

## Articles

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### LOVE is spelt T-I-M-E

In the movie I Not Stupid 2, there is a scene which shows a family sitting down to their evening meal after a hard day's work.

#### Scenario 1:

The children wish their father a Happy Father's Day and pull out their presents for him. The younger son, a primary school aged child, gives him a personalised hand drawn picture, which shows the blackened shadow of his father. When his father asks him what the picture is all about, the boy switches off the lights of the room and asks everyone to look at the father. Indeed, all that is seen of the father is a black shadow of his profile. The child quips that this is what his perception of his father is like, as his father often comes back late at night, when the house lights have all been turned off.

#### Scenario 2:

The older son, a teenager, then pulls out his present for his dad. He has bought his dad a shaver. The dad opens it, and instead of showing appreciation, the teenager gets a scolding for having wasted his money on buying the shaver, which his dad already has, and does not need. The teenager unhappily sulks in his corner.

#### Scenario 3:

The family finally get down to eating. Before long, the teenage son receives a call on his mobile. He is immediately reprimanded and told to put away his phone. Even as this word is spoken, dad's phone begins to ring. Dad is engrossed in the conversation with his friend about where the best rojak and kueh tu-tu stalls in Singapore are located. Shortly after, mum's phone rings too, and she engages in a conversation about the latest shopping sale spots in Singapore. Even grandma's phone goes off, and the Filipino maid who serves them, also gets a call on her mobile. The scene ends with the 2 boys heaping food onto their plates and walking off to their own rooms.

This scene may well reflect the challenges that parents face juggling work life and family commitments, especially the task of bringing up kids rooted in character and values. 4 important principles may be learnt from this story and they spell : T-I- M-E.

#### Time

In our busy and fast paced society, time is a rare commodity, especially when parents have to face demanding work schedules that take them away from the home for long hours. (The child in scenario 1 envisions his dad as a black shadow.) Yet the benefits of spending time with our children, especially in their developmental years, remains undisputed : we build precious bonds of relationship with our children when we spend time together with them, we begin to understand them better as we communicate with them and share their world, we build a store of happy memories that build into our children's emotional health and positive experience of family life and relationships that in turn will affect their own relationships with others.

How can we prioritise time for our family so that they receive the best of our energy and efforts, instead of the crumbs we have to offer after we are spent at the office? A good way would be to block out sacred time for your spouse and your children. This will help to bring balance to a crowded calendar of events. Our appointment with our family is as important as the boardroom meeting with our clients or directors. As far as possible, lock into your diary, the time you want to give to your family on a daily or weekly basis. Build in your holiday plans early too, so that your calendar doesn't get crowded out with other commitments and you find that there is no slot of time left for your family. They should have your priority!

#### Influence

The window of opportunity to influence our children in their formative years closes very quickly. With post modern influences encroaching on the mindset of our children, with the paradigm of relative truth holding the hearts and minds of our next generation, it becomes urgent that parents inculcate time honoured values in their children from a young age. Younger children especially are very receptive to teaching and coaching. The wise King Solomon has said : 'Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.'

Keeping a warm and close relationship with our children is also important, so that we can continue to influence them, even when they are in the older teenage years. Keep communication channels open and manage conflicts wisely, keep anger in reign and check your parenting style, so that you remain an approachable and askable parent to your children.

#### Modelling

Character is more caught than taught. The parents in scenario 3 were trying to inculcate good dinner habits to their children by telling

them to refrain from using the mobile phone at the dining table. However, the parents did not themselves do what they were trying to tell their children. And that became a major setback, as the children did not see action borne out of instruction. Children very often are not listening to the words we speak, but are most receptive to the actions we display. Children See. Children Do.

There is no shortage of negative role models for our children in today's society. The media, arts and entertainment industries have very powerful messages for our next generation that are attractive and alluring. Unfortunately, media messages may not promote positive family values or pro-social behaviour for our children. If we do not role model for our children, the media will. As parents, we need to intentionally model values like integrity, responsibility, respect, compassion, empathy, passion and resiliency to our children.

### **Encouragement**

When the teenager in scenario 2 tries to show appreciation to his dad, he is scolded instead. What a downer to his good intentions! As parents we form the first line of emotional support to our children, especially when they are young. Many of us will remember the early days of childhood when we applauded and celebrated the milestone achievements of our children when they took their first steps or when they spoke their first words. Yet, these words of praise and encouragement grow less as the years go by, replaced by harsher words of reprimands and nagging reminders to be on better behaviour.

We need to remember that our children need to be encouraged and appreciated, just like plants need sunshine to grow healthily. When our children have a healthy self esteem, it will enable them to face the challenges of life with better resilience. Alvin Price has said, "Parents need to fill a child's bucket of self esteem so high that the rest of the world can't poke enough holes to drain it dry.' Fill the emotional tank of your child and watch him conquer the world!

Parenting is ultimately a journey of love for a lifetime with your child. And LOVE to a child spells T-I-M-E!

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