

INCREASING CONNECTION

STRATEGIES FOR FAMILIES



STARRY

We know that a feeling of connection to your family is really important but sometimes we lose sight of that importance when other tasks and responsibilities are draining our energy and mental resources. Below, you will find some practical strategies and ideas for increasing family connection while also balancing the everyday demands of life.

MEANINGFUL MEALTIMES

We feel much more connected to each other when we can eat together and truly interact with each other while enjoying our meal. This means putting away electronic devices, turning off the television, eating and/or preparing the meal together, and conversing with one another about what is going on in our lives while we eat. Try starting a tradition of saying two good things and one hard thing about your day as you eat dinner.



BEDTIME RITUALS

Consider adding a meaningful ritual to your child's bedtime routine. It will help with connection and also help them wind down for bed. Maybe set aside five minutes to talk, read a couple of books together, say your prayers, or maybe just give hugs before bed. You could ask your child for input about what this meaningful ritual could be.



REGULAR CHECK-INS

When you pick up your child from school you, might ask, “How was your day?” What is the usual response? “Good.” “Fine.” “Boring.” “Okay.” Using a more open-ended question will open the door to a more meaningful interaction. Try asking questions like, “What was your favorite part of your day?” or “If you could do anything differently today, what would it have been?” or “What do you feel most proud of about today?” The list can go on, but staying away from questions that will likely illicit a one-word answer will make your after-school conversations more enlightening and enriching.

PLAY!

Play is the primary language for children and, honestly, adults really enjoy it too. Play with your children as often as possible. This doesn't mean you have to have a structured game night that lasts hours. When you get home after a long day, you can just spend 10 minutes on the floor playing with your child and letting your child lead the play. Maybe the two of you make up a quick game or pretend to be mermaids or pirates. Speaking the language of play to your child will likely deepen the connection you and your child feel while also creating lasting positive memories.



EYE CONTACT

We live in a technologically-heavy culture. It is common for you to find yourself attending to a screen of some sort for the majority of your day. We are also a highly productive culture, so when we aren't focused on a screen, we are rapidly completing tasks. This often means that we make little eye contact with our loved ones. Occasionally, take the time (usually about 30 seconds) and give your child your undivided attention and direct eye contact. You will be amazed to find that this engaging interaction will fill their cup, and yours, quickly.



RELAX TOGETHER

We can get so busy and over-schedule our lives to include all of the things we feel we need to accomplish like school, work, extra-curricular activities, meet-ups, play dates, birthday parties, and community events. The list goes on and on. While those things are important, it is also so important to take a break, slow down, and breathe once in a while. Block off an entire Saturday for you and your family to just be. Be together, relax, watch movies, and play games. This relaxing quality time will be great self-care and help to increase connection and reduce stress.



GIVE CHOICES

Children often feel like they have little no control over their lives and, let's be honest, they really don't. We tell them where they have to live, what school they need to go to, when to go to bed, when to wake, what to eat and not eat, what to do on days off, etc. Structure, boundaries, schedules, and rules all come with benefits but every once in a while it is fun to have more freedom. Find opportunities in your day to give your child a choice. These choices could be small (Do you want carrots or broccoli for dinner?) or they could be big (Where should our next vacation be?). Either way, giving children a choice and following through with that choice will help them remember that they have a voice and you value their input and opinion.



LISTEN

Practice your active listening skills when a family member is talking. This includes eye contact, acknowledgement of understanding, asking follow up and clarifying questions, and reflecting content to make sure you heard and understood them. This will help your family member feel heard and understood, which will deepen their connection to you.

PRAISE

We often praise our kids for the things that they do – their accomplishments, their grades, scoring a goal in soccer, winning a game, etc. This type of praise is helpful, but there is another type of praise that can foster a deeper connection and improve self-esteem: Praise for being. This means that you are praising the person that they are instead of what they have done. Examples include: “I really love spending time with you.” “You are a really amazing kid.” “I love you.” “I am so proud of the person you are.”



Hopefully, one or more of these strategies speaks to you and you will be able to implement it with your family to deepen and/or enhance the connection you share with them. Remember that increasing connection can lead to less stress, easier redirection of behavior, better mood, and increased self-esteem.

Increasing connection can take time, but the result is well worth the time and effort.

