

Helping Youth Succeed

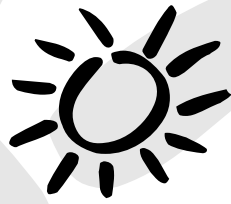
Strengthening Family Ties

A Workbook of Activities Designed to
Strengthen Family Relationships

From the *Helping Youth Succeed* Series

UtahState
UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION

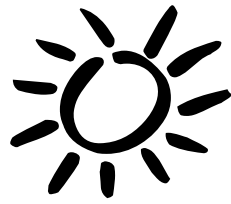




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INTRODUCTION

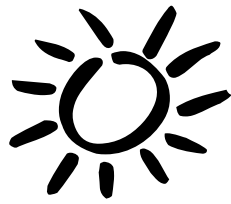
Each of us has a need to be connected to other people for meeting our social, emotional, intellectual, physical and spiritual needs. Families have always been the best place for people to form these connections and meet these needs. Throughout history, this has never been an easy task, but certainly it has always been an important and rewarding one.

Today, the challenge of creating a strong and nurturing family environment is difficult. Families don't always have the support in their communities or from their extended families to help in this task. Parents may not have the benefit of having grown up in a well-functioning family where respect was shown and good family skills were learned. Families take different forms — remarried, two-parent, single-parent, two-earner, single-earner. In fact, each family is unique and no one set of rules will work in every family.

It may seem at times that achieving a rewarding family life is an unreachable goal. No family is immune from problems, but there can be more of the happiness in family life that we seek if we identify and build on our family's strengths in key areas.

This workbook contains fun activities related to five areas of family functioning which are: Building Trust, Family Support, Kindness, Communication, and Working Together. It is recommended that activities in the first section, Building Trust, be completed first. After that, activities can be selected based on a family's unique needs, time allowances, and other special circumstances.





BUILDING TRUST

Healthy families have a balance of doing things together and doing things alone. Family members have their own individuality, but they also have learned that the real test of their commitment to their family is in the amount of time they spend together.

Spending time together in family activities can promote unity and build relationships of trust among family members. This trust develops as a family works together, having common goals and values. These trusting family relationships can help families survive the tough times, as well as strengthen and support individual family members through their own personal struggles.

The balance of individuality and unity can be difficult to maintain. When family members behave without considering others in the family, it weakens the sense of family unity, stability, and trust. One way to improve family unity and build trust is to plan and participate in regular family activities. The activities in this section can help to foster more family identity, and build relationships of trust.

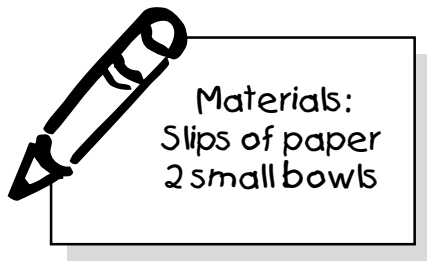
BUILDING TRUST ACTIVITIES

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What If?

The best time to build family relationships is while everyone is laughing and enjoying time spent together. Families need to take opportunities to just sit and relax with each other. The purpose of this activity is to have the family play a simple game that will help you laugh together and build imagination.



ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

Prepare two slips of paper and a pencil or pen for each individual playing. On the first slip, have each person write a question off the top of his or her head. It can be silly or serious. Put all the questions in a bowl and mix. Now, on the second slip of paper, write an answer to that question. Place these slips in a second bowl and mix. Pass the bowls around the room and have each family member take one question slip and one answer slip from each bowl. Now, have each family member read the question and the answer that they have in their hand. You may be surprised at how well they go together or laugh hysterically at the combinations. Keep the game going by starting out with two more slips of blank paper. It may take a few rounds for everyone to get the hang of the game and the game will get better as you play.

SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Did the activity spark your imagination?
- Why did the questions and answers get funnier after several rounds?



Spotlights

Strong families recognize differences in individuals. Through this activity you can celebrate each person's uniqueness. The plan is to give each member of the family an opportunity to be in the spotlight, and also provide a chance to interview another family member to learn his/her talents, likes, dislikes, and accomplishments.

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

Put the names of family members in a hat and ask someone to draw two names. The first will be the interviewer and the second the interviewee. Instruct the interviewer that he/she has until ____ (specify date and time) to accomplish the interview. Provide him/her with a few sample questions such as the ones provided below, or you can create your own.

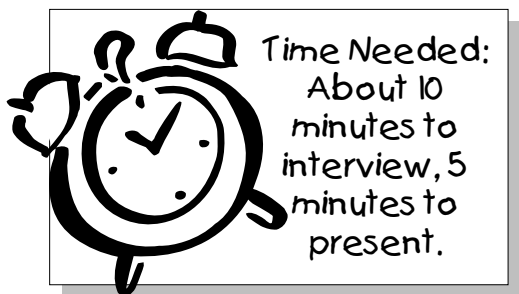
- 💡 What is your favorite thing to eat?
- 💡 What subjects did you like to study in school?
- 💡 Do you have a favorite sport you like to play or watch?
- 💡 What would you like to be when you grow up?
- 💡 What is the best birthday present you ever received?

Rules:

- 1 Use polite audience etiquette.
- 2 Practice listening.
- 3 Do not be critical.

On the given date and time, whether it be at the dinner table with dessert or at a special family picnic, the interviewer presents a spotlight for a special family member. Continue the spotlight until everyone in the family has had a chance to be in the spot light, including mom and dad, and maybe even grandma and grandpa.

Other ideas include making the spotlight an anonymous surprise to see if other family members can guess who it is at the presentation, or making a collage representing the answers to questions to display on the refrigerator until next family member is spotlighted.



SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Did you learn anything you did not already know?
- Who is going to be in the spotlight next?



Expressing Individuality

Each person is unique, with different abilities, interest, hobbies, and even personalities. The family is an ideal place for members to learn to appreciate and express their individuality, or “uniqueness.” In addition, part of establishing a warm, friendly family environment is accepting and learning to appreciate individual differences in one another. The purpose of this activity is to help each member of the family express his or her individuality and develop an appreciation for the differences in other family members.



Materials:
Clay dough that is either homemade or purchased from the store. (see recipes below)

Play Dough I - if you do not intend to harden the dough by baking it, then you may want to use this recipe, which is also great for play dough and can be re-used another day.

Mix together:

- 1 cup flour
- 1 cup water (add food coloring to water if you want colored clay)
- ½ cup salt
- 1 teaspoon cream of tartar
- 1 tablespoon oil

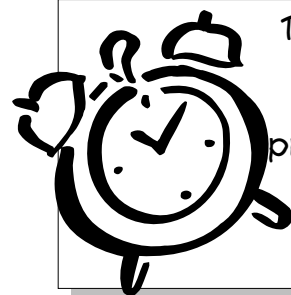
After mixing these ingredients together, heat over low and stir slowly.

