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Resolve to make family a priority this year

New Year's resolutions are as American as apple pie. In fact, during the holiday season they are under discussion in a majority of American households. Many times, business and professional aspirations become the priority, surpassing home and family, but before too much of 2006 has passed, set some personal and family goals, too.

Allow me to offer a few suggestions for you and your children.

Spend time together: Spend quality time with your children. Try to eat at least one meal together every day and have meaningful conversations around the dinner table without television or radio. Discuss everyone's day and ask questions about school and work, and don't forget to share how Mom and Dad spent their day, as well.

Another way to spend time is to make an effort to play games together as a family at least once a week.

Make sure everyone feels loved and important: Feeling important, safe and loved is crucial to normal development. As parents, it is our job to set limits and standards, but it is equally important to nurture children's individuality and creativity. Let them know, on a regular basis, how special they are and what you love about them.

Optimize skills: Every child has natural abilities. Help your child find what makes them feel special and support their efforts to achieve success. Reading is a critical skill and one that children need to be exposed to at an early age. Read to them every day regardless of their age. It provides quality time that everyone can enjoy and also builds vocabulary and basic thinking processes.

Limit and monitor TV and Internet time: It is true that TV and the Internet are educational and can broaden a child's experience, but they can be limiting and, at times, dangerous. Children, many with parental approval, frequently spend too many hours in front of a TV or computer monitor.

Suggest to your children that they read instead of watching TV or using the computer. Reading is an activity that stimulates imagination and cognitive growth, while watching television is a passive activity.

Provide good role models: Children idolize their parents and frequently imitate their behaviors. If they observe violence, smoking or excessive use of alcohol, you can expect that they will copy that parental behavior.

Enjoy yourselves and have fun: Don't forget to enjoy yourself and your partner. Fun and laughter create more positive memories than anger and sadness. Remembering that life is not a dress rehearsal, think about how fast 2006 passed and how we're already a few days into 2007. Be happy and healthy and enjoy every day as a family.

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