

BUILDING FAMILY STRENGTHS VALUES

Values are a reflection of who we are, of our culture and of our own unique heritage. Being clear about our values enables and empowers us to establish priorities and make decisions that we can live with and by. What we learn from our families in childhood builds character and serves us throughout our lives. Families guide personal growth and education, while offering love and protection. When families are strong, our neighborhood is strong, our nation is strong and we can be more hopeful about the future.

Values have influence at every stage of making a choice. Values shape what we believe and perceive. They influence our goals, the alternatives we select and the ranking of these alternatives.

WHAT ARE VALUES?

Values are a part of our experience that affects our behavior. They encompass our attitudes, the standards for our actions and our beliefs. Values are often learned from family, culture and people around us. In addition, values tell others what is important to us and guide our decision making. We use our resources — time, money and brain power — on the things we value.

CHARACTERISTICS OF POSITIVE VALUES WITHIN FAMILIES

Many of our family ideals, beliefs, behaviors or “values” are merely

habits of thinking or behaving. Sometimes this is because we do not know any other way or because we have not stopped to think about the motives or reasons for the things we think, say or do.

Identifying and communicating the values of the family can . . .

- Be helpful in making personal decisions.
- Become a guide for self-empowerment.
- Help manage time, energy and resources to the fullest.
- Help one to know oneself better.
- Help eliminate some of the confusions in life.
- Help formulate a desired system of values.
- Help one to act or behave in accordance with their values.
- Help one to better understand and respect others who have different values.

Values are critical in building character and increasing an overall sense of well-being. Positive values within families . . .

- Promote honesty, integrity, commitment and loyalty.
- Encourage respect for self and others and tolerance of differences.
- Require being responsible and accountable for your actions, while practicing self-control.
- Teach fairness and treating people equally.
- Require consideration, kindness, compassion and generosity toward others.
- Foster being a good citizen who appreciates doing things which make life better for self and for other people.





PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

Younger children are concerned with being good people. Being good means seeing the difference between right and wrong — and then doing what’s right! Being good is about being brave. It’s about doing what’s right when it costs more in friends, money, toys or treats than we want to pay. Doing the right thing consistently is hard for anyone — but especially this age group.



ELEMENTARY CHILDREN

Young children need to know how to act and how not to act. They need to have clear instructions — not conflicting messages from family members and others in their lives. Through the many interactions between school-age children and others around them, the child learns what is acceptable, and what is not. Much of what this age group values will be played out at school, on the playground and through other interactions with their peers.



MIDDLE/JUNIOR HIGH ADOLESCENTS

Adolescents begin to act on the values that have been established during their earlier years. Goals and decisions are made based upon influential people in their lives. Because peers become a strong force during the adolescent period, strong positive values are critical in making positive choices that bring positive consequences.



SENIOR HIGH TEENS

Teenagers have a need to spread their wings while having limits with independence. Finding the balance can be tricky. Too much control by adults can lead to rebelling and poor choices just to get some freedom. Too much freedom leads to feeling overwhelmed — having too much power before they are ready for it. With an overabundance of freedom, some teens can begin to think that no one cares what kind of person they become. Role models who promote and support positive values and can be influential to this age group.



ADULTS

Adults within the family give children people to identify with, examples to learn from, values and traditions to uphold, and a support system to turn to in times of need. It is not enough to set a good example but adults must live by these examples. Valuing oneself and others is a powerful model. In addition to how we treat family members, it includes how we treat others as adults, and how we treat and talk about others outside the family. It has to do with how we lead our lives.

SUMMARY

Values are the important “internal compasses” that guide people in developing priorities and making choices. Although the internalization of values takes place over time, the groundwork is laid from the first day of life. The foundation of character building begins during infancy and slowly evolves through childhood and adolescence, all the while becoming more sophisticated and complex. People do not suddenly become honest and responsible when they become teenagers or adults. The development of these values is a long process that entails many interactions between children and adults.

WHAT DO YOU VALUE?

Family Activity

Values are very important and personal. The point of this exercise is for you to determine what you *actually* value — not what you think you ought to value. Here are a list of values. Look them over and circle all that seem important to you. If something is important to you that you do not see on the list, write it down in the spaces provided at the bottom. Then try ranking your top five values in order of importance, 1 to 5. Ask all family members to complete this activity. Discuss your top five values. This will provide a forum to discuss common values within the family unit.

Look the list over and circle all of the ones that seem important to you.

- | | | |
|-----------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Health | Commitment | Being responsible |
| Wealth | Helping others | Status |
| Beauty | Civic mindedness | Work |
| Integrity | Freedom | Personal growth |
| Success | Recreation | Learning |
| Happiness | Wisdom/Intelligence | Making others happy |
| Family | Friendship | Being loved |
| Respect | Fairness | Family vacations |

OTHER VALUES:

YOUR TOP FIVE VALUES:

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