

Chapter 15 Let's get practical

Because pine trees only open their hearts to those who really show an interest in them and spend time with them, we have to set aside special time and make an effort to get to know our children. Why do we do this? Mark the reasons that are applicable to you and your child below. Pray about each one and write down what you can do to change it. Talk to other parents if you need advice.

- I don't know what to say to my pine tree, therefore I choose not to spend time alone with him or her.
- Bedtime is also the time when I want to watch my favourite television programme. I can't spend twenty minutes sitting on my child's bed then.
- I have so much work that I really don't have time for my pine tree during the week.
- My other children are so demanding that there isn't any time left for my pine tree. My pine tree doesn't insist on attention.
- I don't know my pine tree well enough to know where to start.
- My pine tree chooses to talk to my spouse rather than to me.
- I am only home on weekends, and I have a right to relax and do what I want then; I don't have the strength to sit around with my pine tree as well.
- My pine tree doesn't like me. I don't think he or she wants to spend any time with me.

Most of our excuses for spending too little time with our children are based on one two sad realities: We don't realise how satisfying a deeper relationship with our children can be, or we don't realise how much our children need us. These misconceptions can be reversed when we make an effort to get to know our children and when we see the results of spending time with them.

"Conduct" an interview with your pine tree, even if it is just one question a day for a few weeks in a row, until you can answer all the questions below. Remember that you don't have to ask the questions if your child tends to clam up – you can make statements, such as: "It seems to me like Janet is your favourite friend," or "I often

hear that music coming from your room. It must be your favourite. I don't know that band," or "I see you always do your Math homework first. That must be your favourite subject." As you can tell, you will first have to observe your child carefully before you can make these statements. Remember not to react critically or be judgemental about the answers.

Who or what is your child's ...

- best friend
- favourite music
- favourite subject
- favourite game
- favourite television programme
- role model
- favourite colour
- favourite teacher
- greatest fear
- favourite holiday destination
- favourite book
- favourite movie
- favourite restaurant or dish?

What angers your child?

What does your child want to be when he or she grows up?

What is your child's favourite way to relax?

Which school activity does your child enjoy most?

Which school activity does your child enjoy least?

Which extramural activity does your child enjoy most?

Which extramural activity does your child enjoy least?

What causes your child to feel "pressured"?

Now write down five things you can use as starting points for working on your relationship.

For example:

- I will read his favourite book so that we can exchange ideas about it.
- I will stop pressuring him into passing his music exams.
- Instead of the extra music lessons, I will look for a club where he can participate in his favourite pastime twice a week.
- I will find out how to help him get over his fear of public speaking and ask his teacher not to force him to speak in public in the meantime.
- I will ask him to teach me how to play his favourite game and then arrange a set time to play it with him regularly.

I will ...