

Claire, Amy, Winston, and Clint Nabors
enjoy riding their bikes together outside

The Importance of a Strong and Loving Family

From working out to finding
time to laugh together, Fort Bend
families and doctors
share their tips for raising
all-around healthy kids

Written by Erica Lynn Martinez and Lorrie Crow



Photo by April Pizana Photography

Baseball, cheerleading, homework, oh my! All too often parents and kids become so greatly involved in activities that they forget to actually bond as a family. Strengthening and maintaining a strong and loving family is vital when raising children. While there are many different ways to build that union, here are a few to get you started.

Staying Active as a Family

Sports and outdoor activities are a great way for families to spend time together. Dr. Michael Bornstein of the Pediatric Center in Richmond encourages outdoor activities to boost children's health both inside and out. "Going to a park, playing baseball, or just playing catch are a few ways to stay active," Dr. Bornstein suggests.

Sugar Land parents Arthur and Erica Ramirez's children are involved in sports activities year round. Their three boys, Arthur III, Andreas, and Alexander, are all actively involved in soccer and swim for First Colony Swim Team. Elliana, the baby of the family, is an active cheerleader with Texas Thunder Cheer Gym in Richmond. "We all go as a family to the events to show our support for one another," says Erica. It might be the most obvious way to become healthy, but working out and supporting each other is also a fantastic way to bond as a family.

Healthy Meal Times

Many times after a long day of work and school, finding time to sit down and eat together can be difficult. But fixing a healthy home-cooked meal, sitting down and eating together, and having family discussions of daily events can encourage children to enjoy eating together as a family.

Teresa Gibson admits she and her husband Tom and their 14-year-old daughter Christina have not always been a healthy family. "We were eating out almost all the time," she shares. The family's turnaround came when her husband's doctor told him his high cholesterol and recent weight gain, along with a family history of heart ailments were going to catch up with him.

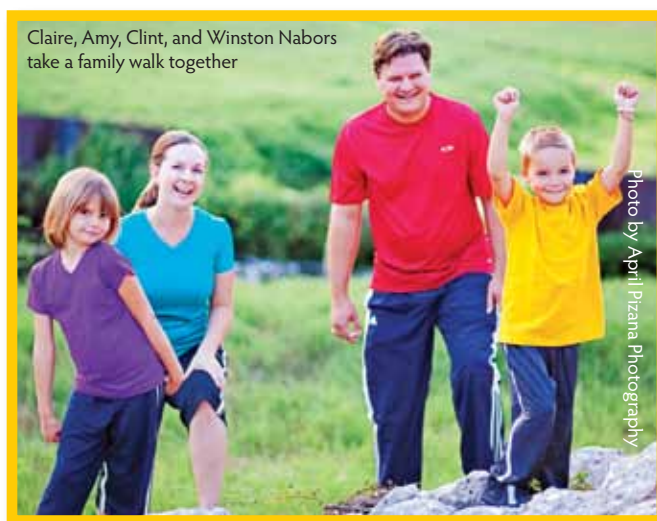
Teresa then took an online webinar class on healthy eating

habits and says that's when her thought process changed. "We ate more frequent, smaller-portioned meals and took supplements that helped support our health," she says. The result is that she and her husband are off all of their medications, and their daughter is off almost all of her allergy medications.

Enjoy Vacations Together

Traveling to an exotic beach or a fancy theme park can be a great experience for the whole family, but you don't always have to travel too far to have a fantastic family vacation. Even just driving into Houston and staying at a local hotel with a great pool for a day offers a fun family bonding experience.

The Ramirez family enjoys taking family vacations as often as they can. "We have a very large extended family and love spending time with them," says Erica. "We go to my grandfather's ranch in Hardin whenever we can."



Claire, Amy, Clint, and Winston Nabors take a family walk together

Photo by April Pizana Photography

TIP
"Parents can help prevent childhood obesity by portion control, avoiding fast food, and keeping kids active. Lead by example."
- Stacey Gallas, MD

Vacation is a time for children and parents to create friendships and understandings about one another. Families will enjoy new experiences and creating memories that will last a lifetime.

Unity, Respect, and Security

Children of all ages need to feel the unity of a family. The closeness and unity of family in a child's life helps them develop a sense of security and self-confidence. Respect can be taught to children at a very young age and when done properly will ensure that the child will grow into a kind and respectful adult. The Ramirez family says it's important to teach children respect for God and His laws, respect for one another, respect for themselves, and respect for authority and property.

