

PARENTING IS HEART WORK
11 WAYS TO CONNECT WITH YOUR CHILD'S HEART¹

1. **talking** – Tell stories about your life, past and present. Share with them like you would a friend. Tell them about their own childhood – they love hearing about themselves.
2. **listening** – Ask open ended questions that let them share their own life. Simply asking about something they liked and didn't like during their day gives them freedom to share about anything they want. As they share about something, draw them out further by asking more questions.
3. **touching** – Meaningful touch is a key element of biblical blessings. Even if you aren't a "touchy feely" type of person, try moving out of your comfort zone and offering hugs and even just a gentle touch in situations you may not typically.
4. **high-energy activities** – Kids love excitement. Play lots of games. Hide and Seek in various forms – with people, with objects – is a big favorite for younger ones.
5. **interests** – Learn your child's interests and engage them as much as you can. A friend of mine started subscribing to skateboarding magazines even though he had little interest, but his daughter was really in to it.
6. **special treats** – These don't have to cost a lot, especially with young kids. We do popcorn nights. A friend used to bring the peanuts from the airplane home after a business trip. Grabbing ice cream is often a winner. You'll capture their heart when you show them you know what they love and then find appropriate times to offer it to them.
7. **partnering** – Find ways to do projects or serve together. Teach Sunday School. Make a meal for someone and have you child help, telling them story of why you are helping as you prepare. Do a simple service project together – we take our girls to bread wrapping regularly and they love it!

¹ Based on a list in *Parenting is Heart Work* by Scott Turansky and Joanne Miller, pp. 93-95.

8. **praise** – Offer genuine praise when you see strong character being displayed.
Seek to praise their hearts and not just their behavior when possible. But also pass along praise as you receive it about your kids and thank them for jobs well done.
9. **fun** – Be silly! Wrestle, tell jokes and be playful. Squirt guns and bubbles at bath time are a blast!
10. **celebrate milestones** – Mark these moments well, pointing kids to God and celebrating the new opportunities your child has to enjoy Him!
11. **traumatic events** – Don't just try to fix hard times, be present throughout them. Engage their hearts when they experience loss through a bad grade, a mean friend or even the death of a loved one. Hold them. Pray for them. Listen to them. Express clear love for them!

heart work ideas to ponder

- It is easy to get lured in to thinking that just getting through your to-do list for the day is success as a parent. But if matters of the heart aren't considered along the way, your to-do list may actually be very counter-productive. Sometimes surviving is what you have to do, but if we never consider the heart our parenting can really cause long-term damage.
- There will be many times when you just survive and don't have time to get to the heart issues. But you can always tuck away thoughts for later when you see a heart concern. Vacations and Date Nights are a key time for us to regroup and determine our next steps in our discipling plan.
- We've got to learn to listen to our kids and not just talk at them functionally all the time! Our goal in listening is to understand their heart, drawing out God and identifying the sins that separate them from Him and others.
- Rules without relationship leads to rebellion. We need to fill up our kids emotional bank accounts in order to make withdrawals through correction or firmness!