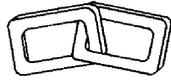


INTERACTION CONSULTANTS



Parents: Invest in your relationship

Remember the days before having kids? No pressures; do what you want; just you and your partner.

Enter the children. Juggling schedules; competing demands for time; no privacy; relationship stretched to the limit.

Many parents forget that in order to give to their kids, they must give to each other first. When parents do give to each other first, it is as if they are recharging their batteries so that they then have more energy to give to their children.

The challenge for some couples is the belief that they cannot find either time or someone to rely on for the care of the kids whilst they have their time together.

Time, being an elusive commodity, must be scheduled. Just as the kids activities are scheduled and occur without interruption, so too must time for the parents. When parental time is held as sacred as the time for the kids' activities, then time for parents is more likely to occur. For many parents the thought of taking time can even be overwhelming. So if this is how it feels, parents are advised to start slowly, maybe scheduling their time together at least once per month to start.

If baby-sitting is a concern, parents can consider grandparents, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, a responsible teenager and even a friend.

At times parents can get creative about finding moments for each other. Rather than weekends or evenings, perhaps there is time for breakfast out or even lunch while the kids are in school.

If money is an issue, parents can consider activities such as bike riding or going for a walk together.

At issue here is investing in the parental relationship. When parents don't take time for themselves, they increase the risk of drifting apart, which in turn can undermine their relationship – something definitely not in the kids' best interests.

Parental bonds need to be as strong and secure as parent-child bonds. Parents who take time for each other, have the opportunity to catch up with each other, reflect on their personal and relationship needs and then those of the children. They can keep the spark in the relationship and provide a great role model to their children of how parents can get along. Investing in the parental relationship also sets a boundary between parents and children. Children see their parents are a unit and are less likely to be able to divide and conquer parents who are close, loving and caring.

Want to help you kids? Make sure you top up the battery in the parental relationship so as the children draw on your energy, you have something to give and a way to recharge again.

Everyone will be better off for it.

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Gary Direnfeld is a social worker. Courts in Ontario, Canada, consider him an expert on child development, parent-child relations, marital and family therapy, custody and access recommendations, social work and an expert for the purpose of giving a critique on a Section 112 (social work) report. Call him for your next conference and for expert opinion on family matters. Services include counselling, mediation, assessment, assessment critiques and workshops.