

Unplugging can bring families together

By Dennis Canfield

Wouldn't it be great if we could somehow bottle some of the Christmas magic that helps to bring our families together during the holidays, so we could enjoy that same feeling of togetherness year round? Of course, we can't do that; that would be too easy.

But it doesn't have to be difficult either. With that in mind, here are a few simple ideas to help the family togetherness of Christmas last throughout the year:

Unplug – Every now and again, maybe once a week, you and your spouse and your kids turn off your phones and TVs and log off the Internet and just be with your loved ones. Have an uninterrupted meal, play a board game, clean a room together, whatever. You may have to take several deep breaths after you put your phone down; that's OK. But it's a sign that you really do need to unplug.

Read to your children at bedtime – even as they get older. Let them pick out the books and make sure that nothing that happened earlier in the day intrudes on your time with your child. If you had an argument with your spouse, or a bad day at work, or if your child broke something or made a mess, let it go when you sit down to read. A few years from now you won't remember it anyway.

Listen to audiobooks when you're in the car together – Instead of everyone putting in their earbuds and listening to music or watching videos on their phones, listen to a good audio book together. You don't have to finish it all in one car ride; it may take a few weeks of car trips to get through. No matter how anxious you are to find out how the story ends, you can't

listen to it unless you're all listening together.

Family movie night – Let the kids pick out the movie (subject to parental approval), put away your cell phones, pop some popcorn, and have some fun.

Family video diary – Get the whole family on the sofa in front of a video camera and let the tape roll while everyone talks about anything and everything. It's especially fun to do this after holidays and vacations and family gatherings. Nothing is off limits, but there is one rule that everyone has to agree to: it's a private video that no one outside the family will ever see.

One reason we all like the holidays so much is that it's the time of year when we make a conscious effort to spend time with our loved ones. It's just as fun to spend time with love ones the rest of the year too; we just have to find time to interrupt the busyness.

Dennis Canfield is a graduate of the University of Illinois College of Commerce, and the Kellogg Graduate School of Management at Northwestern University.