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Connecting Big Plans' Parents to their Communities

Issue 8 • Jan./Feb. 2014

Free Family Winter Fun

We complain about it every year: the freezing cold snow and ice that blankets Alberta. Although these frosty crystals tend to outstay their welcome, winter is a time when children and parents alike delight in these white wonders sprinkling down. So dig out your warmest woollies, serve up steaming mugs of hot chocolate with marshmallows, and prepare for the best winter family fun Alberta has to offer, without blowing the budget!

Stories and more

On those weeks when the temperatures drop below -30C (or even -40C!) you may feel trapped at home. Fortunately, libraries throughout Alberta offer programs that are not only fun for kids, but may also inspire their imaginations. Puppet shows, book clubs, creative writing workshops, story time programs and many more are on offer!

Northern Lights

They're free and more spectacular than any holiday decorations on the planet. When you spot them, quickly have your kids put on their warmest clothing (plenty of layers), pack some hot drinks, and drive to a remote area far away from the glow of city lights. Winter is an ideal time to go Northern Lights spotting, as the sky is darker for longer each day so the lights will appear brighter. The further north you head, the better your chance of seeing them.

Ice skating

The most beautiful lakes in the world freeze over in Alberta each year, forming picturesque and free skating rinks throughout the province! Bring

some flasks of hot soup or stew and spend a day skating together with your family.

Fabulous festivals

Many Alberta communities offer residents and visitors opportunities to participate in unique festivals and special events geared towards family fun in the winter. Visit the Travel Alberta website at www.travelalberta.com for listings of events and activities taking place year round across the province.

Decorating snow

Fill water pistols and spray bottles with water, adding a few drops of food colouring to each. Brighten white snow with the colours of the rainbow!

Sledding

Zip down snowy hills on sheets of cardboard, plastic garbage bags, sleds, and anything else you can find that slides along snow!

Twirl maple taffy

The best time to make taffy is when the snow has recently fallen and is untouched. Rapid-boil pure maple syrup on a stove (stirring continuously while your children collect pans of fresh snow). Once the syrup starts to thicken, pull it off the heat, and gently sprinkle it over the snow. Have your family twirl it around popsicle sticks. Yummy!

Photograph the flakes

Generations of children have been told that "No two snowflakes are ever alike." The problem is – the flakes melt before we have a chance to match them up! Pull out your cameras and have fun teaching your child about photography while zooming in on these phenomenal flakes and later seeing if they match.

Albertans spend half the year in the snow and they embrace it to the fullest. For some, the preferred winter activity is watching the snow fall – through the window, in front of a crackling fire with a hot beverage. Any way you play it, winter is wondrous in Alberta.



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Parents Learning About Needs and Skills

4108 Montgomery View NW

Calgary, AB T3B 0L9

Phone: 403-685-4229

Fax: 403-685-4227

www.bigplans.org



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The Gift of Time - Top 10 Tips

Time is among the most precious gifts a parent can give to their child. Children who receive quality time are less likely to act out and far more likely to lead a happy and balanced life. Why? Because they know how deeply they are valued. Spending quality time with your children is one of the best investments you can make in your child's self esteem, future success and well being. It can also protect your child from making bad decisions down the road, especially during the harder teen years.

Fortunately, creating special moments with your children is easier than many busy, stressed out parents might think. The secret lies in making the most of daily opportunities in your home that naturally give you more time to enjoy your family. By creating daily routines, busy parents can turn even the most humdrum activities, such as doing the dishes, laundry or dusting, into moments that allow them to connect with their children.

Many parents feel enormous pressure to make special time with their children, not realizing that often it is our day-to-day tasks that offer the best opportunities to create spontaneous moments that will be remembered for a lifetime. Simply reading a story before bed, or telling your child every night that you feel so blessed to have them in your life, takes only a few minutes and are perfect ways to create quality time with your child.

#1: Have Breakfast Together

Get up a little earlier and start your day off right by having breakfast together as a family. Make a habit of talking about the day ahead when everybody is rested. Within your breakfast routine, consider establishing a family tradition, such as a reading a positive quote, thought or short story for the day. Get the children involved in preparing breakfast. Even a small daily job, like buttering the toast or setting the table, can boost your children's self-esteem and make them feel like an important part of your family.

