

## **Adapting the 5-P Relay for Inviting Quality Family Time**

Monica A. Briscall  
*Peel Board of Education*  
*Ontario, Canada*

The invitational approach encourages a personal and professional perspective on healthy living (Purkey & Novak, 1984). In this paper, I present how the invitational view was applied to transform a part of my personal life by inviting quality family time for beneficial growth and development. By applying the invitational approach to this area of living, I hoped that we would transform our family time from a schedule in which much energy and time was wasted to a plan full of enjoyment and optimal experiences (Csikszentmihalyi 1990).

To begin the process of inviting family time it was important for my husband and me to review how we had been handling family time by assessing our shortcomings and negative habits. We concluded that the family spent too much time in front of the television, because during the long winter months we were indoors a great deal with nothing else to do.

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) stated that, "free time...is unstructured, and requires much greater effort to be shaped into something that can be enjoyed" (p. 162). We had not been structuring our family time except for certain weekend activities and as a result, we had fallen into a very inactive and dull routine for our family time during the week and for part of the weekend. Since I initiated the process, I undertook the task of discovering how we could go about structuring our family time

and what aspects and factors we should consider to ensure an enjoyable outcome for my husband, our year-old son, and myself.

## **Adapting the 5-P Relay**

After a review of the literature on family time and enjoyment, I searched for a framework in which to continue the process of inviting quality family time. I employed a modified version of Purkey's (1993) 5-P Relay approach to creating an inviting school. Since I was applying this approach in my personal life and not to school life, I substituted Quality Family Time for the 5-P's in Purkey's approach: People, Places, Policies, Programs, and Processes, and applied the five relay tasks under the headings: Goals, Procedures, Obstacles, Overcoming Obstacles, and Evaluation. Instead of a relay, these five tasks were planned over two weeks in which my husband and I worked on each assignment together.

Throughout this process we carefully considered how this affected our year old son who was too young to contribute at this time. This process led us to an action plan where we met as a family and held regular family meetings to ensure that we accomplished our goals. Following is an outline of how we applied this approach to our unique situation with a detailed reference about why and how we set specific goals for transforming our family time.

## **Goals and Procedures**

The first task involved listing goals for inviting quality family time and listing specific procedures for accomplishing these goals. We immediately ran into difficulties because we had too many goals and we knew that if we made this part too difficult we would be setting ourselves up for failure. So, we limited it to five important and attainable goals that we could modify along the way. New goals could be added at a later date. The five goals we listed were to:

1. Limit television viewing time and to become active during television viewing time.
2. Work on developing family closeness or intimacy.
3. Be actively involved in Dylan's (our son's) play-time with Dylan leading the way.
4. Designate one evening a week as Family Games' Night.
5. Pursue a new family activity at least once a month.

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) stated that, "the best moments [of our lives] usually occur when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile" (p. 3). Yet, television viewing is very passive and requires little effort. That is why we found it so boring and dull. Thus, we limited our television viewing time to one hour a night with the exception of my husband who could watch one or two sporting events a week such as a hockey game. In addition, we designated one evening a week as the "No television viewing night." We also considered the idea of making the time that we watched television less passive by talking about the events occurring on the screen with each other, or by talking at the television itself, thereby taking greater control over the impact that television viewing had on our lives.

Our son was just beginning to show an interest in the television, so we limited his television watching to ten or fifteen minute intervals a couple of times a week. This time was during a specific children's show in which there was much singing and action, and Dylan enjoyed moving along with the characters. We encouraged him to be an active and selective viewer from the start. The procedure for accomplishing this goal was to turn the television off, and the implementation of the other four goals helped to fill the silent void and ease the temptation to turn the television back on. Although it was easy for us to limit our viewing time, we did find it difficult to pinpoint one evening as the "no television night" because of the sports events. Hence, we decided to keep it open to one evening a week, and if we had not chosen a night by Saturday night, then it was Saturday night.

The second goal involved working at keeping the family close. Although we are a very affectionate and loving family, it was important

to us to continue to work at keeping the family close and intimate at all levels. Benton (1983) has identified a number of ways that have helped families keep close. These include ideas such as, "Holding an honor night for a particular member of the family..., Seeking solutions rather than problems..., Experiencing the joy of creating together..." (p. 42), "Holding regular family councils...." (p. 70), "Telling a story 'just for you'" (p. 81), and "Build[ing] family traditions" (p.111). We incorporated this element of "keeping the family close" into our family meetings, which we held Sunday mornings after breakfast.

