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Has Family Time Really Grown?

by Denise Schipani

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Sunday begins the "Week of the Young Child"—have you heard of this? It's sponsored by the [National Association for the Education of Young Children](#), and the stated purpose is to "focus public attention on the needs of young children and their [families](#)" by holding early-childhood educational events, including small parades and art workshops. Parent participation is emphasized. I'm wondering: Shouldn't we be actively engaged with our kids on a regular basis? Do we really need this nudge?

Perhaps we do. Despite [a recent study referenced in The New York Times](#) showing that family time has actually increased dramatically since the 1990s (from 12 hours a week, on average, in 1995, to 21.2 hours a week in 2007), it does feel like we're less connected to our kids. They're watching SpongeBob while we fiddle with our BlackBerrys. We're shuttling them to more and more afterschool [sports](#) and activities to prime them for college admissions. Neither is ideal.

Maybe the Week of the Young Child, with its local fairs and ice cream socials, is just the ticket for reminding folks of the power of simple time spent. Scrabble and Legos, scooters and bikes, kicking a soccer ball until it's too dark to see it anymore. Think of it this way: Family time isn't something to check off on your day's to-do list; it's the whole reason you had a family to begin with. Right?

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