

BUILDING FAMILY STRENGTHS COPING DURING CRISIS

Families can call upon their individual strengths to see them through times of crisis and stress. The cause of a crisis varies; it could be a death in the family, a missing family member, a national terrorist attack or war. Regardless, family members will experience a wide range of differing emotions that may result in increased stress and anxiety.

In a recent series of interviews, South Carolina families identified 10 common strengths that help them cope with stressful situations.

Strong families ...

- Believe in open and honest **communication**;
- Experience **contentment** with their lifestyle;
- Have a sense of family **history**;
- Have a sense of **humor**;
- Have a sense of **optimism** about life;
- Exhibit **resiliency** during change;
- Have high **self-esteem**;
- Have a sense of **spirituality**;
- Encourage **unity and family togetherness**; and
- Share common **values**.

Suggestions for coping strategies for families will differ according to the following:

- Does the crisis directly affect the family?
- What disruption in daily activities occurs as a result of the crisis?

- Can the individuals control or resolve the issues affecting the family?
- What support services are available in the local community?
- What additional resources can the family draw from to help them through the crisis?
- How can family members provide support and guidance for one another?
- What lessons can the family learn from the experiences that they are sharing?
- How can the family assist others who are feeling the effects of the crisis?

Families can look to their individual strengths and define a plan for coping with the crisis by capitalizing on their shared qualities and experiences.

For example, if a family is attempting to deal with the stress that involvement in a war can create, they might want to consider the following:

- Practice open and honest **communication**; discuss the feelings created by the current events. Practice active listening. Provide a shoulder to cry on and arms to hug as needed.

- Make wise family decisions and agree to make any necessary sacrifices to foster **contentment** with the family's circumstances.

- Discuss what family military **history** your family shares to develop empathy and understanding of current events. This can also be an opportunity for relating historical events.



- Maintain a sense of **humor** to help family members keep current events in perspective. (Be sure to use appropriate humor, and do not use humor that is ethnic, sarcastic or ridicules any individuals or groups.)
- Help create a sense of **optimism** about the outcome of the current conflict. Help family members see that the future will hold brighter days.
- **Resiliency** during stressful times is seen in how families can work together to conquer daily obstacles and become stronger from the experience.
- Having positive **self-esteem** can help a family identify their personal strengths and weaknesses. Families can seek professional help to increase their coping skills as necessary.
- **Spirituality** is defined by individuals and can be a strong comfort during crisis. Each family will determine how they can call on their inner strength to cope more effectively with the stresses of crisis.
- **Unity and family togetherness** are critical during anxious times. Family members need to let each other know that they are not alone in dealing with the crisis.
- Emphasize shared **values** — such as patriotism, allegiance and commitment to duty — to draw the family together during a crisis.

Times of crisis can increase stress for families. It is important for families to care for all their needs, physical, emotional and social. Healthy families can cope better and will recover from a crisis more readily.

If families continue to experience stress long after the crisis has passed, professional help may be necessary to recover effectively from the stress of the event. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

For additional information on families, consult the web site <http://www.clemson.edu/fyd>. You may also find the following Clemson Extension publications helpful:

FL 520 — Building Family Strengths: Overview

FL 521 — Building Family Strengths: Communications

FL 522 — Building Family Strengths: Unity

FL 523 — Building Family Strengths: Values

FL 524 — Building Family Strengths: Contentment

FL 525 — Building Family Strengths: Self-Esteem

FL 526 — Building Family Strengths: Humor

FL 527 — Building Family Strengths: History

FL 528 — Building Family Strengths: Optimism

FL 529 — Building Family Strengths: Resiliency

FL 530 — Building Family Strengths: Spirituality

These publications are available on the internet at http://www.clemson.edu/fyd/family_life.htm or from the Clemson University Bulletin Room by calling (864) 656-0109.

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