



**Free Parenting Tune-Up!!! See Back page for**

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**See Back Page for Announcement Regarding a Parenting Workshop Coming this month! It's Free!**

#### Quotable:

“Child development researchers have observed that a very high percentage (between sixty and eighty percent) of the interactions between parents and their young children are negative” —H. Wallace Goddard

# Family Times

## The Power of Fun Families

In my counseling practice, I continue to meet families who do not have a lot of fun together. They are so busy running from activity to activity; parents are busy with high demanding jobs; children are busy with Karate Lessons, soccer practice, and homework.

When you begin to look at the week, there isn't a lot of wiggle room for fun and excitement. The next thing you know parents are on edge with children, children are contentious with each other, and most of the time, the dog isn't even happy.

All too soon, most of the interactions we have in our families are negative at best [negative interaction is only to be surpassed by “no” interaction—hence what our children will do for attention]. Colleague and friend, Wally Goddard has written: “Child development researchers have observed that a very high percentage (between sixty and eighty percent) of the interactions between parents and their young children are negative” (H. Wallace Goddard, *The Frightful and Joyous Journey of Family Life: Applying Gospel Insights in the Home* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997], p. 131).

Similarly, Randal Wright, Institute Director at the University of Texas has written:

“Researchers have estimated that an average teenager hears ten negative comments about himself

for every one positive comment. Consider, parents: How are you doing in this ratio in your home? Do you give your children more positive comments than negative? What do you think you would do if someone in your home or at work were to give you the same messages that you give your children? Perhaps you would feel offended or unloved.

“In our desire to help children be better than we were, we often feel that we need to point out every error and mistake they make. But if we are not careful, all they will hear is negative messages about themselves. One mother recently told me she chastised her teenage son for some trivial matter. When she was through, her fourteen-year-old meekly looked up and asked, ‘Mom, is there anything you *do* like about me?’ This shocked her into realizing that though she greatly loved her son, her desire for him to achieve caused her to spend most of her time pointing out his faults” (Randal A. Wright, “The Power of Love and Affection in Our Families,” in *Eternal Families* eds. D.E. Brinley & D.K. Judd [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996], p. 171).

For a relationship to be solid, healthy, and thrive, marriage relations expert John Gottman points out that there must be a 5:1 Ratio of positive interactions to negative ones. I often tell families in counseling that if we could just get the ration to 2:1,

we would probably change our family culture drastically.

I don't think that as parents, we intend to be this mean or negative. I know that before we were married, Janie and I didn't sit on a park bench somewhere and have a conversation that went something like this:

**Mark:** Hey babe, how man kids do you hope we eventually have someday?

**Janie:** I don't know, but regardless of how many we have, lets seek to destroy them?

**Mark:** [Laughing like an evil Villain], Yes, that would be perfect—destroy our children—but how?

**Janie:** [laughing like a combination of Darth Vader and the Wicked Witch in the Wizard of Oz] How about if we just yell and scream at them all of the time.

**Mark:** Excellent! And let's point out every negative thing that they do, and punish them as often as possible!

**Mark and Janie:** Walk off into the sunset together, evilly laughing while playing with voodoo dolls of their future children.

I don't think so. In fact, I almost feel guilty writing this dialogue. When my wife reads this, I'll be in big trouble. I let you know how that turns out next month.

As couples, we certainly don't

## The Power of Fun in Families



“Recreation is an essential and vital part of the gospel of salvation.... Wholesome recreation may include parties, banquets, dinners, games, athletic endeavors and contests, dramas, dances, concerts, radio and television programs, picnics, outings, camping trips, hunting and fishing trips, and vacations in general” (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966], p. 622).

begin life together, hoping that raising our families will be a sentence to “life on the rock pile.” None of us wants it to begin like that. However, as most of us know, life can become somewhat overwhelming, complete with challenges, sacrifices, and oh yea, children. We don’t start off intending to be bad parents— we just get distracted, and the next thing you know—we’ve developed some bad habits. Habits like yelling at our kids every time we talk to them; habits like making too many negative, critical comments; habits like being so busy, next thing you know, you haven’t played with your kids for weeks.

