

Frantic Family Syndrome

By John Rosemond

The Idea Seems to be the More Plates (Activities and Commitments) You Have in the Air, the Better You Are As A Parent

When I think of today's parents, a distinctive picture comes to mind: spinning plates. The idea seems to be the more plates (activities and commitments) you have in the air, the better you are as a parent. To let a plate fall, of course, indicates you've let yourself become lax.

When your peers see what a wonderful job you're doing spinning your children's plates, they begin asking you to spin the plates of various volunteer efforts. To refuse these opportunities for social advancement means being moved to the "C-list," which is the most embarrassing thing imaginable, so you simply don't say no.

That's how Frantic Family Syndrome is created. In the frantic family, no one ever stops moving. Mom and Dad spin plates all day, racing children to one activity after another, then racing themselves to one commitment after another. In the process of all this freneticism, what little time the family has together is spent recovering from all the running.

The symptoms of Frantic Family Syndrome are easy to spot. The family loses its center of gravity which makes it susceptible to stress. Episodes of exasperation, anger, and sullenness are frequent. Communication problems mount, as do sibling rivalries. The afflicted find it increasingly difficult to pretend they're a functioning, happy family.

There is a cure for Frantic Family Syndrome, and here's how your family can start:

- First, the family must be re-centered. That requires that the parents re-commit themselves to their top priority: nurturing the family. If you're married, you and your spouse must realize that it is your marriage that centers the family. Pay attention to it. If you're single, keep in mind that a parent who burns out in the service of children is no parent at all. In either case, pay less attention to the children and more to yourself.

- Second, outside commitments must be minimized. Put each family member on a one-activity-per-week ration. That requires saying no both to children who want to get involved

in everything and to peers who want you to serve on every committee. Yes, this does mean you may be dropped to a "C-list" or two, but take it from someone who's been there a while: It's not so bad.

- Third, set aside specific time for yourself, time for the marriage, and time for the family. For example, Tuesday could be Mom's night out, Friday could be "date night" for Mom and Dad, and nearly every night from 8:00 p.m. onward could be time for the family to shut off the television and talk.

- Finally, practice saying "I love you" to one another. It's absolutely impossible to say those three words

and be frantic at the same time.

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to give you time to relax
and look at the clouds.*