

Family Togetherness Is Good for Your Health

THE BLUE ZONES PROJECT, a community initiative to help improve well-being and facilitate everyday healthy choices, is taking hold all over Southwest Florida. The Project is based on nine core principles, known as the “Power 9,” that were gleaned from areas in the world where people live the longest and healthiest lives. One of the principles is “Family First.”

Researchers found that people who lived longest kept aging parents and grandparents in the home or nearby. They committed to a life partner, which added up to three years to life, and they spent significant time with children.

“When you prioritize the people in your life—your kids, grandkids, spouse, parents or friends—not only do you thrive through those social connections, so do they,” says Deb Logan, executive director of the Blue Zones Project for Southwest Florida.

“The best thing we can give our loved ones is time and our full attention,” Logan continues. When there is more face-to-face communication among family members, well-being improves for everyone, she says. Still, she acknowledges it can be difficult to work time together into everyone’s busy schedules. A helpful strategy is to commit to a daily or weekly time together. Establish a standing weekly visit with a parent. Play

together with young children before dinner. Make it a point to sit down together for a meal each evening. Set a rule that no screens are allowed at the table, and that includes the TV.

than emailing or texting, as you have the warmth of the human voice and a back-and-forth exchange. If you have young grandchildren far away, you can read them a story by Skype. If they’re close by, schedule regular visits and outings.

“Research shows that when a grandparent is involved in a child’s life, the child tends to do better academically, have fewer behavioral problems and be healthier,” Logan says. “And the grandparents tend to be healthier and live longer, too.”

Not everyone has grandchildren, of course, and it may not be practical to spend time with them if, for instance, they live far away. If that is true for you, you may want to look into a Blue Zones project called “The Walking School Bus.” This is a program in which older

people can volunteer to walk neighborhood children to their school bus stops, or to the school itself. Children benefit from spending time around older people who have life experience to pass on, and older people (who are carefully screened by the school) benefit by being around the playful spirit of a child. And all participants get the physical benefit of walking. If you are interested in this program, call Blue Zones at (239) 624-2312 or email bluezonesprojectsouthwestfl@healthways.com. **NH**



Move Naturally



Purpose



Down Shift



80% Rule



Plant Slant



Wine @ Five



Belong



Family First



Right Tribe

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Technology can be used to connect or disconnect from loved ones, Logan goes on to say. If you are far apart from your loved ones, stay in touch through phone calls or Skype. These are better options