

AGELESS PLAY

by Brian Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

I've just returned from a kayak trip down an estuary with my son. I'm still able to put in a fast paddle, but this was a slightly more leisurely cruise. We just wanted to enjoy the near-perfect conditions we were encountering, so we ambled along never stopping to gain a breath. We were keen to enjoy the experience and the view. Fish jumped in front of our kayaks and a group of lazy black swans were having a conference and learning 'swanology' on the shallow sandy banks.

It was a time to talk about life, about my son's friends who owned properties on the tiny isthmus that separates the estuary from the ocean beach. Here, in idyllic New Zealand, it was a great opportunity to have fun with my son and for us to enjoy each other's company. Just to hang out like this was a delight. After all, I only get to see him two months a year. He's thirty-six. I'm sixty-something! He lives in New Zealand with his wife and two boys. Sally and I live in Tennessee, USA.

My point is that you should never give up playing with your kids. It doesn't matter how old you are you should always look for opportunities to spend quality time with them. It doesn't matter what you do, just spend time together building relationships. I feel that it is more important for fathers to deliberately arrange activities with their kids than it is for mothers. Why? Children usually know how much their mothers care about them because their naturally nurturing attitudes and activities usually ensure a continued bond.

Fatherlessness pervades our nation. Even families where fathers are present can suffer a sort of 'fatherlessness'. Many dads, though living in the home, are absent too much through business and busyness. When they are home these dads are often tired and preoccupied. We dads have to really work at spending plenty of time with our kids! One thing I found to be very positive was to 'date' my children when they were at middle and high school. I would only take one at a time and do something special with each of them. Going to the park or to a fast food store were popular activities. Here we could talk about life, about personal issues or collectively plan some future event. Just hanging out paid dividends.

Dads need to examine the balance between business and family life. A very successful executive was at his daughter's wedding. He suddenly realized that he didn't know the name of his daughter's best friend, one of her bridesmaids. He didn't know what his daughter's favorite color was. He felt ashamed of how little he knew about her. The following week he was in a business meeting with younger executives in the corporation. He told them the story and asked that if anyone present wanted his job he was willing to hand it over to that person immediately.

Let's ensure that we start playing with our children when they are babies and never stop until we are too old to get out of our wheelchair in the old folks' home. My comments have been aimed mainly at men, but that doesn't mean that women are excused from ensuring they spend adequate time with their children. Single parents need to plan for such intimate times with their children, too. None of us are exempt!

Here are a few activities that will build relationships apart from those mentioned above. Attend your child's sporting activities on a regular basis. Go to parent teacher conferences to show your interest in their education. Read to your kids. Participate in creative/artistic activities. Throw ball together. Converse with your kids. Take them fishing. Go on walks or bike rides together. Go Swimming. Have a picnic. Play in the back yard. Build a tree house or playhouse together. Invite them to work alongside you in yard work or involve them in washing the car. Have prayer and Bible study together. The list goes on. All it takes is to believe that your children need you around and want you involved in their lives. Always.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.