

# The Down To Earth DaD™

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The Monthly Newsletter for Parents, Schools, and Programs

*Dedicated to providing parents with tools to build stronger bonds with their kids.*

## Quantity Time

**'Being Together is the Whole Thing...'**

By Patrick Mitchell

"...Who wants to go to the store?" I call out to my kids in the living room. My son takes me up on the offer with this qualification: "Only if I can have a treat!" No deal on the treats, I tell him, but he can push the shopping cart. He agrees to come along. Nothing special is planned; I'm just going after some milk and bread. But then, spending quantity time together isn't always Disneyland.

**"The real memories, and the real information exchange comes from when you're driving to soccer practice... or doing things that are mundane. It doesn't come from, 'Gee, lets go fishing on Sunday.'"**

— Alan Kazdin, Ph.D., Chairman of the Psychology Department at Yale University and Director of the Child Conduct Clinic in New Haven, Connecticut, U.S.A.

Parents who think they're strengthening their relationship with their kids by spending short bursts of so-called "quality time" with them might be shortchanging the relationship if they forget quantity time along the way, says Alan Kazdin, Ph.D., chairman of the psychology department at Yale University and director of the Child Conduct Clinic in New Haven, Connecticut.

Quality time served without the meat and potatoes of *quantity* time is just a snack, he suggests. Going to the store together might not

be an over-the-top "quality" experience every time, it's one of many opportunities for parents to log some hours with their kids, over time, and that pays off in the long run.

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The Down To Earth Dad monthly newsletter, circulated to schools, programs, and parents for over 10 years, inspires, informs, and entertains with parent-involvement information gleaned from primary-source (often exclusive) interviews with leading researchers, child development experts, MDs, university professors, brain-development specialists, and authors. The newsletter shares insights on increasing "significant male" involvement at school and home, and in communities, for the sake of children's enhanced cognitive, social, and emotional development. To learn about other Down To Earth Dad® services, tips, and tools -- including on-site staff trainings and parent-involvement events, visit [www.DownToEarthDad.org](http://www.DownToEarthDad.org).

If you've ever enrolled a child in preschool or kindergarten soccer, then you know that watching their games can be better entertainment than any movie, play, or comedy sketch. It's a riot!

Introducing the game of soccer, teaching basic skills, and modeling sportsmanship is about all a good coach can reasonably hope to accomplish at that age. Most parents understand this, and they're happy to watch their kids chase the ball and fall over their teammates (and the opposing team's players, too) as they learn the game.

So, when a parent screamed to her son, "Ryan, stop falling down! Get up!" during a recent game, other *(Continued on Page 2)*

## Quantity Time

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"Quantity leads to quality. The key is logging the time required to get to the good stuff," Kazdin told THE DOWN TO EARTH DAD. He explains by way of analogy: "Let's say I like baseball. I have a busy schedule and I don't have time for a whole baseball game, but I wouldn't mind seeing one really terrific inning. But how can I know which inning that will be? It's impossible to know in advance when the good moments are going to occur," Dr. Kazdin said. "You've got to sit through it all. Quantity time is a prerequisite to allow the quality time to come out. It's a precondition. You can't just pluck it (quality time) out."

## Quantity + Quantity + Quantity = Quality

If your child attends preschool, you're probably going to be ready to interact with them when they get home (or on the way home, talking in the car when you pick them up). "If you want to have quality time with your child, be there when your child comes home from school," Kazdin said. In other words, log the *quantity* time first, and the quality will follow. He offers this familiar scenario: "Your child comes home from school, and you say, 'How was school today?' The child responds, 'fine.' There's not much real interaction here yet," Kazdin notes. It's like pulling teeth to get information, and nothing significant happens yet," Kazdin said, adding wryly, "The technical word for that in psychology is 'normal'."

"Later, after your child has a snack, you're both hanging around, and maybe you are asking a few genuine parental questions, like, 'What did you do in class today?' Now you're starting to get into the quality time stuff, he notes. Maybe you give an opinion; maybe you say, 'Boy, when I was your age that same thing happened to me.' Tell your children about your mother and father. Tell them about your background. Give them a lesson that doesn't tell them what to do, but what other people in your family did," Kazdin says. "You don't want your babysitter or a childcare provider doing that. *You* should be doing it."