Each week we reviewed any activities in which we had participated to help keep family closeness. After the first two weeks, it became apparent that we needed to do more discussing on the issue and we needed to plan the activities for the upcoming week instead of just waiting or expecting them to happen.

The third goal involved structuring quality family time for our son. To accomplish this goal we read about the development of young children. We based our initial discussions on two books written by David Elkind: *Miseducation: Preschoolers at Risk* (1987) and *The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast Too Soon* (1988). The premise of both of these books is the idea that "education is not a race" (Elkind, 1987, p. 83). Instead, it is important to include play in a child's educational development because as Elkind (1987) noted, "... if we make ample provisions for children to engage in a variety of play activities without making them into something they are not or evaluating the children's productions, we contribute to their sense of competence" (p. 157). He warned parents of the negative consequences of pressuring children to grow up too fast through activities such as early reading programs (Elkind, 1988).

Consequently, we proposed to spend more time playing with Dylan during the evening. However, what we did was based on his interests and his attention span, not ours. For example, when he went to the piano and banged on the keys, we engaged in a family sing-a-long, or when he became totally engaged in an activity by himself, we provided him with time and space to play, explore and discover on his own. This did not mean that we neglected his learning in new and varied areas, such as providing him with ample books to browse when he showed an

interest. Still, these activities were always based on the philosophy of, "...responding appropriately to [Dylan's] demands for information" (Elkind, 1987, p. 185), and responding appropriately to his developmental stage and steering away from early academic programs. Through the procedure of reading, discussing and implementing, we provided quality family time for our son.

The purpose of the fourth goal, which involved the idea of having a games' night was to provide an activity when we could have fun together. Pearsall (1990) discussed the importance of learning to be happy together and laughing together. He stated, "Laugh, and your family will laugh with you. Cry, and your family will cry with you. Intentionally bringing humor to the family system helps to provide a balance between the tears of laughter and sorrow that run through our life" (Pearsall, 1990, p. 279).

Although we tried to do this on a daily basis, we wanted to broaden this experience. The games' night was something my husband and I could partake in after our son went to bed. This provided us with an alternative to watching television. We started the process with board games and computer games and then expanded it to include new games.

The final goal involved exploring new activities for the family. It included activities such as painting a mural together, trying out a new restaurant or new cuisine, finding the best creative playground in our part of the city, and reading a book together. Often when children are young, one parent reads to the child; but we did this as a threesome. All of these activities were designed to promote our family's creativity; another idea espoused by Pearsall (1990).

This goal as well as the others encourages the idea of lifelong learning. Lifelong learning is an idea emphasized in two publications by the Ministry of Supply and Services of Canada (1991): "The Prosperity Initiative," and "Learning Well ... Living Well." These documents examined "some of the challenges facing our economy... and ... questions about our learning system" (p.3).

The idea of extending learning beyond the classroom or schools was a major focus. Not only were we improving our family time, but we were replicating what the Canadian studies had found was needed for our society. We were expanding our growth beyond the personal level by sharing our experiences with other families, and because my husband and I are both teachers we were able to share these experiences with our students.

## **Obstacles**

The second task involved studying the goals and procedures, and listing the obstacles that might prevent these goals from being accomplished. The obstacles that we listed included:

1. Starting enthusiastically but quickly losing interest before new habits were embodied.
2. Coming home from work tired and lacking the energy to implement our goals.
3. When times were stressed, resorting to old habits such as television viewing.
4. Disagreeing over the goals to be set and how and why they should be accomplished.
5. Distractions such as going out to shovel the snow before our family meetings on Sunday mornings, unexpected company, or other time commitments.

Another task involved listing ways to overcome these obstacles. To overcome the first obstacle we set specific time frames over six months to encourage us to continue the process of inviting quality family time. These time frames were reset every six months for as long as they were needed. This was also a good time to review our goals and set new challenges to help keep up our interest.

The second obstacle involved being too tired, but we discovered that we could overcome this obstacle by allowing each family member some quiet time during the evening to allow us to recharge battery in any way we saw fit. For myself, it included some Yoga exercises such as deep breathing and stretching.

To overcome the third obstacle, it was important that we not be too hard on each other during stressful times and to allow for certain lapses, while ensuring a return to our goals once the stress level decreased. This return was initiated by a celebration dinner of surviving the stressful period and continuing the process of accomplishing our goals. When we found that the stress lingered on, it was time to review our lives and see how we could reduce the stress first.

