

Situation

Strong, stable, and resilient families are crucial to the health and well-being of individuals, communities, and society. Children and adults with stable, supportive and satisfying relationships experience greater emotional stability and health than do individuals who live with constant family stresses and who experience trauma. For more than 20 years, researchers at the Centers for Disease Control have linked relationship trauma during ages 0 to 18 to poor health outcomes in adulthood. Social determinants such as poverty, poor housing, limited education, lack of job skills, toxic physical environment, family displacements, and weak social connections are associated with family disruption and reduced quality-of-life across the life course.

Indicators of family, couple, and individual stress and disruption include:

- More than seventeen percent of children under the age 18 in Kansas fell below the federal poverty line (\$24, 600 for a family of four) in 2016, which is up nearly 5 percent from 2008 (US Census Bureau, Kansas Kids Count, 2016 National Center of Child Poverty).
- Sixty percent (76,361) of children in poor families live with a single parent, compared to 22% (127,764) of children in non-poor families (National Center of Child Poverty, 2015).
- Twenty-three percent (29,077) of children in poor families do not have an employed parent compared to two percent (12,954) of children in non-poor families. (National Center of Child Poverty, 2015).
- 7,223 of Kansas children were in foster care in 2015 as compared to 6,762 in 2014. (Kids Count Annie E. Casey Foundation)
- The number of families displaced by conflict, poverty, government breakdown, and loss of job/educational opportunities continues to increase in urban and rural areas of Kansas (Bolton & Hernandez, 2017).
- An aging population of farmers and ranchers is resulting in succession issues among farm and ranch families.

Although social issues can negatively affect child and family well-being, a research-based family strengths model delineates six 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 all kinds of healthy 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. Also, we must expand our capacity to build relationships with new populations who continue to add to the diverse fabric of urban and rural communities if we are to meet the needs of all families. K-State Research and Extension is dedicated to providing culturally appropriate child and family development programming for urban and rural audiences that builds resilience and improves the lives of individuals and their families.

References:

- Healthy Kansas 2020 data and objectives can be found at: healthykansans2020.com/index.asp#&panel1-1
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: About Adverse Childhood Experiences: https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/about_ace.html
- Indicators of child well-being in Kansas can be found at: <http://kac.org/state-and-county-data/>
- 2015 – The State of the Family: Kansas Child and Family Wellbeing Indicators report can be found at: http://www.dcf.ks.gov/Agency/FBCL/Documents/KCLE/2015%20History%20addendum_State%20of%20the%20Family%20Report.pdf
- National Center of Child Poverty, 2015: <http://www.nccp.org/>
- Situations and Trends – KSRE Office of Local Government (2017): www.ksu-olg.info/repub_fiscalconditionstrends.html
- County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, 2017: <http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/>
- Applying Global Perspectives on Fragility to Improve US Communities. (2017). *Advances in Anthropology*, 7, 22-23.

Public Value

K-State Research and Extension's Family and Child Development programming contributes to healthy relationships and overall family well-being. The impact of strong families in Kansas is fewer divorces, reduction of children in foster care, decreases in family conflict, successful farm/ranch family transitions, and improved quality-of-life for individuals and their families.

Outputs

Program Participants

- Pre-adolescents and adolescents.
- Adult couples.
- Families and individual family members.
- Parents/guides of children and adolescents.
- Community Partners

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 Implementation of TWC is part of a north central region, multi-state collaborative.]

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. Farm and Ranch Succession Risk Management Education

- Health, stress and well-being, communication, family and business relationships, and transition planning are topics that are covered in workshops for farm and ranch families living in a volatile agricultural economy.
- These educational endeavors are done in collaboration with agricultural economists and farm/ranch management specialists.

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 Step-families

- Helps couples navigate the dynamics and normal challenges of step-family 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. Positive Youth Development 101

- Derived from the national six-city BEST Advancing Youth Development project to train youth development professionals 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. CEUs are available through the KS Dept. of Health and Environment. [Suitable for joint training with community partners.]

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

- Family Change: Separation and Divorce (Olsen, C. & Wiles, B.) revised - 2016
- CoupleTalk: Enhancing Your Relationships (Olsen, C.)
- FamilyTalk: Making it Work (Olsen, C.)
- Loving Long-Distance: Families Separated by Distance (Bishop, E. & Olsen, C.)
- PeopleTalk (Olsen, C.)
- When Words Become Weapons: Verbal Abuse Awareness and Prevention (Johannes, E.)
- Seize the Moment! Bonding Thru Board Games (Brunscheen-Cartagena, L.)
- Soft Skills are Success Skills (Johannes, E., & Rhoades, N.)

FCS Lessons include leader training and teaching guides, participant fact sheets, program evaluations, and other support materials.

Educational Products Websites and Contacts

- www.ksre.ksu.edu/families (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
- www.ksre.k-state.edu/kams/succession/
- <http://www.povertysimulation.net/> Poverty Simulation kit (contact Elaine Johannes for information and facilitation)
- Prevention focused educational resources for under-served audiences such as minority populations, individuals/families with displacement experiences, etc. (Contact Debra Bolton, SW Research and Extension Center, for information and resources) Topics include:
 - ****"How to win friends and influence people...with data":** this helps participants understand data and its use for setting programming priorities
 - ****"A day in the life of Poverty" :** this workshop allows face-to-face interactions with those living in poverty where participants learn of their coping skills and the barriers to financial and social successes
 - ****"How the Socio-Ecological and Logic Models help us Understand Families living in Poverty":** this interactive workshop, which I teach to KU's health sciences classes, allows hands-on experiences in understanding of the models so that they become embedded in our lenses for understanding poverty and wealth

Short-Term (Knowledge)

- Family members will improve their awareness and knowledge, 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 and knowledge about the importance of relationships that promote resilience and well-being by: caring for self, committing effort to the relationship, developing and maintaining intimate knowledge of each other, showing affection and respect toward 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 and knowledge, about 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); and effective parental monitoring (e.g., knowing children's activities, friends, and what makes them thrive, using technology effectively and appropriately).
- Community partners will increase their awareness and knowledge of healthy relationships and well-being; family systems and child, youth, and family development; and how to build strong families.

Indicators

- Family members agree that they have increased awareness and knowledge of/about the six qualities of strong and resilient families.
- Couples agree that they have increased awareness and knowledge, of/about the behaviors that create strong and lasting relationships.
- Parents agree that they have increased awareness and knowledge of: positive parent-child interaction; clear and consistent communication; adaptable/flexible parenting practices; and effective parental monitoring.
- Community partners agree they have increased awareness and knowledge in: effective child, youth, and family programs; connections between family member relationships and well-being, family systems and child, youth, family development.

Medium-Term (Behavior)

- Family members will: contribute to each family members' well-being; and satisfaction in their relationships with each other; identify and build their family's strengths; identify where they can make positive changes; and develop resilience skills during stress and adversity.
- Couples will: commit effort to a long-term relationship; develop skills to manage stress, differences, and conflict; and contribute to the couple's well-being by 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); and 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).
- Community partners will offer 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; and advocate for effective programs for targeted audiences.

Indicators

- Six weeks after completion of the program, family members report they have practiced the six qualities that make families strong and family members resilient.
- 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.
- 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.
- Six weeks after completion of the program, community partners 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 have positive relationships, resilience and health, and stronger family lives.

Indicators

- After the program has been completed, Kansas families and couples demonstrate improved family and couple relationships and resilience.