

Situation

Strong, stable, and resilient families are crucial to the health and well-being of individuals, communities, and society. Children and adults with stable and satisfying family relationships experience greater emotional stability and health than do individuals who live with constant family tension and negative interactions. Every day in Kansas there are approximately 47 marriages and 25 marriage dissolutions. Fifty-nine percent of the dissolutions occurred among couples who had been married more than five years, and 8,423 minor children were affected. Coffey and Geary counties had the highest rate of marital dissolutions during 2013. Divorce increases the likelihood that families with children will be poor by 46 percent (Kansas Vital Statistics; State of the Family: Kansas Child and Family Wellbeing Indicators).

Indicators of whole family, couples, and individual family member stress and disruption include:

- Eighteen percent of children under the age 18 in Kansas fell below the poverty line (\$23,624 for a family of four) in 2013, which is up nearly 5 percent from 2008 (US Census Bureau, Kansas Kids Count, 2013; National Center of Child Poverty)
- Fifty-eight percent of Kansas children in poor families live with a single parent and 35 percent of children in poor families have at least one parent who is employed full-time, year-round. (National Center of Child Poverty).
- Percentage of births to unmarried parents was 36.7 percent in 2012, a 201 percent increase from 1980 (State of the Family: Kansas Child & Family Wellbeing Indicators).
- Teen (ages 15 to 19) birth rate is 35.4 (per 1,000 in the population) in Kansas as compared to 31.1 for the nation (US CDC, National Vital Statistics System 2012; America's Health Rankings United Health Foundation).
- In Kansas, the rate of children in need of care (i.e., protection services) is 8.4 (per 1,000 children in population) as compared to 5.2 for the nation (Casey Family Programs, 2012).
- In the U.S., the unemployment rate for post 9/11 veterans is 10 percent as compared to 8 percent among civilians (Army OneSource, 2013).

A family's financial advantage is associated with higher marriage rates, less divorce, greater marital happiness, and improved child well-being. However, many families must cope with the limited opportunities and added distress associated with financial hardship and poverty. Living in a stepfamily also involves complex and challenging family dynamics and interactions, leading remarried couples to having higher divorce rates than first-time married couples. Cohabitation is an increasing phenomenon among unmarried couples in the United States. Thirty percent of cohabiting couples have children living with them from an earlier relationship although family stability has been reported lower than for married families.

Many Kansas families experience repeated transitions, prolonged stress, unstable situations, and poverty, which negatively impact Kansas children. For example, according to the Kansas Department of Education, in 2014 public schools reported nearly 10,400 homeless children, a thousand more than a year earlier. Other transitions that stress Kansas families includes long periods of time when parents are absent from home due to distant jobs, chronic illness, incarceration, or military service. Military families typically manage well, but geographic isolation, military downsizing resulting in loss of jobs, and hesitation to ask for help strain many National Guard and Reserve families.

Though the rate of teen pregnancies has decreased, the issues of helping single-parent, teen-led families cope with social and economic challenges continue. Although social issues can negatively affect many aspects of child and family living, a research-based family strengths model delineates six major qualities of successful families worldwide. Those strengths are: appreciation and affection for each other, commitment, positive communication, enjoyment with being together, spiritual well-being, and coping abilities in times of stress and crisis. Likewise, predictors of healthy marital and couple relationships include making intentional relationship choices, continually working to understand the partner's world, showing nurturing and caring behaviors, developing a couple identity, using skills to successfully manage stress, differences, and conflict,

taking care of self, and engaging a positive social network of support. Research also reveals that in times of stress and crisis families with optimism, resourcefulness, and determination are resilient. K-State Research and Extension is dedicated to providing culturally appropriate child and family development programming that builds resilience and improves the lives of individuals and their families.

References

- Kansas and county marriage and divorce statistics: http://www.kdheks.gov/hci/as/2013/AS_2013.pdf
- Healthy Kansas 2020 data and objectives can be found at: healthykansans2020.com/index.asp#&panel1-1
- Indicators of child well-being in Kansas can be found at: <http://kac.org/state-and-county-data/>
- 2014 – The State of the Family: Kansas Child and Family Wellbeing Indicators report can be found at: <http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/programming/doc18414.ashx>
- Resetting the Poverty Debate: State of the States, 2013: <http://halfinteneducation.org/2013-annual-report/>
- National Center of Child Poverty, 2013: <http://www.nccp.org/>
- Situations and Trends – KSRE Office of Local Government (2015): www.ksu-olg.info/repub_fiscalconditionstrends.html

Public Value

K-State Research and Extension’s Family and Child Development programming contributes to healthy relationships and social-emotional interactions for strong, stable families. The impact of strong families is fewer divorces, decreased risk of out-of-home placement of children (protective services, foster care), decreases in family conflict, improved mental health and family member well-being. Consequently, stronger families improve the health and well-being of all Kansas communities.

Outcomes

Short-Term (Knowledge)

Programs will result in short-term outcomes for family members, parents, and community members/providers.

