

# Quality Family Time

By Margie Ryerson

Kevin, age 12, sat in my office expressing hurt and resentment that his father didn't spend more time with him. But when I met with Kevin's dad, he insisted that he did spend a great deal of time with Kevin. Needless to say, this was confusing.

In fact, Kevin's father devoted many hours each week assisting with Kevin's soccer team and attending every game. The team traveled, so he also went away with them several times a year. However, Kevin wasn't yearning for this type of interaction; rather he wanted time alone with his dad.

Families are busier than ever nowadays with so many tempting activities to fill their time. Parents want the best for their children, and this often means enrolling them in many programs – sports, music, tutoring, Scouts, church groups, drama, art, etc.

Friends and social activities are important. School is increasingly demanding. We all know the feeling of trying to juggle our family's schedules and still find time to be together.

With parents and children being pulled in so many directions, it is important to prioritize. This may mean that each child picks only one or two activities at a time. And perhaps each parent limits volunteer efforts for school, sports, and community, as well. While it is important to do our fair share, it is also crucial to safeguard significant family time.

Family meals are extremely important. Ideally, eating dinner together can be the norm and not the exception. Mealtimes are wonderful opportunities to relax together and enjoy each other's company. It helps if complaints and criticisms are kept to a minimum; for example, this is not the time to discuss homework, grades, or disciplinary matters.

Other than vacations, many people tell me that their family recreational time often consists of attending children's events, or sharing pizza and a video, or socializing with other families. These activities are fine, of course, but adding more interactive times as a family, such as a bike ride, an ice-cream outing, a ferry ride across the Bay, or playing a board game at home can create meaningful experiences for everyone. Sometimes the most lasting memories can be these simple shared times together.



Annaluna (3 1/2) playing with her parents Roberto and Jennifer at the Orinda Community Park

Of course, as your children grow older their schedules and desires may conflict with family plans. If your teen helps plan family activities and also has permission to opt out occasionally, you will have a better chance of eliciting positive participation.

Margie Ryerson, MFT, is a marriage and family therapist with offices in Orinda and Walnut Creek. Contact her at 925-376-9323 or margierye@yahoo.com

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