

Quality time in the family

By Fatahyah Yahya

NOT having ample time for the family members appears to be the norm in many Malaysian families today, especially those with working adults.

Heavy workloads, out-station travelling, meetings, social and welfare commitments are some of the activities that take up time which should be spent with the family. There seems to be a conspiracy out there that soaks up our free time. There is a possibility that this kind of situation could lead to stress within our family institution.

How many of us are guilty of not spending "quality time" with our loved ones — our spouse, our children? A lack of quality time with our spouse or family will lead to stress in our family relationships and later, and could also affect our job performance. In any relationship, it is important to devote some kind of quality time with our family to keep our relationships healthy and strong and also to listen for ways we can support one another. The term "quality time" is not a new thing; it must have been in existence since the time of Adam and Eve. However, it is not clear how this term is defined literally since there has been very little study done in this area. What is to be noted is that "quality time" is something that has gained importance in today's society. To some people, it could mean meaningful or useful time spent with the family. It is believed that this time should be made up in quality for what is missed in quantity. When one talks of quality time, there are high expectations. Unfortunately, in reality, it often falls short of expectations, thus resulting in conflict and resentment.

One expectation of quality time may be that it will be relaxed and free of conflict. It is also expected that quality time will provide an opportunity to have meaningful conversations and do worthwhile things with our family.

From one point of view, quality time can be defined as the time spent and provided for our spouse or children that makes them happy or satisfied. In this situation, it is expected that both parties should be happy or satisfied or at least one of the parties is. Often times we think that spending the whole day with the family is already spending quality time with them. In actual fact, this is not the case. Quality time could be only a few seconds or minutes of meaningful time. Quality time includes the presence of the spouse or loved ones while one is facing difficulties or having problems. It could also be the readiness to be there to listen, comfort and accommodate. It must also be pointed out that quality time does not require a specific agenda or plan. It can be spontaneous and varied in length from a few seconds, a few minutes to several hours, depending on the situation.

Aware of contemporary concerns about today's families having limited time to spend together because of time restraints, Sandusky and Allen conducted needs assessments to determine the extent of this perceived problem (Sharon & Nancy, 1995). Results indicated that working adults spent little time with their children outside of the daily chores of childcare. Most of their time together was spent watching television.

These responses paralleled the 1987-88 National Survey of Families and Households-American Demo-graphics, which determined that working parents had an hour prior to work and three hours after work to share with their children, including child care (Jacobsen & Edmonson, 1993). Spending quality time with the family can be done by giving special attention to provide experiences in seeing, hearing, touching, tasting and feeling things that are new, different, unique, beautiful, exciting and fun.

On the other hand, it can also be done by involvement in a hobby together with other family members. In short, spending quality time with the family is important not only when the children are young but also as they get older. There are endless activities to share with your spouse and your family.

Take a close honest look at your own family and ask: "Am I giving them quality time — or just time?"

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