- **Family members** will improve their awareness, knowledge, and intentions related to the six qualities that make families strong and resilient: showing appreciation and affection toward family members, - demonstrating commitment toward each other, - using positive communication with each other, - having enjoyable times together, - building spiritual well-being within the family, and - managing stress and crisis effectively.
- **Couples** will improve their awareness, knowledge, and intentions about the importance of a strong couple relationship that promotes resilience and well-being for themselves and their family unit by:- caring for self,- committing effort to the relationship,- developing and maintaining intimate knowledge of each other,- showing affection and respect towards each other,- fostering a shared sense of couple identity,- managing problems and conflicts in a way that protects the relationship, and - engaging a positive social network.
- **Parents** will improve their awareness, knowledge, and intentions about the role they have in the lives of their children and the importance of: - positive parent-child interaction (e.g., support, caring, enjoyment, decrease in hitting, neglect); - consistent, cohesive communication (e.g, positive messages, clear/age-appropriate direction, decreased harshness, bullying, and verbal abuse); - adaptability and flexibility in parent practices (e.g., giving age-appropriate choices, age-appropriate expectations, decreased stress and anger around parenting); - effective parental monitoring (e.g., knowing children’s activities, friends, and what makes them thrive, using technology effectively and appropriately).
- **Family life educators, providers, family and child workers, and community leaders** will increase their awareness, knowledge, understanding, and appreciation for: effective program planning. Implementation, and evaluation of child, youth, and family programs;- the connection between family member relationships and well-being, community quality of life, and creating opportunities to build strong families and healthy family members; - family systems and child, youth, and family development; and- effective program approaches for targeted audiences (e.g, military families, teen-led families, families in transition, foster families).

Indicators

1. Family members agree that they have increased awareness, knowledge, and intentions of/about the six qualities that make families strong and resilient.
2. Couples agree that they have increased awareness, knowledge, and intentions of/about the behaviors that create strong and lasting relationships.

3. Parents agree that they have increased awareness, knowledge of, and intent to successfully practice: positive parent-child interaction; clear and consistent communication; adaptable/flexible parenting practices; and effective parental monitoring.
4. Family life educator, family and child workers, and community leaders agree they have increased awareness and knowledge in: effective child, youth, and family programs; connections between family member relationships and well-being, creating opportunities to build strong families, healthy family members, and community quality of life; family systems and child, youth, family development.

Medium-Term (Behavior)

Programs will result in medium-term outcomes for family members, couples, parents, and community members/providers.

- Family members will: contribute to each of their family members' well-being. - contribute to their family members' satisfaction in their relationships with each other. - identify their family's strengths and continue to build upon those strengths. - identify those areas of their family life where they would like to make a positive change. - develop skills that support their resilience during times of stress and adversity.
- Couples will: commit effort to a long term relationship.- develop skills that manage stress, differences, and conflict.- contribute to the couple's well-being by intentionally having meaningful time together.
- Parents will practice: positive parent-child interaction (e.g., support, caring, enjoyment, decrease in hitting, neglect).- clear and consistent communication (e.g., positive messages, clear/age-appropriate direction, decreased harshness and verbal abuse). - adaptable/flexible parenting practices (e.g., giving age-appropriate choices, age-appropriate expectations, decreased stress and anger around parenting). - effective parental monitoring (e.g., knowing children's activities and friends, knowing what makes them thrive, using technology effectively and appropriately to help with parenting).
- Family life educators, child and family workers, community leaders will: practice planning, implementation, and evaluation of effective child, youth, and family programs. - support connections between family member relationships and well-being, the creation of opportunities that build strong families, healthy family members, and community quality of life.- use their understanding of family systems and child, youth, and family development in programming. - advocate for effective programs for targeted audiences.

Indicators

1. Six weeks after completion of the program, family members report they have practiced the six qualities that make families strong and family members resilient.
2. Six weeks after completion of the program, couples report they have practiced the behaviors that make the couple relationship strong and resilient in times of stress.
3. Six weeks after completion of the program, parents report they have practiced: positive parent-child interaction; clear and consistent communication; adaptable/flexible parenting practices; and effective parental monitoring.
4. Six weeks after completion of the program, family life educators, child and family workers, and community leaders report that they have: strengthened the six qualities of strong families; supported positive and effective parenting; used practices and programs that support the connections between family member relationships and well-being, creating opportunities to build strong families, healthy family members, and improve community quality of life; integrated family systems and child, youth, and family development in programming; and advocated for effective program approaches for targeted audiences.

Long-Term (Change in Condition)

Strong and resilient Kansas families and couples that consistently exhibit positive family and couple relationships, resilience and health, and strengthen the family lives of others.

Indicators

After the program has been completed, [insert number of] Kansas families and couples have improved their family and couple relationships and are stronger and more resilient (that is, able to "bounce-back" in spite of adversity).

Outputs

Program Participants:

- Pre-adolescents and adolescents.
- Adult couples.
- Families and individual family members, and adult couples.
- Parents and guardians/caregivers of children and adolescents (e.g., foster parents).
- Family life educators, child and family workers, community leaders.
- School administrators, faculty, and staff.

