

# Downtime...

Our lives these days are so busy and complicated. Many of us are guilty of overscheduling ourselves and keeping our calendars filled to the brim with appointments, meetings and social engagements. So it is natural that many parents assume that children need to be busy as well. Chances are if you ask a preschooler what makes them happy, it is a rare occasion when he will say “gymnastics” or “soccer.” He is more likely to say, “when my family goes to the park” or “when daddy reads me a story.” It is the everyday, ordinary things that children appreciate the most. The real needs of a preschooler are actually quite simple.

In order to give children the “best possible start in life,” cut back on the scheduled activities and set aside a regular time to do “nothing” instead. It is okay to give yourself conscious permission to spend downtime with your child. By doing nothing, you are doing something very important. You are letting your child know that you value your time together and you are discovering who your child is in the process.

Once you have set aside this time for your child, you need to adjust to his pace. Put your mail on the counter, and wait to check your emails and your phone messages. Tell your child about your day, and the experiences you have had. Ask your child about their day and the things that he has done. Listen without interruption and show your child you value what he has to say. Observe the world around you together, encourage him to ask questions, listen to music, hang a piece of art work that your child created together, or talk about the weather. Sometimes just being in the same room is enough. Read a book at the same time your child is looking at a picture book and you will both experience a feeling of togetherness. This space you have made in the day is a good time to nurture self-help skills such as brushing his teeth or putting his clothes in the hamper and his toys away.

If you really need to do chores because your time is limited, encourage your child to help you. A preschooler is perfectly capable to help set the table or fold laundry. When you do this together, you are teaching your child that he has a responsibility to the family.

Children who spend regular unstructured time with their parents are more likely to be intellectually curious, less fearful of risks and better decision makers. They tend to initiate ideas, lead creative play and are good problem solvers. When you give your child a gift of unstructured time, you are giving him a hundred and one opportunities to create, imagine, discover and experiment.

And by the way, not only children benefit from downtime. Busy parents need

downtime too. When you slow down and go at your child's pace, you're giving yourself a break from the demands and pressures of adult life. If you are like most parents, you spend so much of your time working to ensure the best for your child. In this time that you've set aside to spend together, you're not only doing something for your child, you're allowing your child to do something very special for you.

Enjoy your downtime, and let me know if you tried it.

Fondly,  
*Cheryl*