Along with respect and unity, a family should strive to build a solid foundation that will help children feel a sense



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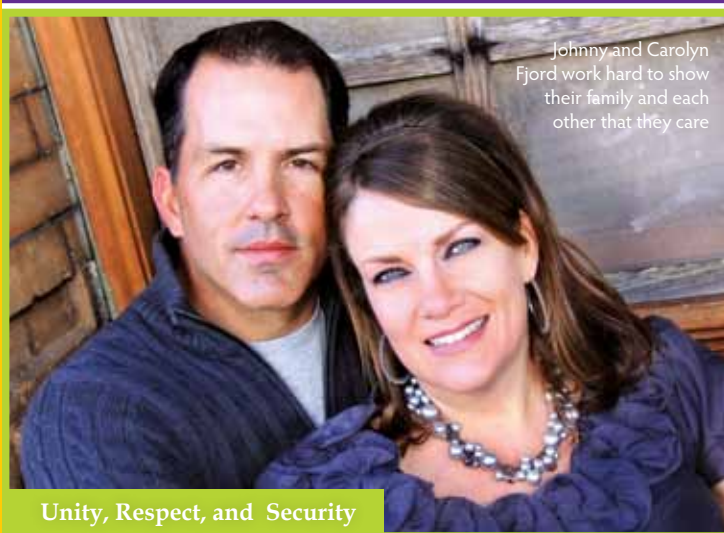
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The Harden family makes time to gather for meals at least once a week



Healthy Meal Times

Johnny and Carolyn Fjord work hard to show their family and each other that they care



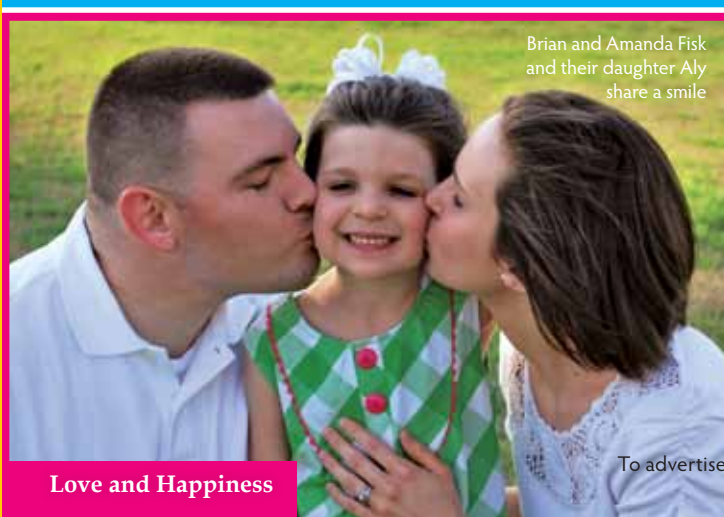
Unity, Respect, and Security

Heather Lynch-Blosse and her family enjoy a Caribbean cruise together



Enjoy Vacations Together

Brian and Amanda Fisk and their daughter Aly share a smile



Love and Happiness

of security. "When children gain security from their family, they feel like their needs will be met," says Arthur. "They understand that they can talk about their problems."

TIP
 "Help children feel like they're an integral part of the family, which often comes from slowing down and just spending time together."
 - Denise Pfister, LPC, MS

Love and Happiness

Every family should strive to create a relationship full of happiness and support. Singing, laughing, and playing daily are essential in family life. Enjoying every minute of the day with your family is important. Creating a happy environment for children will give them a happy outlook on life.

The greatest and most important characteristic of a healthy and happy family is love. Kids who grow up in a home with lots of love have good self-esteem, and it is important to keep a home filled with lots of praise. Making time to spend together as a family and fostering a loving environment can lead to a healthy family life and healthy, happy kids. **SLM**

ERICA MARTINEZ enjoys being a freelance writer and mother of two.

LORRIE CROW has been eating a lot of fruits and vegetables lately. She also plays hide and seek with her baby grandson Braden, who laughs at her silly faces.

Give Your Kids Chores and Responsibilities

Here are a few age-appropriate tasks parents can introduce in their child's daily routine to encourage responsibility.

- AGE 1** Pick up their toys when they're finished playing.
- AGE 2** Put their dirty clothes in the hamper and their shoes in the shoe basket.
- AGE 3** Set the table at mealtime and feed the pet every day.
- AGE 4** Pick out outfits and put on clothes themselves.
- AGE 5** Teach your children how to make their bed.