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Taking Time to Talk and Listen

Our intentional effort to communicate better today will bless our families eternally.

In a perfect world every child would return home from school to be greeted with a plate of freshly baked chocolate chip cookies, a tall glass of cold milk, and a mother ready to take the time to talk and listen about her child's day. We do not live in a perfect world, so you can skip the cookies and the milk, if you like, but don't skip the "take the time to talk and listen."

Twenty-nine years ago, President James E. Faust (1920–2007), Second Counselor in the First Presidency, lamented that families have so little time together. Think about that—29 years ago—he said in general conference: "One of the main problems in families today is that we spend less and less time together. . . . Time together is precious time—time needed to talk, to listen, to encourage, and to show how to do things."¹

As we spend time together and talk with our children, we come to know them and they come to know us. Our priorities, the real feelings of our heart, will become a part of our conversation with each child.

What is the number-one message from your heart you would choose to share with your child?

The prophet Moses teaches us in Deuteronomy:

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

"And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:

"And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt *talk* of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deuteronomy 6:5–7; emphasis added).

And may I add one more: "And when thou eatest at the dinner table together."

If we desire our families to be together forever, we begin the process today. Spending time talking with our children is an investment in our eternal family as we walk the path toward eternal life together.

One mother from Illinois, USA, shared how she made time to talk with her children:

"When our children were small, I got into the habit of watching a few favorite television programs. . . . Unfortunately, the programs came on at the same time the children went to bed.

". . . At one point I realized I had put my



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programs at the top of my list and my children farther down. For a while I tried reading bedtime stories with the TV set on, but I knew in my heart it wasn't the best way. As I pondered about the days and weeks I had lost to my TV habit, I began to feel guilty and decided to change. It took a while to convince myself that I could really turn off the TV.

"After about two weeks of leaving the television off, I felt a burden somehow lifted. I realized I felt better, even cleaner somehow, and I knew I had made the right choice."²

Bedtime is a perfect time to talk.

Helaman said of the stripling warriors, "They rehearsed unto me the words of their mothers, saying: We do not doubt our mothers knew it" (Alma 56:48).

It was "the words of their mothers" that taught them. While talking to their children, those mothers taught the word of God.

Preserving Personal Communication

Much good comes from talking, and the adversary is aware of the power of the spoken word. He would love to diminish the spirit that comes into our homes as we talk, listen, encourage each other, and do things together.

Satan futilely attempted to prevent the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ in this dispensation when he tried to halt a critical conversation between Joseph Smith and God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

In Joseph's words, "Immediately I was seized upon by some power which entirely overcame



me, and had such an astonishing influence over me as to bind my tongue so that I could not speak” (Joseph Smith—History 1:15).

The adversary would love to bind our tongues—anything to prevent us from expressing verbally the feelings of our hearts face to face. He delights in distance and distraction; he delights in noise; he delights in impersonal communication—anything that would prevent us from the warmth of a voice and the personal feelings that come from conversing eye to eye.

Listening to the Hearts of Our Children

Listening is just as important as speaking. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said: “If we listen with love, we won’t need to wonder what to say. It will be given to us . . . by the Spirit.”³

When we listen, we see into the hearts of those around us. Heavenly Father has a plan for each of His children. Imagine if we could get a glimpse of the individual plan for each of our children. What if we could know how

to enhance their spiritual gifts? What if we could know how to motivate a child to reach his or her potential? What if we could know how to help each child transition from child-like faith to testimony?

How can we know?

We can begin to know by listening.

One Latter-day Saint father said: “I do a greater amount of good when I listen to my children than when I talk to them. . . . I have gradually learned that my children don’t want my ready-made, time-proven, and wise answers. . . . To them, being able to ask their questions and to talk about their problems is more important than receiving my answers. Usually when they get through talking, if I have listened long and well enough, they really don’t need my answer. They have already found their answer.”⁴

It takes time to focus on the things that matter most. Talking, listening, and encouraging do not happen quickly. They cannot be rushed or scheduled—they happen best along the way. They happen when we *do* things together: work together, create together, and play together. They happen when we turn off media, put down worldly distractions, and focus on each other.

Now, that is a difficult thing to do. When we stop and turn everything off, we must be prepared for what will happen next. At first the silence may be stifling; an awkward sense of loss may ensue. Be patient, wait just a few seconds, and then enjoy. Give your full attention to those around you by asking a question about them and then begin to listen. Parents, talk about an interest of your child. Laugh about the past—and dream about the future. Silly conversation can even unfold into a meaningful discussion.

Prioritizing Our Eternal Purpose

Last spring, while I was visiting a class of young women, the teacher asked the class to write our 10 priorities. I quickly began to write. I have to admit, my first thought began with “Number 1: clean the pencil drawer in the kitchen.” When our lists were complete, the Young Women leader asked us to share what we had written. Abby, who had recently turned 12, was sitting next to me. This was Abby’s list:

1. Go to college.
2. Become an interior designer.
3. Go on a mission to India.
4. Get married in the temple to a returned missionary.
5. Have five kids and a home.
6. Send my kids on missions and to college.
7. Become a “cookie-giving” grandma.
8. Spoil the grandchildren.
9. Learn more about the gospel and enjoy life.
10. Return to live with Father in Heaven.

I say, “Thank you, Abby. You have taught me about having a vision of the plan Heavenly Father has for all of us. When you know you are walking a path, in spite of whatever detours may occur, you will be OK. When your path is focused on the ultimate goal—that of exaltation and returning to Heavenly Father, you will get there.”

Where did Abby get this sense of eternal purpose? It begins in our homes. It begins in our families. I asked her, “What do you do in your family to create such priorities?”

This was her answer: “Besides reading the scriptures, we are studying *Preach My Gospel*.” Then she added, “We talk a lot—at family home evening, at dinner together, and in the car while we drive.”

Nephi wrote: “We talk of Christ, we rejoice

in Christ, we preach of Christ.” Why? “That our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins” (2 Nephi 25:26).

Talking, listening, encouraging each other, and doing things together as a family will bring us closer to our Savior, who loves us. Our intentional effort to communicate better today—this very day—will bless our families eternally. I testify that when we talk of Christ, we also rejoice in Christ and in the gift of the Atonement. Our children will come to know “to what source they may look for a remission of their sins.” ■

From a Salt Lake City stake conference satellite broadcast address given on October 24, 2010.

NOTES

1. James E. Faust, “Enriching Family Life,” *Ensign*, May 1983, 41.
2. Susan Heaton, “Talk Time Instead of TV Time,” *Ensign*, Oct. 1998, 73.
3. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Witnesses unto Me,” *Liahona*, July 2001, 16; *Ensign*, May 2001, 15.
4. George D. Durrant, “Pointers for Parents: Take Time to Talk,” *Ensign*, Apr. 1973, 24.

For a story and activity ideas on this topic, see pages 8–10 of this month’s *Friend*.

