

What is the one thing that every human being has in common? Answer: We all have a mother and father, we all have a family. The term family can have vastly different meanings for each of us but it is a constant none the less. Some of us are totally connected to large embracing families and some of us have created a family circle in the absence of blood relatives. These days families come in all shapes and sizes, all of them based on relationships and a unique dynamic that influences how the family functions as a unit.

Beginning with this inaugural column, each week I will zoom in on some aspect of family life with the goal of examining what is typical, what is challenging, and what can be done to improve the quality of family life.

It is said that we give time to what we love. While this is probably true enough, it is also true that we can love our family members very much and still forget to spend time with them. Modern life is busy with many distractions and it is not uncommon for parents and children to drift away from each other because they get caught up in their own demanding lives. In many cases the wake up call is one or more critical incidents that can have a profound affect on the family. Kids need attention and guidance and when they don't get it at home they may choose to find it elsewhere. If they are young children they can feel neglected and that will impact their development. If they are adolescents or teenagers they will seek out ways to establish their independence free from parental constraints. Either way can spell trouble for the family both in the short term and in the future.

The one concrete action parents can take to reduce the risk of losing touch with their children is to make time to be together and to do so with deliberate intention. This can take many forms but at minimum families need to establish a weekly family night that is mandatory. That means there is an expectation that this time with family takes precedence over all other activities and all family members must participate. A good formula for family night is to begin with a family meal, followed by a short family meeting to address any emerging issues, and then spend time having fun playing a game or watching a movie together. This routine will build stronger family relationships and open the lines of communication.

Time together is the ingredient that keeps families healthy. If you aren't doing it already, make time this week to focus on your family members. It is the best thing you can do for yourself and your children.

Deborah Joyce is the Executive Director of District 69 Family Resource Association serving children, youth and families in Oceanside. Contact her at 250 752 6766.