Connecting with your Child
By: Samantha Crist

Some days go by in a blur, and you struggle to remember what you did with all of your time. Adults can become stressed and overwhelmed with responsibilities throughout the day and forget that the smallest people in their families often need the most attention, but what can we do to connect with children, and why is this so important anyway? Connections on the outside, with other people, build neural connections within children’s brains. We can connect with our children, and others in our lives, by taking time to be present in a situation creating social bonding moments and the sharing of love.

Imagine you’re in the shoes of your toddler, taking in the world around you. Everything is bigger than you, louder than you, and scary. Who are you going to look for to feel safety and help you regulate your emotions? You are going to seek safety from the adults in your life, and rely on them to help you understand the world around you. Adults create this sense of safety and understanding through caring connections with children, leading to the building of strong relationships. Adults who are able to foster connections with others will support children to develop into self-confident individuals who are able to create relationships of their own and understand the importance of self-regulation. They will also create a relationship with their children that is more cooperative, and full of energy.

Knowing why connections are important is the first step in supporting children, but knowing how to connect with them is the most important thing. Think about a time when you felt connected to someone. What did it look like? Were you looking at that person? Did you have some kind of physical touch that fueled the connection? Where you present in the moment and being playful? A true connecting experience with another person will have these factors built in, and you will be creating a bond with that person. Every time someone experiences one of these moments their brain tells them that they are safe and loved by the other person. This is the exact thing that children are seeking as they experience the world around them, and is why creating connections with your child is crucial to positive growth and development.
Some great ways to create connecting moments with your child is through fun games or activities that can take less than five minutes out of your day. Make yourself and your loved ones a commitment: take time out of each and every day to truly connect. Play pat-a-cake or peek-a-boo with your young child, check in with your older children by playing a game – make cards with questions on them to find out how their day went or what is happening in their lives, be present for your significant other as they discuss their struggles or successes. Connect as a family by doing an I Love You Ritual, interactions and games that you can play with your children to connect, created by Dr. Becky Bailey founder of the self-regulation program of Conscious Discipline®. Taking this time out of your day will cement the bond that holds your relationships together, it will create a sense of safety in the relationships that are built, and most importantly, it will allow your children to have the ability to connect with others as they grow.

We understand why connections are important, what connections can look like, and I have given you examples of how to connect with people, but I am not going to tell anyone that connecting with children, or others in your life, is always easy. It can be hard at times and it can be easy at times, but no matter what, it will have a positive impact on both you and the person you are connecting with and will be worth it! Put in the effort even if you have a busy life or feel like you are barely making it, it will not only build the relationship with your children, but it will make you feel better. We all can use a little extra playfulness and joy in our lives. Wishing you well!