### The Doctrine of Recreation

You wouldn’t think you would have to command a slew of Mormon folk to have fun at home, but you do, because we’re really, really busy, and we’re trying to save the world. Perhaps you have heard this line:

*Mary had a little lamb,  
Could have grown to be a sheep,  
But it Joined the Mormon  
Church, and died from lack of  
sleep*

With that in mind, consider the following ideas. From the *Family Proclamation* we read:

“Wholesome recreation plays an important role in creating successful marriages and families.... Parents who provide opportune ties for wholesome recreational activity lay a foundation on which their children can build virtuous, happy lives.

“Wholesome recreation also creates loving memories that lay the foundation for eternal relationships” (see M.A. Widmer, D.J. Cherrington, E.J. Hill, & B.J. Hill, “Wholesome Family Recreation,” *Strengthening Our Families: An In-depth Look at the Proclamation on the Family*, [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 2000], p. 190).

It was President Ezra Taft Benson who gave us fathers

some permission to have a ball with our children. He said:

“Go on daddy-daughter dates and father and son’s outings with your children. As a family, go on campouts and picnics, to ball games and recitals, to school programs.... Build traditions of family vacations and trips and outings. These memories will Never be forgotten by your children” (President Ezra Taft Benson, *Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988], p. 511).

One of my favorite passages in Mormon Doctrine reads:

“[R]ecreation is an essential and vital part of the gospel of salvation.... Wholesome recreation may include parties, banquets, dinners, games, athletic endeavors and contests, dramas, dances, concerts, radio and television programs, picnics, outings, camping trips, hunting and fishing trips, and vacations in general” (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966], p. 622).

I believe I love Brigham Young’s motto:

“Life is best enjoyed when time periods are evenly divided between labour, sleep and recreation. All men, women and children should labour; all must sleep; and if mental and physical balance is to be maintained, all people should spend one-third of their time in recreation, which is rebuilding, voluntary activity— never idleness. ‘Eight hours work, eight hours sleep, and eight hours recreation’ was Brigham Young’s motto. *Re-creation* is indeed the meaning of recreation” (Susa Young Gates and Leah D. Widtsoe, *The Life Story of Brigham Young* [New York: MacMillan Company, 1931], p. 251).

A key to fun in families is to learn not to “run faster or labor more than you have strength and means” (D&C 10:4). Fathers tend to get caught up in thinking they if they can’t take their kids to Disneyland, or buckle them

to a raft while they float the Colorado River, then what’s the point? Believe me; there is a point. Kids will remember the sack lunches and romps on the trampoline in the back yard just as much, if not more, than the restaurants and expensive amusement parks. That’s the nice thing with kids— you spell love just one way—T-I-M-E. They really don’t care what you do with them, as long as you do it.

### Family Connections

When you were growing up, did you have a favorite relative? Does someone come immediately to mind? For me, it was my granddad. When he came to town, the party was just about to begin, and everyone knew it. I would drop hanging out with High School friends when granddad blew into town.

I’ll never forget the time that we were at a large family gathering. My granddad began to dance to “Jeremiah was a Bullfrog” and passed around a Styrofoam hat asking us to all take bites out of it. He was just crazy, and everyone loved him, especially me. He would play baseball with us, tell us stories when he was a kid, take us to amusement parks, take me to baseball games— it was always fun. There is nothing better to be deeply connected to another human. Wallace Goddard wrote: “Families can be strengthened by getting together and by sharing. No amount of holiday football can compensate for human connections” (H. Wallace Goddard, *The Frightful and Joyous Journey of Family Life: Applying Gospel Insights in the Home* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997], p. 131).