When the clay forms a small ball, remove the dough from the heat and knead while the dough is warm. Store the clay in a sealed container.

Play Dough II - this recipe is best if you intend to bake the dough so that it becomes hard.

Mix together:

- 1 cup flour
- ½ cup salt
- ½ cup water
- food coloring if desired



Time Needed:
About 15 minutes to prepare dough, and 45 minutes for activity

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ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

Using various colors of clay dough, use your creativity to mold some type of design or structure that represents your uniqueness, or individuality. You could mold a figure that represents a personal characteristic, a goal, a hobby, an accomplishment, or some value that is important to you. For example, if you love Boy Scouts, you may want to mold the image of a person sitting on a log by a campfire. If you received an award as the “Employee of the Month,” you may want to mold the image of something that represents hard work, or dependability. If friendliness is a personal characteristic that you value, you may want to mold a face with a pleasant smile, or if you have a great love for animals, you may want to mold several of your favorite animals.

After molding some type of figure, you can preserve the figure by placing it on a cookie sheet and baking it in the oven on warm for several hours (until hard). This will harden the clay hard so that it maintains its shape. If you did not use food coloring to color the clay, or if you like to paint, you could paint the hardened figure. Once everyone has completed a mold, display these molds in the home.

SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Why did you choose to make what you did?
- What does it mean to you?

💡 OTHER IDEAS

1. Instead of expressing your individuality using clay, you could draw pictures using plain white paper and colored pencils/crayons. Drawing may allow you to express more ideas than if you use clay. Make sure that you do not place an emphasis on artistic abilities. It is okay to draw simple stick figures that represent people or other objects.
2. You could express your individuality by cutting pictures out of old magazines and pasting them on a poster board. After each person has completed a mold, picture, or collage, allow each family member to explain how their collage, picture or mold represents them.



Puzzle Pieces

It is important that a family be close to each other. But too much closeness can cause problems, especially as children are growing and trying to become their own person. The key is to balance closeness while letting everyone be special. The purpose of this activity is to show the importance and uniqueness of an individual while demonstrating that the individuals are all family members that make a family great.

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

Before the activity: On a strip of butcher paper or poster board, draw an outline of a house and cut it into puzzle pieces.

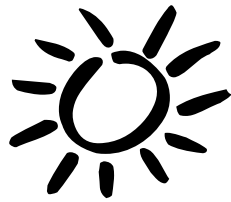
During the activity: Distribute the puzzle pieces to different family members and ask them to make that piece their own. Have materials available, like magazines and crayons, etc., so they can make a collage of things about themselves through coloring, cutting images from the magazines, or gluing items on. Tell them to be sure and not go over the edges of the puzzle pieces. Do not let them know what the puzzle makes.

When everyone is finished, have each family member describe their puzzle piece and tell why they chose what they did to include on their piece. Then, when everyone has described their pieces, have a family member take the pieces and put them together to form a house. Talk about being an individual that is part of the family and what that means.

SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Did this activity make you feel good to be a part of your family?
- Is your family a support to you? Do you feel like you can talk to anyone if you need to?
- Do you feel like your family can make you strong as an individual when you do activities away from home?
- Did this activity show you the strengths of your family as individuals?





FAMILY SUPPORT

Healthy families enjoy being together and make the effort to plan activities and do things together. Family time doesn't have to be elaborate or expensive. The most simple activities will become the most important — laughing together at family jokes or having some favorite traditions like Saturday morning breakfasts or popcorn on Sunday nights.

Doing things together as a family builds family relationships and in turn, family strength. People sometimes say that it's not the quantity of time that is important, but the quality of time. It's hard, though, to have much of a relationship with someone you spend little time with!

In addition to strong family relationships, healthy families also make use of support networks. Support networks are connections that a family has with people outside of the family, such as relatives, neighbors, friends, social groups, community officials, and church members. Through these support networks, family members are able to interact with others and expand their circle of friends. These networks also can provide great strength and support when families are in need of help.

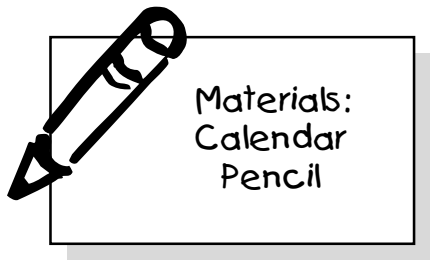
FAMILY SUPPORT ACTIVITIES

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Family Dates

One of the best ways family members can strengthen relationships is by spending one-on-one time together. Family dates are an excellent way to provide this special time. Planning a date not only reserves some time so that the activity is likely to take place, but it also gives the family members something to look forward to. Family dates help strengthen relationships within the family.



ACTIVITY INSTRUCTION

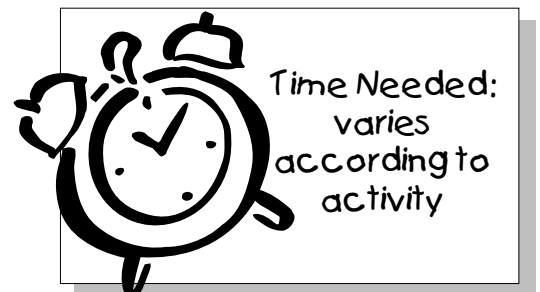
As a family, sit down together and plan a date for each child and parent. Do something that both members enjoy and that does not exceed your budget. In two-parent families, parents can take turns going on dates with each child. In single-parent families, the parent can take turns going on dates with each child or children can schedule dates with each other. For example, a big brother can take out his little sister or a big sister could take out her little brother.

After planning these dates, schedule them on a calendar. Once scheduled on the calendar, make sure that these dates maintain a high priority. Only emergencies can interfere with these family appointments. After each child has been on a date with a parent, plan and reschedule more dates.

Spending time together in family activities is a way of strengthening family ties and creating memorable family experiences. **To make activities enjoyable for the whole family, it is important to plan them together.**

SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What would you like to do for another date?
- How hard/easy was it to plan the date that you both wanted to do?
- Did the date make you feel closer to each other?
- What was the best thing about the date?
- Did going on a date together make you feel important in your family?



Family Traditions

Traditions give us a feeling of security — an important thing for adults and children. They help us feel that the world is a good place and life is worth living. They can be especially important when there are transitions in family life — a job change, a move, an illness, or divorce. They provide a feeling that even though some things have changed, there are still things that we can count on. Traditions give a feeling of “rightness.” The purpose of this activity is to help the family see what traditions already exist in their family and decide what new ones might be started to ensure family stability.

