

Keep those loving connections alive

When work and family demands are pulling from every direction, our relationships can suffer. But there are day-to-day actions we can take to reconnect with family members as much as possible - even when every day is full.

Make a special effort to demonstrate thoughtfulness: A phone call to your spouse to say 'Hi. I'm thinking of you'; A whole day devoted to your children's favorite activities; A special dinner with the grandparents for no particular reason; An e-mail to your teenager from work.

Rekindling romance can be hard to do in the midst of family and work demands, but it's important to give attention to that part of your life. Spend some time considering what you most like to do with your spouse or partner - then build it into your life. If we wait until we've got the energy, have the time or sense the opportunity, we just might wait forever, so set a deliberate schedule. Are evening walks a sure way to feel close again? Do you need a weekend away together every few months? How about reserving one day a week to eat together after the children are in bed - and restrict conversation to anything but household responsibilities.

It's wise to develop interests and activities that can be done together as a family, as well as those we do on our own. Sharing an enjoyable hobby, joining a family health club, or visiting extended family members and friends can go a long way in building connections, while pursuing our own interests provides for personal growth and interesting conversations with our partner.

Check your communication styles. Are you listening and communicating as much as you should? Have you fallen into any bad habits, such as letting important issues go, harbouring anger or resentment, feeling isolated but not sharing your feelings? Sometimes, just paying extra attention to our patterns of communication within the family can motivate us to improve them.

One way to strengthen family bonds is to clarify family responsibilities. Do you have family meetings regularly to air issues and establish solutions? Is everyone contributing to the running of the household? Are there areas of daily stress that can be remedied with more flexible or more structured ground rules?

Make plans for the future. A family can strengthen their sense of togetherness by discussing their vision of the future and working together towards those goals. What skills do the children want to develop? Is there a favorite place in the world that you can build travel plans around? Would a grandparent be interested in joining you for a series of night courses? Looking ahead and building plans for all family members helps create a sense of optimism and family strength.