Life is busy. Then you have children. Life gets busier. Then you plan what is best for your children. Sometimes life is so busy with work, activities and friends that the best plans you have for family time get squeezed out. We must be intentional to make sure our time with our children stay in the schedule.

Research shows that parents working outside the home are spending less and less face-to-face time with each child. This message is not intended to be a guilt trip for working parents. The reality is, there are still 24 hours in a day and most parents, working outside the home or not, struggle to get everything done. It is important that all parents look at their schedules to determine how much face-to-face time is available for interaction with each child. If there is not enough time to provide a good relationship and communication time with your children, take the steps necessary to change your schedule or your child’s schedule.

From birth, talking throughout the changing of the diaper is a must. Some new parents say they feel funny talking and admit they are not sure what to say. Just talk about the weather, or the colors of the nursery, or tell a story of your childhood. What you say does not matter as much as just the conversation with your infant.

Reading books is also important. Even if the infant wants to chew the corner of the board book, as you say words and point, the brain connections are being made. You are having fun and helping your little one learn.
Be intentional to spend at least nine minutes a day face-to-face with each child. Research shows that children need nine meaningful touches every day to feel connected.

There are three primary times to spend three minutes with each child. The first is 3 minutes after children wake up and see you. Make that positive even if you do not have a “morning” child. Secondly, the three minutes after you come home from work or your child comes home from school for the day; spend a few minutes to see how their day went. And finally, the last three minutes of the day is before they go to bed.

Most of us have a bedtime ritual that lasts longer than three minutes with the child. However, the important three minutes is the actual talking with the child.

The consequences for not spending a lot of time with your children are obvious to most. We want our children to feel connected to the family and we want to feel connected to them.

Face to face time helps with oral language and vocabulary also. And, both are connected to reading comprehension. Spend a minimum of nine minutes (or more) a day with each child and enrich your life and theirs too.

The encouragement to have parents be more intentional about time with children is part of a Children’s Trust Fund/MU Extension program called Strong Parents, Stable Children. Check out more resources at ctf4kids.org. Or call Lisa Wallace at the Henry County MU Extension office at 660-885-5556 or email wallacel@missouri.edu.