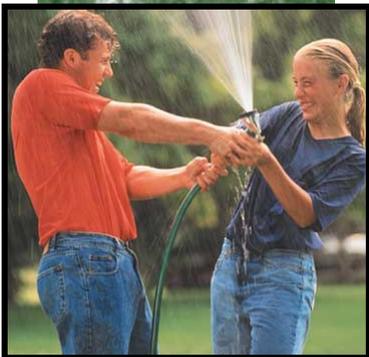
Aside from being connected and having fun with extended family members, having such relationships with our immediate family members is crucial to the optimal development of our children. I would like to share with you the story of some friend of ours from Southeast Texas—



## The Power Fun in Families



**The Family that  
plays together;  
stays together—at  
least for a while!**



Bernie Packard, his now since passed wife, Sarah, and their fourteen children. I would say that a family of sixteen would be quite busy, not to mention at the time, Bernie was a stake president and busy attorney. In their family, their children seem “very happy, well adjusted high achievers. All who are old enough have been on missions and married in the temple. They have high standards and are morally clean. Many have asked where this family’s apparent success stems from. One thing is obvious—they are strong in their beliefs and try to serve the Lord and their fellow beings. There are three things I have noticed that make this family especially strong. 1) They have developed their communication skills. They love to sit around together and talk. The parents often stay up late into the night talking to their children. 2) They are very affectionate with their children and express their love continually. 3) They have fun together. Dances are sometimes held for their older children, and youth from the stake are invited to their large home. Some of these parties draw over 200 youth, with about forty non-members in attendance. The parents often invite their children’s dates over to play games and talk. A while back, after one of their famous ‘hide and seek’ games in the darkened house with several of their children and their dates, the father was heard to say to one of the teenagers, ‘I thought for sure you were going to see me. I was hiding on top of the refrigerator.’ I wondered what his attorney friends would think of the LDS stake president had they seen him on top of the fridge. But, he is thoroughly unconcerned about any criticism that may come from his relationship with his children. His family is number one in his life, and his children are the evidence” (Randal A. Wright, *The Case for Chastity: Helping Youth*

*Stay Morally Clean* [National Family Institute, 1993], pp. 153-154).

### Fun Ideas for Families

We live in a world that is so crazy, and unbelievably busy, that if we don’t schedule some time to have fun, it won’t happen. I know that in our family, if we are not careful, it can be Thanksgiving before we do anything together after a full summer of activities. With summer approaching, there are many things we should consider in order to have fun at home. I do believe that a family that plays together, stays together. Obviously, there is more to it than that, but playing together is a start. Here are some ideas:

- Playing games: Games put parents and children on the same level, competing and cooperating as equals. Parents can let their hair down, be silly, make mistakes, and pretend to compete fiercely. None of this happens with a sense of time urgency. You don’t say, “Get the monopoly game out and set it up quickly; we’re on a tight schedule!”
- Vacations, hikes, hide and go seek, movies.
- Family Home Evening can be a very fun experience. Have a talent show. Dress up, put on a play. Make a video.
- Learn about your heritage.
- Watch home videos or slides.
- Have a family camp-out in front of the fireplace or in the backyard.
- Blow bubbles together.
- Go for a walk and take the dog.
- Make a family band. Put

beans between two tin pie place, use an oatmeal box for a drum, play a comb or a saw. Write a family song and play it.

- Put on a family talent show.
- Dress up and put on a play.
- Play school and let the kids be the teacher.
- Collect all the loose change in the house and go buy a family treat.
- Hold a power outage party. Pretend the electricity is off and play games by candlelight.
- Hold a family Olympics.
- Make a miniature golf course in the house.
- Sleep under the stars.
- Save all of the underwear and sox in the family and fold them while you watch a movie together.
- Build model.
- Go fishing.
- Start a family hobby.
- Put together a jigsaw puzzle
- Rent a family video and make popcorn
- Watch one of your favorite old movies with your children.
- Have your family organize a block party.
- Play charades
- Do something active: hike, bike, walk, play basketball, or Frisbee golf
- Run through the sprinkler or slip n slide
- Make homemade pizza as a family



## The Power of Fun in Families

- Bake cookies together and deliver them to someone who needs to smile
- For dessert, have everyone finger-paint with pudding
- Hide a jellybean in a dinner dish. Whoever finds the bean gets to stay up 15 minutes extra with Mom and Dad.
- Water fights are always good for some wholesome recreation. Except in our family with a 200 pound college bound linebacker, someone always seems to get hurt, even if we are using water balloons.
- Sitting in front of the TV in a hotel eating cheese and crackers—our kids thought that was more fun than the actual rides at Disneyland
- Pouring freezing water on the person in the shower. I haven't done this to my wife in a long time, but writing this reminds me that it's time.

