

## BUILDING FAMILY STRENGTHS

### SPIRITUALITY

Strong families have a sense of spirituality that is defined in different ways. It is a spirit that transcends “self” and is expressed in many forms. It implies a way of acting toward others with whom there is a relationship or connection. A strong spiritual base has been identified as an important strength for families that helps them celebrate and value the gift of life. Spirituality can provide hope, support and sense of purpose to life.

#### WHAT IS SPIRITUALITY?

Spirituality is believing in a higher power and acting on a value system beyond self-interest. It provides a sense of purpose and support in everyday life and during difficult times. Spirituality is a guiding force that bonds the family together. However, spirituality for America’s families has diverse meanings, extended beyond as well as among family members.

Spirituality offers a belief system that teaches how to have healthy relationships within the family unit and with others. This is true even in painful and tough situations. A strong spiritual base . . .

- Provides a sense of love and being loved. It can improve your self-image.
- Provides a way to deal with successes and failures, especially in relationships with family, friends and significant others. It teaches us to seek forgiveness when we have wronged another and learn to forgive when we have been wronged.
- Gives meaning and purpose to our lives. It provides the comfort and feeling that our lives are part of a higher purpose.
- Pushes us to look outside of ourselves for love, support and strength when needed.

- Encourages hope rather than despair when life seems to close in on us.

#### PROMOTING SPIRITUALITY WITHIN THE FAMILY

Families with a sense of spirituality carry a gratitude and sense of hope that recognizes even the little things of life as special events. A strong spiritual base gives families a sense of belonging and acceptance by a higher being. It gives meaning and purpose to families that provide strength and hope in times of adversity. Spirituality provides a greater sense of purpose and a stronger sense of support from family and friends.

Through their spiritual beliefs, families find ways to deal with successes and also failures, especially in family relationships. They learn to be supportive and to forgive and forget to maintain healthy relationships within the family unit.

Spirituality provides tools and models for building good relationships in the family. It is a key element in establishing strong caring families. Some of the benefits of a strong spiritual base will show up in families whose spirituality . . .

- Offers the basis for good self-esteem. This is necessary for individuals within the family unit to have value and self-worth.
- Offers a belief system that recognizes the importance of families in teaching values and skills for life within communities.
- Offers a belief system that teaches the critical need for support systems that encourages positive family relationships. This is true no matter how painful these relationships may be in stressful situations or during times of crisis.



## PRESCHOOL CHILDREN



Children are born into the world with a clean slate. The ability to grow in a nurturing and caring environment provides the background for healthy spiritual growth. This is guided by the values and beliefs within the family unit.

## ELEMENTARY CHILDREN

Young children begin to branch out into environments (such as school) where they will be with other children. The likelihood of exposure to other beliefs begins to become more of an issue. Therefore, it is important that they understand and have a strong foundation of spirituality within their family unit.



## MIDDLE/JUNIOR HIGH ADOLESCENTS

The adolescent years can be filled with many changes and transitions that cause pain and confusion. A strong spiritual base can make these life events easier and give adolescents a sense of control over their destiny. It can open up positive ways of dealing with situations that challenge who they are and where they are going in life. Adolescence can be a very sensitive and emotional stage but with a strong sense of spirituality, it can be a time of positive growth.



## SENIOR HIGH TEENS

Many young people may experience situations in their life that cause them to question their spirituality. A lot of this may come through relationships with others that cause them hurt and harm. This becomes a challenge for some young people as they struggle to forgive and forget. Often, statements like "I can forgive, but I cannot forget" become very familiar. Forgiveness requires a healing process inside to the point where the pain is no longer present. Then and only then can one forgive, forget and move on.



## ADULTS



Adults are the guide and model within the family. Children expect adults to practice what they teach. Therefore, it is important that examples of spirituality and what it stands for within the family are demonstrated. For example, genuine smiles are a sign of love, affirmation and appreciation. A smile can bring hope and change the course of someone's day.

## SUMMARY

Research points to the power and value in a strong spiritual base for building strong families. This spirituality is demonstrated in a family's ability to overcome life's most challenging events. While the diverse meanings of spirituality among families are hard to summarize, the spirit in which it is shown in relationships may be understood in the following quotes.

**"Forgiveness is giving love when there is no reason to."**

**"You may give without loving, but you cannot love without giving."**

**"What sunshine is to flowers, smiles are to humanity. They are but trifles, to be sure — but scattered along life's pathway, the good they do is inconceivable."**

**"There is no greater love than the love that holds on where there seems nothing left to hold on to."**

**"A good deed is never lost; he who sows courtesy reaps friendship, and he who plants kindness gathers love."**

**"Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless."**

**"A house is made of walls and beams; a home is made of love and dreams."**

**"Kindness is the oil that takes the friction out of life."**

**"Laughter is the brush that sweeps away the cobwebs of the heart."**

**"Life is not a problem to be solved, but a gift to be enjoyed."**

**"People may doubt what you say, but they will always believe what you do."**

# SPIRITUALITY

## FAMILY ACTIVITY

The strength of families may be defined by their ability to be there for each other in the good and bad times. Spirituality provides the peace within and reminds families of the gifts that each member brings to the family unit. Realizing that “ONE” really can make a difference in lighting the spirit within families and others is powerful and worth remembering. Share these thoughts about “ONE” within your family. Think about the power of “ONE.” Talk about other “ONE” ideas that can make your family stronger. Ask each family member to share one idea or good deed that gives them a sense of love and security within the family.



“ONE”



- One **SMILE** begins a friendship
- One **STAR** can guide a ship at sea
- One **WORD** can cheer you up
- One **CANDLE** wipes out darkness
- One **SONG** can change the mood
- One **BIRD** can sound like springtime
- One **VOTE** can change a nation
- One **LAUGH** can conquer sadness
- One **HEART** can know what is true
- One **TOUCH** can show you care
- One **HOPE** can lift your spirits
- One **LIFE** can make a difference
- One **STEP** must start each journey
- One **FRIEND** can share your pain
- One **VOICE** can speak with wisdom
- One **FLOWER** can brighten the day
- One **TREE** can start a forest

*“Great are they who see that spiritual is stronger than any material force, that thoughts rule the world.”*

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

Prepared by:

Brenda J. Thames, Ed.D., CFCS, Extension Program Development Specialist

Deborah J. Thomason, Ed.D., Extension Family & Youth Development Specialist

Reviewed by:

Mark Brown, County Extension Agent - Darlington County

Kellye Rembert, County Extension Agent - Richland County

Lana Tietjen, County Extension Agent - Marion County

Thomasina Tyler, County Extension Agent - Jasper County



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