

If you're a working parent, it's more than likely that you spend most of your time wracked with guilt. While you're out there earning money to pay the bills, and to keep your mind active, you can't help but worry that you are missing out on those moments in your child's development that are never to be repeated.

But there's no point in eating yourself up with guilt. Try shifting your focus from the amount of time you spend with your children to the **QUALITY** of the time you share. Try these ways of making sure that your limited spare time is used in a way which will benefit you all.

**Everyday routines can equal quality time.** Just because you don't spend all day, everyday, with your children, doesn't mean you have to be a one-person circus act when you DO get to see them. You can teach them a valuable lesson about the importance of working for what you want from life when you show them that you're a human being, not Supermom or Super dad.

It's OK - in fact, it's normal - to be tired when you get home after a hectic day in the workforce. You don't have to then embark on a range of energetic activities to prove to your children that you love them.

It's a good idea to get into a regular routine during the week, where everyone spends quiet time debriefing after the day's events, and reconnecting as a family. Give your children some the cooking tasks, or get them to set the table or put away the laundry which got folded on the weekend.

While you share the chores, chat about what happened to you during the day. You'll be united in a sense of a common goal: a pleasant meal and a tidy house. This is far more preferable to rushing around doing everything yourself and screaming at your children when they inevitably whine for your attention.

#### **Plan a special weekly event.**

So that you don't feel that you're all walking on a treadmill of chores, try organizing one weekly treat that you all do together. Bring your kids in on the act, and ask them where they want to go this weekend.

It may be the zoo, it may be a movie or it may just be shopping to get them new winter underwear. But it's a great idea to go on an outing with them on a regular basis.

If you do find yourself going out to get a fairly mundane shopping task out of the way, stop off for ice cream, or to feed the birds in the park on the way home. These little treats will be exciting for your kids and will remind you that it can be fun to be a parent.

**Watching** your children carefully throw crumbs of stale bread to a clamoring flock of birds can be a surprising poignant experience. You will find their innocent excitement contagious and touching - and a great subject for candid family photos.

#### **It Is Better To Give**

Teach your child the beauty of giving and volunteer time with him or her. Deliver food baskets to the elderly or clean up a seniors' garden. Stuff envelopes for a charity. Whatever you do, bring your children along and let them participate with you. You'll not only spend time together, but also teach them a valuable lesson about helping those in need.

#### **Bedtime Business**

It may prove difficult at first, but let the dishes go and don't vacuum the rug. Instead of giving your babies the two-second bath, make getting ready for bed an event. Pour in the bubbles and let the little ones hit the water--with you close by, of course, enjoying the splish-splash. After pulling your child from the suds, give him or her an all over baby massage with lotion. Then top off the relaxing adventure with several of your child's favorite bedtime stories.

#### **Betty Crocker and Kids**

Do you rush home and hit the pots while the kids play? You may be missing an excellent opportunity for spending time with your kids every night. Try inviting your little ones (or not so little ones) into the kitchen to help you cook. Besides enjoying about an hour or so of preparation time immersed in the attention of Mom and Pop, the kids will feel a sense of accomplishment for contributing to the family meal. Pouring in ingredients and mixing are good activities for smaller children, while older kids can handle tasks like cleaning vegetables, preparing salads, and setting the table.

#### **No Boob Tube**

We parents use the television for more than entertainment. Oftentimes, we use it as a crutch. You know the scenario: Pop in the Teletubbies or Blue's Clues tape, so the kids remained occupied while you do the taxes, pay bills, or clean house. Or, you vegetate watching the television yourself after work to "unwind." Either way, you're depriving yourself of quality time with your kids. Also, resist the temptation to plop down on the couch with the kids and watch TV together (which does not constitute quality time by the way!). Instead, engage your children in a good old board game or take a family walk.

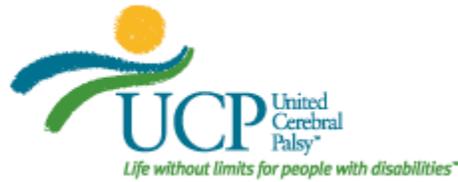
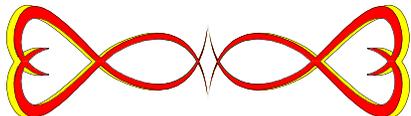
### Call in Sick

Ever see the commercial where the mother tries to juggle the kids out the door while she attempts to leave for work, only to succumb to her daughters' pleadings for a day at the beach? Sometimes you and the wee ones just need a mental break. We're not advocating lying to the boss, of course, but do schedule personal leave in advance and use the time for an outing with your children. Weekdays are great days to go to a museum and expose the kids to Picasso or try an aquarium visit. By skipping work and planning the outing on a weekday, you'll avoid long crowds and traffic.

### Cardio Kids

Exercise with your kids. Instead of dropping off the children at the child-care center of a club, do your workout with them. Strap on your tennis shoes and load the tot in the stroller and go for a brisk, long walk or jog. Older kids love working out to tapes. Try Richard Simmons Sweating to the Oldies series. The music is fun and the moves are simple enough for them to follow along. An added bonus is the comedic value; you may find yourself doubled over in laughter watching tiny kids attempting a kick boxing or workout hip-hop maneuver. Besides getting your workout in and enjoying time with your kids, you set an example of good habits and help your kids appreciate lifelong health. You also save on the health club bill!

It's not so hard to work regular moments of joy into your everyday routine, and to remind your children - and yourself - of how wonderful being a parent can be.



### Information supplied by:

**Childcare Enhancement  
With A Purpose  
(CCEP)**

**Stephanie Eger  
Project Coordinator**

**Amelia Hardin  
Dee McNalley  
Developmental Specialists**

**United Cerebral Palsy  
of Huntsville & TN Valley  
256.859.4900**



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# Better Quality Time With Your Children



Everyday  
routines can  
equal quality  
time

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