



Family Vitality

Time Together

When 1,500 school-age children were asked, “What do you think makes a happy family?” the children didn’t list money, cars, big homes, or televisions. The answer they gave most, according to Nick Stinnett and John DeFrain, authors of *Secrets of Strong Families*, was doing things together.

Spending time together is an important characteristic of strong families. Healthy families frequently work, play, eat, vacation, and attend religious services together. In strong families, spending time together is not an obligation to endure, but a pleasure to enjoy and anticipate.

If you believe that life is the most valuable possession you have, then sharing a piece of your life is the most precious gift you have to offer. Few activities offer so much in return. Sharing time with your family eases loneliness and isolation, nurtures relationships, and creates a family identity.

Quantity and quality go hand in hand. Obviously some quantity of time is necessary for time together, be it good or bad. It’s not necessary, however, to spend every available minute together as a family. The time individuals spend one on one within the family—child with child, child with parent, and parent with parent—also is important. Equally important is time for friends, hobbies, sports, and solitude. Healthy families keep a good balance between “too much” and “not enough” time together.



Every Minute Counts!

Mealtimes

In today’s fast-paced world, families eat together less frequently. Nevertheless, whether it’s breakfast, lunch, or dinner, mealtime is the only time some families spend together. When possible, make mealtime a special occasion—a time anticipated by everyone in the family. Involve family members from the start with tasks such as setting the table, making salads, or perhaps even planning and shopping for the meal. Then create a pleasant atmosphere. Turn off the television. Put newspapers, work from the office, and other cares aside. Invite family members to share interesting experiences, plans, upcoming events, and news. Instead of everyone rushing off when the meal is finished, encourage lingering around the table for relaxed and pleasant conversation. Let family members know that mealtime is a family occasion.

Family Chores

Running a household requires a lot of time. Time spent doing chores around the home can leave little for other activities. Make family chores a team effort. Turn tedious tasks into opportunities for getting together, communicating, and playing with your family. Although doing it yourself may seem faster and easier, allowing children to help teaches them self-reliance and cooperation. When a family works together, everyone sees they have an important role in the day-to-day functioning of the family. In the long run, the work gets done more quickly and the children gain a sense of responsibility.

Special Events

A special event is anything you want to celebrate. Special events include holidays, birthdays, anniversaries, firsts, lasts, beginnings, endings, and “just because.” Strong families regard these as opportunities for the entire family to be together.

Outdoor Activities

Try the team approach for yard work. With everyone’s help, a beautiful yard is half the work and twice the fun. Spend the time you save enjoying the great outdoors. Take walks together. Grow a family garden and allow each person to care for his or her own section. Play hide-and-seek or croquet together. Spend as much time as possible with your family outside. Go camping, swimming, hiking, fishing, or

boating. The combination of time together, a pleasant atmosphere, rigorous exercise, and tranquil relaxation makes for wonderful memories.

Indoor Recreation

Except on rare occasions, time spent watching television together is not quality time. Set limits on the amount of time your family watches television. Play educational games together, or even games just for fun. Talk, listen, and really get to know each other. Read together. Providing children with opportunities for reading aloud greatly improves reading skills, kindles imagination, and inspires creativity.

School and Homework

Frequently set aside time for one-on-one discussions with each child about his or her day in school. Let interest in your child's life show. Set a regular quiet time each school night for homework. Be available when children need help.

Suggested Activities

1. Storytelling

Gather around and hear your son tell about his field trip to the zoo and his favorite animals. Hear Mom sharing memories from her childhood. See children wide-eyed with wonder as Grandmother tells stories about the old days, or as Mom and Dad tell how they met. Don't forget the "Remember when we..." stories of shared family experiences. And of course, make-believe tales can be a special delight.

This fact sheet is one in a series of six on the topic of Family Vitality. Others in the series include:

- *Characteristics of Strong Families* (HE7-138)
- *Appreciation and Encouragement* (HE7-139)
- *Building A Strong Marriage* (HE7-141)
- *Family Council Meetings* (HE7-142)
- *What You Can Do* (HE7-143)

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2. Family Service Project

Giving of ourselves and lending a hand is the essence of a family service activity. Spend the day helping a friend paint and fix up her apartment. Offer to babysit for a young couple. Adopt an elderly neighbor and check on her throughout the year. Shovel the snow off your elderly neighbor's walks and driveway, or provide needed transportation.

3. Pick a Name

Write the name of each family member on a slip of paper and toss the slips into a hat. Let everyone draw a name other than their own. Before the week is up, each family member is responsible for doing something special for the person whose name they drew.

4. Potluck Pictures

Hold a potluck dinner for the extended family. Besides a dish, ask participants to bring along some special family photographs. After dinner, have a time for "show and tell."

5. Memory Makers

A memory maker is a unique, out-of-the-ordinary activity. For example, a father might take his young teenage daughter out to an elegant restaurant. Or, the family might throw a surprise "welcome home" party for an older brother or sister who's been away at college.

Publications are also available on the World Wide Web at: <http://www.ca.uky.edu>.

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