

BUILDING FAMILY STRENGTHS HISTORY

Strong families have a sense of family HISTORY. They have a need for connection to the past. Knowing family history provides ROOTS and a sense of belonging. Many people enjoy the feeling of security that comes with understanding who they are and where they came from. Recognizing the diversity of past generations can help family members appreciate their own uniqueness at the same time they celebrate their similarities. Newer and more sophisticated technology has resulted in a renewed interest in researching family history. The improvements in record keeping and the increased access to records that the computer provides has allowed many individuals to begin to explore their family history.

WHAT IS FAMILY HISTORY?

Family history is the study of the past and its significance in our lives today. Learning more about our personal family history can benefit us in many ways. The past influences the present. Things that may seem insignificant when they occur can turn out to have a profound influence on a family's life. Strong families will often look at significant events that changed their lives and how those events have influenced who they are today. Understanding and appreciating family history keeps families connected from one generation to the next.

Developing an understanding of one's past can improve an individual's feeling of self-worth. Having a sense of where you "came from" can sometimes help you to establish where you "want to go." A strong sense of family history celebrates individualism and recognizes common values, goals, interests and strengths.

PROMOTING FAMILY HISTORY

Families share something unique – something that can not be taken away or changed – family history.

Family history can be promoted by:

- Telling favorite family stories.
- Relating important family events.
- Tracing family members who have moved away or are deceased.
- Attending family gatherings and reunions.
- Communicating regularly.
- Sharing family history with younger family members.
- Keeping family traditions alive.
- Remembering and celebrating family birthdays, anniversaries, weddings and graduations.

If families value their heritage and celebrate their family history, communication increases, family members spend more time together and individual self-esteem is enhanced. Families with a strong sense of family history are more self-assured and have a deeper appreciation and respect for individuality and diversity.

Deciding how to explore and record your family history is an individual decision. Some families have accurate written records, some may have photographs, and others may have only family stories to provide a basis for starting a family history search. With the onset of new technology — such as computer programs designed to record family history and the endless information available on the Internet — and the improved accessibility of archives, family members can trace their roots with greater ease and success. However, nothing is



more accurate than the sharing of information from one generation to the next.

Families can share their histories through stories, letters, audio interviews or videos. Regardless of how the information is shared, family members benefit from the interpersonal relationships that are enhanced during this intergenerational exchange. The time spent gathering family history facts will be time cherished in the future.

PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

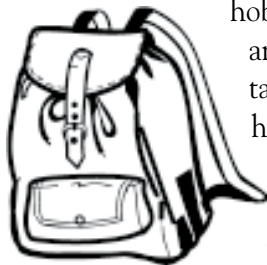


Young children can enjoy the time spent with older relatives. The special intergenerational interaction of young children with their elders can provide an appreciation to both parties. Sharing family stories with children can help to create a sense of belonging and serve as a vehicle of understanding between the generations.

Identifying how the family is related to one another and where the child fits in can ensure a child's sense of belonging.

ELEMENTARY CHILDREN

Elementary age children can recognize their family history structure. The physical attributes, hobbies, professions and culture of ancestors will interest the elementary age child. As the child studies history in school, family stories can help the child to relate more effectively to the historical events. For example, if a child's great grandfather was a World War I



veteran, his grandmother a nurse in World War II and his dad a participant in the Persian Gulf War, it can create a desire to learn more about these events.

MIDDLE/JUNIOR HIGH ADOLESCENTS

Young people at this age may be more occupied with what is happening now than in the past. However, they may enjoy developing relationships with their older relatives and will actually enjoy talking to them – rather than to their parents! The importance of understanding why they have certain physical traits, religious beliefs or family customs may intrigue a child at this stage of development.



SENIOR HIGH TEENS

Teenagers are on a constant search for their identity — and what better way to define themselves than by understanding and developing an appreciation for their family heritage? Teenagers are approaching a time when a sense of belonging is key to acceptance and a measure of self-worth.



Teens can use the exploration of their family history to develop their research and organization skills and to improve their listening and written communication skills. As with other school-age children, teens can understand the significance of certain historical and sociological events. This realization can lead to a clearer understanding of where they fit in to the “big picture” and improve their own self-worth.

ADULTS

Adults are the most likely group to begin a real investigation into their past. Many adults have a genuine need to know more about their heritage. The need may arise from a health concern or — as with all generations — a need to establish a sense of belonging. Many adults are turning toward searching their family history as a hobby and are finding new technology useful as a means to search more extensively.



SUMMARY

It is never too late to begin to learn about your family history. Family history is important because it:

- Develops a sense of stability.
- Provides a support system.
- Helps you understand inherited traits.
- Identifies health or medical risks.
- Provides a family legacy.

FAMILY HISTORY



FAMILY ACTIVITY



Directions: Answer the following questions. You may want to include all family members in this activity. Discuss everyone's response and remind everyone that all opinions are respected.

1. Who do you consider to be your immediate family? Your extended family?
2. What are some things that you "expect" from your family?
3. What is your favorite childhood memory involving your family?
4. What personal trait do you admire most in yourself that you inherited from your family?
5. Who is the most "outstanding" member of your family? Why?
6. How many relatives do you have that are 75+ years old and living in good health?
How often do you visit them?
7. How would others describe your family? How would you describe your family?
8. If you could change one thing about your family, what would it be?

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