

Emotional Availability



Oct 2012

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The most valuable investment we can make for our children's development is one that we often overlook because of its simplicity.
By Dr Justin Coulson



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Sep 2012



This Month...

Mo 1 St Therese of Lisieux
Tu 2 Guardian Angels
Th 4 St Francis of Assisi
Su 7 **Ord Time 27 Childlike Faith**
Our Lady of the Rosary
Su 14 **Ord Time 28 The Rich Man**
Th 18 St Luke
Su 21 **Ord Time 29 To Serve**
Tu 23 St John of Capistrano
Su 28 **Ord Time 30 Let me See**
We 31 All Hallows Eve

Attention is the Currency of Relationships

Parents consistently assure me that they want 'the best' for their children. They invest time and money in education, enrichment, and extra-curricular activities to give their children every advantage they possibly can.

These opportunities are important. They help our children grow and develop in valuable ways.



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However...

the most valuable investment we can make for our children's development (socially, cognitively, psychologically, and even physically) is one that we often overlook because of its simplicity. That one thing is taking the time to be emotionally available for our children.

This idea seems so simple that most of us simply nod our head in agreement, shrug our shoulders, and move on to the next big 'fad' in parenting. But if we do that, we will miss offering our children the most valuable advantage they can possibly receive.

Just as dollars are the currency of our economy, attention is the currency of our relationships.



Here's a simple summary of the amazing life outcomes kids are more likely to experience when their parents are emotionally available (when compared with children whose parents are unavailable emotionally)...

- **Better** academic performance
- **Better** social skills
- **More liked** by peers, teachers, and other adults
- **Less likely** to engage in delinquent behaviour, early sexual promiscuity, and drug/alcohol consumption and abuse
- **Less likely** to experience 'internalising' issues such as depression, anxiety, etc.
- **More engaged living in adolescence** (characterised by absorption in tasks and social integration)

Being emotionally available requires us to pay attention – **close attention** – to the emotional world of our children, and to respond compassionately.



Being Emotionally Available

My eight year old daughter drove this point home to my wife and I during a recent conversation. We were conducting a parenting performance appraisal (which you can read more about on my [blog](#)). My wife asked Ella,

“Do mummy and daddy make you feel important?”

Her response:

“When you are busy you don’t listen to me properly. Like when Dad’s on the computer or you (mum) are doing craft you’re not available to me. It feels like those things are more important than me.”



Ouch. Those were her words, not mine. Our kids notice when we are not available.

A father told me he was having daily battles with his teenage daughter. I suggested he go for regular walks with her each morning or evening and be emotionally available, even if was just 15 or 20 minutes.

The first few walks were awkward. She felt like he had an agenda. She refused to talk. But within a week they were looking forward to their time together and talking more freely and pleasantly than they had for months. He complained to me (in jest) that he was thinking of making the walks less regular just so she would stop chewing his ear off!





Invite Your Children Into Your Space

Whether your child is two or twenty two, being emotionally available will improve your relationships with your children. Here's how to do it:

Go out, turn off your phone, iPad or tablet, and simply be together. Then listen to your child. Don't interrupt. Don't tell them what you think. Don't judge. Just listen.

It may be in a park, at the beach or on a mountain trail. It might simply be wandering around your neighbourhood, or it could be at the local cafe with an iced chocolate. Just make sure there are no distractions. Then ask questions, listen carefully and suspend judgement.



Your children will love being in your space and will feel special. Invite them to allow you into their space. It may take more than one date. But if you put your attention into your relationships, they'll become enriching sources of happiness and meaning for you.

Mums and dads who make themselves available for their children have happier families and better functioning children. Kids do best with both parents being there emotionally, regardless of your family structure. Having happy kids and strong family relationships... it's about time.



Dr Justin Coulson is a parenting expert and the author of *What Your Child Needs From You: Creating a Connected Family* available from ACER press. He is available for speaking engagements via his website: www.happyfamilies.com.au. Justin and his wife Kylie are the parents of 5 children.

Hints for being emotionally available to your children:

- Minimise distractions by turning off TV, radio, internet, and iPods.
- Ensure every child gets some one-on-one time with just you.
- Ask questions, listen, suspend judgement.
- When your children say something to you, stop what you're doing and really take in their words
- Try to look past the things they say to see their heart and the intent behind their words
- Recognise that challenging behaviour may be your child using her limited communication skills to send signals she needs you



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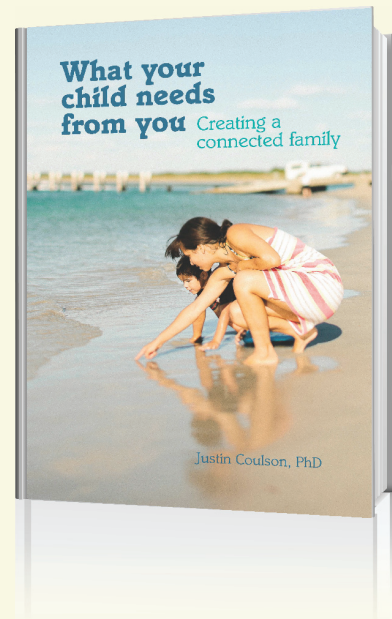
Dr H Wallace Goddard
Parenting Author and Prof. of Family Life
University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension

What Your Child Needs from You: Creating a Connected Family

Dr Justin Coulson

A practical manual for creating a connected family, delivering concrete strategies to help parents build meaningful relationships with their children.

What your child needs from you outlines the methods through which parents can cultivate emotional availability with their children and so learn to really understand them.



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Hello? Is Anybody There?

