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### 'THE FAMILY THAT PLAYS TOGETHER, STAYS TOGETHER'

The above adage seems like a no-brainer, but scientists conducting research consistently find that families that spend more leisure time together tend to feel closer, report better communication, and are more satisfied with family life.

There are two general kinds of activities that matter. **Core** activities are those that typically happen at home and do not require many resources. Examples include playing board games, playing in the backyard, watching TV, or reading together. These activities lead to family stability and can enhance relationships. **Balance** activities, on the other hand, happen less frequently. They are unique and require more resources to carry out. Examples include taking vacations, camping, or going to a theme park. These activities meet the need for novelty and change.

Being in quarantine during a pandemic, experiencing a community-wide disaster, or moving to a new town can be stressful on a family. Family members might experience loss, grief, or stress from losing a job, being separated from friends, moving to a new community, or having to take on new responsibilities. Changes can lead to disruptions in relationships, roles, and routines within a family that may throw people's lives off balance.

During such times, it might be difficult to engage in Balance activities. But keeping family routines and engaging in Core activities during normal *and* challenging times can be beneficial to family members. Having familiar, predictable activities that are fun can become family rituals that foster a sense of togetherness and support resilience in relationships.

### FAMILY-BASED NATURE ACTIVITIES

Until recently, family scientists did not think it was important *where* family activities occurred. Yet a growing body of research shows that spending time in nature has positive psychological effects on children

and adults. Recent research also shows that time spent together outside may have positive effects on relationships among family members. Our research found that family-based nature activities:

*...positively contributed to family relationships by fostering the opportunity to engage in meaningful communication were highly anticipated and positively reminisced, and encouraged continuity of meaning across generations (Izenstark & Ebata, 2019).*

When individuals spend time outdoors, they feel less stressed, are more likely to feel mentally restored, and can pay more focused attention to others. Being outside also provides families with the opportunity to spend time together, away from external distractions, which makes it easier to catch up on the lives of loved ones.

Spending time in nature does not have to entail being in wild, wooded areas. Such excursions can simply occur in the backyard or at a local park. Doing activities with others could mean just taking a walk, biking, cooking, or having a cookout in the backyard.

### WHAT FAMILIES CAN DO

- Be intentional in planning time together regularly. Choose activities that offer fun, positive feelings and build bonds among family members.
- Be willing to try different kinds of activities, knowing that the important thing is to spend time together.
- Let children help select, plan, and prepare for activities. It should not only fall on the parents to make things happen.
- Use the time together to talk, celebrate, and reaffirm what is important to your family. Try to refrain from problem-solving or offering advice during this time.
- Strive to regularly schedule family time, even as children grow older and may not want to spend as much time together.



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Building Blocks brief: [Physical Activity During Times of Stress](#).
- Humans in Nature ([www.humansinnature.org](http://www.humansinnature.org)).

## EVIDENCE BASE (SELECTED)

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For more information on the Family Resiliency Center, Building Blocks of Resilience, and TAP, visit: [go.illinois.edu/buildingblocks](http://go.illinois.edu/buildingblocks)

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