

## After School Connections

In a world so focused on electronic devices and social media, fostering deep connections within families can prove to be difficult at times. The first few hours after school seem to be the most challenging time for many families. What are the first questions typically asked to a school aged child or teen when he or she climbs into the car, hops off the bus, or sits down at the dinner table? “How was your day?” “Did you learn anything at school today?” “What did you do today?” Unless the child or teen is feeling particularly chatty, these questions can easily be answered with one word, right? What parent wants the one word answer of “fine” or “nothing?”

How can this common exchange change? Here are some examples and ideas of how to get everyone talking, including parents!

1. Ask open ended questions or make open ended comments asking for information. For example, “Tell me something positive that happened today.” “Tell me how you encouraged someone today.” “What made you smile today?” “What made you feel happy or sad today?” Parents, do not hesitate to offer a piece of your day and answer these questions or comments yourself. Believe it or not, kids are curious about what parents do when they aren’t around.
2. Get creative! Sit down as a family and create a question box. Grab a shoe box, cover the outside with a grocery bag, and decorate it together. Don’t forget to cut a large square in the top through which to deposit and remove your questions. Take some 3x5 index cards and have each member of the family write down five open ended questions or comments to put in the box. After school or at meal time, each member of the family has to draw a card, answer the question on the card, or talk about the statement on the card. Suggestion: During this time, shut down all electronic devices and put the phones away.

3. Focus on feelings. Encourage children to identify and explore their emotions when discussing their day. For example, if the child mentions nervousness, ask them how they experienced the nervous feelings. Did they feel like butterflies were in their stomach? Did their face feel warm? Were their hands shaking? These types of questions help kids realize that their parents are interested in all aspects of their life.

## **Social Media: Family Friend or Foe?**

In early September of this year, I became a parent. However, I did not become a parent in the most orthodox manner. I got married and inherited an eight year old girl. I am not a big fan of the word “step,” so I refer to her as my daughter. She refers to me as “Miss,” “Mom,” or “Fairy God Mother;” whatever seems to strike her fancy at the time. I happen to answer to all three.

Needless to say, life as I have known it for the past 40 years is completely different and spending time with my daughter is becoming more and more of a priority of mine. This usually means my phone and my laptop need to stay in their cases so I can pay attention to her. Let me tell you, paying attention pays off. My daughter and I have had some great talks over the past month. I have found out quite a bit about what makes her happy and what is currently bothering her. These conversations are critical because I want my love and understanding to become the louder voice in her head compared to what society and social media are going to throw at her in the coming years. My daughter’s relationship with her phone and social media are just beginning. The time for our connection to take priority is right now.

According to Asano (2017), the average person spends two hours each day on social media. That calculates out to be about five years, give or take a few months, over a lifetime (Asano, 2017). Taylor (2013) stated that physical home size has increased by 50 percent which makes it possible for individuals within the family to go to their separate corners of the home and conduct individual activities. Considering the demands of corporate America, studies, and extracurricular activities, spending significant additional time on social media could almost eliminate the opportunity for family time (Taylor, 2013). If the existence of social media has a significant impact on the life of an individual, how much impact does it have on the life of a family?

Let's face it, society has a very loud voice. Technology and social media have made it possible for that voice to become so loud it shouts over the voices of love and connection. Society tells us that we must have the best of everything in order to be happy. Love and connection tells us that we need relationships to thrive in this life. God created His children this way.

Although social media has its proper place with regard to connecting with others, it should not be our main source of reaching out. Having a quick messenger group chat on Facebook does not foster the same connection as scheduling a family outing to reconnect after a long stressful week.

Intentional connection must be a priority in order to maintain a healthy family unit. Don't hesitate to be creative! Every family is different and has a different set of unique needs. Intentional connection can be accomplished through weekly technology free family activities, daily meals together, interactive study time for parents and children, daily or weekly family devotions, and family movie nights. These are just a few examples of how families can connect and intentionally interact with one another.

Asano, E. (2017, January 4) How much time do people spend on social media. Retrieved from <https://www.socialmediatoday.com/marketing/how-much-time-do-people-spend-social-media-infographic>

Taylor, J. (2013, March 13) Is technology creating a family divide. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-power-prime/201303/is-technology-creating-family-divide>