Log the hours with your preschool child, and good things will happen, according to Kazdin. "The real memories and the real information exchange comes from when you're driving to soccer practice, when you're hanging around waiting in a doctor's office, and when you're doing all the things that are mundane. It doesn't come from, 'Gee, let's go fishing on Sunday.' That's terrific, and it might even be remembered more, but that's

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## Zany Soccer Parents

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parents were startled. Her shout was out of place at a game where all the kids—not just her child—were falling down.

But I know why she yelled: she thought her son's performance was a reflection on herself as a parent. I did that myself back when my oldest son was seven years old. I felt that all eyes were on my child, and his performance was a reflection on me, personally. I wasn't smart about all the things I said in the heat of the moment, at public events like soccer games. But I'm much more mellow about such things as a parent the second time around.

I enjoy the funny moments that occur when children chase the soccer ball, glance at their parents, and fall down occasionally. I holler "*Good effort!*" if I shout out anything at all, these days.

I once heard an older clergyman explain that, in his experience interacting with thousands of families, the parents who seem to over-react to their kids in public, going a little too far with their discipline, do so because they're embarrassed. This embarrassment, he said, causes some parents to say and do things they probably wouldn't if nobody was watching.

Surely, falling down while trying to stop an opponent from kicking a ball—when both you and your opponent are five or six years old—doesn't warrant getting yelled at; after all, coordination and sports agility aren't necessarily the hallmarks of preschool and kindergarten kids.

I hope you get the chance to introduce your kids to the game of soccer if you haven't already.

And if, by the way, you think they're the ones who'll have all the fun, think again because it's a riot watching from the sidelines!



not where the impact comes from," says Kazdin.

## Finding the Time

It's not always easy logging those hours of *quantity* time, but it can be done, even if you don't see your kids as often as you'd like. The key is maximizing your time with your kids. Sam Osherson, Chairman of the Psychology Faculty at the Fielding Institute in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and author of several critically acclaimed books on fatherhood, notes that dads of preschoolers face many time constraints, though none of them are insurmountable.

"If you are a stay-at-home father, if you're a divorced father, or if you're a father who travels, each of those situations have different kinds of dilemmas attached to them that fathers need to find solutions for," Osherson told THE DOWN TO EARTH DAD.

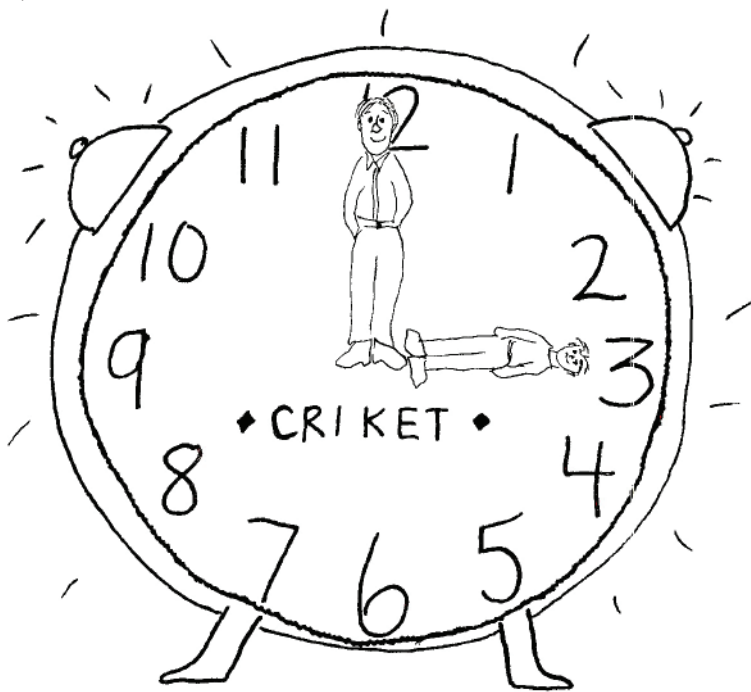
And some of those solutions can be found in his book, *The Hidden Wisdom of Parents*, a compilation of stories written by parents about the dilemmas and solutions they have experienced, including making more time for their children out of the limited time they have. Kids need dads in their lives. They get a sense of their own value from their fathers, says Osherson. "The bottom line is that the child needs to feel that he or she is known by their father, and is valued by their father. The trick for the father is to make sure that he really feels that he knows the child, and that the child feels known by the father."

