

Falling In Love With Your Child Part I  
Open the Treasure Box to Discover The Gold Nugget  
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Remember when you fell in love: The intensity of emotion, the excitement, the passion. Remember wanting to know every little detail about that person; wanting to spend as much time as possible with that special one. When we fall in love, everything feels fresh and new. Falling in love can take many forms. As parents, we can fall in love with our children. That first moment with our child can capture our hearts. Kate, from Baton Rouge, stated about the birth of her son, “The moment he looked into my eyes, I knew it was love.”

The challenge in any relationship is to capture and maintain those feelings. Over time as we learn about each other, we become accustomed to our personalities, and we no longer take the time to appreciate the little things about each other that we once thought were endearing. In a romantic relationship, we can become complacent. With parenting, we can simply be too busy. Then suddenly, our children have grown up, and we struggle to remember those cherished moments.

Have you ever reflected back on life and asked, “Where did the time go?” As parents, it is easy to get overwhelmed by day-to-day activities and miss the wonderful changes occurring in our children’s lives. We get so involved in daily chores and the minutia of life that we sometimes miss the very being we are trying to create and nurture. Children are small for such a short period of time. Before we know it they are toddlers, then school age, then teenagers. One way to savor these precious years is to take the time to fall in love with your child and to maintain that loving relationship throughout each stage of childhood.

When I mention the idea of falling in love with your child, some parents have an instant affinity with the concept and speak fondly about their love affair with their child. Other parents, however, struggle with falling in love with their child. They love their children but don’t understand what it takes to cherish each moment. They are too bogged down with life to enjoy any one part of it.

Some of the best advice I received as a new mom was to enjoy the “hold me” days rather than resist or regret them. You know the days when Baby wants to be held all day, and you can’t get anything done. This friend told me how much she regretted worrying over the household chores rather than enjoying that time bonding with her child. When you spend your time with your child preoccupied with or worried about other things, you are really not spending time with your child. You are not enjoying your child. Dishes, laundry, and other chores will always be there. Your child will only be this age once. Before you know it those “hold me” days or “I need attention” days disappear and what emerges is a more independent toddler who fights to get out of your

lap just seconds after climbing up into it. Then that sweet toddler who wants you to play with her constantly turns into a child who would rather be with friends than stay home and play with mom or dad. I have tried hard to follow this sage advice, and I have learned to view these days as treasures. “Hold me” days are my daughter’s way of telling me she needs time with me. Each of these days is a gold nugget for me to treasure in my heart for a lifetime to come.

Taking pleasure in each moment of your child’s life also means living in the moment. Take time to enjoy each new stage of your child’s development rather than wishing that the next stage would come along. When we constantly look for the next stage rather than focus on the present one, we end up living in the future, not the present. We are either wishing our child’s life away (i.e. “I can’t wait for her to learn to talk.”). The other extreme happens when we finally realize what we have missed and we long for those nostalgic days of past stages (i.e. “Remember when she loved to cuddle and would sit in my lap for hours.”). What we actually lose is the joy of watching our child grow and develop in the moment. Each developmental stage in your child’s life has its own treasure box overflowing with gifts for both of you to discover. Take the time to focus on what your child is learning now regardless of what it is (i.e. sitting up, walking, reading, sports, etc...) and savor the aspects of her personality that help her learn each new skill. It won’t be long before she has mastered that skill and moved on to another. Make the effort to get on the floor and crawl around and play, build a fort, or create a new game in the tub. Your child’s personality will unfold before your eyes if you pay close enough attention. You have a front row seat to this amazing creature developing before you. Take time now to enjoy the show.

Loving relationships are characterized by closeness, intimacy, and affection. Falling in love with your child follows the same pattern. Touch is essential to human existence: our physical, emotional, and psychological well-being depend on touch and affection for survival. Your child craves touch from you, and both of you will benefit equally from frequent affection with each other. Find time each day to be affectionate with your child. Look for opportunities to snuggle or hug and kiss. Take advantage of putting her to sleep or waking up, take naps together, or snuggle up and read for quiet time. Doll from Alexandria said, “My most precious time with my kids was cuddling and reading. It was our bonding time. I wanted them close to me.” Look for opportunities in the day. When she dumps that bowl of spaghetti on her head, consider it a time to laugh together and enjoy being close as you wash it out. When you are in love, you want to be as physically close and affectionate as possible. Mothers who work outside the home talk about wanting to rush home to spend as much time as possible with their children that they can. A loving, affectionate relationship can be accomplished by taking advantage of the time you have and focusing that time on your child.

In a romantic relationship, it is important to make time for each other that is special and focuses on each other. Falling in love with your child is no different. Time is important. That is, time that allows the two of you to connect and interact in a way that is all your own. Find the time to do special activities with your child that only the two of you do. This is a good opportunity for rituals or traditions. Children love one-on-one

time that focuses on them, and they love repetition. My dad and I went to breakfast together often, and Mom was not invited. She would tease us about wanting to go, and we always replied with a comment about our time together. When we get a chance even now to slip away, just the two of us, we do. You do not have to be extravagant; you don't even have to spend money. Be creative with your selections. The important thing is making the opportunity happen. You are creating a confident, happy, self-assured child and memories to last a lifetime for both of you.

One thing to be cautious about when falling in love with your child is not to allow the relationship with your child to overpower or disrupt your relationship with your spouse. You are not choosing one over the other or loving one more than the other. Your relationship with your spouse must be paramount if the marriage is to survive, and research bears out the fact children whose parents love each other and stay together benefit in life. I am not suggesting that children of single parents will not succeed, but they often have more challenges to overcome. Allowing yourself to fall in love with your child does not forsake other relationships in your life. Rather, it complements them adding more depth and intimacy to you and your subsequent relationships.

Falling in love with your child by that first glance or first touch is the easy part. It's maintaining that feeling throughout each stage of childhood and the challenging times that is difficult. The goal is to prioritize your time remembering that spending time with your child is on the list and should be in the top three spots. However, sometimes our days get turned upside down and the priority list is shot. These are the challenging days when we are better off giving in to the flow and following the needs of the child rather than stressing ourselves out by forcing our child to maintain our schedule for the sake of the schedule. What you will discover when you allow yourself to simply spend time with your child is a closer, more intimate relationship. You will be less stressed, and your child will have her needs met. This romance with your child will change as she develops more autonomy and independence. In a blink, your child will be grown and your relationship changed – not better or worse, just different. Make the effort now to capture this moment in time and savor it for a lifetime. Tomorrow will bring new adventures and new memories. Let today be your focus.