

Parent-in-Training

You are not alone in this thing called "parenting"

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bella kids+families

The Little Things

On a windowsill in my kitchen, I have a small canvas inscribed with one of my favorite sayings. I must read it twenty times a day...while I am making my morning coffee, cleaning the countertops, or chopping vegetables for dinner. It reminds me, time and time again, of my priorities in life. It helps me remember that the most important thing in my little world is my family.

The canvas says, "Enjoy the little things in life, for someday you will realize they were the big things." I don't know who coined this quote, but it holds so much weight for me. It reminds me those other things pale in comparison to quality time with my son and husband. Nothing else, not wealth, my professional pursuits, others' opinions of me, or the dirty floor in my kitchen, really matters. This saying also guides my many decisions, big and small, throughout the day.

Small decisions like, "Should I check my email or go play with my son in his sandbox?" I wouldn't want to miss his delight when he builds the perfect castle or careens a car down the interstate he built. Bigger decisions, such as which house to buy, are also guided by this principal. A cheaper house, instead of our dream house, allows me to work part-time and spend these important formative years with my son. I can't get these years, filled with thousands of little moments, back. I want to savor them all, while I have the chance.

I think that often we, as parents, allow the "big things" to overshadow the "little things." We work ourselves to death in our jobs so that we can have the stately house, nice cars, expensive toys, etc. Yet, while we are working ourselves to the bone, we may be losing those invaluable moments with our children. When we are at home, we check our iPhones obsessively to read our work emails. Each time we do, our attention shifts from our children and we send the understated message, "My email is more important than you right now."

When we are old and gray, do you think we will regret that we didn't return our business associate's email fast enough? Or, will we lament about the loss of quality time with our loved ones? Will we look back and realize that, in the pursuit of "fame and fortune", we lost something precious that cannot be replaced?

So, what does that quality time look like? It is NOT sitting beside our child on the couch while they watch a TV program. It is NOT shepherding them between soccer, ballet, and swimming. Quality time involves one-on-one interaction through play, board games, hikes through the woods, and cuddle-time on the couch. It is free of our modern distractions such as phones, computers, and TVs.

In my work, I often see children who are starved for quality attention from their parents. Sure, their parents are physically present, but often not emotionally or cognitively. The children then begin to act out. Young ones throw tantrums, teenagers willfully disobey parents' rules, and so on. Our children end up "pushing us away" when they actually need us closer.

So, ask yourself, "How many times a week do I have quality time with my children? What does this quality time look like?" If your answer is "not much," perhaps you need to re-think your lifestyle. Are you working too hard, involved in too many activities, or spending too much time "hooked up" to technology? If so, find ways to carve out time that is devoted just to your children, and nothing else! Remember, possessions and money do not equal love, but time does.

For my part, my favorite quote will continue to drive my decisions, big and small, each day. I will choose reading with my child over Angry Birds on my iPad. I will choose digging in our garden together over reading the news. And, as much as it pains me, I will play Thomas the Train over and over again as I delight in the little moments of joy that spread across my sweet boy's face.



Decca is a wife, mother, counselor, and parenting educator. In an effort to further help kids and parents, Decca began studying the Love and Logic Parenting® philosophy. She teaches classes to other "Parents-in-training" and runs Blue Ridge Parenting LLC (www.blueridgeparenting.com). You can also "like" Blue Ridge Parenting on FB for more parenting tips and advice.

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