

## Tips for Strengthening your Family Relationships

All families have qualities that make them unique. Whether a particular family is a nuclear family, a stepfamily, a single-parent family, or an empty-nest family, it usually consists of related people who care for one another. Regardless of composition, all families need to be nurtured and strengthened from time to time. Families can cultivate strong family bonds by creating a foundation revolving around 6 characteristics.

**Commitment** serves as a foundation for strong family relationships. Strong families are dedicated to the well-being and happiness of all family members. Commitment means that:

- each family member is precious.
- forgiveness is readily available.
- priorities must be established.
- some sacrifices must be made.
- common goals must be shared.
- traditions are established and maintained.

**Appreciation** enhances family members' self-esteem, makes family members feel worthy, and creates a sense of belonging within the family unit. Family members can show appreciation by:

- looking for positive attributes instead of negative.
- showing love in small ways every day.
- saying, "I Love You" every day.
- praising the accomplishments of other family members.
- expressing a lot of appropriate affection.
- remembering and celebrating birthdays, anniversaries, and special occasions.

**Communication** helps family members feel connected to one another. Members of strong families communicate about trivial matters, as well as, important issues. Positive communication involves both talking and listening, and family members feel open to sharing their opinions. Effective communication within a family means:

- being open, honest, and kind.
- listening carefully, without distraction.
- trusting one another.
- avoiding criticism, judgment, and acting superior.
- showing empathy.
- having an understanding attitude.

**Spiritual Wellness** guides ethical behavior, concern for others, and provides unity among family members. Shared beliefs create a bond among family members, and provide a framework for love, purpose, security, hope, and peace. Spirituality:

- helps family members maintain a positive outlook on life.
- provides guidelines for living.
- offers support from people who share in a belief system.
- provides meaningful traditions and rituals.
- helps families cope during hard times.

**Effective coping skills** help families unite during times of conflict, stress, and crisis. Strong families draw on each other's strengths when faced with a crisis, and maintain flexibility in order to deal with the issue. Effective coping strategies for families include:

- finding something positive in the situation and focusing on it.
- uniting and sharing the responsibility of solving the conflict or crisis.
- seeking help from outside sources when needed.
- keeping the lines of communication open.
- drawing on shared spiritual beliefs.
- being flexible and adaptable during crisis situations.

**Spending time together** builds family relationships, creates family memories, and helps the family develop an identity. Quality family time enhances communication skills and provides each family member with a sense of

security and belonging. Family activities are unique to each individual family depending upon personalities, interests, and hobbies of each family member. Some quality family activities include:

- sharing mealtimes as a family.
- completing house and yard chores together.
- taking a hike and packing a picnic lunch.
- going camping and playing outdoor sports.
- having a game or puzzle night.
- going bowling or seeing a movie.
- attending religious services.
- participating in scouting or 4-H activities.
- attending school activities.
- celebrating holidays, birthdays, and anniversaries.

Strengthening family relationships takes time, patience, and commitment. The 6 characteristics serve as a guide to help family members create and maintain strong family bonds. It takes a lot of hard work to build a strong family, but the end result will be well worth the effort.