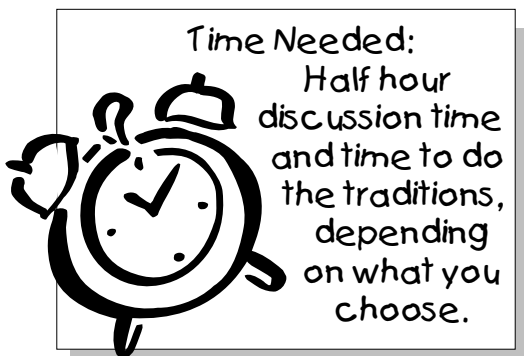
ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

Exercise - “Name Our Traditions”

1. Give everyone in your family a piece of paper and ask them to list the traditions in your family. These can include some things done every day and others done only once a year.
2. Compare lists. You might be surprised to hear what traditions others think are important. Add any others you are reminded of as you talk together.
3. Evaluate. Are there some everyone would like to do more? Are there some that are no longer enjoyable.
4. Add to the list. Is there something you would like to become a new tradition? It can be anything your family does that says, “Our family is special”. Starting new traditions can be especially important when the family situation has changed — such as when a new step-family has been formed.

SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Did the traditions you chose help you feel good about your family?
- Do you plan to continue the traditions you chose in your future families?
- If everything did not happen as you wanted, what can you change about the tradition to make it better?
- Decide if there is an age limit to the traditions you choose. Make sure that the traditions are not outgrown by different family members. Re-evaluate the traditions periodically.



Getting-to-Know-You

In hard times families often need a support network that can help with the physical needs and well-being of other family members. Having a support network in your neighborhood can also be important to you in knowing with whom your children might come in contact. This activity can help strengthen family ties and build bridges for support and friendship in our communities and neighborhoods.

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

Identify a new family that has moved into the neighborhood, or maybe a family or elderly person with whom you are not well-acquainted. Plan a getting-to-know-you party to welcome/acquaint them with the neighborhood. You might choose to have a barbeque in the street. You might also like the idea of a progressive picnic and have an activity or menu item at each participating neighbor's home.

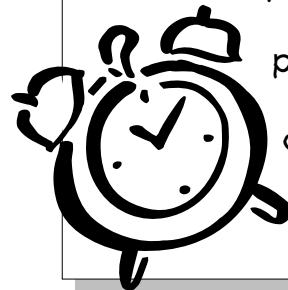
Suggested activities:

- frisbee
- croquet
- horseshoes
- basketball free throws
- hide-and-seek
- Red Rover, Red Rover

SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- How can knowing your neighbors help your family?
- Does knowing your neighbor help you feel better about your neighborhood?
- What else could be done to get to know your neighbors?

Time Needed:
Depending on how elaborate you make your party, the planning time could run approximately 30 minutes to an hour.



Circle of Friends

It is important to have friends to turn to when you need to talk about the things that are happening in life. These friends can be there to support you throughout your whole life. The purpose of this activity is to get together and have fun with your circle of friends!

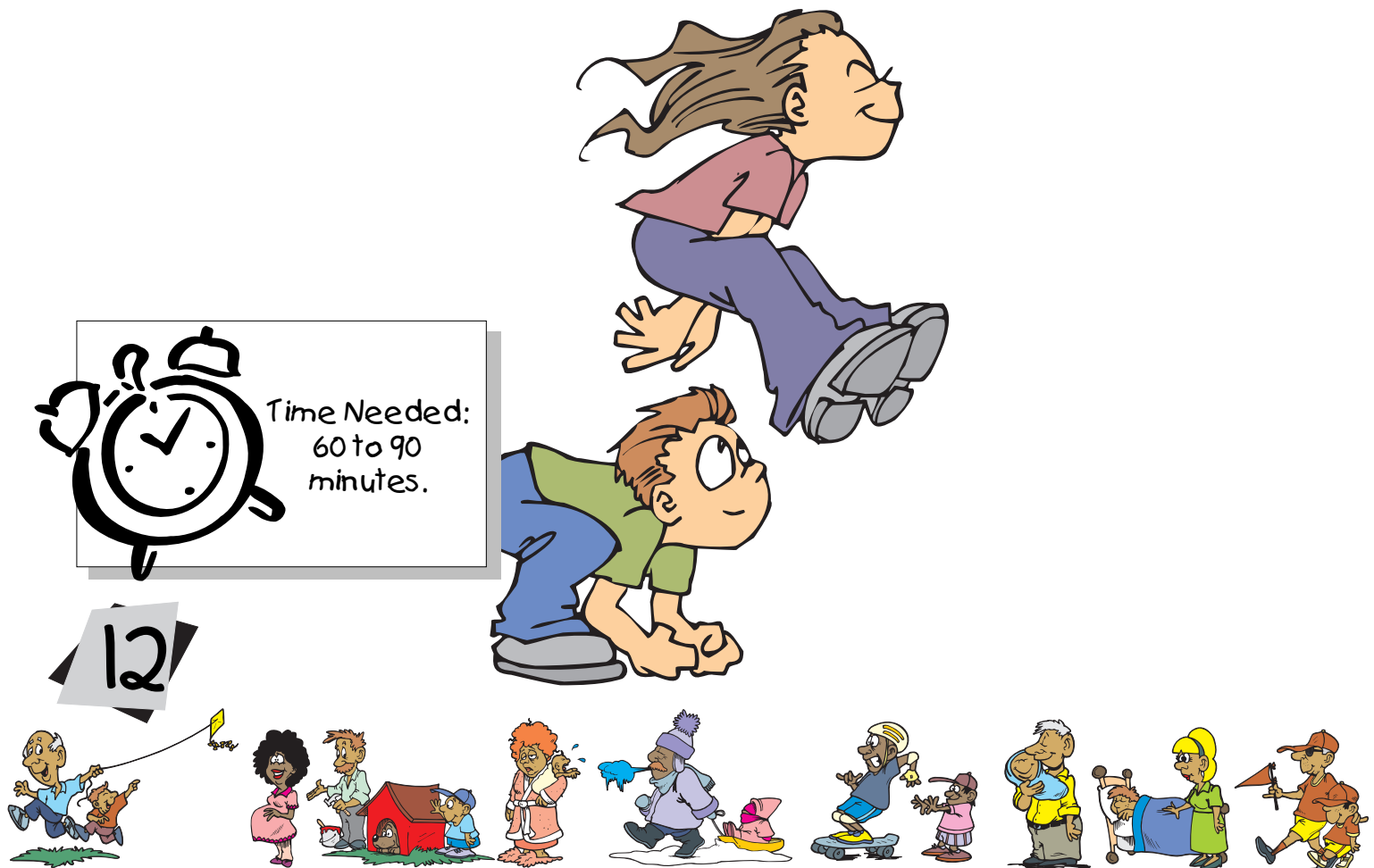
ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

Have each member of the family plan to host an activity for a group of friends. It is important that parents also take time to foster individual or couple friendships. Identify about two to four of your good friends. Then call them and invite them for an activity. This could include dinner, a picnic, playing a sport with them that they enjoy, like golf, or doing something your group enjoys like shopping, rollerblading, or just spending time together talking.

