

# A Wise Investment: Benefits from Families Spending Time Together

## Summary

Spending time as a family is a wise investment. Children in families that participate in religious activities together are more likely to report having parents who show affection, and those with involved parents tend to fare better in school and are less likely to engage in risky behaviors.

- **Spending time in everyday family leisure activities is associated with greater emotional bonding within the family.** A family's "core" leisure activities (those that are typically everyday, low-cost, home-based activities such as playing board games, playing in the yard, gardening and watching television together) were related to the family's cohesion ("the emotional bonding that family members have toward one another"). Both a family's "core" activities and their "balance" activities (those that are novel experiences and require a greater investment of time, effort, planning and money--such as vacations, special events, and sports activities) were related to the family's ability to adapt.<sup>1</sup>
- **Children in families that participate in religious activities together are more likely to report seeing expressions of love and affection between their parents.** Two dimensions of family religious involvement--family participation in religious activities at least once per week and parental prayer more than once per day--were associated with greater expression of love or affection between the parents, as reported by their children.<sup>2</sup>
- **Parents of families in which both the parents and children attend religious services are more likely to know their children's social networks.** They are more likely to know their children's friends, those friends' parents, and their children's teachers, than parents of families in which only the parents or only the children, or neither, participated in religious activities.<sup>3</sup>
- **Children's academic success is associated with having mothers who frequently communicated with them.** This entailed talking with the children, listening to them, and answering their questions.<sup>4</sup>
- **Children whose fathers spend time with them doing activities tend to have better academic performance.** Preteens whose fathers spent leisure time away from the home (picnics, movies, sports, etc.) with them, shared meals with them, helped with homework or reading, and engaged in other home activities with them earned better grades in school, on average, than peers whose fathers spent less time with them. Similarly, teens whose fathers engaged in activities in the home and outdoors, spent leisure time, and talked with them earned better grades, on average, than teens whose fathers spent less time with them.<sup>5</sup>
- **Adolescents whose parents are involved in their lives tend to exhibit fewer behavioral problems.** Parent involvement was assessed by how often the parent or parental figure asked about their children's lives, encouraged their interests, gave

good advice, and spent free time with them in school activities.<sup>6</sup>

- **Youths who communicate, do activities and have close relationships with their parents are less likely to engage in violence.** Family integration through bonds with a parent (in particular, with a mother who was living in the home) was associated with a decrease in the likelihood that an adolescent will commit an act of violence. (Parent-child bonds were measured by adolescents' reports of feeling close to their parents, being involved in family activities, and communicating with their parents.) Youths in two-parent families whose bond with their resident mothers was just one standard deviation higher than the mean level were 18 percent less likely to commit an act of violence than peers with average maternal bonds. Among youths living in single parent families, a bond with that parent that was one standard deviation above the mean was associated with a 17 percent decrease in violence, while a one-unit increase in bonding with a nonresident parent was associated with a 5 percent decrease in violent behavior.<sup>7</sup>
- **Teens who frequently have dinner with their families are at a lower risk for substance abuse.** Compared with teens who frequently had dinner five times or more per week with their families, those who had dinner with their families only two nights per week or less were twice as likely to be involved in substance abuse. They were 2.5 times as likely to smoke cigarettes, more than 1.5 times as likely to drink alcohol, and nearly three times as likely to try marijuana.<sup>8</sup>

- **Teens whose parents are home with them after school and in the evening are less likely to experience emotional distress.** Other parental factors included having parents who engaged in activities with the teens and parents who had high expectations regarding teens' academic performance.<sup>9</sup>

### Endnotes

- 1 Ramon B. Zabriskie, and Bryan P. McCormick, "The Influences of Family Leisure Patterns on Perceptions of Family Functioning," *Family Relations* 50, No. 3 (July 2001): 281-289.
- 2 Christian Smith and Phillip Kim, "Family Religious Involvement and the Quality of Parental Relationships for Families with Early Adolescents," *Research Report of the National Study of Youth and Religion* 5 (2003): 1-23.
- 3 Christian Smith, "Religious Participation and Network Closure Among American Adolescents," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42, No. 2 (2003): 259-267.
- 4 Tom Luster *et al.*, "Family Advocates' Perspectives on the Early Academic Success of Children Born to Low-Income Adolescent Mothers," *Family Relations* 53, No. 1 (January 2004): 68-77.
- 5 Elizabeth C. Cooksey and Michelle M. Fondell, "Spending Time with His Kids: Effects of Family Structure on Fathers' and Children's Lives," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 58 (August 1996): 693-707.
- 6 Michelle J. Pearce, "The Protective Effects of Religiousness and Parent Involvement on the Development of Conduct Problems Among Youth Exposed to Violence," *Child Development* 74, No. 6 (November/December 2003): 1682-1696.
- 7 Chris Knoester and Dana L. Haynie, "Community Context, Social Integration Into Family, and Youth Violence," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 67, No. 3 (August 2005): 767-780.
- 8 The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, "The Importance of Family Dinners II," (September 2005), <http://www.casacolumbia.org/download.aspx?path=/UploadedFiles/cvq5rn5t.pdf>.
- 9 Michael D. Resnick *et al.*, "Protecting Adolescents from Harm: Findings From the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 278, No. 10 (1997): 823-832.

