

Rhythm of life

Positive family rhythms can lead to calm, a feeling of connection and, at times, greater family peace, writes special needs teacher and author Lou Harvey-Zahra.

Everything in nature has its own rhythms. The sun rises each day, followed by the moon and darkness. The seasons of the year change from the expansion of summer months to the inner reflection of winter (and the nourishment of rain). A tree blooms then appears to sleep.

All these cycles hold a secret: the rhythm of activity followed by rest, expansion, followed by contraction; the cycle of balance. Parents are responsible for the rhythm of their child's early life, and to create a balanced rhythm is a foundation key to creative discipline.

During his workshop, The Secret of Happy Children, Steve Biddulph explained that in his opinion "75% of all discipline problems are caused by the hurry that parents are in". How fast-paced is your life, and how fast are you making it for your children? When you slow down, there is...

- Time to connect, cuddle, love and play
- Time to talk, laugh and look into each other's eyes
- Time to tell stories, hear a lullaby and take a nap
- Time to share a meal and a chat
- Time to spend in nature (and go on an adventure)
- Time to enjoy life at a child's pace.

All the activities on the above list are free, and provide a lifetime of memories. A toddler's pace requires your patience, but also allows you to see the world through a child's magical eyes. So take a look at your daily and weekly routines. Can you create more time at home with a slowed-down pace, at least in your child's formative years? When you're out, try not to rush from one activity to the next; give your young child the time to balance on a wall, push a doll's pram, look at a flower or watch a bug.

Every family's lifestyle and work commitments are different. Consider how your rhythm can slow down on the days you are at home.

Can you have a home day each week, one day where the car stays in the garage? On this day, cuddle in bed, and stay in your pyjamas for longer. A home day can create time for cooking, fun in the garden, stories, a bath together: a slowed-down, connected life. A slowed-down pace also gives a young child time to play. This day can provide sanity in a busy world.

Following a daily rhythm of activity then rest can lead to a balanced life. If a child's pace is too fast, without daily peaceful periods to connect to loved ones, rest and quiet play, tantrums may follow. Lay the foundation of time; it is a precious commodity in the 21st century.



Simple every-day rhythms

- Aim for a regular bed time
- Make sure your toddler is met every morning with a hug and "I love you" or kind words
- For a toddler, food requires a predictable daily rhythm. Young children usually require breakfast, morning tea, lunch, afternoon tea and dinner; to eat and drink every three hours or so
- Try to have a special daily nap or rest-time rhythm in place when you're at home. Even when your toddler no longer needs their daytime nap, make sure that there is a lovely quiet time routine in place
- Creating a fun and connected bedtime rhythm can mean you hear the word "No" less when you tell them it's time for bed
- Take the time to play games while cleaning teeth. Each tooth has a story to be told of its daily adventures: "This tooth ate Cornflakes for breakfast; this tooth went to the park..."
- Bedtime provides time to be together in a loving way: a gentle head massage, a story, a lullaby, a special candle.