Let your friends know that you appreciate them and that their friendship is important to you. Having a good friendship takes time and effort. Family members of all ages can plan different activities that their friends enjoy doing.

SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- How did it feel to get your friends together?
- Did you have a good time doing your activity?
- What specific qualities do you like about your friends?
- Do you plan to meet again and make it a scheduled event?



Family Awards Night

Everybody likes to be noticed for the good things they do. If parents can learn to recognize and reinforce the good things their children are doing, the children will find more opportunities to be positive. The purpose of this activity is to help parents reinforce positive behavior through praise by recognizing children for their good work.

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

After a family dinner, announce to the children it is Family Awards Night. Each child is awarded a simple trophy (a can of soda pop) for their good works of the past week.

Awards may be given for the following accomplishments:

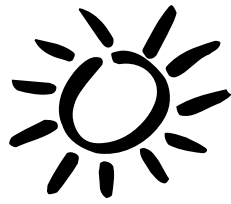
- sister support—gave a needed hug, helped with homework
- generosity—saved for a sibling's birthday present
- elbow grease—put the chain back on another's bike
- fitness—turned off TV to go outside and exercise
- patience—played with the baby
- safety—helped younger children cross the street
- self-starter—got up on their own for school

Children may also pitch in and find appropriate awards for each of their parents. You can get creative with the awards and offer something different every once in awhile, like a favorite box of cold cereal.



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KINDNESS

It would seem that being kind in families is such a simple idea that perhaps it doesn't need emphasis. But kindness may be more powerful than we think. Results from a national survey show that kindness is one of the strongest predictors of positive family outcomes. Families that show a high amount of kindness are more likely to experience greater family satisfaction than families that show low amounts of kindness. Furthermore, children in families where kindness is high are less likely to experience problems such as poor school performance, substance abuse, crime, and gang involvement.

It has often been said that "actions speak louder than words." When we do kind acts for family members, we show them that we love and care about them. These kind acts go a long way in fostering an environment within the family that is nurturing, warm, and friendly. As we do kind acts for others, we communicate love and respect and, in turn, family members do kind things for us. Kindness is contagious. Catch it!

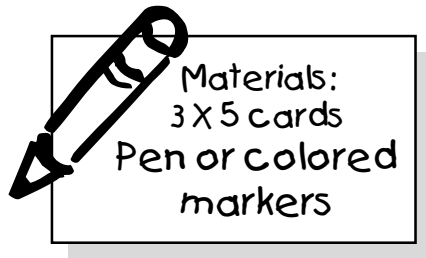
KINDNESS ACTIVITIES

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Coupons of Kindness

Some of the best gifts we can give to family members are acts of kindness. Although these acts may be simple, they are special because they show others that we really do care about them. The purpose of this activity is to increase acts of kindness among family members.



ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

On a 3 X 5 card, make a coupon, writing down acts of kindness that you are willing to do for a family member. Include specific details on the coupon, such as the name of the family member, what acts of kindness you will do for him or her, and how often the coupon may be re-used.

When the person is ready to use the coupon, he/she simply gives it to you in exchange for your act of service. If the card is good for more than one kind act, put a check mark in the corner to indicate the number of kind acts that have been used.

Acts of kindness that are often enjoyed by family members include:

- Help with chores, such as washing the dishes, folding the laundry, or working in the yard
- Wash and vacuum the car
- Go on a dinner date
- Do a short activity together, such as a bike ride, a walk, a car ride, etc.
- Go to a movie

SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Was it hard to think of different acts of kindness you were willing to do?
- Did you think of other acts of kindness you could do when you saw what others were writing?
- How did it feel to do acts of kindness? To receive them?



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Affection

In a family it is important to show affection to each other. A family can grow closer as they receive love and support from each other. Families can begin to learn to show affection even if they haven't done it in the past. This activity will help!

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

Talk with your family members about the importance of showing affection. Ask each family member to tell the ways that they would like affection shown to them, or would like to show affection. Some members might like hugs, while others might like to give and receive affection through performing acts of service. It is important to find out how different family members like to receive affection. Otherwise, feelings might be hurt if you give affection and it is not appreciated. Signals might be crossed as you give affection the way you would like to receive it, but the other person does not know it.

It is important to tell *each* member that you love him or her. This might be difficult to start with, but it can become easier with practice. Start with telling your family members that you love them as you are going somewhere, or at the end of a telephone conversation. As it becomes easier to tell your family, or individual family members, that you love them, also show your love by giving hugs and being interested in them, if you are not already doing that.

Make an "Affection" sign as a reminder to the family to try and demonstrate love to each other. This can be anything that the family feels would be a good reminder.

SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- After introducing the idea, follow up later with a discussion.
- What good things have happened because of trying to show more affection?
- What are your preferences about receiving affection?
- Did any family members feel different about demonstrating affection than you thought they would?
- Was it hard to start showing affection to each other? Did it get easier over time?



Helping Others

When we take an interest in others and do kind acts for them, we begin to understand and appreciate them more. We also begin to understand how much our kindness means to others. This activity will help increase our understanding of others' needs by performing kind acts for them.

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

Select a family or individual in your neighborhood or community that you can do a kind act for. Is there someone that particularly needs your help? You may want to choose someone that you do not know very well or someone that is in need of something that you have to offer. After identifying one of the needs, do a kind act for this person or family. You can do a kind act that does not cost any money and does not require a lot of time. The kind deed could be as simple as visiting an elderly person, inviting a neighbor to your home for dinner, assisting someone with yard work, or volunteering your time to help a non-profit organization.

SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What made this activity worthwhile?
- Do you think the person that you did the kind act for appreciated what you did? Why?
- After doing a kind act, such as the one you did, what feelings did you experience?
- How did these feelings affect the rest of the family?
- How does our attitude affect how we feel about the activity?
- What characteristics helped your family work well together as you performed the kind act?



Time
needed for
this activity
will vary.

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Forgiveness

Forgiveness is using the power within us to let go of anger, feelings of revenge, and unhappiness. Letting go of these feelings frees us from burden. This activity can help family members understand the meaning of forgiveness. It will help family members learn that letting go is part of forgiving. It will show that having bad feelings about others can backfire and hurt you.

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

To introduce the theme of the lesson print the letters *F, O, R, G, I, V, E* on seven pieces of paper. Mix them up and pass to each member of the family to choose a letter. Unscramble the letters and when the word is spelled out, have each family member complete the sentence, Forgiveness is _____, using a word that starts with the letter they chose.

To demonstrate the importance of letting go, fill a backpack or sack with five heavy objects (such as books or rocks) and label them *revenge, hurt, hate, resentment, and anger*. Label the backpack "*Bag of Grudges*." Have each member of the family try to lift the heavy load. Have them try and hold it off the ground for 2-3 minutes with hands outstretched. Explain that carrying the backpack is a lot like carrying these five feelings inside our hearts. When we forgive, we let go of all these feelings and are free from the burden of carrying them.

SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Who is hurt most when we do not forgive? Why?
- How can we be sure we have truly forgiven another?
- Is forgiveness a sign of weakness or strength?
- How does it affect our lives and those around us when we do not forgive?
- Does the other person need to desire forgiveness?
- (Be careful not to single out individual family members you think need to let go of grudges. Let family members draw their own conclusions.)



Empathy

When family members show kindness to each other, families work together better. One thing that can help is being able to understand how others feel. Understanding how others feel is called empathy. The purpose of this activity is to help family members develop the ability to empathize and understand others' feelings.

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

Select a scenario listed below. Then talk within your family about how each member would feel if that happened to them. Listen to what each member says without criticizing the person. Emphasize that the family is trying to learn to think about how others feel in relation to their actions.

How do you think the other person felt?

1. You promised to help your brother/sister with a project. Now you say you cannot help.
2. You promised to take your children somewhere, but cannot.
3. You said you would go to your friend's house after school, but now you are not going.
4. Your brother/sister were looking for their clothes and found them in your drawer with a stain on them.
5. Your parent fixed a nice dinner, but no one was home to eat it and it got ruined.
6. Your brother/sister tried out for a team (like cheerleading or football), but did not make it.
7. Your sister/brother lost a soccer game.
8. Your mom/dad was in line for a promotion at work, but did not get it.
9. You got good grades on your report card, but your sister/brother did not.
10. Your parents asked you to help clean the house, you did not, and someone important came by to visit.

SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

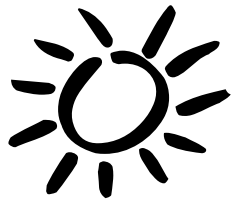
- Was it hard thinking about other's feelings with each scenario rather than your own?
- Did you think about how you would feel if that had happened to you?
- What is the best way to learn how to think more about others' feelings?



Time
Needed:
30-40
minutes

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COMMUNICATION

Everyone recognizes the importance of effective communication in families. But knowing communication is important isn't enough. It requires continual effort each day. Family members can keep communication channels open as they talk about common interests, the events or activities of the day, family concerns, or personal problems.

Good communication helps families resolve the conflicts that are bound to happen. Many of the conflicts that arise are because of misunderstandings, rather than because of real differences. If families don't communicate well, problems generally don't get resolved, and they often get worse.

Communication is more than just a way to resolve conflicts or avoid problems though. Through effective communication, family relationships are strengthened. Joys can be shared, burdens can be lifted, and love can be expressed. The rewards are well worth the effort.

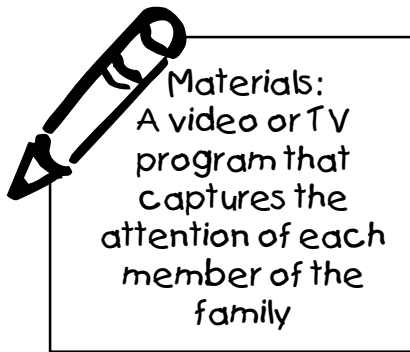
COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES

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Understanding Non-verbal Communication

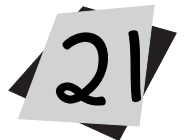
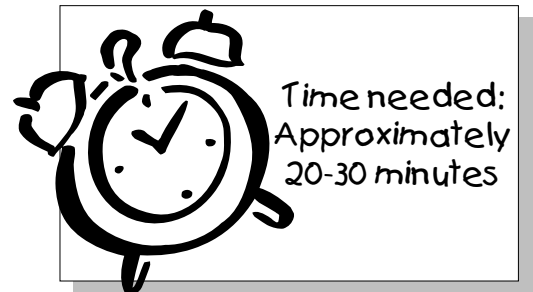
Tone of voice, facial expressions, body posture, and hand gestures are the non-verbal parts of communication. Our non-verbal messages can help us to communicate, but they also can be confusing. Since much of communication is non-verbal, we need to become good at sending the message we mean to. We also need to learn to “read” the non-verbal signals of others. If the non-verbal messages contradict the verbal messages, communication becomes very confusing. This activity will help each member of the family become more aware of non-verbal communication.



ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

As a family, make a list of different non-verbal actions. For example, folding your arms, snorting, frowning, etc... Select a TV program or a segment of a video. Watch about 5 to 7 minutes of the program with the volume off. While watching the program without volume, identify the different non-verbal messages, especially the feelings that are expressed. After 5 to 7 minutes, turn off the TV and discuss what you observed. You could even carry on the discussion as the program continues. Discussion-starter questions could include:

- What were the non-verbal messages that you observed?
- How important do you think the non-verbal messages are in helping you to enjoy the movie and understand what was going on in the movie?
- Did you observe any confusing non-verbal messages?
- What feelings were expressed through non-verbal communication?
- What were some of the difficulties of this activity?
- What can you do to be more aware of non-verbal messages?
- Did everyone think the non-verbal message meant the same thing?
- Are non-verbal messages always obvious in real life?



FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY

Have two members of the family sit back-to-back on the floor or in two separate chairs. With backs to each other, carry on a conversation about giving directions to somewhere or explaining how to do something. As you do this, try to understand the feelings of one another. After doing this for awhile, turn around and face each other and continue your discussion.

SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- When you had your backs to each other, did a lack of non-verbal communication affect your ability to communicate with the other person? If so, how?
- What feelings did you experience as you communicated with your back to the other person?
- When you spoke to the other person face-to-face, did this improve your ability to communicate and understand the other person's feelings? If so, how?
- Did face-to-face communication improve your ability to understand the other person's feelings?
- How can you increase your awareness of non-verbal messages you do not mean to be sending?
- How can you be aware of how we may misinterpret someone else's non-verbal messages?



Precision Communication

Good communication contains enough detail in the message that the person listening knows exactly what the speaker is saying. When the communication is not specific enough or the listener is not listening carefully, mis-communication occurs. This activity will provide an opportunity for family members to practice giving and listening to detailed instructions, thus, avoiding mis-communication.



Materials:
Chairs or other non-breakable furniture (such as kitchen chairs), String or yarn, Scissors, A scarf or towel that can be used as a blindfold

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

Set up a maze in your home using furniture, such as kitchen chairs or other pieces of furniture that can act as a barrier. Tie string or yarn between the furniture to create a clear path through the maze. Select a family member that will try to walk through the maze blindfolded. This person must not see the maze prior to being blindfolded. Have someone give voice instructions so the family member can be directed through the maze. The purpose of this

activity is to see if a family member can help the blindfolded member get through the maze without bumping into the furniture, walls, or string. This means that the person giving the instructions must communicate using detailed instructions and the blindfolded member must listen carefully to these instructions.

