

# **Building Family Strengths**

## **Family Strength 1: Caring and Appreciation**

Families are strengthened by expressions of caring and appreciation. Even when a family member makes many mistakes, members of strong families find ways to encourage and support each person. Strong families notice and share positive aspects of each other. For example, they pay attention to another person's polite behavior or something nice he or she did or said. They notice the talents, skills, achievements, special qualities, and characteristics that make the other person unique. You might show appreciation by writing short love notes about one of these things, and put the note under the person's pillow, or in a backpack, briefcase, or purse. Write something like "Emily, I'm proud of you for working so hard on your homework. Love, Dad." Giving time is an important way of showing caring and appreciation. Children want parents to be available – to have time, to show interest, to do things with them, and to talk with them.

A strong family finds that opportunities for quality time occur as they spend quantity time together. Eating meals together, sharing joys and defeats, working together, making treats together, and watching movies or playing games are examples of shared activities. Some families even schedule one evening every week for special family activities.

Physical expressions are good ways of showing affection, love, and appreciation. Small children often like to snuggle with their parents. A quick pat, a hug, a kiss, a handclasp, or an arm around the shoulder can say a lot to people of all ages. Good manners and everyday courtesy to a child or a spouse lets the person know that he or she matters. Ask children and other family members to do things rather than demand that they do them. Compliment good behavior. Thank family members for their efforts. Ask for opinions. Listen to comments. Avoid saying anything that is critical or unkind.

## **Family Strength 2: Commitment**

Members of strong families are committed to the family. They value the things that make their family special. Even when times are hard, they work on problems together.

## **Family Strength 3: Communication**

Strong families communicate. They talk. They share themselves. They share their feelings, hopes, dreams, fears, joys, sorrows, experiences, growth, and needs. They take the time to listen and respond to what others have to say. There are a number of things that can improve family communication.

Make time to talk. It is especially important to talk about feelings. You may decide to turn off the TV so the family can talk. Talk about feelings and experiences while driving in the car, while sharing household chores, or before bedtime. You can encourage family members to share by

saying, "Tell me more." "Wow. That must have been exciting (frightening, etc.)." "What was the best part of the day for you?"

Be a good listener. Listening to what others say and feel is one of the most powerful ways of showing love. To be good listeners we often must set aside our lectures and really try to understand from the point of view of the other person. The goal is simply to hear, understand, and accept the other person's feelings and views.

## **Family Strength 4: Community and Family Ties**

Strong families draw on other people and institutions for support. If they have a hard time dealing with a problem, they are willing to seek outside help. Strong families also tend to be closely involved with the schools, churches, and local organizations that promote the well-being of the community and the individual. Ties with relatives, neighbors, and friends are especially important. Busy schedules can make it hard to spend time with people outside the family. But relationships can sometimes be kept up by having family members write brief notes. Or the family can make it a special point to visit with certain people.

## **Family Strength 5: Working Together**

Strong families make decisions, solve family problems, and do family work together. Everyone participates. Parents are the leaders, but the children's opinions and efforts are invited, encouraged, and appreciated. For example, a toddler can be involved with you in grocery shopping. Explain that you need a helper when you shop for groceries. Decide which simple food items the helper can choose, such as cereal or fruit snacks. When you get to the right aisle, give the child a few moments to make a decision. An older child can be taught to use the information on product labels to make decisions. Provide plenty of encouragement for their efforts.

## **Family Strength 6: Flexibility And Openness To Change**

All families develop habits, routines, and a set of rules. These patterns are ways to deal with day-to-day life. Some of the more obvious patterns are who cooks, washes dishes, does the laundry, or fixes the car. Other less obvious patterns include: Who has the right to make what decisions? How are differences of opinion handled? How are anger, affection, or other emotions expressed?

There are a number of common changes most families face. Children get older. Adults switch jobs or retire. Families are reshaped by birth, adoption, marriage, divorce, sickness, and death. Families move to different communities. Family relationships are most likely to remain healthy and strong if family members adapt to these changes.

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