

WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING

Close Kids is a very refreshing and insightful book to read. In today's world of limited family time, not only do parents not have the time to spend with their children, but siblings also do not have time to bond. As a pediatrician, I see this all too often. Bravo to Brett for researching this problem and bringing it to light.

I believe everyone who reads this book will be glad they did and will discover things they missed in their upbringing. *Close Kids* is an important resource for all parents!

—Richard Stanford, MD
Winner, Top 100 Pediatricians in America

A truly well written and organized book emphasizing the proper analogies for raising siblings to retain a close relationship. The book emphasizes important magnets that parents need to recognize in order to keep their children on the right track.

An excellent book every parent should read if they value family ties and relationships.

—James Cox, M.Ed.

I was surprised, satisfied, altogether pleased. I don't recall having encountered any earlier book or even a magazine article on the same theme ... quite accomplished writing. I particularly liked all your carefully selected quotes from Rilke, Hepburn, Patton, Carlyle, and Hope. Full speed ahead ...

—Larry Swindell

Ret. Book Critic, Fort Worth *Star Telegram*,
and bestselling author

The book is a brilliant, simple idea and a hot felt need. My wife and the kids' grandma are your sweet spots for sure.

—Bruce R. Barbour

Literary Agent, Literary Management Group

A black and white photograph of three young girls riding a carousel horse. They are all laughing heartily, with their mouths wide open. The girl on the left has a large flower in her hair, the middle girl has a smaller one, and the girl on the right has a large bow. They are all wearing light-colored, sleeveless dresses. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people and the structure of the carousel.

CLOSE KIDS

CONNECT YOUR CHILDREN FOR LIFE

BRETT A. JOHNSTON

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—Richard Stanford, MD

America's Top 100 Pediatricians

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Close Kids

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“The Lord gave the word and great was the company of those who published it.”

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to all the
wonderful, strong, and interesting women
in my life whom I love dearly:

Tiffini

Sondra, Nancy

Drew, Tatum, and Evan.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dear friends, I would be remiss if I didn't take a moment to thank all the people who made this project what it is. No single act by me was responsible, and in many ways, this work came from somewhere outside my consciousness. There are many people to thank for their time, energy, and creativity who made this book happen.

Tiffini Johnston

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Bruce Barbour
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Cindy Ritchie

And everyone I know and didn't know who I asked, "Are you close to your siblings?"

And most of all God for putting so many obstacles in my path, which changed the direction I was going so many times. Thank you.

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INTRODUCTION



Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves... And the point is to live everything. Live the questions.

—Rainer Maria Rilke,
Letters to a Young Poet

Becoming a father brought not only a precious little bundle of joy into my life but a bundle of questions and challenges about parenting that tiny human being, about how to provide the best nurturing and environment possible. As other little bundles joined our family, along came more questions and challenges. It has been a great and satisfying adventure to face and accept some of those

challenges, ask the questions, and discover some of the answers—an adventure that I realize will continue throughout my lifetime.

This book is the result of this father's quest to answer one of those questions, to "live the question."

What can my wife and I do with our young children today to provide them the best chance of having a solid, loving, and close relationship with each other as adults?

The following pages hold the nuggets I have discovered so far on my journey. Let me begin by telling you how this particular project came to be. My wife, Tiffini, and I were discussing a friend of ours and her extraordinarily close relationship to her sister. These two thirty-something sisters are inseparable. Their bond is so great neither one makes a big decision without bouncing the idea off their "best friend." The sisters check on each other often to talk about the small events of life or just to say hello.

Each has her own family with children and is perfectly attentive and capable of handling her

own affairs, but there is something special about the way they communicate and lean on each other. We thought how nice it would be for our girls to grow up and enjoy this type of relationship!

Tiffini and I started asking the sisters questions about their great connection. We asked about how they were raised. Did they just happen to like the same things or have similar views that gave them common areas of interest? Did specific events take place during their childhood to strengthen their relationship? What, if anything, did their parents do to support and foster their budding friendship?