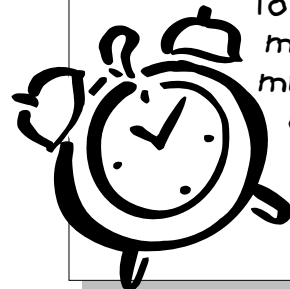
SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Why was clear detailed communication necessary for this exercise?
- How important was it to listen carefully to the one giving instructions? Why?
- What were some of the difficulties associated with helping a family member complete this exercise?
- Using some of the ideas from this exercise, how can you, as a family, improve your communication skills?

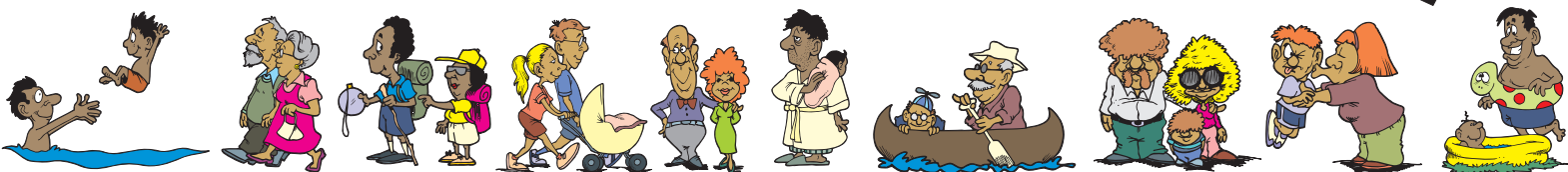
FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY

Using a piece of paper and something to draw with, draw a simple picture or pattern. Without letting family members see the diagram, tell them what they need to do so they can draw a picture that looks as similar to yours as possible. After giving detailed instructions, see how accurately the pictures match up.

Time Needed:
Approximately 30-40 minutes (10 minutes to set up a maze, 15-20 minutes for the activity, and 10-15 minutes for discussion)



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Hints of Anger

Everyone gets angry at one time or another. Anger is normal, but it is important to learn how to handle anger in a positive way. This activity will help family members identify the signals that indicate anger and help them avoid saying or doing something unkind.

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

Think about a time when you were angry or upset. How did you feel? Have family members volunteer answers to the following questions and any others they might think of in relation to how they felt when angry. Is there a difference between what you think about your anger cues and what other family members think?

- Were your hands relaxed or clenched in a fist?
- Was your heart rate normal or beating fast?
- Were your muscles relaxed or tight with tension?
- What kind of thoughts were going through your head?

Now, identify a time when you were relaxed and having a good time. How did your body feel during this period of time? Ask family members which way they felt more comfortable, angry or happy? Discuss the importance of knowing when you are getting upset and might need to take a break and think.

SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Why is it important to recognize the signs that you are angry?
- Why is it important to control your anger?
- What do you feel like specifically, when you are upset?
- What are the things you are going to do to manage your anger so it does not hurt your family relationships?
- Can recognizing anger cues help in managing your anger?



Family Communication Center

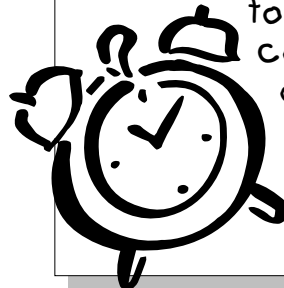
In order to keep connected as a family, it is helpful to know what is going on in everyone's lives! Keeping up-to-date on everyone's activities can help to understand each other. Busy families are involved in lots of meetings, appointments, and activities outside the home. To keep things running smoothly, it helps to have a system for keeping track of who is doing what. This activity will help families communicate clearly and coordinate schedules with one another.



Materials:
Large bulletin board
Thumb tacks or push pins
Pad of note paper
String
Pencil or pen
Calendar with large squares for writing schedules



Time Needed:
An hour to assemble the message center and master phone list, plus 15-30 minutes at the beginning of each month to prepare the calendar and another 5-10 minutes each week to update.



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ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Messages Section** - Remove the cover from a small spiral bound note tablet. Attach the back cover firmly to bulletin board. Wrap or tape some string around one end of a pen or pencil. Attach the other end firmly to the bulletin board. (The paper and pencil will now be handy for jotting down phone messages, tearing them off the pad and immediately attaching them to the bulletin board.) Discuss how to take telephone messages and stress how important it is.
- 2. Numbers Section** - Make a list of important phone numbers and post it on the bulletin board. Include:
 - Emergency numbers (police, fire, ambulance, poison center)
 - Doctors' and dentists' numbers
 - Parents' work numbers
 - The number of a person to call in an emergency
 - Names and phone numbers of children's friends
 - Names and phone numbers of relatives in other towns
 - School office number
- 3. Calendar Section** - Attach a calendar to the bulletin board. Make sure family members write down meetings, appointments, and other important scheduling information.
 - Use remaining space to attach notes and reminders alerting family members to tasks and errands that need to be done.
 - **Do not** remove calendar, phone list, pencil, and note tablet from message center!
 - Practice taking messages for one another by pretending to call and leave imaginary messages. (For example: "This is the president of NBC-TV calling to speak to your mom. The film crew will be arriving on Thursday at 8 a.m. to start filming the documentary about her hectic schedule. Please tell her not to wear her motorcycle jacket and to make sure the cat has a new collar.")
- 4. Note Section** - Attach a note pad and stick pins so phone messages and notes can be posted.

SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Does the communication center bulletin board help with peace of mind and knowing where everyone is?
- Do you feel more organized as a family?
- Is there less confusion since you started using the communication center?
- What worked about the communication center? What did not?
- What other things are needed for the message center?

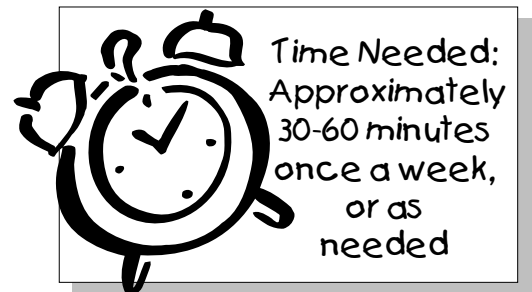


Family Meetings

Regular family council meetings help the family make decisions that are good for everyone. It can help families learn how to plan together, to accept responsibility, and show concern for others. It also helps build communication between family members and provides a time and place to enjoy each other by being together. As a family, reserve a specific night of the week when your family can consistently meet together for a weekly family meeting.

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

1. Set a regular time. Setting a regular time and place gives the family council a position of importance and results in its becoming a permanent part of family operations. If everyone knows that the family is meeting together regularly, they find that most problems can wait a few days to be discussed. For this reason, some families like weekly meetings.
2. Use an agenda. Post a paper during the week where family members can list concerns they want brought up (possibly, the message center). Discuss things in the order listed. This also reduces problems between meetings when parents can say, "List it on the agenda and we'll discuss it at the meeting."
3. Attendance is voluntary. All members of the family are invited to attend — but attendance is voluntary. However, if a member is not present, he/she is still expected to abide by any decisions made by the family council.
4. Each person has equal voice. Everyone should be encouraged to contribute ideas and suggestions. All members must be treated the same, regardless of age. Using the steps of negotiation to (1) introduce the problem, (2) discuss solutions, and (3) vote on a solution. This gives everyone a chance to be involved. Councils do not always run smoothly. Teenagers are often suspicious that the new program is just another way for parents to gain compliance to their demands. In the first council meetings, rebelliousness may be exhibited to deliberately test whether parents are sincere about including them in family decision-making.



