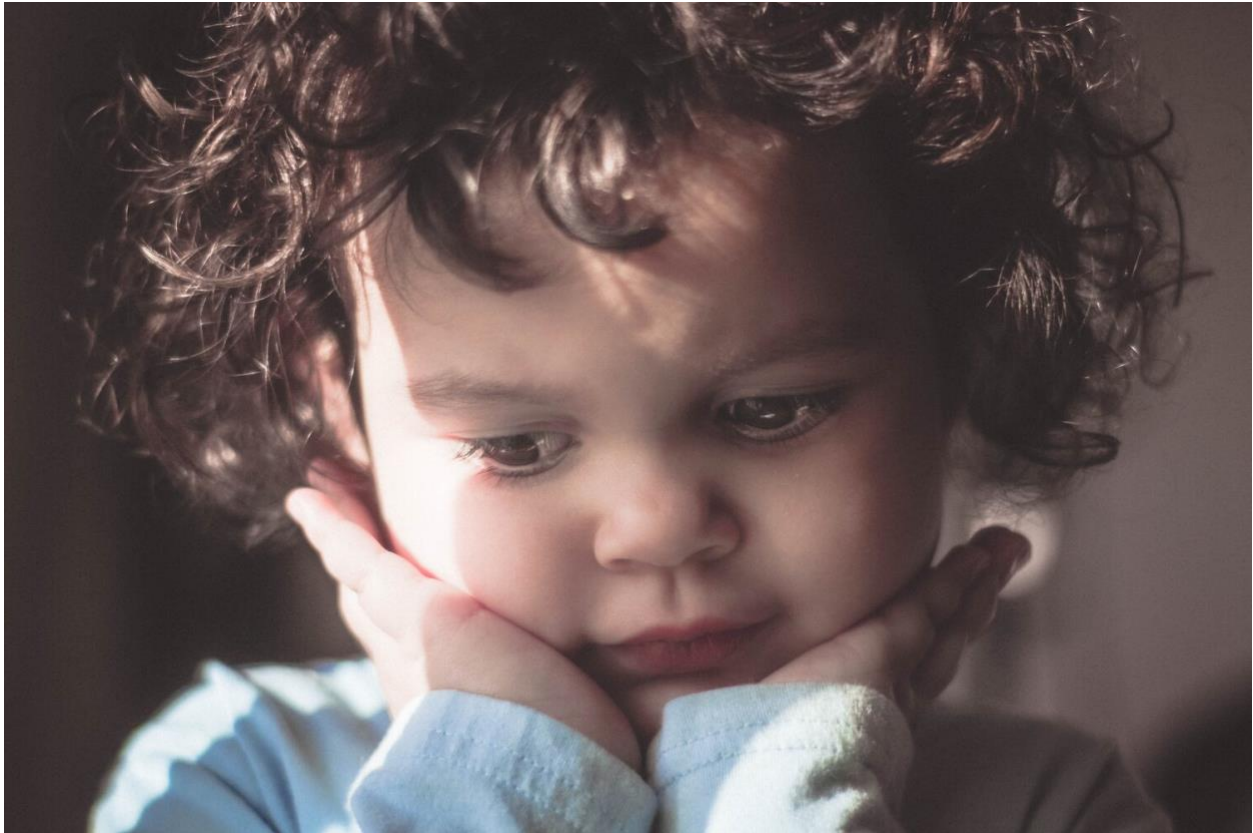


The Present Parent



Life that lives itself.

Questions for Timothy Dukes, PhD.

In my work, I've often counseled working parents to make more conscious choices about their time use, career choices, and work-family boundaries. So much of your book is about making conscious choices to be present with our children. Can you elaborate on why this is so important?

He looks for me and I recognize that I am needed. She is alone and feeling isolated, someone needs to know the combination that will open the door and release her from her solitude. A parent's presence is the primary way that a child learns to navigate the complexity of life. It is not so much that we teach them as it is that they teach us what is



required. We then calibrate our attention, our behavior, our mood to join them exactly where they are. This level of presence establishes a pattern of engagement that becomes an internalized map for how to meet life's challenges and opportunities.

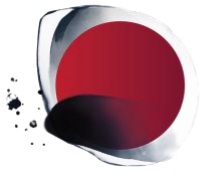
Balancing the parenting of our children while addressing our own wants and needs, our work responsibilities, the need to continually develop our careers, and succeed in our jobs is a constant challenge. In the same way we show up for our children, we also must show up for ourselves. We need to make choices that increase our capacity to hold one, while we engage with the other. This balancing act, this context of presence, will ensure as much as humanly possible that we don't allow one to defeat the other.

