

Other Practices That Help Families Live Out Their Values

BE PRESENT. Agree on a time when you will be together each week. It might be breakfast on Saturday morning or for an hour after dinner on Sunday afternoon. During that time, pose a question for discussion, such as “What was a good thing that happened in your life this week?” or “How might our family be faithful to God or serve God together in the coming week?”

LAUGH, DANCE, AND SING TOGETHER. Just do it. Tell jokes or a funny incident of the day at dinner. Sing together as you drive to the grocery store or to a soccer game. Put on a child’s favorite CD and dance together. Teach your children the dances that were popular when you were a teenager. Laugh together!

LISTEN. Really hearing what someone is saying when we rush from thing to thing is difficult. Play this listening game for a few minutes. Begin a conversation about any topic. However, each person must say what the previous person said to the satisfaction of that person before adding to the conversation.

PROVIDE SPACE TO ASK QUESTIONS. Make a question box in which any family member can place a question. Draw a question when everyone is together (for a meal, in the car, just before bedtime) and talk about it together. You might “salt” the box with some of these questions to get started:

- ▶ What would you like to change about the world?
- ▶ What living person would you like to meet?
- ▶ If you could ask God any question, what would it be?

SAY, “I’M SORRY.” Keep a supply of plain index cards and art supplies in a box. Explain to the family that these supplies are to make cards that say, “I’m sorry” when you have upset a family member. They are for both adults and children to use.

PLAY GAMES TOGETHER. Make up games to play together or adapt games you already have so every family member can be involved. Look for games that encourage everyone to work together to reach a goal. Here’s one for traveling: List all the states or provinces on a sheet of paper. See how many license plates for different places you can identify as you travel to your destination.

GO FOR WALKS. Walk in any kind of weather, at various times, and for many reasons: a summer rain shower, after a snow storm, to look at the stars, to say “hello” to neighbors, to get ice cream cones, along a beach, through a wooded park. While walking is good exercise for every family member, these walks are to enjoy being together and to discover new things. Don’t rush them.

ELIMINATE COMPARISONS. Look for ways to celebrate the individuality of each family member, adult and child. Play a simple game, such as “What’s your favorite?” Each family member has a turn to select a category (ice cream flavor, book, game, sport, color, etc.) and each person answers the question. The categories can be more complex with older children present. Use questions that ask for the person’s preference, which have no wrong answers.

HONOR DIFFERENCES. On birthdays, pay special attention to the birthday person. Pray for her or him, inviting each family member or person present to say a sentence prayer for the honoree. Some families have the tradition that the birthday person selects the menu for the family meal together. Others have a special plate that the honoree uses. Celebrate the uniqueness of the birthday person in other ways that fit your family’s interests and schedule.

HOLD EACH OTHER IN YOUR THOUGHTS AND PRAYERS. Anytime a family member goes away for a sleepover, a business trip, off to camp, or wherever, assure that person that those at home will pray for her or him each day until she or he returns. Parents, bless your children as they leave for school each day and encourage them to bless you with words something like, “May God be with you today.” If something special, such as a test or an interview, is happening, make the blessing more specific, such as “May you feel God’s presence today when you take the test.”

