

Time is the best investment for kids

Remember what you were like as a kid? It's probably just as well that our memories tend to be selective. If our kids found out about some of our own shortcomings, we would never live it down.

We can be thankful that most children do value their parents and want them around – at least some of the time – even though if they are aged 12-20 it would be far too uncool to admit the fact.

So think ahead and imagine what you would like your own children to remember about how well you did as parents.

Most would mention the fact that mum and dad had time to do something with them, and made the time to talk to them without always rushing about. Children want to have a bit of their parents entirely to themselves because that very individual attention is something they crave.

Sometimes this very human need can get overlooked in the race to make enough money to have a nice holiday, pay school fees or get the latest plasma television.

And many parents feel they are doing the best for their kids if they have a financial plan that sees the house paid off in 10 years.

This is laudable in principle, but if you spend the next 10 years doing overtime and never seeing the children, chances are that by the time you are ready to relax with them, they will have left home to lead their own lives. You will have missed the chance of being a part of their growing-up process and really getting to know them.

People might think they don't have a choice because they have to work so hard to provide security for the family. Certainly, if you can't have a roof over your head or food on the table, you don't have much choice other than to work as hard as you can. But many of us can modify things if we think they're important enough.

However, this involves compromise. Perhaps it means that you will take 20 years to pay off the house rather than 10 years, or the overseas holiday you dream about needs to be downsized to a couple of weeks "overseas" at Phillip Island rather than Bali.

Putting time into the children is an investment that gives you a better chance of avoiding disastrous problems later in the adolescent years. What you are doing is putting a deposit in the "relationships bank account" rather than the financial one.

What this does is give your children the best chance for the future, because your child will learn from you how to get on with people and how to communicate in relationships. Family-friendly workplaces now often recognise that allowing flexibility for an employee - such as taking a few hours off to see a sports final or a school concert – means that they have a happier and more productive employee.

Finding time for a family activity and not letting other things get in the way is important, whether it's a dinner once a week or a family excursion to the swimming pool. It's about making time for the family, committing to it and making it part of the family tradition. By doing this you are teaching the children about commitment and that you don't let people down unless there is an important reason.

Sometimes you need to prioritise and not use being busy as an excuse. We are all human and being in a warm office is much more pleasant than standing in ankle deep mud in a blustery wind on a sports field.

The bottom line is that even a little effort to give time to the kids can be really beneficial, so don't think about what you can't do – focus instead on what *can* achieve with the children.

Survival tips

- Time spent with the children is an investment in their future stability
- Commit to some sort of regular family activity
- Don't let work and financial stability stop you from developing family relationships.