



Deanna Beech, Ph.D

INCREASING FAMILY FUN

3 Great Ways to Connect with Your Kids

Increasing Family Fun

3 ways to connect with your kids that really count

We all want family time to be fun, but for some reason we seem to think that the fun times are reserved for weekends, or worse, for vacations. And even if you already are having fun with your family through out the week, I hope that one of these ways can be added to your list for increasing 'Family Fun.'

Positive Engagement:

For 10 minutes - Let them be in charge

I don't mean in control of the house, and I'm not advocating some crazy therapy. I am simply suggesting that they get 10 minutes of your undivided attention each day, and in that 10 minutes they get to say what and how you two play. This is primarily for the 4 to 12 year old range, little kids need more and older kids need less.



It's harder than you think. You really have to back out of the equation. You don't get to say, "Let's go play basketball," or "How about we read a story?" Watching a movie or playing videogames doesn't count. Nope. Instead you start with what your child is playing and join in. This comes easy to some. And for those that find it hard to do there is a trick. Start by narrating your child's play, like an announcer, and slowly ask into the game. What does this look like?

*Dad of a 7 year old little girl notices that she is playing tea party with her dolls,
"Doll is about to try the tea. She looks happy about it, but Dolly always
seems happy to have tea. And there is the first sip. Is it good tea? (aside to*

*child with your hand over your mouth – Does Dolly like the tea?) **Yes, the tea is good and Dolly has done it again, another fantastic tea party!***

The asides to your child let them know that they are running the show. Older kids have different interests but the idea still works.

*Mom of an 11 year old, **“What are you listening to?”***

*Child, **“A group.”***

*Mom, **“Yea, I was young once, can’t be a bad as what I listened to. Let me try.”***

*Child, **“You won’t like it.”***

*Mom, **“Oh, now who’s the judge. Let me check it out before you send me to the old-age home.”***

*Child, **“Okay, you asked for it.”***

Mom (It does not matter if you hate it, find something nice to say about it. It could be as vague as ‘They sure sound passionate about what they’re singing.’ And then ask, ‘What else do you like to listen to?’)

In these ten minutes you get a look inside how your child’s thinking. What are the themes involved in their play or music? Is there a happy ending? Be curious and ask open-ended questions.

This simple act gives you a huge payload for your effort. It is a form of both intense positive attention and it allows them to positively assert control. Let’s face it, kids will get our attention one way or another. The good news is that they prefer the positive attention and will work harder to stay on your positive side. This is like putting money in their emotional bank accounts. It’s good to have a nice positive balance for when you need to set limits or give consequences, which are like withdrawals.

Your 3 Favorite Things Today

There are two really wonderful times to add this into your family – dinnertime and bedtime. What are you adding? It's as straightforward as it sounds. You ask your kids, "What were your 3 favorite things that happened today?" And then be curious to find out why it was so special to them.



You may be wondering – why 3 things? It's because this makes everyone dig a little. If you're eight years old and you just have to say one good thing it might always be recess. So, if we ask for a second we get a little more personal. And, it's with the third that we probably really get a glimpse into our children's inner world.

This easy to use tool does so much. Once your child knows that you are going to ask for the 3 best/favorite things each day they will start to look for them. This **develops optimistic thinking** because your child is looking for the positive in each day. Optimistic thinking has been found to be one of the most significant predictors of happiness in later life. You are literally building their future happiness.

Then, while you're talking about their lucky moments, ask your child what he thinks made that possible. Some things really are just lucky, like finding five dollars on the sidewalk, but most things have to do with your child's personal effort. When this is true praise their effort and point out the fact that they made it happen. Now you are developing their ability to persist at a task to get to a goal, **personal grit**, and you are also developing the idea that they can have control over making good things happen for themselves, **internal locus of control**. Get everybody in the family playing along. It's a powerful tool and fun to do.

Tickles, Hugs and Squeezes

Yep, just that – tickles, hugs, and squeezes – and lots of them. I'm talking about rolling around on the floor and lifting them in the air and then smothering them with kisses and laughing till it's hard to breathe. Wrestling on the sofa and letting them get the best of you so that they're piled on top. I'm sure that you already hug your kids when you get home from work and when you tuck them in bed. These hugs and kisses are the reassurance that everything is good and safe in their world, absolutely necessary. Adding a few moments here and there to physically engage in a playful show of how much you love and adore them is like icing on the cake.

