

The essential to-do list for parents

What's on your list? You know, the list of every single thing you need to get done today.

- Sign that permission slip.
- Pack lunches.
- Get everyone to school on time.
- Deadline at work.
- Lunch meeting.
- Doctor's appointment.
- Pick up from dance rehearsal.
- Drive carpool to soccer practice.
- Clean the house.
- Do laundry.
- Make a nutritious dinner.



And with so many things vying for your time, the very things that are most valuable to your kids (and you) are the things that don't always make the cut.

It's easy to get caught up in an endless sea of to-dos. But sometimes, it's important to do things that aren't necessarily the most immediately productive.

Here are a few ideas of what you may want to add to your list. (And feel free to order takeout tonight and put off the laundry until tomorrow. Or the next day. We don't judge.)

No matter how much time you spend with your child, chances are not much is spent one-on-one with your undivided attention. That's because our lives (and our kids' lives) have gotten busier and busier and we're just struggling to keep up.

So this week, instead of getting coffee with a coworker or rushing from commitment to commitment, take your son or daughter out for special time together. This gives you a chance to connect and make memories. And it gives you time to really talk ...

Ask your kids questions.

Talking (and listening) to our kids should be at the top of our to-do list. It helps caregivers form a bond, clarify expectations and be aware of what's going on in the child's life. (This can also keep kids safe - in person and online.)

But life gets in the way. Think about the amount of time you spend not talking to your children - whether you are in different rooms, working on different projects or watching television.

Try to make some of that time you spend in silence into time for conversation. Carve out time every

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day to focus on your child and talk.

Make this a priority - and be sure to unplug those devices when you are having a conversation. This could be the 20 minutes on the way home from school or during dinner. (And if you have trouble coming up with something to talk about, check out a few ideas for questions to ask.)

Sometimes, we spend more time as parents talking at our kids and less time really listening.

Read books together.

Books teach our children so much, even when we don't realize it! So spending time every day reading is time well-spent.

Reading to children at a young age can also lead to academic success years later. (Check out the resources from United Way of the Quad Cities for more about the importance of reading.)

But it's more than academic. Talking to your kids about the books you're reading can help bolster their emotional intelligence. And best yet, reading books (like those on our list) can even help your kids stay safe.

Take care of yourself.

Staying healthy - mentally and physically - is a vital part of being a parent. So, continue dating your partner, engaging in your favorite hobbies, spend time with friends, and be sure to exercise and eat right.

It's easy to let these things slip off the radar. But a healthier parent - inside and out - sets a better example and is better able to care for children.

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Many of the things that we add to our list are there because we love our kids. We want to provide for them and help them succeed in the world.

But a small shift in priorities can make a world of difference in the lives of our kids and ourselves.

What should you place at the top of your to-do list?



Originally posted on the Now What? Blog 7/08/15. The Now What? Blog served for nearly 7 years to

- 1. Normalize parents seeking support and help as a manner of child abuse prevention*
- 2. Engage community in how they can work to prevent child abuse*
- 3. Work to build resiliency in families through promotion of the 5 protective factors*

Maybe you coach a baseball team or you help care for the neighbor kids from time to time. You are investing in the safety and security of the children in our community. Because it truly does take a village to raise our children, we want to offer the tools needed to bring awareness and education to preventing child abuse.