Programs - Evidence-based

1. Together We Can: Creating a Healthy Future for our Family
 - TWC (Together We Can) prepares unmarried parents to set goals to promote and create a healthy future for their children.
 - Helps unmarried couples establish positive co-parenting relationships.
 - Ensures on-going and sustained involvement of both parents.
 - Prepares couples to make healthy decisions for their children.
 - Supports a community-based response to the stress associated with poverty.

[Suitable for teen parents, teen couples. Can be used as an educational programming component with community poverty initiatives such as Circles.]
2. ELEVATE – Taking Your Relationship to the Next Level
 - A couple’s education curriculum that blends practical skills with an understanding of the physiology of human interaction to enhance healthy relationship knowledge and skills.
 - This 8-hour, research-informed, couple’s education curriculum engages couples in learning and practicing the seven core principles/skills essential to maintaining healthy and stable relationships.
 - Grounded in best practices of family life education. Two distinct characteristics of ELEVATE are (1) the practical strategies and tools taught; and (2) the inclusion of mindfulness practice activities that help couples regulate their heart-brain response to stressful triggers.
3. Healthy Relationship and Marriage Education Training (for professionals working with couples/families)
 - The aim of this project was to increase child welfare professionals' access to relationship and marriage education as one strategy to meet the safety, permanency, and well-being needs of vulnerable children in the child welfare system.
 - A number of tools have been developed to help professionals teach healthy relationship skills. These tools are based on teaching the seven principles of the National Extension Relationship and Marriage Education Model (NERMEM).
4. Dating Smarts (for youth grades 5 to 9)
 - Six one-hour lessons that include highly engaging activities to explore essential aspects of early relationships — attraction, infatuation, feelings and rejection.
 - The messages are respectful, affirming the value of early romantic experiences while offering perspective on how these grow and change over time.
5. Relationship Smarts PLUS (for youth grades 8 to 12)
 - Evidence-based relationship skills curriculum for teens.
 - Twelve one-hour lessons that address life skills, healthy relationships, dating violence, and pregnancy prevention, delivered by these innovative educational strategies: Building assets and strengthening protective factors; and empowering success with skills to form and maintain healthy relationships, make wise sexual choices, and work toward their goals
6. Stepping Stones for Stepfamilies
 - Helps couples navigate the dynamics and normal challenges of stepfamily relations, management, and parenting.

Includes a six-lesson home study course, a teaching guide with video/DVD and participant fact sheets, and training materials for community family life educators.

7. Viva La Familia Sanos (Long Live the Healthy Family!)

- An interactive program for building and maintaining strong Latino marriages and families. Includes leader training, Powerpoint masters, evaluation surveys, certificate of completion, and instructional manual for community family life educators to deliver a four-lesson series in groups. All available on the Families! website.

8. Advancing Youth Development (AYD)

- Derived from the national six-city BEST project to train youth development professionals, AYD is a seven-module comprehensive training program for providers, youth workers, and community leaders on adolescent development. The Cornell University curriculum is taught to groups in a total of 12 hours or can be broken into hourly modules.

[Suitable for family life educators, child and family workers, providers, and community leaders.]

Programs - Evidence-informed, minimal commitment (i.e., 1 hour/1 session)

- Family Change: Separation and Divorce (Olsen, C. & Wiles, B.) revised - 2015-2016
- CoupleTalk: Enhancing Your Relationships* (Olsen, C.)
- FamilyTalk: Making it Work* (Olsen, C.)
- Loving Long-Distance: Families Separated by Divorce* (Bishop, E. & Olsen, C.)
- Awareness to Action: Army Families in our Communities* (Johannes, E., Olsen, C., & Domsch, A.)
- Breaking the Code: Understanding and Preventing Teen Bullying* (Johannes, E. & Hartman, A.)
- PeopleTalk* (Olsen, C.)
- When Words Become Weapons: Verbal Abuse Awareness and Prevention* (Johannes, E.)
- Seize the Moment! Bonding Thru Board Games* (Brunscheen-Cartagena, L.)
- Your Feelings, My Decision, Our Actions: Promoting Social Emotional Health among School-age Youth and Their Families* (Johannes, E., & Rhoades, N.) - available 2015-2016
- FCS Lessons include leader training and teaching guides, participant fact sheets, program evaluations, and other support materials.

Educational Products

Websites:

- www.he.k-state.edu/fshs/extension/ (School of Family Studies and Human Services Extension website)
- www.ksre.ksu.edu/familiesandrelationships (Kansas Extension Families and Relationships website) under revision and name change
- www.fcs.uga.edu/nermen National Extension Relationship and Marriage Education Network (NERMEN)
- www.cyfernet.org (national Extension Children, Youth and Family Education and Research network website)
- www.dibbleinstitute.org/ The Dibble Institute
- www.healthymarriageandfamilies.org/ National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families

Supplies:

- Building Strong Families and Relationships — displays, info cards
- Together We Can (TWC) — displays, training manual, marketing support