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ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS - continued

5. Use rules of order. If participation is to be equal, then some type of order must be maintained. If a person has the right to express himself, then he also has the right to be heard — which implies that others have the obligation to listen. Rules of order help this situation.

6. Rotate chairmanship. If the same person conducts all meetings, that person eventually begins to assume an air of superiority. To help maintain a feeling of equality, family members should take turns conducting the councils. This allows each person to experience the privileges and the responsibilities of this position.

7. Accentuate solutions. Family council should not be “just a gripe session” — a time to get together and complain. In order to prevent this, you may decide that the person presenting a problem must also suggest one possible solution. Family members could then discuss alternate solutions or modify the one presented.

In practice, some solutions do not work as well as anticipated. As family members begin to live with a decision, they may decide it needs to be changed. This change, however, must wait until the next regular meeting. Children soon recognize a need for better solutions and they learn by experience to make wiser choices. When family council is held regularly, each member learns to project ahead and anticipate problems. When this occurs, the emphasis at council meetings shifts from problem solving to problem prevention and planning. Family council can also be a time to plan fun things like vacations or family outings. Families can talk about different places to visit and how they want to spend the time available.

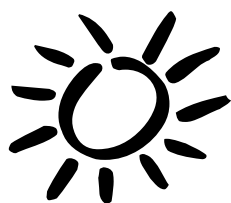
8. The family council can be the final authority for the family, or a family can have a modified version of decision-making. For it to be effective, however, most decisions made by the council need to be binding. If parents always overrule the council, children will soon lose interest.

9. Keep a record. There sometimes develops a difference of opinions as to who conducted the last meeting, what matters were discussed, and what plans were agreed upon. For this reason, a secretary to record minutes is most helpful. The secretary can rotate with each meeting.

SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- How did your first family meeting go?
- What about the meeting was good? What was bad?
- What do you want to incorporate in future meetings?





WORKING TOGETHER

Healthy families establish clear rules that are reasonable and flexible enough to meet changing circumstances. These families recognize that rules play an important part in family life. They help a family operate smoothly by providing structure and order within a family. They help build respect, fairness, and equality among family members. In many respects, family rules are like traffic laws. Traffic laws are there so that drivers can travel safely. It may seem like traffic laws slow us down. However, they actually increase our speed by organizing the flow of traffic.

Research shows that when children are allowed to help make family rules, they are more willing to live by them. Being involved helps children want to be more responsible in helping the family maintain order and also helps make the rules seem fair and reasonable. A great time to review or change rules is during family meetings because the meetings give the family an opportunity to talk about how each members feels.

WORKING TOGETHER ACTIVITIES

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Make a Cake

It is sometimes difficult for children and young adults to understand the reason for limits and rules. We need limits and rules to guide us in a direction that is the most beneficial to our success. Parents and children need to carefully discuss and determine the type of limits and rules that are necessary for their family. In this activity, the plan is to make a pineapple upside down cake without any instructions. Then enjoy a piece of cake over discussion of the value of family rules.

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

Prepare a pineapple upside down cake beforehand using your favorite recipe or the one provided, and set aside. Have the family meet together in the kitchen for this activity. Give the family a list of ingredients, but no indication of how much of each. They will need to figure out amount of ingredients, equipment needed, and oven temperature. The instructions could read something like this:

Pineapple Upside Down Cake

sugar, both kinds
milk
vanilla
egg
shortening
pineapple
baking mix (flour, etc.) margarine cherries

Mix all the ingredients together except pineapple and cherries. Place fruit in bottom of baking dish and pour mixture over the top. Bake in very hot oven until done. Take out of oven and dump upside down.

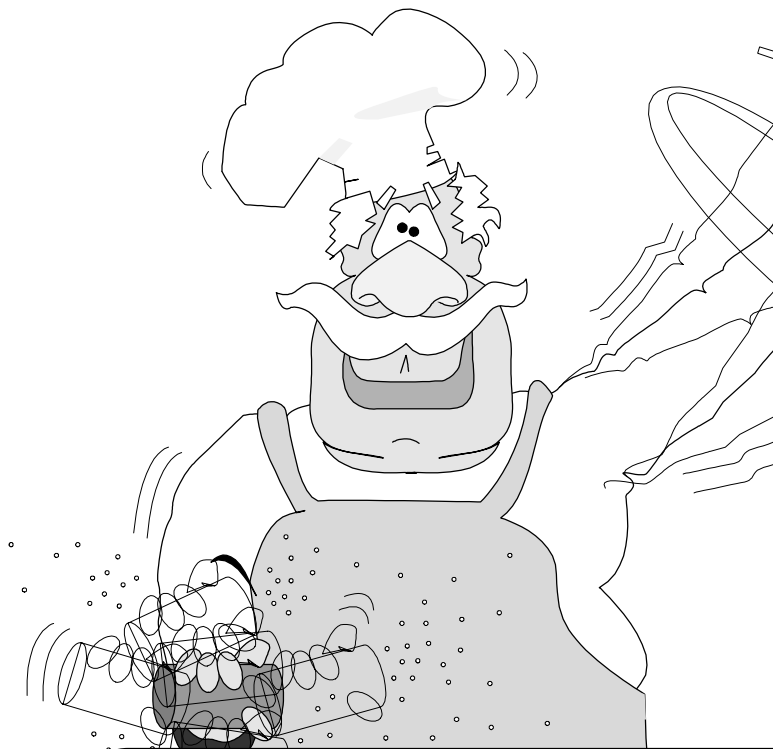
To no one's surprise the cake will turn out to be a disaster and tempers might even start to fly (if they haven't already). Bring out the cake that was made ahead of time and ask if anybody would like to try this one instead. Over a fresh piece of cake discuss the following suggestions.



SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What did the first cake turn out to look like? Was it pleasing?
- List some suggestions that would have helped to make a good recipe.
- How is the recipe like our family rules and limits?
- Could our family possibly resemble the disaster cake if we did not have rules to follow?





