

TIME TOGETHER, TIME APART

IT'S TRUE FOR PARTNERS TOO...

This article focuses on your relationship with your kids but, just to be clear, adults have different closeness/distance needs too. You and your partner/friends may very well have different closeness/distance needs. Figuring out the right balance of togetherness/apartness is often a rewarding puzzle to solve in close relationships. When you get it right it feels great! When your rhythm is off it can lead to struggles.

CLOSENESS AND DISTANCE

The shutdown that we're all living through has made for an awful lot of family together time. You may have noticed that there have been times you've been quite happy to be around your family and other times that you've felt a strong need for some time away from other people. You may also have noticed that your partner and your kids have gone through similar cycles of coming together and moving apart. This closeness/distance cycle can be thought of kind of like a spring. If you pull a spring too far out it really wants to pull back in and if you squeeze it tight it wants to expand. All of us have a rhythm of needing connection until the need is fulfilled, followed by needing to pull away for some space to be alone.

We're All Different

Just like springs have different tensions, people have different needs for togetherness and distance. Some people do best with lots of time together and other people do best with more time apart. When our rhythm is in sync with the rhythm of others we care about, everyone feels comfortable. But it's common for one person to have a higher need for togetherness than another.

Missing Being Apart

Our daily school/work routines naturally gave us time away from each other. Being apart during the day gave us an opportunity to miss each other and look forward to coming back together again at the end of the day. But what happens during a pandemic when you're all shut in together most of the time? Many of us don't have the opportunity for natural separations during the day.

Our daily existence requires both closeness and distance, the wholeness of self, the wholeness of intimacy.

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You may well ask... "What can I do when I need time away from my family?"

YOU'RE THE PARENT BUT YOU CAN STILL GET WHAT YOU NEED

Obviously, as the adult in the relationship, you naturally have to give more of your time than you get back, but that doesn't mean that you can never find ways to get the space you need. In fact, doing this allows you to have more energy to give your kids later on.



THINGS TO TRY IF YOUR KIDS WANT YOU CLOSE BUT YOU NEED TO BE ALONE:

Younger kids:

1. Build it into their routine – “While you have your Lego time, I’m going to have my rest time.”
2. Set a timer so they know how long you’ll be away from them (i.e. visual timer or a playlist of songs)
3. Give them an item of yours, ‘charged’ with hugs that they can hold or wear while apart (i.e. bracelet, hoodie, blanket, etc.)

All kids:

1. ‘Fill them up’ – prior to taking alone time try to spend time with them before you leave them doing something that you both enjoy – reading a book, watching some funny videos, going for a walk, etc.
2. Draw their attention to your next connection – “After I’ve had my [quiet time, reading time, alone time, etc.] we are going to... (bake, make a craft, go for a walk, play a game, etc.) together.
3. Have a visual indication of when you’re available and when you’re not—It can be hard during times when we’re working at home for kids to know when we can be interrupted and we need to be left alone. Have a lamp you turn on when you can’t be disturbed, a sign you flip—any kind of visual indicator will do.
4. Arrange a time when someone they feel close to can have a check in time with them—phone conversation/zoom etc. and give them “special alone time” with the person they love.
5. Tag team as parents—if you have a partner that’s able to be engaged with your kids tag team—decide together who gets first break and then switch (if both of you are feeling the need for alone time)

WHAT CAN YOU DO IF YOUR CHILD WANTS MORE ALONE TIME THAN YOU DO?

- 1) Make sure they get what they need not just what they say they want. Some kids think they need more alone time than really do. As the parent it's your job to decide how to balance closeness and distance with your kids.
- 2) Negotiate time together with older children. "Let's watch a movie tonight. I'm thinking we'll start at 7. You'd rather start at 8? 8 it is."
- 3) Make sure that the pull you're feeling to be together is really what your child needs and not just what you want. Sometimes just taking a minute to think about whether this is what you need, what they need, or what you both need, can be helpful.

THINGS TO WATCH FOR...

It's important to note that, while the feeling of wanting to be more connected to our kids might be a sign that we have different closeness/distance cycles than our child, there are times when the feeling of distance may mean we've fallen out of right relationship with our kids. If your child:

- rarely seeks you out,
- is always in their room
- almost always seems more connected to other kids than they are to you
- and rarely wants to share themselves with you

there might be relationship issues to consider beyond differing closeness/distance cycles.

