

Time Is Love: Why Being Present Matters More Than Ever

In the whirlwind of school runs, work meetings, laundry piles, and life's endless to-do lists, it's easy for family time to fall to the bottom of our priorities. We're "there" with our children, but are we truly *with* them?

One powerful truth from our family's journey—and from years of research and real-world parenting—is this: **To our kids, love is spelled T-I-M-E.**

The Surprising Thing Our Kids Told Us

In our home, we've developed a simple but powerful tradition we call **PPIs—Personal Parenting Interviews**. It began with a parenting checklist that challenged us to see ourselves through our children's eyes. Questions like:

- *Do my parents listen to me with genuine interest?*
- *Do they spend time with me just because they want to?*
- *Do I feel like they care about what's important to me?*

Wanting honest answers, my wife, Kylie, nervously sat down with our kids and asked them directly what we were doing well as parents, what wasn't working, and how we could improve. It was raw and real. Sometimes confronting. But it brought deep connection—and clarity.

Their answers? What mattered most wasn't perfection. It wasn't expensive holidays, big birthday parties, or how much we earned.

What they cherished most was simple: *time*.

Time to talk. Time to play. Time to cry, laugh, or walk together. Time where they felt seen and heard—not rushed or "fit in" between everything else.

The Challenge for All of Us

It can feel overwhelming to add "spending more time with the kids" to an already overloaded schedule. But this isn't about adding more pressure. It's about recognising what actually makes the biggest difference.

Your children want your presence. They want you. **YOU**. Because you're that big and important in their lives!.

Even teenagers—those fiercely independent, eye-rolling, door-slamming teens—still crave connection. One of our older daughters recently asked for a walk along the beach after a long day. I was exhausted. I almost said no. But I got up and went. Five kilometres and one heart-to-heart later, she was all smiles—and so was I.

What Can You Do Right Now?

Here are a few simple ways you can start prioritising time and connection in your family, even in small, meaningful doses:

1. Create Moments, Not Events

You don't need hours—sometimes just 10–15 minutes of undivided attention means the world. A bedtime chat. A shared joke. A walk around the block. A spontaneous milkshake run. A choice to ignore your phone, the red notifications, the emails, and the addictive algorithm for five minutes so you can spend it with your child.

2. Ask These 3 Questions

Start your own version of the “PPI” with your kids:

- What's going well?
- What's not?
- How can we do better?

You might be surprised by what they say—and how seen they feel just by being asked.

3. Be Interruptible

Sometimes connection comes at inconvenient times—like when you're falling into bed or reading a book. If they're reaching out, consider pausing the task and tuning in. These moments matter. (Note - they are often unlikely to interrupt you on a device. And you are unlikely to budge when you're on one. Be careful with how screens make you appear to your child.)

4. Make Time Their Way

Each child connects differently. One might want to chat. Another prefers side-by-side activities like cooking or gaming. Follow their lead.

5. Remember: It's Not Forever

The days can feel long, but the years are short. Before we know it, they'll be grown. And what they'll remember most isn't how clean the house was, but whether we *were there*—really there.

Just like dollars are the currency of our economy, connection (feeling seen, heard, and valued) is the currency of our relationships.

Parenting isn't about being perfect. It's about being present. In a world full of distractions and pressures, choosing to give our children our time is one of the most powerful ways we say “I love you.”

So tonight, even if you're tired, pause for a moment. Ask a question. Play that card game. Sit on the edge of their bed and just listen.

Because in your child's eyes, love is spelled T-I-M-E—and that's what they'll remember.



Dr Justin Coulson is a dad to 6 daughters and grandfather to 1 granddaughter. He is the parenting expert and co-host of Channel Nine's Parental Guidance, and he and his wife host Australia's #1 podcast for parents and family: The Happy Families Podcast. He has written 9 books about families and parenting. For further details visit happyfamilies.com.au.