic math concepts such as storing and retrieving information, categorizing patterns, sequencing numbers, and sorting.