

## Mrs Dowdell's Parenting Pointer

### Not enough hours in the day

A recent newspaper article said that parents' top worry is that they're not spending enough time with their children. How do we juggle the pressures of parenting with work commitments, supporting other family members, keeping on top of household chores, managing our budgets and maybe even attempting to have some sort of social life?

When I run parenting courses, we often use a "Benefits and Barriers" exercise to help us begin to explore a topic. For example, we'll list all the benefits of playing with our children versus the barriers that may prevent this or make it difficult. With every benefits and barriers exercise I've ever done, the one barrier that is consistently mentioned is time. Why not grab a piece of paper and do your own benefits and barriers exercise? The key is to be realistic but not to burden ourselves with more guilt. Perhaps by listing and focussing on the benefits of time invested in our children, we might be motivated to make a few small changes that can have a large impact.

We all have 24 hours in a day. How can we make the most of the time we have? What hours are taken up with activities we can't control and what hours do we have some choice about? Is it more important that our home is spotless and tidy or that we have time to listen to and have fun with our children? Can we save time in other ways like doing our food shop online? Maybe plan a week's menu in advance so that we only cook quick simple things on busy days. I know that my phone can quickly suck me in and before I know it I've wasted half an hour scrolling through social media. One of the things I try to do when I want to spend time with my family is to leave my phone in a different room, so that I'm not tempted to keep checking it.



**IT'S ONLY BY SAYING "NO"  
THAT YOU CAN CONCENTRATE  
ON THE THINGS  
THAT ARE REALLY IMPORTANT.**

**STEVE JOBS**

Sometimes our schedules are packed with lots of great things but do we need to do all of them? How can we get the right balance between activities and quality family time? Sometimes we need to say no. If our child is already involved in after school activities 2 evenings a week, do they really need another one? Or, what if that club on a Saturday morning means we never get to spend days out together as a family?

How can we maximise opportunities to spend time with our children? Firstly, I would strongly suggest having rules around the use of technology, so that the default activity isn't everyone disappearing to their own rooms to play on their gadgets. Are there ways we can involve our children in some of the household jobs that need doing? Preparing and cooking a meal together can be a great way of chatting and connecting. Children find it easier to open up and talk during "side by side" activities, rather than a face-to-face conversation. When my children were younger we used to have a weekly housework night where each of us had a few jobs to do and then we all shared a big bar of chocolate. Getting the children involved in chores saves parents time and teaches children independence and responsibility. (Although we have to accept, they may not do jobs as thoroughly as us.)

Avoid the debilitating guilt trap that cripples us into thinking we can't do enough and instead think creatively. We have lots of demands on our time but let's prioritise our children as best we can. As I've discovered with my own family, before you know it, they've grown up and flown the nest. We can allow other distractions to consume us or we can make the decision to carve out time with our children.

Got any questions? Need any help or advice? Please e-mail me at [parenting@foundrylaneprimary.co.uk](mailto:parenting@foundrylaneprimary.co.uk)