

Show the Love – Plan a Date with Your Child!

By Jess Riedel, Intern, CDS Family & Behavioral Health Services

February is here and with it comes the commercial explosion of pink and red hearts, flowers, and candies. With these commercial representations of February comes the celebration of love. This love is not limited to a love you share with your partner, but can also include all types of love - love for your children, parents, family, and friends – and even a pet or a favorite sweater. For parents, one of the most important loving relationships to celebrate is the one you have with your children.

Although love should be celebrated every day in ways both big and small, we should view this month of love as a reminder to reevaluate our lives, making sure we are focusing on our loved ones and spending enough quality time with them. A recent survey from Virgin Holidays and Universal Orlando Resort claims that parents and their children spend an average of 36 minutes together each day, with that number increasing to 2 hours and 20 minutes over Saturdays and Sundays combined. The survey also reported that 7 in 10 parents say this time is spent together in front of the TV – not an ideal place to promote loving communication. Today's society is busier than ever, so it is no surprise that quality time with family falls to the wayside of work, school, chores, clubs, sports, play dates, etc.

A great way to spend some quality time with your children is to devote a chunk of time to doing an activity with them. Just like when you are “courting” a potential partner, you plan activities with the person and give him or her your undivided attention, plan a date with each child! No interruptions allowed, so block out a time where there won't be any distractions including phone calls, TV, or homework. In this age of multi-tasking, this sounds difficult, but showing your child the love is well worth it!

You'll want input from your children on their individual preferences but here are some low-budget ideas of things to do together that are conducive to one on one conversation to rekindle the love:

- Visit Santa Fe College Teaching Zoo
- Do arts and crafts at home or at one of the local shops
- Visit UF Museums (Natural History and/or Art)
- Take nature walks and picnics at one of Alachua County's many parks
- Cook or bake together
- Play a board game or card game

Take advantage of whatever small chunks of time you get together, be it in the car or at the dinner table. Talk about their day, ask them questions like:

- "What superpower would you want to have and why?"
- "What would you do with a million dollars?"
- "If you could only eat one thing for the rest of your life, what would it be?"

Make sure to listen more than you speak. You can learn so much about each other and deepen the bond you share with your child by simply taking each moment and making the most of it.

If your child's behavior and attitude make it "challenging" to show your love, CDS Family & Behavioral Health Services provides Family Action Counseling to youth ages 6 to 17. (352) 244-0628 x3822. www.cdsfl.org