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Why Having Fun with Family is Important

By: Jill Savage

Messies and Cleanies

There are two kinds of mothers in this world: cleanies and messies. Your ability to have fun is going to be directly related to which category you fall in. Many times “fun” means “mess”. This is the first reality we have to come to grips with if we are going to have fun. When my friend Cathy splashes in the puddles with the kids, there is certainly going to be a mess. Wet, and maybe even muddy, clothes will have to be attended to. Showers or baths may be in order. If we don’t have the right perspective, this will feel like an interruption to our day. The right perspective, though, is that it is an essential part of our day. Having fun with our children is part of being a mom. And dealing with messes is sometimes a part of having fun.

I fall into the “cleanie” category. The prospect of messes far too often keeps me from having fun with my children. I have come a long way over the years, but I still have more to grow in this area. I’m way too practical at times when I need to be spontaneous. God has been working with me on this one – a project I know my kids are glad he is doing. I certainly don’t want to look back, after my children are gone, and say, “I wish I had loosened up. I wish I’d had more fun.” I want to do that now, while I can make the change and make a difference in my kids’ lives.

Spontaneous Fun

Sometimes spontaneous fun happens when we maximize the moments. Cathy called the other day and invited our ten-year-old daughter to her home. Her eight-year-old daughter was having a private garage sale just for a few friends. She had cleaned out her room, priced her items, and was ready to host this special event. Cathy was surprised at her daughter’s business enterprise,

but decided to make the most of the occasion. She helped Rein set up the sale on their Ping-Pong table in the basement and ordered pizza for the girls who were attending this private sale.

Opportunities for fun happen on a regular basis – as mothers, we choose to either maximize the moments or minimize the fun.

Family Fun

Family fun is an important part of building a strong family identity. When families have fun together, it builds a bond that can last a lifetime. Traditions are often developed in times of fun. Those traditions help define and individualize each family.

At the Savage household, we have a tradition of fun called “surprise rides”. This started when the older children were small, and we wanted to surprise them with a spontaneous activity. It might be ice cream at our favorite ice cream parlor, a spontaneous trip to the park, or a matinee showing of a new family movie. Whatever it is, though, the anticipation is the best part of the fun. From the time Mark and I yell, “Surprise ride,” and everyone rushes to get in the car, until the time that we arrive at our surprise destination, the excitement increases. As the kids have gotten older, they have often suggested surprise rides. Of course they’re not really a surprise that way (unless your teenager is driving you somewhere!), but the suggestion alone says, “Let’s have some fun together as a family.” It has given us common ground and shared vocabulary that lends to family fun.

Holidays also provide opportunities for fun that may develop into special traditions. Several years ago I served dinner backwards on April Fools’ Day (dessert first!). It was a fun evening that started a new tradition. Each April 1 has been dubbed “Backwards Day” ever since.

Families need to recreate together. We need to have unstructured times of togetherness. I’m not talking about watching TV together – I’m talking about a pick-up game of basketball, playing cards, or just sitting out on the porch talking and laughing together. Camping, fishing, biking, and hiking are great times of family recreation. As moms, we must take the initiative and make these things happen. We have to be available, and we have to value having fun together. As we



spend time together in both spontaneous and planned activities, we will find our family relationships growing stronger.

Birthday Fun

The night before a birthday is spent preparing for a special breakfast. After the birthday person goes to bed, the table is set with birthday plates, cups, and napkins. The family presents are placed in the center of the table. Later, we quietly slip into their room and hang balloons and streamers. When the birthday girl or boy awakes in the morning, the room reflects his or her special day. As we move downstairs to the breakfast table, the best part of the celebration takes place: cake and ice cream for breakfast! Yes, I know it flunks all the tests for a healthy breakfast, but it stands the test of time for building family fun. It is certainly a favorite activity of our family, and with six people in our family it means six times a year we eat cake and ice cream for breakfast!

Our birthday celebrations have become treasured traditions for our family, special memories that Mark and I realize can only be enjoyed when the children are home. We only have a short season to fully enjoy these traditions and times of fun, for far too soon our children will be grown and creating traditions of their own.

