



# The Wellness Family

Dr. Giesen Keeps You Informed

## The Engaged Parent

As much as we wish it were so, children do not come with an instruction manual. There's no "how to" that can be followed; no two children are alike so what works with one generally won't work with the other. However, there are things that can be done that will ensure children know that they are loved and accepted: they need to be engaged.

### *The Intentional Parent*

Every parent knows what it's like to be busy. In more homes than not, both parents work to help sustain the family. This means that family time is reduced by work hours. Recognize the value of the time available to spend with your child. It's wise to never be sitting at the computer or in front of the television or with a phone in hand saying, "Uh-huh, yep, okay, sure, Sweetie, have fun," without really listening. When a child approaches you, follow these three rules: *stop, look and listen*.

*Stop what you're doing:* turn away from the computer, pause the television or mute it, put down the phone. *Look at the child:* look them in the eyes and smile at them. Dr. Ross Campbell, the author of *How to Really Love Your Child*, says, "It's up to each parent to use eye contact to convey unconditional love." Then *listen to what they say*. Have a real conversation with them.

The American Psychological Association recommends letting children complete their point before responding and repeating what you heard them say to ensure that you understood them correctly. Ask follow-up questions so that they know you were genuinely listening. Talk "with" them, not "at" them.

It could be something minor, like they may just want a snack, but the fact that you stopped what you were doing and gave them your full attention will mean the world to them. It tells them that they matter to you and they are more important than what you were just doing.

### *The Talking Child*

Most any parent with a little girl understands that sometimes you simply want them to stop chatting. Little girls (and some little boys) tend to talk until they're winded and their conversations may not even make sense. You may feel like they'll never stop talking – listen to them anyway.

The day may actually come when they stop talking. The one word answer will become common and, no matter the question, the answer will be, "Fine." Children grow up and one day when they're teens, they might not want to talk, so talk to them while they do.

No matter how much they talk, never say, "Will you just shut-up already?" or "Do you ever stop talking?" Even said in a joking tone, it will sting and that little one may actually stop talking to you... for good. So, no matter how much it pains you, pay attention, let them talk while they're willing to, because the long term effect may be that as teens they remember that you always listened.

Of course, if life gets in the way, be sure to take a second to *reschedule* your talk. "I really want to hear about that but I'm really busy with this right now. Can we talk after dinner?" If you never brush off what your child wants to tell you, they'll always want to talk to you. So, take a moment to grab a post-it or a note card and write a reminder to yourself to ask your child to finish their story then bring it to the dinner table.

### *The Complimentary Parent*

Children that grow up knowing that they are loved may not always believe a parent's compliment. You may hear things like, "You have to say that, you're my mom," or "You're just saying that because you're my dad." Realistically, we tend to doubt compliments that come from people that we know love us. So, back-up your compliments with facts. A compliment that includes support will be easier to believe and may actually mean more because it tells your child that you've been watching them, observing them, and considering who they are becoming as a person.



*As children get older, there will inevitably be conversations they don't want to have with their parent. It's important to find your way around the wall of silence.*

For instance, compliment their character: "You are so generous, I saw you give your little brother the last few dollars he needed to buy that action figure he wanted," or, "You have so much integrity! I know it wasn't easy to tell the truth when you dropped my phone but you did it!"

Recognize their efforts. Too often as parents we focus on disciplining the negative but forget to praise the positive: "I really appreciate your help setting the table, you did such a great job folding the napkins," or, "Thank you for taking out the trash, it means a lot to me that you did that right away."

The point is to be sure that your compliments can't be considered empty platitudes but a clear and undeniable recognition of the positive characteristics that your child is displaying. Blanket statements can be doubted; but the message will gain heart-knowledge if your compliments come with proof.

### **The Communicating Parent**

As children get older, there will inevitably be conversations they don't want to have with their parent. It's important to find your way around the wall of silence. The following may help open the doors of communication:

- Date Night – leave the cell phones and handheld gaming devices at home and talk
- Running Errands – this is one of the best kept secrets of parenting, since you are focusing on the road, you aren't watching them, and it becomes less intimidating for them to tell you things that they normally might not be able to if you were looking them in the face
- Dinner – eat at the table as a family, no television or electronics, just you and the kids and encourage them to talk about their day
  - o Play "High" and "Low" – go around the table and have each person share the best thing and worst thing that happened to them that day; you will learn a lot this way
  - o Ask an open ended question and try to mix them up each night – What is something unusual that happened to you today? Tell me something amazing that happened today? Complete this sentence: "My day would've been awesome if..." and bring a little imagination to the dinner table
- Bedtime – spend the last 5 minutes of the night with your child: for older children, talking to them in soothing tones about whatever topic catches their attention; for younger children, massage their feet or rub their temples or backs; engage with them in whatever feels comfortable, be the last thing they see before they go to sleep, remind them they're safe

- Electronic Curfew – if you had nothing else to do (no distractions) it would be easier to engage your children so consider setting an "electronic curfew" in your home, a set time each evening when all electronics get turned off. Due to smartphones and handheld gaming devices, the average child can spend up to 53 hours in front of a screen each week. An electronic curfew may restrict this and increase the time available to actually spend conversing

### **Self-Check**

No one is perfect. You're going to make mistakes as a parent but the easiest way to avoid them is to remember how much you love your children and that you want them to know they are loved.

To be a more engaged parent, take a moment to consider the recommendations in the newsletter and evaluate your strengths and weaknesses. Be intentional in your desire to increase your time engaged with your children and begin to work on your weaknesses.

The next time your child comes up to you, stop what you're doing and listen to them. Even if it's not "important" let them talk anyway, ask follow up questions, engage them. Of course, similar to starting a new exercise routine, don't expect to be able to listen to them for an hour, but just 10 minutes of your undivided attention is going to mean the world to your child.

This includes infants, the American Medical Association advises parents, "Even though he doesn't understand what you're saying, your calm, reassuring voice is what he needs to feel safe."

One step at a time, with baby steps in communication, you can become the engaged parent your child needs.



*Dear Patient,  
Dr. Giesen is dedicated to providing you with the absolute best in family wellness care. So take a moment today to discuss with your Family Wellness Chiropractor any concerns you may have regarding your family's overall health and wellness.*

### **This newsletter is provided to you by:**

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