

YOU CAN CHANGE YOUR FAMILY

Below is a list of seven ideas that make families strong. Select at least three of the activities and complete them this week. Write a paragraph for each activity you complete, explaining how it improved your family's relationships.

1. COMMITMENT

Next time a family member needs some help, try rearranging your schedule to be available to show that family member that he/she is important to you.

2. TIME TOGETHER

Try having family dates. Think of something fun to do and then invite someone in your family or the whole family to do it with you.

3. APPRECIATION

Write notes to family members. Leave a note in a school book, on the mirror in the bathroom, anywhere a certain family member will see it. Say, "Thanks for cheering me up when I needed it this afternoon," "I appreciate you washing my clothes for me," or "Good luck on your test today."

4. COMMUNICATION

Use "I" messages to let others in your family know what you think or how you feel without insulting or criticizing the other person. Start with "I think...." or "I feel..." Add what you are thinking or feeling (I feel annoyed when you ask me who is on the phone every time I use it.) Explain what you said without blaming or criticizing. ("I guess I just need to feel like I have some privacy")

Next time a family member expresses a feeling or relates an event to you, give him/her your undivided attention. Listen with your eyes and ask questions or make comments with sincere interest. Try to understand how he/she feels. Work at deciphering messages and body language. If your Mom asks, "Whose socks are on the floor?" pick them up and put them away instead of saying, "They're mine."

5. DECISION MAKING AND RESPONSIBILITY

Negotiate with your family. If there is a decision you don't agree with, tell your family you'd like to talk about it. It will work best if you first describe the problem from your point of view without getting angry, 2) suggest different ways of solving the problem, 3) discuss the pros and cons of each solution, 4) compromise, combining parts of your ideas with others, and 5) try it for awhile before you decide whether or not you like it.

Try helping one of your parents in one of the jobs that they do (preferably one you usually take for granted). See if you don't feel a little pride in having done it and in having made a contribution to your family.

6. PROBLEM SOLVING

Many times we tend to just look at all the things that are wrong with our families. List and describe three times your family did a good job at something. (Example: helped someone else who was having a hard time, remodeled the family room, coped with a death, etc.)

7. VALUES AND SPIRITUAL WELLNESS

You may want to talk to your family sometimes about their values and what they think is right and wrong. It may be hard to discuss these issues. One way to do it is to read the letters to Ann Landers or Dear Abby. Read the article to your family and ask them what they think about it. Discuss it.