These sisters had a lot of the same things in common as other people we knew. As we thought about it, we could name other friends with similarly great adult relationships. Some were sisters, some were brothers, and some were a mix. We could also name a few friends that had downright poor relationships. Why was there such a disparity between similar adults in a relationship that *should* be the closest one we have outside of our relationship with our spouse?

Never fear, I thought. In this day and age, the answers to any question are just a few clicks away,

right? I would easily find the information needed to ensure our girls a lifetime of friendship right on the Internet. Wrong. Not this time. After checking the usual places for books about “close kids” or “close siblings,” nothing came up—not a single book or even an article.

Now, there are literally thousands of books on parenting and raising children, and I’ve enjoyed reading many of them. They address everything from overcoming a temper tantrum to “Training a Tiger.” There are so many I sometimes have trouble making a selection. One similarity reigns supreme through almost all of them. *They are oriented in the present.* This is fine but not what I was looking for. I wanted to delve into the future, to learn something today that would help my kids form a lifelong bond with each other. Was it possible?

With little to no input available from existing materials, I realized I would have to come up with a plan to find the information. My solution was to develop a massive, Internet-based survey. As ideas formulated for collecting data, a realization came to me. *In almost every single case, in every country around the world, the sibling relationship is the longest relationship of anyone’s life.* Chances are most

siblings will not know their spouses for nearly as long as they will know each other—all the more reason it should be a joyful and rich experience!

The original idea was pretty simple: find a way to gather a large amount of information on siblings; separate the responses into two groups, placing those with great relationships in one pile and those with poor relationships in pile number two; then look into the time respondents spent together under one roof with their siblings, specifically their time spent at home from age zero to eighteen; and see what information could be uncovered.

My hope was that the key findings from the “close sibling group” could be pulled out and applied to my family today, that they would prove to be transferable and reproducible. Those key principles could then be used as a guide to give our kids the best shot at a close, lifelong relationship.

The electronic survey was finished and traveled around the world in no time flat! The response to the survey and subject matter was overwhelming. People from all over the world participated—from mainland USA to New Zealand, Australia, the Orient, then on to Europe and Africa. The flood of

information was off the charts! Individuals were sharing the survey with friends and family, asking questions and dying to hear the results. This response was both gratifying and humbling.

We want our kids to have a bond that will stand the test of time, life's unexpected tragedies, bad hair days (we have three girls), boyfriends (I'm willing to wait a *long* time for those problems), their own kids, or anything else life brings their way. By positively impacting the way our children relate to each other, we can also positively impact their interaction with us and others, which may bring even more value to the small lessons of this book.

Because this subject is my passion and many others seemed to be interested, it became my goal to make the key findings available to the world in the book you now hold. I hope you will use it as a reference for years to come and deem it worthy of sharing with your friends.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS

The goal of this book is to provide you with tools and ideas to help give your children the awesome gift of a positive, lifelong relationship together. Parents have a huge impact on the ultimate relationship of their children, and I firmly believe the more “CloseKids” principles utilized in a family, the better chance siblings will have to become close kids for life.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS NOT

If your children are in need of professional help, this book is not your answer. CloseKids.com is currently teaming up with professional family therapists around the country to create a network of people who can help you. As a service to our customers, we are compiling a list of certified professional family counselors throughout the country. Visit our Web site to see if there is one in your neighborhood. We will do everything in our power to help you and your children.

BRETT A. JOHNSTON

SOMETHING BIGGER THAN THIS BOOK

Part of the proceeds of this book will go to help organizations that make a real difference in the lives of kids. It became evident during this process that I needed to step up and teach my kids about giving to others. Groups that reach out to help kids learn about giving are very near to my heart, and I want to share them with my children and your family. So if you know of a group that you think helps kids in a special way, please let me know at CloseKids.com. I would love to hear from you and consider them as a future partner!