I've heard the terms "quality time" and "quantity time" before, but before reading your book, had not considered the importance of "incidental time." Can you briefly explain what you mean by incidental time and why it is so important for parents?

I am very fond of the reality of incidental time. I might define it as those moment that are not planned, they arise unexpectedly, and invite us into our child's world or them into ours. Incidental is defined as "falling upon" or "happening to." Incidental time fosters curiosity, serendipity, play, frolicking, resulting in a "felt-sense of knowing" by both the parent and the child. This "felt-sense" establishes the baseline of fundamental connection. Nothing is planned, duration is a secondary concern, and now in this moment, something unfolds between us that is abiding. Incidental time holds context for life as is. Life that lives itself and in which, if we are present, we participate.

I love your insight that "support is defined by the receiver, not the giver." Can you explain what you mean by this, and what this means for the mindset we should have as parents?

As a child, I am supported by you, my parent, when you wrap yourself around my immediate concerns. You do not ask of me, something I cannot deliver. Even if you mean well, if you do, I may reject you because I may not know how to get to where you want me



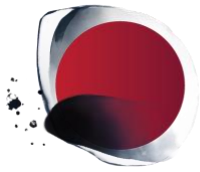
to be. Please come to me, connect with me as I am and together, we can head in the direction of your support. Remember, we do not live in the same world but separate and connected worlds. When I need your support, it may mean that our implicit connection has been lost. First re-establish our connection, come to me with your help and together we move into the future.

Like most kids, my son doesn't have a great sense of time and gets frustrated when we tell him it's time to stop one thing and start another (like stopping play time to take a shower, etc.). I particularly liked your advice on gently coaxing kids along when you need them to transition. Can you discuss this further?

I think most issues for our children arise when they are in transition. Maybe some guidelines for helping them make transitions is helpful. Make transitions predictable: tell your child ahead of time, maybe 15-30 minutes or so before you want them to leave one activity and approach another. This helps them to develop the capacity to both stay with the activity they are currently involved in but also to manage the feelings and expectations that soon they will have to stop playing ball and come inside for a bath.

Make sure you are the right size for the situation. Go to your child, stoop down to their level, and physically and gently touch them to ensure that you have their attention. Be willing to negotiate. If 15 minutes is not enough, then how much time do they need?

When we interrupt our children's play, it is no different than if someone interrupts us when we are deeply engaged. They are in a state of consciousness that we are asking them to shift. At any age, this will be met with resistance. However, the resistance is usually just on the threshold between this activity and that next thing we are asking of them. We can manage their resistance, by not concretizing it into an "issue," a "behavior problem." We can manage their resistance, by not creating and then participating in a struggle... perhaps of our own making.



That reminds me, an ask is met with one response. A demand another. Both are necessary, but parenting is a process, not an event.

Finally, we working dads often have significant work responsibilities that bleed into non-work or family time. What specific advice do you have for us?

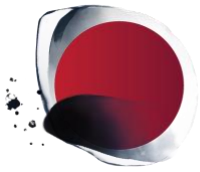
The specific advice I have for busy working dads or any parent who juggles work responsibilities and non-work or family time: tell the truth. We all know that our work provides an opportunity to settle into a flow of thinking and behavior that much of the time we have difficulty leaving. If you tell the truth to yourself about your experience, you may find that changing from work to family is, in fact, difficult. Actually, this shift is not much different for our children, when we ask them to make a transition.

Recognizing there is difficulty in making the shift from one part of our life to the other part is often a first step in opening to a sense of ease. These transitions are challenging; but the truth is, we have an infinite capacity for life if we can be present. We have to be willing to hold one side while we are open to the complexity and demand for energy and attention that the other requires. We now hold both in a field of presence so that one does not conflict with the other. If we are present for our family life while attempting to attend to our professional demands we hold both sides in conflict. Who really wins, if this is the case? Are we willing to have our personal lives diminished by someone or something that has stolen our lost parenting opportunities – one email or call at a time?

Reference:

Dukes, Timothy. (2017). The Present Parent Handbook: 26 simple tools to discover that this moment, this action, this thought, this feeling is exactly why I am here. Familius, LLC.

Image courtesy of: [Ricky Turner](#) [@imrickyturner](#)



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