
CELEBRATE YOUR FAMILY

“Celebrate Your Family” is intended to help your family develop its strengths. The only two requirements for celebrating your family are a desire to do something that will strengthen the family further, and a family commitment to set aside some time for strength-building activities.

All families experience stress. What separates a strong family from other families is that the strong family works at making itself healthy. The stressors affecting families are the ordinary events that occur as the family lives and grows together. The entire family feels the stress that comes about when an 18-month old continually tries to play with the television, or a 2-year old repeatedly insists on doing *everything* herself, or the 6-year old who is still in his PJ’s after being told 12 times to get dressed. Stress also occurs when Mom or Dad has to work overtime, or the telephone rings in the middle of supper, or Mom is feeling “under the weather.”

What separates a strong family from all the others is how it deals with these ordinary stressors. A strong family works at developing its abilities to cope with stress.

Every family, regardless of its shape or size, can develop its inner strengths. These inner strengths can help deal with the ordinary stressors of life.

One strength that members of strong families work at is the ability to communicate with each other. Live yeast is a necessary ingredient in making yeast bread. It makes the dough rise; it enables the dough to grow. Communication is a necessary ingredient in the life of a strong family if it is to be alive and grow strong.

Good communication doesn’t just happen—like yeast, it must be kneaded into the family. Family members must work at communicating to strengthen their families.

FAMILY ACTIVITY 1.

Let’s pretend.

Recognizing that every person has feelings is an important part of communication. Sometimes when one person forgets about another’s feelings, the person is hurt because of something that is said. After supper, plan to play “let’s pretend.” The parent says to all the family members, “In our family we have all kinds of feelings. Sometimes I feel sad, or happy, or tired, or confused. Each of us will make a face that expresses a feeling, and all the others will try to figure out how the person who made the face is feeling. I’ll begin, (The parent should express one feeling, such as obvious joy.) How am I feeling?” Instruct each person to pretend a feeling.

After the activity is completed, talk about how important feelings are and how feelings influence what we say and do. Encourage the members to recall a time when one person felt a certain way.

FAMILY ACTIVITY 2.

Make a collage of feelings.

Assemble the family members around the table. Have available several old magazines or papers that have pictures of people’s faces, scissors, a crayon, paste, and one large sheet of paper.

Instruct each person to find a picture of a person. Tell the others how the person is feeling. Cut out the picture and paste it on the large sheet of paper. Print the name of the person’s feeling on the picture.

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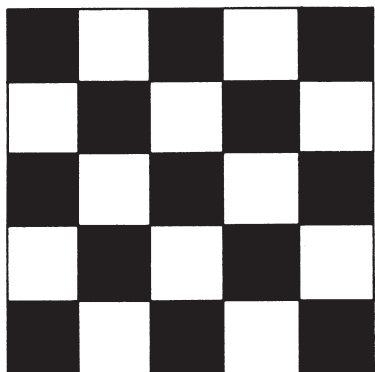
A variation of this activity is to instruct each person to draw a picture of a person's face expressing a feeling. Compare the different faces and feelings.

As in Activity 1, talk about the importance of feelings and stress — that it is okay to have feelings.

FAMILY ACTIVITY 3

Let's count the squares.

When all the family members are together, hold up the checkerboard square. "Let's each of us count, to ourselves, the number of squares." Ask each member how many squares he found on the board. (Younger children may need to count out loud.) Chances are there will be different answers.



Say, "We each saw the same checkerboard and yet we each came up with a different number. This is just what happens in our family. Sometimes we see things differently." For example, Joe and Mom both see the clothes all over Joe's bedroom floor. Mom tells Joe to pick them up. He picks up some and says he's finished. Mom says there are still lots of clothes on the floor. They each saw the same thing but saw it differently, just like the checkerboard square.

Talk about other examples of how two people see things differently and the importance of not immediately thinking one is absolutely correct and the other wrong. Talk about how we can see things from another person's point of view.

FAMILY ACTIVITY 4.

Let's make a telephone.

Two or more paper cups and four to ten feet of string are necessary. Carefully punch a small hole in the bottom of two paper cups. Cut a piece of string about four to five feet. Thread the string through the holes in the bottom of the cups and tie a knot so the string doesn't pull out.

Stretch out the string. One person can talk into the open end of one cup at the end of the string while the other person places the open end of the other cup to his ear. If the string is stretched out, messages can be

sent over the "line." Try stretching the string around a corner or have another person hold onto the string in the middle. The message will not get from one cup to the other.

After everyone has had a turn talking and listening, say, "In our family, sometimes we don't listen or talk so another person can understand. When one person interrupts, it's like holding the string in the middle or bending it around the corner. When this happens, what one person says can't get to the other person."

FAMILY ACTIVITY 5.

Let's speak in pastels.

In every family, there are times when the volume level is pretty high. Rather than one parent yelling repeatedly to tone things down, announce that "today we are going to speak in pastels." The parent can ask one of the children, "What is a pastel?" (A pastel is a pleasing soft color. It is not harsh. It's a color toned down.) "That's the way we are going to talk to one another today — we will all speak in pastels."

If this activity is repeated often enough, all the members of the family will know immediately what is meant, when one person suggests "talking in pastels." Instead of telling or yelling at each other to tone down, simply say "Let's talk in pastels." The family scene will improve!

All too often we don't do the things that help our family grow stronger. Improving our family communication will not just happen — it takes some effort. Every family can learn some new ways of communicating. Families can practice and improve their talking and listening. By working at improving some of the aspects of family communication, the family will grow stronger.

By James E. Van Horn, Extension Specialist, Family Sociology, The Pennsylvania State University.

Reprinted for use in Kansas by Charles A. Smith, Extension Specialist, Human Development

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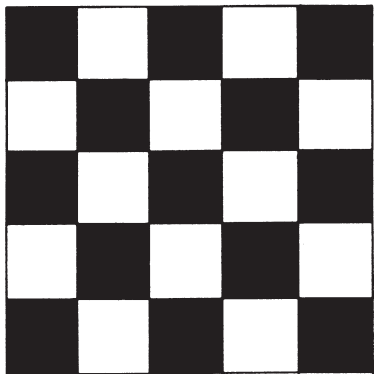
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