#2: Make Household Chores a Team Event

Children love routine and they also secretly love chores. Regularly feeding the family pet, taking out the garbage, dusting, or being your sous-chef during the evening meal, work particularly well. What seem like just chores for you can often be fun activities for younger children. And don't be afraid to start them young! Kids love to help out. Simple jobs, like sweeping the floor or transferring wet laundry to the drier, instill the importance of contributing to the household and develop a solid work ethic along with a sense of gratitude. For teenagers, more sophisticated activities, like learning to cook, buying groceries, and doing the laundry teach essential life skills. A light hearted, team approach to housework has the added benefit of decreasing the time you spend doing chores and often eliminate the need for nagging.

#3: Create a Fun Bedtime Routine

Establishing a fun bedtime routine is something children look forward to and allows you to bond with your children on a daily basis. Get the logistics like teeth brushing out of the way before cuddling, stories or a simple hug good-night. Remember that once you have said "good-night" to not get suckered into the "just one more story" or "another glass of

water" request. Children need to go to sleep on time, so they awaken refreshed and not grumpy. Smooth bedtimes also give you much needed rest on your own or special time to connect with your spouse.

#4: Go on Date Nights

Set aside one evening per week for "date nights" spent together as a family and make it a tradition. Have dinner together, play at the park, go out for ice cream, or watch a movie and have popcorn in the comfort of your own home. Friday evenings often work best, as homework and weekend commitments don't interfere. The goal of this time is to catch up and have fun together because families who play together often are the ones who stick together.

#5: Dust Off Your Games and Play Together

Board games and card games are a great way for the family to interact. Let your children pick the games they enjoy. Don't be shy about creating your own games. Use ordinary objects around the house to create a fun play space—build a fort with blankets, make music with pots and spoons, create a puppet show or even a treasure hunt. Outdoor games such as baseball, hide'n seek, follow the leader or "shooting some hoops" in the driveway can provide great fun for everyone, whether you are on a team, acting as cheerleader, or simply keeping score.



#6: Plan Family Holidays and Special Occasions as a family

Involve children in planning birthday parties, social events, weekly schedules and family holidays. Children love exploring brochures and writing out holiday wish lists. If children feel they are part of the planning, they not only feel important but tend to be committed to making it a success and have a much better time.

#7: Focus on the Positive

A common complaint of children and especially of teenagers is that their parents nag too much. Just as you don't like to be put down, your children don't want to be around someone who is constantly criticizing (neither do our spouses by the way). Focusing on the positive is often the most effective way to reach out to your child and teen and to also have them do more of what you want and like them to do. So lighten up and make a point to recognize and appreciate your teenager or child when they are being helpful. Simply saying "thank you" can help bridge deep seeded issues that divide you from your child.

#8: Invite Conversation Instead of Demanding It

Don't interrogate your children—talk to them. Instead of asking, "What did you do at school today?", tell your children about your day. This is one of the easiest ways to model and invite great conversation. Teenagers in particular, need to know they can bring their problems to you. If they think you are going to freak out every time they share, they will simply stop sharing. A great way to break the ice is by being real with them about some of your own challenges. When parents periodically share their own daily issues and open themselves up to hearing their children's opinions, they are actively demonstrating healthy conversation. This builds trust, understanding and will make your child more open to sharing with you. One of the best times to talk is in the car. Teenagers are especially more open when they don't have to make eye contact when discussing sensitive issues.

#9: Make Room for Spontaneity

If you look back on the best moments of your childhood, chances are the things you remember most fondly were unplanned. By being impulsive and doing the unexpected,

you can create memories that last a lifetime. Spur of the moment events, like a Saturday morning pancake making contest, a dinner picnic in the family room, tenting in the backyard or a giant after school tickling fight often create a treasure chest of family legends.

#10: Eat Dinner Together

The dinner table is one of the most important daily opportunities for solid family interaction. If schedules are getting in the way, change your schedule so you can eat dinner together more days than not. Consistency is crucial. During the meal, turn off the phone to ensure uninterrupted time, give each child time to talk about their day and make certain you are sharing too. Keep the conversation light and leave heated discussions for other times. Most importantly, make dinner mealtimes fun and cooperative.

Reprinted with permission from The Family Resource Facilitation Program (FRFP).

No Bake Craft Clay

2 1/2 cups flour
1 cup salt
1 cup water
Food coloring

Mix together and add food coloring. Refrigerate for a few hours. Store in airtight container or plastic zip lock bag.



