

February 2011

Kindred *Spirits*

Use strengths to deal with challenges Strong and Resilient Families

Family Fun

Having fun together is very important for strong families. Having a family fun time does not cost a lot of money. Here are some ideas for family fun time:

- ◆ Read and share stories.
- ◆ Grow a garden.
- ◆ Have family fun nights.
- ◆ Cook a special meal.
- ◆ Play games or sports.
- ◆ Take a walk.
- ◆ Share hobbies.
- ◆ Create traditions to celebrate special occasions.

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"All families have strengths and challenges. But some families are better than others at using their family strengths to deal with their challenges and grow," says Nina Chen, MU Extension human development specialist. What are family strengths that make some families effective? Research at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln has found six characteristics of family strengths from the United States and 27 countries. The following are the six key strengths that families, including grandparents raising grandchildren, use to build and maintain healthy environments:

- ◆ **Appreciation** – Strong families show appreciation and affection and care for and express gratitude to each other on a regular basis.
- ◆ **Commitment** – Commitment helps develop a sense of unity, trust and belonging among family members. Committed families keep promises, support one another and invest time in family activities and functions.
- ◆ **Positive Communication** – Strong families take time to talk with and listen to one another in order to stay connected. Positive communication is a foundation for all family strengths.

- ◆ **Time Together** – Strong families enjoy quality time together on a regular basis. Family time can be as simple as eating, playing, reading, working and sharing together. When you make it a priority to spend time together, it shows that you value your family.

- ◆ **Spiritual Well-being** - Spiritual well-being includes caring, support, compassion, love, hope, faith, values and the optimism a family shares. It is an important source of strength and a guiding force in strong families.

- ◆ **Coping Skills** - Strong families work together rather than pulling apart. They have the ability to cope with changes, stress, crisis and challenges in constructive ways. Family strengths build a sense of togetherness, unity and belonging. You may have recognized many of your family's strengths.

Chen says, "Every family has room for improvement and building strengths. By adding more strengths to those your family has, you can provide a positive environment for your grandchildren and make your family even stronger."

Children Need Life Skills

Focus helps kids learn to control themselves

How do you ensure that your grandchildren not only survive but thrive? According to Kris Jenkins, MU Extension human development specialist, "Children need to acquire knowledge in many different areas, but life skills are important to success. Good life skills manage attention, emotion and behavior in order to reach goals."

In the April issue of *Work and Family Life* newsletter, Ellen Galinsky highlights seven life skills that children need to learn: focus and self-control, perspective taking,

communicating, making connections, critical thinking, challenges and self-directed learning.

Focus is perhaps the first skill that children need. This skill enables children to pay attention, remember the rules, be flexible and master self-control. The first step in promoting focus is to help infants and toddlers learn how to control themselves. Have you noticed that a child will calm down when you take him to a quiet place or if you say soothing words and acknowledge his feelings? When you follow your grandchild's own cues to calm down, you aren't making him calm down; you're helping him to learn how to take control of his own emotions.

Another way to create focus is to encourage a strong interest in something. Does she like to color and draw? Provide art supplies. Does your child love to cook? Share easy recipes and cook with him. Another way to help children focus is to play games that require concentration such as puzzles, matching games, musical chairs and "Simon Says." Games, with rules that children have to remember, encourage focus.

Reading to children is a great way to create focus. But, don't just read them the story; have them listen to a line and then repeat it to you. Little songs that have rhythm and rhyme are a great way to teach children to focus.

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Begin with Healthy Habits

Many of us will usher in 2011 with good intentions and a slew of New Year's resolutions. Saralee Jaimeson, MU Extension human development specialist, says that if you have reasonable expectations and laudable goals, for example to be healthier and happier, you will be more likely to match your intentions with success.

Set these goals for a healthy new year:

- ◆ Make my health a priority.
- ◆ Schedule and keep doctor's appointments.
- ◆ Drink more water, at least 8 glasses a day.
- ◆ Eat more fruits and vegetables.
- ◆ Exercise most days of the week.
- ◆ Take time for myself.
- ◆ Celebrate my successes.

Adopting healthy habits means that you set realistic goals—even if they are tiny in the beginning. You can make 2011 your happiest, healthiest year yet by making small changes.