

Baylor study: Fun at home may satisfy more than time together elsewhere

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WACO—While family fun often is associated with new and exciting activities, family leisure spent at home in familiar pastimes may be a more effective route to happiness, a Baylor University study indicates.

“That may be because when the brain is focused on processing new information—such as taking part in an unfamiliar activity with unfamiliar people in a new location—less ‘brain power’ is available to focus on the family relationships,” said lead author Karen K. Melton, assistant professor of child and family studies at Baylor.

While research results suggest all quality time together contributes to satisfaction with family life, “all family leisure is not equal,” she said.

“The best predictor of happiness for families may be spending quality time together in familiar activities inside the home. And that’s great news for families who have little time or few resources,” Melton said.

The study—“In the Pursuit of Happiness All Family Leisure is Not Equal”—is published in *World Leisure Journal*.

Researchers used a sample of 1,502 individuals in 884 families in the United Kingdom. Each family taking part in the online research had at least one child between the ages of 11 and 15. Participants answered questions about whether they participated in family leisure in the past year, and if so, what activities (from 16 categories) they did, how much time they spent doing them and how frequently they did so.

Melton said the catchy expression “The family that plays together, stays together!” carries two misconceptions—all family leisure brings positive results and all family activities are equal.

“Family members also can express stress and conflict as well as pleasure during leisure time,” she said. “The activities alone will not heal the scars of hurting families.”

Melton noted some studies support the idea eating together is one of the best predictors of functioning families, while watching TV is seen as ineffective for individual happiness or family function. But families should question one-size-fits-all notions.

“For some families, quality togetherness is having dinner together or playing games. For others, it may be hobbies, videos or TV, music,” Melton said. “At the end of the day, what matters is that we are social beings who crave a sense of belonging and connectivity.”