

15 Ways To Create the Family of Your Dreams

by Kathryn Kvols

Do you desire more closeness in your family? USA Today reported that one in five kids say that they have "too little" or "hardly any" meaningful time with their parents. Most children spend more time in front of screens today than they do interacting with families.



Families should be like batteries – a place to be recharged; yet so often they end up being a source of stress and conflict. No one wants it that way, but we were never really taught how to be close. Unfortunately, "Intimacy 101" is not offered in school curriculums as of yet. Families that are close create an atmosphere of warmth, fun, acceptance, belonging, understanding and delight in each other. So how do we create a connection like this within our family?

1. Make Your Home Emotionally Safe. In order for children to thrive and become their best, they need to feel emotionally safe. If they do not emotionally feel safe, they expend their energy protecting themselves instead of discovering themselves. Children who feel silenced, smothered, judged, threatened or rewarded will have a hard time feeling emotionally safe. Also, parents who allow their children to pick on one another emotionally or physically do not create emotional safety in their homes.

One of the best ways to create emotional safety is by making your home a "No Put Down Zone." In addition, request that any one who puts down someone, gets to tell that person three things they like about them.

Another way of creating emotional safety is become aware of your child's feelings and allow them to express their feelings, no matter how irrational they are. This doesn't mean you have to agree with them. Just listen without judging, and watch those highly charged feelings dissipate.

2. Work Through Conflict. Teach your children to state how they feel without calling names or blaming each other. Next, have them clearly state what they want in a calm tone of voice. Encourage them to find a solution where both people win.

3. Repair Hurts. Many families do not address or acknowledge hurts. This neglect only adds more fuel to the fire. Revenge escalates from yelling, to slamming doors, etc., in an attempt to get others to notice that they are hurting. Often, silence and distance become deadly weapons in this battle. If you find yourself in a revenge battle, the first step is to stop overpowering or hurting back. This is difficult to do, because you often feel justified in escalating the situation. You can repair hurts by admitting where you are wrong and doing things to help re-establish the relationship.

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4. Schedule Sanely. It is almost impossible to feel close when you are hurrying around trying to get things done. Family members feel that something else is more important than they are.

5. Family Rules! Have a family meeting to determine what your family agreements are and what the consequences are if someone forgets them. For example you may all agree to have your home be a No Put-Down Zone. If someone forgets, they need to give the other person three Put-Ups! When children are apart of the agreement process, your family really begins to rule!

Word of caution: Make sure that the consequences are not punishment or this will backfire very quickly.

6. Kindness Pays Big Dividends. Did you know that when someone does an act of kindness, both people experience a boost in their immune system? Plus, everyone else who watches it will experience a boost in their immune system – even if the act was not done to them.

7. Commit To Closeness. We may say we want to have peace and closeness in our families, but have you ever made it a commitment? What would that even look like? One way to accomplish this is to teach your family to become aware of the energy in your home. Is it tense and negative or is it loving and cooperative? If it is tense and negative, change the energy by encouraging one another, talk about how people are feeling or do something fun. Make being close as a family your number one priority every day.

8. Encourage Your Family To Be A Team. Encouraging your family to become teammates creates a sense of belonging and unity. Talk about your family being a team. When chores need to be done, see how fast you can get them done by working as a team. Develop a team name and cheer.

Teach cheerleading as a part of being a team. Instead of competing with each other, teach your family that positive reinforcement creates a wonderful feeling of camaraderie. If parents don't stress the importance of teamwork, children often concentrate on who's getting more – more attention, toys, food, love, etc.

9. Show Up. This includes:

- Being on time
- Keeping your agreements
- Remembering important events
- Listening with no agenda
- Watching them
- Focusing your attention on them, without thinking about something else you deem more important.

10. Honor Your Child's Path. Respect the path your children take to learn and grow, rather than wanting or expecting them to do what you think is best (e.g., get the grades you want, or participating in the clubs and sports you want). This gives your child freedom to discover their unique talents and passions, as well as make their own mistakes. Your children will want to be close when they feel celebrated for who they are.

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11. Greet Each Other. Children like to feel the connection that occurs when you say your "hellos" and "goodbyes" in a passionate way. Make sure your face lights up when you see them. This creates a feeling of being wanted and welcome.

12. Get To Know Each Other. At mealtimes, do a "Summary of Your Day." Each person shares as many of the following questions as they want:

- What was the best part of their day?
- What was the worst part of their day?
- What was something silly or funny that happened today?
- They can ask advice on any subject. The only rule is that no one can criticize or make fun of anything someone is sharing.
- What is your biggest challenge right now?
- What are 3 goals you have this week?

13. Develop A 'Mind Trust' In Your Family. Emphasize how important it is to go to the person you have the problem with and work it out. Don't accept bad-mouthing and gossip about family members. If children feel they are being bad-mouthed behind their back, it is impossible to feel safe.

14. Get Your Children Connected To Your Family, Not A Screen. Children spend more time interacting with a screen than they do with their parents or family. Remove TV and computers from your children's rooms. Place them in public areas of your home. Children who have computers and TVs in their rooms do not have to interact with others. Your family is the place where children need to learn the skills to build lasting relationships. It is so tempting to use them as babysitters but:

"The American Academy of Pediatricians recommends that parents remove televisions and personal computers from children's bedrooms, and that no child under the age of two be exposed to television."

More than 50% of middle-schoolers who have computers in their rooms turn them on after their parents think they are in bed and asleep and use them late at night.... this is scary!

15. Have Fun With Each Other. Lighten up! Schedule time where you do something fun together as a family once a week. Fun and play make your home an inviting place to come home to.

Family can be a powerful place to recharge your battery so that you and your family have the energy to do what you need to do in the world. Use the tips above to strengthen your family and create the closeness and cooperation your family longs for.

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