

Creating a Great Family Life

Participant Guide



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Common Challenges that Families Face:

LESS TIME: An increased pace of lifestyle, including longer hours at work, can interfere with the quality and quantity of time devoted to family relationships. If the thing that your family members desire the most is to spend time with you, and you are not available because of other work or social pursuits, it can create tremendous strain on a relationship. Many times, relationships do not come to an abrupt end, but may simply wither away from lack of attention.

ELECTRONIC GADGETS COMPETING FOR ATTENTION: Not only do many families struggle for quality and quantity time together, but they may lose their precious time by spending many hours in front of the television, surfing the internet for leisure, playing video games, or chatting online. Children in particular may spend a tremendous amount of time playing on the computer, coming late to the dinner table and bolting from the table quickly to disappear into their rooms for hours.

POOR COMMUNICATION: Communication skills form the foundation of a relationship's efficacy yet poor communication is the often cited cause of relationship failure. In order to meet the various needs of your loved ones, and resolve misunderstanding and conflict, family members must be able to not only share how they feel and think, but be able to listen effectively.

NEGATIVE ROLE MODELS FOR KIDS: Through TV, movies, music and the internet, kids are being exposed to the world and some of its negative influences at an earlier age. It can be difficult to monitor everything that your child is exposed to, much less guide them in rejecting negative influences when you aren't aware of what they've seen and heard.

NEW GENERATION PARENTING ROLES: Parents themselves are in a new situation where they are one of the very first generations that women have successfully entered the workforce. The stereotype label of "supermom" has been applied to working mothers who valiantly struggle to balance all of the responsibilities of a successful career, while still managing all of the traditional duties around the house like cooking, cleaning, and child-rearing.

HIGHER DIVORCE RATE: Statistics show that divorce rates are on the rise. The stigma that divorce carried with it several generations ago is not experienced to the same degree. With more and more marriages breaking up, you are less likely to face harsh judgment from your family and peers. With the added pressures of daily life, to many people divorce may seem to be the best or only option out of a tough situation.

NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE: Divorce can have a dramatic impact upon the emotional state of every member of the family, particularly children. They may feel angry, betrayed, guilty that they caused the divorce, or any number of negative reactions. Divorce often alters the economic lifestyle of the family, with legal fees and

the loss of one of the incomes. Divorce may also throw the family into an entirely new town or city. Combine all of these elements, and a charming, agreeable child may turn into a very challenging and upset teenager.

BLENDED FAMILIES: Bringing a new Mom or Dad into the picture may upset children and create tension and conflict. The kids may love this new person and bond with them, or decide that the new step-parent will not replace their existing mommy or Daddy, and therefore they will decide to rebel. Step-parents may also introduce step children, and therefore step-brothers and sisters. There might be conflict between the new siblings as well!

INDIVIDUATION: The natural process of children aging and evaluating their parents values, behaviours and beliefs. Children may challenge these values and beliefs, and in the process of examining and critiquing the core essence of who your parents are, it can create conflict with Mum and Dad. Arguments at the dinner table stemming from diametrically opposed viewpoints can create confrontation. The kids have to try on what is different from the parents in order to decide what is important to them, and create their own identity.

Who are You as an Individual?

How would you define yourself as a person? What are your major personal interests, hobbies, causes, values?

What are your "Special Gifts"? What do you do well?

Self-Esteem: What are you most proud of about yourself?

What is your role in the family?

Who are the Members of Your Family?

1. Name/Relationship/What are their special gifts?

Describe the quality of your Relationship: _____

In what way could your relationship improve? _____

2. Name/Relationship/What are their special gifts?

Describe the quality of your Relationship: _____

In what way could your relationship improve? _____

3. Name/Relationship/What are their special gifts?

Describe the quality of your Relationship: _____

In what way could your relationship improve? _____

4. Name/Relationship/What are their special gifts?

Describe the quality of your Relationship: _____

In what way could your relationship improve? _____

Describe your Home and Family Culture

If one of the answers below strikes a chord with you, feel free to check it off. If not, create your own personalized description of your home!

“Our home is...”

- A sanctuary
- Party-central!
- Busy
- Loving
- Chaotic
- Frenetic
- Organized
- Disorganized
- Supportive
- A warm and loving place that we have proudly decorated ourselves
- A status symbol... and we're trying to keep up with the “Joneses”
- A disaster... but filled with love...
- A disaster... get me out of here!
- So tidy, it could be a museum. And that's exactly how we prefer it.
- Other: _____

Make Time for Family

Create a family schedule:

It is very grounding and reassuring for a family to have a certain schedule of events and rituals. Knowing that dinner is a family event and is at 6:30 each night helps individual family members plan their own schedules around that special time. Knowing that the kids are to brush their teeth and start getting ready for bed by 8:30 helps mom and dad rest assured they have time for each other from 9-10. Setting up patterns and routines like this helps to avoid conflicting appointments, frustration with having to cancel plans, and gives a sense of continuity in your lives. You can rest assured that mom & dad will get time with the kids and each other each night. Have a “game-night” together: Families that play together stay together. A great ritual can be to set aside some time on the weekend, perhaps Saturday afternoon or Sunday night, and enjoy a game together as a family. Board games are an excellent opportunity for the family to do something light- hearted and fun, and they also serve to help mom and dad teach fair play, competition, problem solving, and winning with grace. It also gives a relaxed backdrop to chat with your kids and each other, rather than a formal “let's sit down and talk” type of discussion. Problems that the kids are facing in school, neat events that have happened that week, the latest crush they have, or simply forming a better relationship are all benefits from having a light-hearted setting. As well, by making it a weekly ritual, your kids can have a sense of security that their parents make time for

them on a regular, scheduled basis, and will create a strong memory and feeling that they are a priority in their parent's lives.