The Family Resource Facilitation Program (FRFP)

FRFP offers a free six session parent training program called "Positive Solutions for Families". Materials and information provided in the Parent Training Series will give parents insight and strategies on how to promote children's social and emotional skills, understand problem behaviour and how to use positive approaches to help children learn appropriate behaviour. This free series includes; information sharing, activity based learning opportunities, take home resources, free child care and refreshments.

If you are interested in learning more about this training series please contact Jackie Knough at 403-830-8222 or email jknough@frfp.ca. We will have opportunities in the New Year for parents to register for this training series.

Please visit www.frfp.ca to learn about community resources, parent education topics, family fun activities and information regarding services from FRFP.



The Family Resource Facilitation Program

Family Literacy Day 2014

On January 27, 2014, Family Literacy Day will celebrate 16 years of learning as a family. The initiative, created by ABC Life Literacy Canada in 1999, has been embraced by literacy organizations, schools and libraries all across Canada. This year, ABC is encouraging families to take time each day to have “15 Minutes of Fun”.

“Making time each day to learn together with children helps to develop a shared culture of lifelong learning,” says Gillian Mason, President of ABC Life Literacy Canada. “Learning opportunities happen every day at home, in the park, with friends and family. It is vitally important that all of us, parents and caregivers, understand the benefits of learning outside the classroom and seize these opportunities to learn and grow together.”

Time spent following a new recipe, playing a game, or reading a story together can focus on learning in a fun way. These teachable moments at home help children learn listening skills and language skills, and develop their imaginations and creativity — and are also opportunities for adults to practise their skills to keep them sharp.

15 Minutes of Fun!

ABC Life Literacy Canada is encouraging Canadian families to have “15 Minutes of Fun” learning together. Learning can happen at any time. Practicing literacy together every day has tremendous benefits for both children and parents. Here are some great ways to get started:

1. Write a joke book with your family.
2. Read a bedtime story to the grown-up putting you to bed.
3. Make up a new recipe together and post it online.
4. Tell knock-knock jokes together while doing the dishes.
5. Organize a book swap at your school.
6. Make up riddles and tell them to your friends.
7. Create a family book club.
8. Build a drum with your family.
9. Surf the Internet and learn about your favourite animal.
10. Make up a song about your day to sing to your family at dinnertime.
11. Write messages to your family on sticky notes and post them around the house.
12. Create a story about what you'll be doing for Family Literacy Day.
13. Play a board game together.
14. Build an acrostic poem using your hero's name.
15. Make an origami boat and see if it will float.

“Food For Thought”

For Parents and for Practitioners Who Work with Families

Have you noticed how the world has changed and how busy our lives have become?

The realities of the modern world pressure families to always be on the go. Many parents work long hours and find impossible to find ways to sit down and eat together. We often bring work home physically and emotionally. Our children are often overscheduled with too many activities often with activities and events that they don't really care about or enjoy. Digital media is everywhere in so many forms – computers, smart phones, the Internet are amazing but they can also suck away our valuable time and isolate family members from each other. It is more now than ever that thinking about family time as learning and bonding time is so important! How can we ensure that we take time to eat as a family, play together, read and talk together? Are there ways to balance our work responsibilities and reserve time for each other?

Do we need to sign up our kids for every sport, volunteer for every committee or and answer every e-mail and text that arrives during our non-working hours instantly?

Do we really need to visit our Facebook page every day?

Can we make a commitment to share mealtime together as a family every day and while at the table, not have the TV on or sit silently and instead talk about our day?

What can be done to connect family members who are separated by distance? How can grandparents share time with their distant grandchildren?

How can we make sure that we cook together, make sock puppets and then use them to put on a show, play board games together, tell a story together and grab a good book and gather the whole family on the couch and read something wonderful?

How do we do this learning? Is it all about setting blocks of time allocated for family learning? Or does it begin with the questions such as “How was your day?” or “Mom do you think I would look good with green hair?” With 15 minutes a day or no formal day or time on the calendar?

Imagine the world 10 years from now. One can only imagine it will be more fast paced than ever, that families are going to be even busier, even more distanced geographically and even less able to connect to one another. To ensure that all our children and adults have the essential skills of the 21st century, we need to better recognize and acknowledge the value of family learning!

Let's celebrate Family Literacy Day on January 27 and every day!

Reprinted with permission: <http://canlearnsociety.ca/family-literacy-day-2013-15-minutes-of-fun-and-beyond>



Visit the HSBC Learning Activity Centre for more fun literacy activities you can complete as a family!

<http://abclifeliteracy.ca/flid/15-minutes-of-fun>