These are all activities that can be fun. Of course, all fun can't be planned. I know in our family, most of the fun has been spontaneous things that just happen. There is no way to plan a pillow-fight, or some of the jokes that come up.

- One time, I thought it would be fun to climb up on top of our roof and eat pizza and chicken wings. Don't ask me why, but we just did it (My wife wasn't real thrilled). The kids talk about that as if it was the greatest thing our family ever did. In fact, we only did it once or twice, but the kids talk about it as if we do it every week.
- Last summer, instead of buying fireworks, we talked our kids to climbing up on our roof again and watching the fireworks. They loved it. Once again, my wife wasn't so sure.

Sandra Covey, the wife of Stephen R. Covey wrote the following:

"I think everyone's favorite family nights in our home were the times when we would go on a series of adventures. Stephen would usually make them up as we went along, and none of us knew what to expect. It might be playing a game of volleyball in the backyard, then having a swim at the high school gym followed by a visit to the pizza parlor. Or it could be going to the driving range and letting everyone hit a bucket of golf balls, and then going to a movie and finishing up with a root beer float at home. We might play a game of miniature golf at the rec center, then

jump on the backyard trampoline, share some ghost stories as it got dark, and then sleep out in the backyard. Or we might join another family for a hike up Rock Canyon, build a fire and roast some marshmallows, and then go bowling. Sometimes we'd take trips to a museum—the art museum, the science museum, the dinosaur museum. Sometimes we'd rent videos or show home movies and pop popcorn" (Sandra Covey, in *Seven Habits of Highly Effective Families* [Golden Books: New York, 1997] p. 148).

Let me share a few ideas in closing:

1. Plan your recreational activities; fun just doesn't happen. For the next Family Home Evening, you could make a list of the top 100 things your family wants to do in the next 100 years. When our oldest daughter was 16, she and I made a list of about 10 things she wanted to do before she left home. I just reviewed the list, and we have accomplished about half of those. When she comes home from college this year, we will work on a few more!
2. Plan age appropriate activities. My 18 year old son isn't going to be wild about meeting *Barney* at Kroger. At the same time, our 4 year old daughter isn't real keen in the idea of riding the Titan at *Six Flags*.

We need to plan things that will meet the needs of our children.

3. Plan recreational activities that will foster the development of family members. For example, read bedtime stories to your children. Read in the car on family trips. Engage in musical activities (singing together, duets on the piano and playing an instrument). Play worthwhile music in your home. Attend concerts, games, and recitals of your children.

4. Intentionally establish rituals that connect family members and foster family love. For instance, read bedtime stories and sing songs to your children. Treats after FHE is always a winner. Each quarter, have an overnight date with your spouse. Each summer, take a camping, backpacking, or Hiking. Each year, take a child on a fun date the week before their birthday.

5. Create one-on-one time with each family member through your Recreation. You could invite child on a daily walk. Play chess, other board games, or shoot baskets with children, one on one. Take a single child to a sporting event, musical, or theater.

6. Take time to serve as a family. That could be anything from a family performance in a nursing home, to picking up litter in your neighborhood. Remember, it's the little things that will be remembered the most.

### Seminars and Workshops Coming to Dallas on Marriage and Family Topics: Free

As some of you may know, Kevin Hinckley and I have been involved in teaching and presenting workshops at Education Week both at Brigham Young University in Idaho and in Provo. We have had a wonderful time, and have received a great response. Our topics have included marriage and parenting issues. We have entertained several requests to conduct our workshops and seminars here in the Texas. We would like to begin a series of workshops in the Dallas Area beginning in April. Our beginning topic will center on the topic of enhancing marriage. We had to move our seminar in March because of the time—we learned that Saturday morning was not the best day for most people, nor for us. We have changed our workshop format to Friday Evenings (date night). If you would be interested in our April Seminar, please email me at Doctree10@comcast.net, or call 214.868.6238. **Our April workshop is free of charge. I repeat, free of charge.** We will be at the Holiday Inn Express in Plano, located at 700 Parkway East Right off of Park on the Central Expressway. The Date is Saturday, April 22nd, at 7:00 p.m.! We hope to see you there!