

Practical ways to build relationship with your children:

These suggestions are just that – suggestions unless you put them into action. Please don't try to do all of them at once. Pick one and start there and add more later. The point is to do life together...make the time – disciple through relationship.

BEDTIME:

Something wonderful happens at bedtime, have you noticed? It like children decide they want to know the secrets of the world and ponder the deep things of God: “Mommy, why am I here?” “Is God really real?” “What will I do when I grow up?” “Why did God make mosquitos?”

Prepare for these moments – try to make sure that you're physically and mentally ready for these moments so you can seize them. Lay down next to them, scratch their back, ask questions, chat...be a kid again. As children get older and you find yourself with teenagers, this late nighttime is so vital in relationship building. Take that time to pour into your children.

My husband has instituted “Daddy Date Nights.” Maybe once a month, he will wake one of our children up and take them on a date. This is usually to a local restaurant like IHOP where they eat and talk for a few hours. We ask the kids not to tell the other kids when they go on a “Daddy Date” which gives it that extra fun secretive feel.

HELPERS:

You need helpers!!! Yes, you do!!! You don't you say?!?! Ok, I'm right there with you – helpers of the small kind don't always “help” but our kids need to be our helpers. It's perfect time for relationship building, modeling and task training. Let your children help you cook, do dishes, fold laundry, put up laundry, wash the car, mow the lawn, feed the animals or anything else you do. Ask yourself, can my child help with some small part of what I'm doing?

- I used to not let my kids help me cook because it was just too stressful – and in truth sometimes I still don't for that reason but whenever it's reasonable I have a “muu song” which means: second hand in Thai. My children absolutely love to help – even if it's just pouring my pre-measured ingredients into the bowl. Even though I trip on the step stool moving to and fro in the kitchen, it's worth the smiles and the memories. **NOTE – DO NOT, I repeat, DO NOT attempt this on stressful days! Make your heart ready and enjoy your children as they help you.
- The family that cleans together – stays together?! I don't know but I do know that almost every evening we turn on some fun music and we clean up for the day. It's usually only 20-30 minutes but we all buckle down and clean to fast paced, fun, hyperactivity inducing music and our children LOVE it.

FAMILY CULTURE:

What is your family culture? Build traditions in your family and celebrate life! Here are a few examples of our family culture:

- We don't celebrate Halloween so instead we do: "Ice cream-a-ween" We get the best flavors of BlueBell ice cream, all the toppings a kid could want, waffle bowls and a few cans of whipped cream and lay it all out decoratively on the table. We turn on some fun music and my husband usually leads them from the other room with their eyes closed, in a train formation. They open their eyes, squeal and DIG IN. We spend the evening eating ice cream, playing games and watching movies.
- Birthdays: We usually have birthdays but on an individual's birthday we all eat ice cream for breakfast! YES! Can you tell we love ice cream?! Well, I DO ANYWAY and my kids are going to whether they want to or not! We actually add cocoa pebbles or fruity pebbles to the ice cream with milk and serve! It's fun, special and a real treat.
- Themed Nights: Friday Night Movie Night – my kids love to pop popcorn and watch a movie together. While the movie selection is especially slim these days we sometimes go for a series such as "Little House on the Prairie" and will watch 2 episodes. Maybe one night a month have a dress up night and everyone dress up and act as a character just for fun. Have a taco night or a NO ELECTRICITY night – Light candles and do things that don't require electricity (board games, a craft, READ A BOOK)
- Night Time Reading: READ TO YOUR CHILDREN! Find a good book and dive in! The Bible, fiction, bibliographies! Even if it's only 10-20 minutes of reading a night – enjoy a good story together, it's relationship building and brings up amazing things to talk about. Sally Clarkson's ministry has great resources for what books you can read to your children.
- WALKS: Go on walks with your children. Even if you don't have great scenery, just get outside together. Play in the water – have a water fight. Just be together.