



THE FAMILY TREE

“Hugs...for a time like this”

December ushers in a warm, holiday season focused on family. Family traditions, family remembrances, fun and feasting are a part of our history and our American heritage. It is a time for coming together and holding close and dear those we love most in this world. And given the tragic and unsettling events of recent months, many of us are also finding we're hugging the children in our lives just a little bit tighter every day. But wrapping our arms around them isn't the only way to give a hug. How about offering a more *symbolic* hug, through kind words and thoughtful deeds? As a pre-holiday gift to you, our readers, we at The Family Tree have compiled a short list of our favorite “hugs .”

Milk and Cookies. All of us older folks grew up on a steady diet of milk and cookies – after school, after dinner, or simply whenever we needed a little comfort food pick-me-up. Now that we're immersed in the “yogurt-covered raisins, not candy bars” health era, we have all been indoctrinated to feed our kids “wholesome snacks,” like raw veggies and granola. We would venture to say, however, that a bag full of carrot sticks has no where near the “huggability” that a plate full of double-stuffed Oreos has, especially when accompanied by a tall, cold glass of milk! (Don't feel too guilty – the milk is healthy.)

Donkey Kong, Anyone? Just think what an after school side trip to the local favorite video arcade will do for your child's soul? By now, you're probably mumbling to yourself – who would voluntarily spend even five over-stimulating minutes in Looneyville? But to your youngster, Jeepers or Chuck E. Cheese are virtual paradises of crashing cars, whacking moles and stalking dinosaurs – with all its rightful ear-splitting sounds and bright, flashing lights. They will love you for it, and the pizza isn't half-bad.

High Tea. Remember when we gals used to don our mother's earrings and high-heeled shoes for an impromptu tea party, complete with china tea things and invited “guests” (the most honored of which were our moms and/or dads)? Why not unearth this grand, and oh so civil, tradition as a special treat on a cold, rainy day? To make it even more memorable, you might go one step further with a mother-daughter tea for a few of your neighborhood friends.

An Evening Under the Stars. How many of us as children remember the thrill of camping outdoors with our friends? All that's required is a backyard, pup tent, sleeping

bags, flashlights, and plenty of junk food. Just the ticket for your young adventurers and their best buddies. In colder weather, a camp-out in the Family Room is also a lot of fun. You might even want to give door prizes for the scariest ghost stories.

An Afternoon of Beauty. A quick trip to Target or Wal-Mart yields all of the exotic lotions and potions you need to enjoy a leisurely “spa day” with your daughter of any age. You might also give one another a manicure and pedicure. Or, if you have a few more extra bucks to blow, a visit to the salon of your choice can do wonders for the soul – and the mother/daughter bond.

Rock – Music to Your Teen’s Heart. The average price of a CD these days? \$14.95. The price of the smile on your kid’s face when you hand it to them? Priceless. There’s nothing that says “I love you” any more clearly to a teenager than being surprised with a gift of music – preferably a hot, new release from his or her most cherished rock band. YOU will most definitely rock!

Rest for the Weary. We all treasure the occasional day off from work. And let’s face it, every one of us needs it! So why not give your youngster a day off from doing the dishes, folding the laundry, or some other daily chore? They’ll love the opportunity to watch a video, play ball with some friends, catch up on homework, or even just “veg out.”

Three Little Words. Sometimes we all forget that the best “hug” in the world can be found in those three, little words – “I love you.” And of course, we recommend saying them often and with feeling. The effort is minimal, the rewards, infinite.