Francine & Byron Pirola

Have you ever had that experience with your spouse when he or she seems so distracted that you wonder if they are having an out-of-body episode? You suddenly realise that everything you've just said has simply floated off into the ether and not a word made an impact.

Most times, we find this amusing – we playfully tease each other about being so 'spacey' – maybe we threaten a raunchy striptease if it happens again (much to the horror of any adolescents in earshot).

But sometimes it hurts, especially if it's part of an ongoing pattern. We feel neglected, irrelevant, and unimportant to the other.

In the words of parenting expert Justin Coulson, "attention is also the currency of relationships". Attention powerfully communicates love; when someone gives us their focused attention we feel deeply loved and valued. It works for children, and it's absolutely essential for a healthy marriage.



Attention Quotient

And yet, how often do we actually give our spouses our full attention? Here's an inventory to help you evaluate your 'Attention Quotient'.

A. When you first reunite at the end of a day apart...

1. You usually don't even notice the other has arrived home.
2. You say a 'Hi' over your shoulder as you continue with your task.
3. You give each other a quick kiss and keep going.
4. You stop, pause, embrace warmly, and connect for a few minutes.

B. When your spouse wants to speak with you, typically...

1. You resent it because it's interrupting you.
2. You respond quickly so you can get back to what you were doing.
3. You listen, but you're somewhat distracted.
4. You stop, put aside what you were doing, look your spouse in the eye and listen intently for the message behind the words.



C. In a typical work day, the amount of time you give your full attention to your spouse would be...

1. Less than 30 seconds.
2. A minute or two.
3. Five to ten minutes.
4. Anything from 15 minutes to an hour.

D. When you go out for a coffee together, typically...

1. You're checking your phone for messages or reading the paper.
2. You sit silently side by side with both looking out at passers-by.
3. You talk about general stuff or have a planning meeting.
4. You talk personally about your dreams and heartaches of the past week.

E. When it comes to having a date, in a typical month...

1. We don't have dates... we've got young children to care for.
2. Can't remember the last time we had a date, but would be nice.
3. Maybe once or twice a month.
4. We grab a date whenever we can, even if it's only at home for 15 minutes after the kids are in bed.

F. When your spouse wants to be close to you...

1. You brush him/her off, with a 'later'... that never happens
2. You give him/her a quick hug and kiss and move on
3. You give him/her a smoochy kiss for a minute or so
4. You pull him/her into the pantry (or other private spot) so you can make out.

Your Score:

19-24:

You're up there with the best of them... keep it coming!

11-18:

You're fairly typical... but is that all you want to be? Give your spouse some attention and lift your relationship to awesome.

6-10:

Oh oh, your spouse is suffering from a serious case of Attention Deficient Disorder! Major intervention required.





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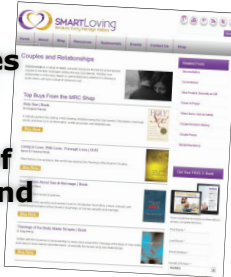
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Family Rituals

October's Saints:

St Therese of Lisieux:

Feast day: October 1st

Featured Activity: **Living Faith Beads**

St Francis of Assisi:

Feast Day: October 4th

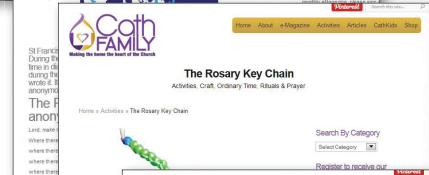
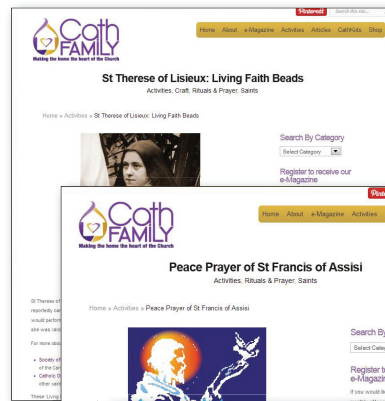
Featured Activity: **Peace Prayer**

Our Lady of the Rosary:

Feast Day: October 7th

Featured Activity: **The Rosary Keychain**

[CathFamily.org](#)



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Light it Up! | Halloween | Oct 31st

The kids in our street love Halloween, but we don't really go for the ghoulish costumes and greedy demands for sweets. It is however quite a community event – the only time of the year when we get to meet many of our neighbours.

If your children are participating, take care to avoid the pagan and occult overtones by censoring what they wear and reorientating the focus of decorations and treats. Here are five ways to celebrate the event as a 'Night of Light' rather than one of mischief and darkness.

- 1. Light Up.** Light up the front of your home with candles, Christmas tree lights and glow sticks. For something different make some fairy dust – combine glitter and the contents of a glow stick in a clean jar. Seal and shake - instant fairy dust!
- 2. No Rotten Teeth allowed.** Instead of giving trick-or-treaters lollies, give them a glow stick or other inexpensive party favour.
- 3. Christ-o-lanterns.** Instead of evil grins, carve crosses or hearts into your pumpkin. You can also substitute the pumpkin for a watermelon (cheaper), and use the watermelon balls as a fruit treat for your trick-or-treaters.



- 4. Dressed to Inspire.** Avoid the witches and ghosts, dress as one of the saints. There are pirates, princesses, angels, dragon slayers, kings, animal lovers, Indians, and more among our Heavenly family. For ideas: [here](#)
- 5. Teachable Moments.** Use the opportunity to spread Christ's message of joy and salvation – talk to your trick-or-treaters about the Christian meaning of Halloween (literally, the eve of All Saints (Holies) Day), send messages of good cheer to your neighbours with homemade Scripture cards with passages about light. Click the button below to download the activity.

[Night of Light](#)

