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Real Magic: One-on-One Fun

Show me any two people who have fun together frequently and I'll show you a good relationship. Just as praise and affection are like water and fertilizer to a child's self-esteem, shared fun provides the same kind of necessary nutrition to a personal relationship. Whether they are young or old, people who have regular fun together like each other—period. For many families these days however, this much-needed shared fun gets put on the back burner because of the unfortunate focus on two things: busywork and whole family activities.

Work, Work, Work

Marriage is a mixture of work and good times, and the successful couples are the ones who can find the happy balance between work and play. And since work seems to fill our time so naturally and aggressively, finding that balance really boils down to maintaining sufficient time for shared fun. If you asked me what's more important in a marriage relationship, communication or shared fun, I would answer, "shared fun."

The same is true in your relationship with each of your children. To like the kids you must enjoy them regularly and for them to respond positively to your discipline, they must enjoy and like you. Yes, there is work to be done but it is absolutely critical that you find time to play with your youngsters.

Unfortunately, in the hustle and bustle of everyday existence many of the daily encounters between parent and child go like this:

"Time to get up."
"Here's your breakfast. No TV till you're done."
"Got your book bag?"
"You don't have time to play with the dog."
"Come on now, we're in a hurry!"
"Don't forget your coat."
"Love you, good bye."
"How was your day? Got any homework?"
"Leave your sister alone!"
"You've got to finish your peas if you want your dessert."
"You can go to Bobby's for one hour. I want you back at 8:00."
"Give me a kiss goodnight. I don't think you brushed your teeth."

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How much mutual enjoyment took place on this day? None. The parent saw the child as a bundle of unpleasant tasks, and the child saw the parent as a bundle of unpleasant directions. No relationship will remain healthy when this kind of interaction is the only feeding it gets. The antidote? Fun!

Brace Yourself for Some Bad News

Family fun today is way overrated. We consistently hear, for example, that eating dinner as a family every night is the sure-fire way of preventing crime, drug abuse, academic underachievement, and a bunch of other social evils.

Going out with the whole crew is not all it's cracked up to be for three reasons. The first is sibling rivalry. Mom and Dad are at the beach, for instance, with eight-year-old daughter and six-year-old son. The boy says something smart to his sister, who throws her hotdog at her brother who laughs as it misses and gets full of sand. Now both kids are screaming at each other and everyone on the beach is looking. This isn't fun.

The second reason fun with the entire family doesn't always work is this: The more people you put together in the same place, the greater the chance for differences of opinion and conflict.

The third reason that family fun is overrated: The best parent-child bonding occurs in one-on-one parent child interactions. Children really cherish alone time with a mother or father, without the presence of their greatest rivals—siblings. Watch the kids when they're alone with you. They open up, they talk, they feel free and they kind of blossom. It would be a shame to rarely—or never—experience that with a child because you're so busy thinking everybody should be together all the time.

REMEMBER

To like your child, you must enjoy them regularly. And for them to respond well to your discipline, they must enjoy and like you too. That means only one thing: You'd better find regular time to play with your youngsters!



Ask Dr. Phelan: Frustrated Five-Year-Old

Q. I have a five-year-old son who is above average in intelligence but has a big problem with frustration. If things don't go his way he loses control and throws a "fit". After he gets calmed down he is ok. He gets very demanding at times when he wants something. Any suggestions?

A. We suggest you check out our program "[1-2-3 Magic: Effective Discipline for Children 2-12](#)". Keep in mind, one of the worst things you can do to a frustrated child is to try to talk them out of their frustration, so you need to respect our "No Talking and No Emotion" rules.

Be sure to check out our [Ask Dr. Phelan](#) tool for more quick tips on common parenting challenges!

ParentMagic Inc
800 Roosevelt Rd
Glen Ellyn IL 60137

www.parentmagic.com