

A New Year's Resolution for parents

A new year is often the time when people make resolutions to exercise more, eat healthier or save more money.

But Kansas State University child development specialist Bradford Wiles says one of the best resolutions that parents can make is to strengthen the connection with their children.

For parents, that could mean making additional time to read to young children, or involving them in preparing their lunch. Even young children can help with laundry by putting their folded clothes into their drawers.

“Kids want to be like mom and dad, or like aunt and uncle,” Wiles said. “It’s our job to show them how to do that, to be really intentional – and the greatest thing is that it is its own reward. When you’re doing that and they’re paying attention and you’re able to build that bond, it is good for parents, too. It’s not just children that benefit.”

As parents interact with their children more purposely, the child also begins to develop more self-worth, Wiles said.

As children grow, parents can also be intentional in how they increase their helping skills. For example, younger children may first be taught to wash spoons, but as they grow older, they can move up to forks and knives. And when the child does well, help them understand why it was a job well done.

“Use the word ‘because,’” Wiles said. “Children may not understand ‘why’ things were great. So tell them, ‘you did a good job because you used the towel the way I showed you,’ or, ‘you put enough soap into the basin. ...’

“It’s about helping them understand that you care about their development. As a parent, you are always modeling behaviors and providing feedback, and helping them understand why things are ‘good.’”

Wiles also said parents should be intentional in putting down electronic devices in favor of spending time with children. He said when parents are constantly looking at phones or tablets, “you’re modeling this as socially acceptable.”

“You are essentially saying that ‘whatever is on the phone or tablet is more important than you are,’ and I just don’t think that is the message we want to convey,” Wiles said. “I would submit that we have plenty of time for that after our children go to bed. It is important for us to pay attention and be intentional

and engaged because it goes by very quickly. It makes a big difference in our children's lives."

Wiles adds: "Positive attention goes a long way in preventing behavior problems. At our core, we want to be loved and we want attention from our loved ones. Children will certainly remind you of that, and I think it's good that you want to be there for them. One of the greatest things to honor is that you can show them that they're valued."