



# Waiting? Have Some Family Fun Times

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Time is a precious commodity and most busy families never seem to have enough of it. A recent trend has indicated that many parents overschedule their children in various activities including sports, music lessons, after-school programs, youth organizations, and even kids college.

Kerry J. Daly, sociologist from the University of Guelph (Ontario, Canada), discovered in a study of dual-earner and single-parent families that the total amount of time they have together has not changed dramatically. What has changed is that the time they have together is faster and has a greater density of activity with household chores to be done and children's activities to go to. Daly suggests that families can spend more time together by working less, reducing the number of children's activities, watching less television, or allowing more unscheduled time in the family agenda.

The American Pediatric Association recommends that children under the age of two should not watch television. Their recommendation is based on research that babies and toddlers have a critical need for direct interaction with parents and others for healthy brain growth. Children older than two should watch no more than two hours of television per day.

American children spend anywhere between two and five hours a day watching television, more time than for any other discretionary activity except for sleep. A study conducted by Dr. Elizabeth Vandewater of The University of Texas at Austin and Harvard Children's Hospital Children revealed that increased time watching television was associated with decreased time interacting with their family and playing creatively.

The following strategies may help make the most of family times when waiting.

## Traveling Tips

- Develop an emergency bag of fun things to do in the car.
- Read the names of counties or states on license plates.
- Play a game of twenty questions to guess where you are going on a fantasy trip.

## Supermarket Tips

- Play the alphabet game in a supermarket using the first letter of a food, i.e., a–apple, b–banana, c–corn, etc.
- Involve older children in the grocery shopping by having them find items with coupons.
- Find the cheapest and most expensive juice and figure the price difference.

## Waiting for an Appointment Tips

- Carry flash cards to practice while waiting for appointments.
- Pull questions from a board game to practice.
- Create a story by passing a pencil for each person to add to the story.

## Restaurant Tips

- Play connect-the-dots into squares on the back of a paper placemat or tray liner.
- Use sugar packets to play concentration by hiding a coin under the packets.
- Fold paper placemats in thirds and have each child draw one of the following on each placemat: a head, trunk, or the feet of an animal (mark the boundaries so each connects).

Remember to make the most of your family's time by capturing the opportunities and having fun at the same time. Together with your children create your own fun ways to spend time while waiting with your children. The next time you are waiting, your children will be ready for the bag of tricks, and you will discover that you have more family fun time than ever.

Dr. William J. Doherty, family therapist at the University of Minnesota, says "the key is to realize that family time does not just happen in today's society."

## Resources

- Daly, K. J. (2001). Deconstructing Family Time: From Ideology to Lived Experience. *Journal of Marriage & Family*, 63 (2), 283–294.
- Vandwater, E. A., Bickham, D. S., & Lee, J. H. (2006). Time Well Spent? Relating Television Use to Children's Free-Time Activities. *Pediatrics*, 117 (2) e181-e191 (doi:10.1542/peds.2005-0812)

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August 2007—3474