Overcoming the fourth obstacle of disagreement about our goals, and how and when we should accomplish them, involved communication: listening to each other and working through these conflicts until we resolved them. The key was not to let the conflicts dictate the outcome of our family meetings, but use them as learning experiences. At times we either had to do more reading on the conflict issue or we set the conflict issue aside and got on with the process. In this way we decided to deal with the conflict at a later date. A conflict could stall our plans, but could not halt the process of inviting quality family time.

The fifth obstacle involved distractions, but as we became involved in the process we noticed our commitment deepen. Therefore, it became harder for the distractions to interfere with our work on improving our family time. We reviewed our time commitments daily to ensure that we allowed a little time each day to work on this issue. When one member of the family was constantly distracted, we reviewed the reasons behind such avoidance, and worked towards helping that family member feel more comfortable with the process.

## **Evaluation**

Another task involved listing ways to evaluate whether we had achieved each goal. Rather than listing specific criteria for evaluating each goal outcome, we used Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) seven elements of enjoyment for the basis of our evaluation. These elements included:

1. A challenging activity that requires skills
2. A merging of action and awareness
3. Clear goals and feedback

4. Concentration on the task at hand
5. The paradox of control
6. The loss of self-consciousness
7. The transformation of time (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 49-67).

Since the purpose for transforming our family time was to increase our enjoyment and enhance our experiences together, we felt that the best way to evaluate our goals would be to review these seven elements of enjoyment at our weekly family meetings. By doing so, we would see if anyone had experienced any of these elements during the activities to transform our family time. Initially this was a simple process, but it became more complicated as we tried to attain our goals while experiencing all seven elements of enjoyment in each activity. We felt that it was important not to evaluate during our activities because then we would be unable to become totally immersed in our activity. We did, however, reflect on the experiences at any time during the process. When we found that we had not experienced greater joy and togetherness during a week, we reviewed the goals as well as the activities and made adjustments accordingly.

The final step in this adaptation of the 5-P Replay involved an action plan in which we set time-lines and assigned responsibilities. Since our son was only a year old when we began, these tasks rested on my husband's and my shoulders. Because I initiated the process, I undertook most of the readings and responsibility for setting the plan, transforming our family time, and implementing it, although my husband contributed to various discussions during this process. The responsibility was shared more evenly between the two of us once the family was fully engaged in the process.

## **Conclusion**

We began experiencing greater enjoyment as a family unit as soon as we started the process. In part, this was because we had to spend more time together discussing related issues and working on implementing the plan. This encouraged us to delve into the area even deeper, which in turn gave us a sense of accomplishment and helped us to transform our family time by increasing worthwhile and optimal experiences. Although there were down periods, it became more difficult to slip into old unproductive habits because the quality of our family time had improved, and we were



no longer willing to settle for family time in which energy and time were wasted.

Purkey's (1993) 5-P Relay approach gave us a vehicle not only for starting but also for continuing the process. It could be modified along the way and included time-frames that helped us stay on task until new habits were embodied by the family and the process became a regular part of our family time. Moreover, we became aware of how the continuation of this process would benefit the family as we continued to engage in activities for improving our personal lives as lifelong learners. I hope that this article will encourage others to initiate discussion and action on how to invite healthy living from a personal and professional perspective. The 5-P Relay has value for many types of institutions, as demonstrated by my family in our effort to improve family time.

## References

- Benton, J. (1983). *Keeping Close How to Make Your Relationships Work*. New York, NY: Citadel Press.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Elkind, D. (1987). *Miseducation: Preschoolers at Risk*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Elkind, D. (1988). *The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast Too Soon*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Ministry of Supply and Services. (1991). *Learning Well...Living Well*. Ottawa, Ontario: Government of Canada.
- Ministry of Supply and Services. (1991). *The Prosperity Initiative: A Summary*. Ottawa, Ontario: Government of Canada.
- Pearsall, P. (1990). *The Power of the Family: Strength, Comfort, and Healing*. New York: Doubleday .
- Purkey, W. (1993). "The 5-P Relay: An Exciting Way to Create an Inviting School. Unpublished Manuscript. Greensboro, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Purkey, W. & Novak, T. (1984). *Inviting School Success*, 2nd ed.  
Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

*Monica A. Briscall is a teacher with the Peel Board of Education of Ontario, Canada.*