Pineapple Upside Down Cake

2 Tbsp. margarine
1/4 cup packed brown sugar
1 can sliced pineapple, drain syrup
1 1/2 cups buttermilk baking mix
1/2 cup sugar

1/2 cup milk
2 Tbsp. shortening
1 tsp. vanilla
1 egg
maraschino cherries

Heat oven to 350 degrees. Heat margarine in round pan, 9 x 1 1/2 in., in oven until melted. Sprinkle pan with brown sugar. Place 1 pineapple slice in center of pan. Cut remaining slices into halves, place cut sides out, around pineapple in center of pan. Place 7 maraschino cherries in the center of curve of pineapple slices. Beat remaining ingredients on low speed 30 seconds while scraping bowl. Beat on medium 4 minutes. Pour batter over fruit in pan. Bake until wooden tooth pick or fork inserted in center comes clean, about 30-40 minutes. Immediately invert pan on serving plate. Let remain a few minutes. Serve warm.

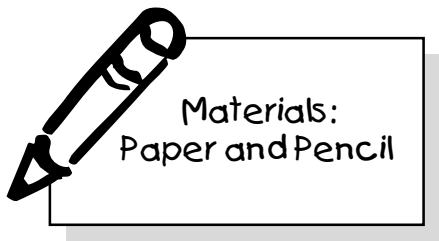
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Establishing Family Rules

Think about what our country would be like if we did not have traffic laws, or any laws about littering, stealing, children going to school, or destroying another person's property. Without laws, our country would not be a safe and enjoyable place to live.

Laws, also called rules or limits, are established in families to help them function smoothly and to help members be happier. Imagine what might happen if there were no rules about curfew, chores, respecting one another, what time to go to bed, what TV programs were appropriate or inappropriate, or when to complete homework. Furthermore, think about what would most likely happen if family rules and limits were not enforced with consequences for broken rules. A family would likely be disorganized and family members may not be treated the way they would like. The purpose of this activity is to help your family maintain order and respect for one another by establishing family rules and consequences that will be enforced when rules are broken.



ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

During a family meeting, talk about rules that are needed for order in your family. This is an excellent time to make sure that every family member clearly understands the family rules. You can also set rules that will help your family function more smoothly. During this meeting, work together in order to establish consequences that will be used when family rules are broken.



ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS continued

As you do this activity, there will probably be some disagreements regarding family rules and associated consequences. Research shows that families who involve children in setting rules and consequences do better than families who do not, so it is important that each member of the family be able to contribute.

Children are more likely to feel that rules and consequences are fair and reasonable if they participate in establishing these guidelines.

SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Were you able to involve each member of the family when establishing family rules?
- What family rules are important to your family?
- Do the rules seem to be fair and appropriate to each member of the family? If not, what can you do to arrive at some agreement?
- In what ways will your family benefit from establishing clear rules?
- Why do you think it is important to be flexible and change the family rules over time?
- If the rules you established are not appropriate later on, how will you change these rules?



Grandma's Rule: Work Then Play

Are you having “one of those days” when the house is a mess, no one is motivated to clean it, and family members are not getting along too well? Having an orderly way of doing chores makes family life more pleasant. Grandma always said, first finish the work, then play. Time needed for this activity will vary.

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

As a family, take a few minutes to decide what chores need to be done so that the house looks and feels clean. Estimate how long it would take the whole family to finish these chores if everyone worked together and worked quickly. Next, identify a reward that is appealing to every family member, such as homemade milk shakes, a picnic or barbecue, going to an inexpensive movie, etc. As a family, make the agreement that if everyone works together and completes the chores, then the family gets the reward under two conditions:

1. The chores are completed close to the estimated time.
2. Everyone in the family has a positive attitude and tries to get along with each other.

You may want to change the rules a little bit. If the family has a positive attitude while working, but does not complete the chores within the estimated time, then the family gets a “lesser reward” (a reward that is still appealing to the family, but not as appealing as the other reward). Before starting a stop-watch or monitoring the clock, get organized. What cleaning supplies will you need and where are they located? Who will start on what chores, and how can you work together so that you can finish cleaning as quickly as possible? This is the most important step. Before you start the clock, decide to have fun and have a positive attitude. Start the clock and Go!

SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Did you have fun doing the work? If so, what made it fun? If not, what can you do to make it fun next time?
- How does it feel to have a clean home?
- In the future, what can you do to improve cooperation with chores?
- How can Grandma's Rule help you to complete chores in a more efficient manner?
- How can Grandma's Rule help you improve your attitude toward doing chores?
- Although the reward helped make this activity fun, can you work together and have fun without having a reward? What will determine if you have fun or not?



My Responsibilities

In a family, everyone has specific chores that are their responsibility. When everyone does what they are supposed to do, the family runs smoothly. If a family member does not do what he or she is supposed to do, or tries to worry about what others are doing, then chaos might occur. This activity can demonstrate the importance of completing individual responsibilities.



Materials:
1 tray
4 sheets of paper, different colors
about 30 small items
(paper clip, pencil, salt shaker...)

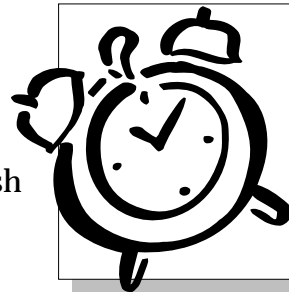
ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

Place the 30 items on a tray. Show your family the tray for 30 seconds, then ask them to write down as many items as they can. They are supposed to work independently of one another. While they are writing, remove all the items from the tray. Place the four pieces of paper on the tray so there are four different colored areas and then put the items back on the tray with approximately the same number of items in each different colored area.

Split your family into four different groups, and assign each group or person a different color. As a group they are to try and remember the different items. Show the tray for 30 seconds and then have each group write down their items. Compare the number of items remembered from the first time to the number remembered the second time. (When split into groups, your family should be able to remember all the items on the tray.)

SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- How many items did each of you remember separately?
- How many items did you remember when you were in your groups?
- When you worked separately, could you accomplish as much as when you worked together?
- When everyone concentrated on their own area, did you remember everything?
- Why is it important to do what you have been asked to do in regards to family chores?



Time Needed:
20 minutes

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Family Court

Adapted from: *Ensign*, January 1995

Parents often find themselves in a constant battle when children are involved in tedious arguments. It is frustrating and tiresome to play judge and jury for children when they should be learning to solve their own problems. The purpose of this activity is to cut down on parents' involvement in children's arguments and to allow a cooling-off period before a decision is made about any discipline.

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

Establish a place in the home where children and parents can create a *Gripe List* (possibly the Communication Center). This will be a place to write down complaints. When children come to a parent to settle an argument, a parent can simply respond, "Put it on the gripe list." At the end of the week the family will sit down together and address each other as if they were in a real court room. A neutral party is selected as judge (mom or dad); the plaintiff and defendant are given an equal opportunity to argue their cases and then they are asked to go to a different room while a verdict is reached. The parties are brought out and read the verdict along with an appropriate punishment.

As the weeks go by, the time set aside for the Family Court will not need to be as long. Many have found that with a cooling-off period children often forget the offenses against them and cases are dismissed from lack of evidence.

SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Is this a fair way of solving problems?
- Did the gripe list shorten over time?
- Did you learn to solve problems fairly, outside of court?





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