

BUILDING FAMILY STRENGTHS

UNITY

INTRODUCTION

Strong families recognize that there are benefits and pleasures to be gained from time and activities together. They value the family bond and make special efforts to preserve time together for family activities and interaction. By spending pleasant time together, families build a reserve of good feelings and are able to cope with personal and family crisis more effectively. Strong families are deeply committed to the family unit and to promoting the happiness and welfare of each other. Family commitment comes from an active involvement in setting and carrying out family goals. Families work to spend PRIME time together. They don't just take advantage of spare time to devote to the family; they actually PLAN for quality family time.

WHAT IS UNITY?

Family unity encourages families to create daily routines as well as special traditions and celebrations which affirm members, connect them to their family roots, and add fun to ordinary family events. Family unity includes time that family members spend together – both quality and quantity. Family unity means maintaining family identity and togetherness and balancing family priorities with support for individual needs. Family unity produces strong family bonds and freedom for individual self-expression.

What families do together does not matter as much as that they do SOMETHING together that is mutually planned and enjoyable. Spontaneity, humor, wit, and fun are goals to work toward. A balance of family time should include some of the following:

- active and inactive
- physical and mental
- at home and away
- work and play

CHARACTERISTICS OF FAMILY UNITY

Family time does not come easily. Activities and overload are a sign of the times for youth and adults. The challenge is to manage and prioritize your time so that family time is possible. The benefits of increasing family unity are endless. It:

- helps everyone to feel that they are important,
- helps build family pride,
- keeps the line of communication open between family members,
- instills an appreciation of family,
- helps family members prioritize and value family time, and
- can foster creativity and provide a fun-filled experience.

Strong families are deeply committed to the family unit and to promoting the happiness and welfare of each other. Commitment is a vital factor in developing a strong sense of family unity.



A quality that constantly appears in strong families is a feeling that they can depend on each other in “good” times and “bad” times. The sense of knowing that someone is always there for you helps individuals develop a well balanced self-esteem and a sense of individual worth. This security can come from a diverse variety of family structures. Families can provide unity and support in a nuclear or extended setting. Parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins are all an important part of the family structure that can provide love and support systems for the family.



PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

We must begin at an early age in order to instill an appreciation and love of family.

When children are young they require a great deal of time for care giving. However, family members

must struggle to balance the care-giving time with the fun time. Young children can develop strong family ties to extended family members and siblings which can provide a greater understanding and appreciation for quality family time. Tips for helping preschoolers develop an appreciation for family unity are:

1. Ask questions about family history and interact with older family members.
2. Draw, design, or create your family tree.
3. Plan a special activity and spend one-on-one time with each member of your family.

ELEMENTARY CHILDREN



School and other activities can begin to take a great deal of time and special care should be given to spend time with your family. It is important to spend time with all family members and to take time to talk, ask questions, and show appreciation

for one another. Suggestions for increasing family unity are:

1. Spend time with family members and have them share stories of their childhood.
2. Spend time with your brothers and/or sisters organizing family photographs and videos.
3. Remember family birthdays and anniversary with homemade cards and notes.

MIDDLE/JUNIOR HIGH ADOLESCENTS



Although peers become more important during adolescent years, it is important that you make time to spend with your family. Plan a family

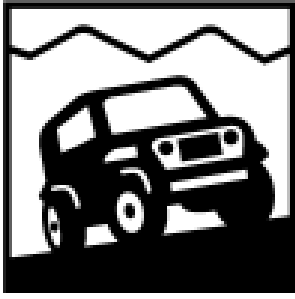
service activity that can include your entire family, such as collecting toys for needy children during the holidays or sponsoring a roadside cleanup in your neighborhood. Physical activities, games, and sports are wonderful ways that you can spend quality time with your family.

SENIOR HIGH TEENS



Teenagers have as busy schedules as many adults. It is often hard to find time to fit everything into one

day. Family activities may need to be planned in advanced. You might ask your parent to help you with a school project, work on your car, or help plan an activity or event. Include your younger siblings in on some of your activities; you can be an important role model in their lives.



ADULTS

There are never enough hours in the day to do everything! Quality family time must become a priority early in your relationship with your spouse, children, and extended family. Planning becomes the critical issue. We must learn to put what matters most to us **FIRST** in our priorities. It is possible to balance work and family responsibilities, but it takes planning, time management, sacrifice, and devotion.

SUMMARY

The key to success in building family unity is planning, perseverance, and flexibility. Your relationship with the members of your family is the foundation upon which your family is built. The stronger the foundation is, the more strength you can draw from it. Remember:

If you are too busy to spend time as a family,
You are **TOO BUSY!**

FAMILY UNITY

FAMILY ACTIVITY

Spend some family time discussing the questions listed below. Select a convenient time to do this activity. Include all family members and encourage everyone to take part in the discussion. You can place these questions on folded slips of paper and have each family member select a question to begin the discussion.

1. Do you feel that you are an important part of the family?
2. Is there a calm, accepting, and happy home atmosphere?
3. Do you feel the freedom to express yourself?
4. Do other family members show an interest in your activities?
5. Do the other family members respect your feelings and ideas?
6. Are your family members too busy to take time to be with you?
7. Do your family members respect your property and privacy?
8. Do you feel that you can depend on your family to support you in challenging times?
9. Does your family encourage displays of affection and acceptance?
10. When your family disagrees, do you take time to resolve the problem?

Once the family has talked about these issues, decide which areas can be strengthened and improved. Plan how you can work on these areas together and establish a time to continue this discussion later. Family unity is a lifelong process that takes work and dedication - but the rewards are endless!

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