"Five Tips for Having a Great 'Date Night' with Your Kids"

by Jim Burns, Ph.D.

The power of parents "being there" for their kids is so profoundly meaningful that we often miss it. When kids understand that their parents are available and accessible to them, kids will often thrive during the adolescent years. Parents who are present and involved in the lives of their kids place important emotional, physical and spiritual "deposits" that will continue to influence their kids for years to come. Many times parents look for the latest parenting fad to help their kids grow into mature adults. Yet one key component for building kids' lives is right in front of them: investing time, energy and a commitment to 'be there' for their kids. A regular, one-on-one 'date night' with each of your kids is a great place to begin intentionally investing in the overall health and growth of your child. Here are five tips for having a great 'date night' with your kids.

1) **Choose to do something your kids want to do.** At times, when parents want to do something together with their kids, they'll select an activity that *they* have interest in, but their kids have little or no interest in. If you really want to create a positive 'date night' culture where your kids *want* to hang out with you, try doing things that the *kids* are interested in. While this is a simple idea, it can reap a lot of benefits! And remember, 'date nights' don't have to be complicated! They can be as simple as taking your child out to get an ice cream cone or throwing a Frisbee around in the yard.

2) **Communicate.** Be sure to engage your son or daughter in conversation at some point during your 'date night'. Don't just talk about what you are interested in. Talk about anything and everything. Ask your kids about their interests, opinions and feelings. Ask open-ended questions that can't be answered yes or no. (Note: if you have not had a history of talking with your kids, getting started may seem a bit awkward to both you and your kids. Don't let this get in your way. Share with your kids what you are trying to do (build stronger relationships / reconnect) and start slowly with reasonable expectations. Just keep at it!)

3) **Listen.** Don't do all of the talking on a 'date night' with your child! Communication is a two way street, so be sure to work at listening. Listening is the language of love. Through listening, you demonstrate that you value your kids. When you take the time to really pay attention, show empathy and listen – you are taking a key step in connecting with your kids. When kids know that their parents will really listen (instead of immediately "correcting") they will be more willing to talk.

4) **Display affection.** Even though teenagers are in the process of becoming adults and separating from their parents, they still need the affection of their parents. In fact, sexual

promiscuity in teenage girls can often be traced back to a desire for (and lack of) affection from their fathers. Dads, be sure to offer your kids genuine affection through loving words, affirmation, encouragement, small gifts and appropriate touch. (For ideas on physical affection, download our free tip sheet, **"*Keeping in Touch with Your Kids*"**. Click ***here*** to download this tip sheet.)

5) **Never embarrass your kids in front of their peers.** It's possible that a 'date night' activity might take you onto your son or daughter's "territory" – to a place where they may run into some of their peers. Gentle teasing is one thing, but embarrassing your kids in front of their peers might be close to being an unpardonable sin in teen culture. Show respect to your kids and they'll be more willing to hang out with you – and your 'date nights' will be much more enjoyable as well.