How do you know when you're getting it right? "If a father feels like he's having fun, the kid is too, generally speaking," Osherson said.

## Investing in the Future

The way parents learn to interact with their children in the school years paves the way for better communication later on. "It's (quantity time) an investment for crises later. Parents are often concerned that the child doesn't come to them in a time of crisis. Well, if you weren't there very much during the times when things were going fine, then quality time by itself definitely isn't going to do that," Kazdin said. "You lose a lot of the relationship when you don't give them the quantity time. There will be more topics that in normal adolescence the child will not talk to you about. When there's a real crisis and need for advice, the child is willing to rely on his or her peers and his or her judgment, rather than your judgment," he said.

"Being together is the whole thing," Kazdin says. "Occasional hugs are fine, but they are no substitute for being there with your kids." Parents who spend lots of time with their preschool children—a great *quantity* of time—give their children "a whole set of physical and psychological mechanisms to negotiate the world for the rest of their lives. They really gain the benefits of knowing the requirements for living, and that's not how to bake a cake, it's how to handle that stress at school. A little quality time is better than no time at all. But, says Kazdin, "It's no substitute for being around." Parents just have to log those hours.



## Father and Family Activities

If you'd looked into a crystal ball when I was 20 and told me, "There will come a day when you will wander your neighborhood counting cats with small children," I'd have said your crystal ball was defective. And yet, here I am several years later, living a cat-counting reality with my preschool daughter and son.

The three of us started hiking around the neighborhood looking for, but never finding deer. Cats were much more plentiful. They were easily spotted inside garages, on doorsteps, and at the edges of houses. So, we counted them.

This month I'm asking you to embark upon a cat-counting adventure of your own (or something similar) with your kids. It really seems to be a good father-and-child experience, perhaps because it contains the elements of an organized activity with a purpose, and yet is carried off rather casually. Forming father-child traditions are cool, even if they are traditions that can only happen a couple nights a week or so.

### Getting Started...

Plan to head out the door together for a 10-minute stroll, and set the time limit in advance. That way you won't end up counting cats a mile from home! Kick things off by telling your child to look in yards, driveways, and to scout window sills for the felines. The cats are out there, trust me. My challenge to you is to get out there and count cats! Or, if you live in a relatively forested area, I suppose you might have some luck counting deer instead. But whatever you do, the point here is...to do it together!

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## The Down To Earth Dad®

*The Down To Earth Dad* Monthly Newsletter  
for Parents, Programs, and Schools

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## Dad's Delicatessen



### Chicken Ginger

This month's recipe, Chicken Ginger, comes to THE DOWN TO EARTH DAD newsletter from Richard Ogilvy, who lives in Oslo, Norway with his seven-year-old daughter, Sara. This chicken-and-rice dish is easy to prepare, takes only 15 minutes to cook and serve, and is quite cheap, and filling, says Richard, and kids love it. This recipe is not for waight-watchers, though, he says, but boy is it tasty!

#### Ingredients:

½	Pre-cooked chicken
½	Green bell pepper, sliced
½	Red bell pepper, sliced
6 or 7	Mushrooms, sliced
1 cup	Sour cream
1 tsp.	Ground ginger
1/2	Lemon
2 cups	Rice

Cut the cooked chicken into small pieces. Cook rice in covered pan with salt and butter. Put frying pan on medium heat with olive oil. Put the chicken bits in a frying pan, sprinkle with ginger and the juice of half a lemon (to taste). Stir. After 5 minutes of frying, add pepper pieces. Stir. Cook 2 or 3 minutes. Add mushrooms. Simmer. Cook 2 or 3 minutes. Add sour cream. Simmer on low. Pour something cold to drink, and call in the kids!