

Center for Youth and Family

The Power of Being There

by Jim Burns, Ph.D.

Your children regard your very presence as a sign of caring and connectedness. The power of being there makes a difference in a child's life. This sounds so simple, but don't underestimate the positive message you are giving your kids by watching those games, driving them all around the county, or being with them in one of the hundreds of other ways you are present in their lives. You don't have to be present with your kids 24/7, but your presence gives them a greater sense of security than almost anything else you can offer them. All studies on positive family living tell us that meaningful times families spend together are well worth it. Soccer moms: it's worth it! Dads who leave work early to watch the game: it's worth it! Single parents: as tired as you may be if you continue to find the time to go on special outings with your kids, you will reap the benefits now and later in your family life.

I have the privilege to speak and listen to thousands of young people each year. What do they desire most from their parents? A relationship with them. They seek their parents' time and attention. Please never underestimate the power of being there for your children. Two key points to remember are (1) bless your kids with your presence, and (2) bless your kids with affection.

Bless Your Kids with Your Presence

You are probably already blessing your kids with your presence and doing it well. In reality, moms often do this better than dads. Dads sometimes get sidetracked. My daughter, Rebecca, reminded me of the power of being there when she was in the third grade. One night at dinner she announced to the family that I was coming to Mrs. Saxe's third-grade class for her show-and-tell time. Rebecca hadn't asked; she simply told us. I asked her if the other daddies were being invited to come to class.

She said, "No Dad, just you."

I replied, "Don't you usually share a book or a doll or something?"

She answered, "Nope, I promised my teacher you would come."

When I arrived, I figured I'd sit in the back and get comfortable while Mrs. Saxe was teaching the class. Then Rebecca stood up and interrupted the class, walked over to me, and took my hand saying, "Come on, Dad. It's your turn." I tried to whisper that Mrs. Saxe may not be ready for me, but it didn't matter to Rebecca. The teacher smiled and canceled the remainder of the math lesson as Rebecca introduced me to the class.

"This is my dad. His name is Jim. He's a great guy and he's bald" (as if they hadn't noticed!).

When I finished my five-minute speech, Mrs. Saxe asked the students if they had any questions for me.

One child, Matthew, said, "Yeah, how old are you anyway? You look kind of old to be Rebecca's dad."

With my self-image slipping I told him how old I was. He just shook his head. I'd never thought of myself as old until that moment! The questions continued one after another. None of the kids asked about my educational background or how much money I make or any of the things we adults often place on the pedestal of importance. The kids mainly asked relational questions.

When I was finally finished with the last question, I headed for the door. Rebecca stood up and came toward me. I thought, “Oh no. What now?”

She reached out her arms to me and gave me a big hug and simply said, “Daddy, thank you for coming to class today. I am so proud of you.”

Rebecca and her third-grade class didn’t see my tears, but I cried all the way to the car. It dawned on me that Rebecca doesn’t care about academic degrees, awards, credentials or even money—she cares about relationship. She wants my time and attention and my presence. Her security doesn’t come from my work—it comes from having me around.

Bless Your Kids with Affection

The power of being there involves more than just our presence; it also involves our touch and affection. Do your kids know you love them? Of course they do. But they still need a hug and a verbal “I love you” on a daily basis. If you didn’t come from a family that displayed affection, then you might have more difficulty being affectionate, but your children still need the reassurance and blessing of your affection.

Children need to experience touch and affection from their parents, or they will look for a counterfeit as they get older. Jesus took the little children in His arms and blessed them. Touch is a major form of blessing. There is power in touch.

The power of being there for our children is so profoundly meaningful that we often miss it. When kids understand that their parents are there for them, they can overcome amazing obstacles and circumstances. The power of being there is a deposit into a child’s emotional, physical, and spiritual bank account that will bring intimacy and understanding to a family. The answer is simple and right in front of you: investing your time, energy, and commitment to be there for your children. The result is hope and security for all.

*Excerpted from the book, **The 10 Building Blocks for a Happy Family** by Jim Burns, Ph.D.*

Azusa Pacific University’s Center for Youth and Family with Jim Burns, Ph.D., serves as a research and training institute dedicated to providing biblically-based resources for parents and youth to help build healthy families.