Have special one-on-one time with your kids:

As rewarding as "game-night" can be, nothing can replace the bonding experience of spending quality one-on-one time with each of your children. Setting aside specific, regular times over weeks and months to focus solely on them can be a huge investment in your relationship with them, and their feelings of being loved and valued by you. As well, every child has their own passions, interests and personalities; spending quality time with them alone allows you to tailor your activities to meet their needs more closely. You can select certain events that are specific and meaningful for each child. If one child loves to camp, spend Saturday night camping in your local natural park. If that isn't convenient, set up the tent in the backyard, roast some marshmallows and tell some fun stories!

Do projects together:

Involve your children in age-appropriate activities. Pride of ownership of your home extends to the kids as well. Spring cleaning, adding a deck onto the back of your home, tidying up the home, planting new colorful flowers... these are all activities that you may involve the whole family, in some capacity. It feels nice to sit back and reflect on something positive and enjoyable that you've created. And, it creates a unifying feeling that "we did this as a family" that can be very powerful as well.

When can you schedule family time? What activities would you like to do, and with whom?

Positive Communication Reminders

Address small grievances quickly & respectfully.

It is inevitable that your family member is going to do something that will bother you, and vice-versa. We don't address small things when they are still small... we wait until they grow inside us and make us angrier and more upset with each passing infraction. And when we try to communicate when we're angry, it never comes out effectively. When someone exhibits a small behaviour that bothers you, gently point out the behaviour and ask them nicely if they would please change what they do. You may say to your spouse "Sweetie, can I ask you a favor? When you finish the last cup of iced tea in the fridge, would you mind please making another? Thanks." If the behaviour persists, escalate the request, but still use diplomacy. "Honey, can I share with you something that's bothering me? I notice that you use the last cup of iced tea and don't refill it. I'd appreciate it if you'd please fill it up when you're finished."

People don't care how much you know... until they know how much you care.

Effective family communication is built upon a foundation of love, compassion, genuinely caring about the other person, and respect: respect for others, and respect for yourself. If a parent is disciplining a child, offering advice or counsel, and for any reason the child feels that the parent's affirmation of love for them is hollow, the child won't care WHAT the parent says. If your child only hears criticism from you and believes you DON'T care about them, they won't care about your opinion. If however you base your direction and coaching upon concern for her desires and well-being, she is much more likely to place value upon your opinion.

LISTEN to the other person's viewpoint first.

Steven Covey says "Seek first to understand... then be understood." We must realize that we learn more when we listen than when we talk. As well, by taking the time to really understand their perspective, you may find that you change how you view a situation. It will also create empathy for them; instead of focusing on winning, you may find yourself accepting some of their arguments and softening your own stance as your compassion and understanding of their viewpoint grows.

Cool off before Responding.

If our family member has upset us, it's usually a good idea to wait a while and calm down before responding. Many times when our emotions are high, we may find that our intellect is low! Use stress-management techniques such as deep breathing to regulate your emotions and soothe your upset feelings, before saying something you regret.

Content Paraphrase/ Feeling Paraphrase.

Paraphrasing is the act of re-stating someone's words, but replacing them with your own. The purpose of doing this is to ensure that you have a clear understanding of what they have said. Content paraphrase simply looks to understand the meaning of their statement. By doing this, you can acknowledge the meaning of their statement, and that you understand them. In a family argument, your child might say "Dad, this is totally

unfair! The other kids get to stay out past midnight; why can't I?!?! I'm sixteen years old, and I deserve to be treated with more trust!" You may content paraphrase and say "It sounds like the other kids are allowed to stay out to later hours than you, and that doesn't seem fair. After all, you're sixteen now, almost an adult, and you think that I don't trust you to stay up that late. Is that what you mean?"

Feeling paraphrase.

Feeling paraphrase takes listening to its highest level, where you seek to have empathy and show empathy for the person speaking. In the case of your upset child, you may say "It sounds like you feel upset, and frustrated." Your child has the opportunity to really open up about their feelings. You may have guessed correctly, or they may come back and say "Actually, I feel really disappointed! The whole group is going to an 11pm movie, and this cute boy I like will be there! He invited me himself, and I'm going to miss my chance to go out with him!" Now, you have more understanding of your daughter's perspective, and how this is affecting her emotionally. This can offer you a powerful opportunity to develop a win/win scenario that meets your needs, and meets hers. "So, how about I let you go to this movie, but I will pick you up afterwards? My main concern is that I don't want you driving around at that hour of the night with your teenage friends. I'm concerned for your safety, but as long as I know you're watching a movie at the theatre, I'm willing to compromise."

Access your Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP)

For confidential support and access to resources, contact your EAP using WorkHealthLife.com or the LifeWorks app.

Contact your leader or HR to learn how to access your organization's EAP.

