



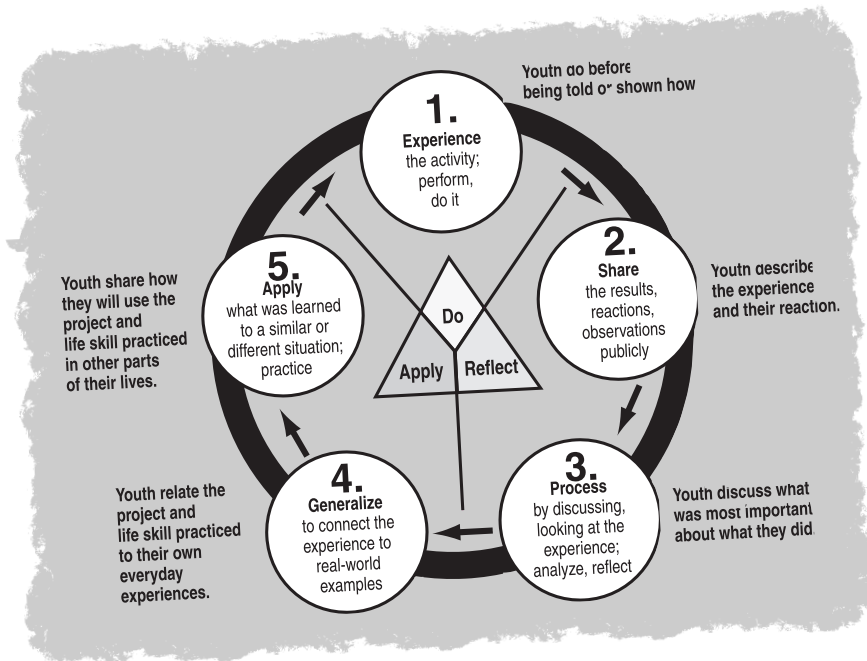
It's all in the

Family

Source book of
communication activities, projects,
and other things to do together

Experiential Learning Model

"Experiential learning" is what distinguishes 4-H Youth Development Education from many formal education methods. It involves providing opportunities for youth to practice what they are learning by sharing the experience, reflecting on its importance, connecting it to real life examples, and applying the knowledge that results to other situations.



Activities and learning experiences in this manual are designed with this model in mind. Your aim is to guide and support youth, and then help them reflect on what they have learned did and how it applies to other situations.

Throughout this process be sure to take time to discuss and talk things over by asking questions related to the experiential learning model. You'll find that the activities in the manual contain suggestions for discussion and application. In addition, here are some key questions for you to consider adapting for your family's use:

Key Questions

Examples of **sharing** questions:
(*What happened?*)

- What kinds of things did you discover when you did the activity?
- What was the hardest part? The easiest?
- What did you like about the activity? What didn't you like?

Examples of **processing** questions:
(*What's important?*)

- What do you think the activity taught you about communication?
- What's something important to keep in mind?

Examples of **generalizing** questions:
(*So what?*)

- What did you learn about yourself through the activity?
- Why is what you learned important for this family?
- How does this fit into other things that are happening to you outside the family?

Examples of **application** questions:
(*Now what?*)

- What is something you have done differently because of what you've learned about communication?
- Describe a situation where the things you learned about communication came in handy.
- If you haven't had a chance to use what you have learned, can you think of a way you might be able to in the future?



*It's all in the
Family*

Note to Parents:

T*his manual is part of the 4-H Youth Development Building Bridges: Reaching People Through Communication program. It's been specifically developed for families because of the crucial role parents play in helping their sons and daughters develop communication skills.*

Communication as a Primary Life Skill

In strong families people work to make the home a place of love and support. It means being able to respond to challenges, discuss needs and concerns, and express love and appreciation for one another. None of these things happen automatically. Good communication skills are essential. The activities and suggestions in this booklet can get people started.

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It's all in the *Family*

Today's families are busier than ever. Even in the most efficient and organized households, there's always something else that needs to be done. It wears people down, drains their energy and gets in the way of things that are really much more important. Perhaps the worst thing about being so busy is that it can keep people from enjoying the pleasures and satisfactions of family life.

On the other hand, many busy parents know the amount of time families spend together isn't as important as what happens during that time. That's why communication is so important. It's a crucial ingredient in creating strong and supportive family relationships.

This booklet is full of information, tips and games for families who understand the importance of good communication.

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It only takes 10 minutes

Taking even 10 minutes out of a busy day to pay closer attention to the people in your family can make a big difference in the long run. When you consider where the rest of your time gets spent, ten minutes doesn't seem like a lot.

Consider making an inventory of what people in your family do with their time—homework and extracurricular school projects; sports events; music lessons; 4-H activities; church involvement; community and volunteer responsibilities; and other commitments. Look for times everyone is likely to be home. If there are none, it could be a sign it's time to take a look at priorities.

Sparing just 10 minutes for someone in your family really isn't too much to ask. In fact it just might turn out to be the best 10 minutes of the day.

Here are three short conversation games that can easily fit into a 10-minute block of time:

Betcha Didn't Know

Take turns telling about something that happened recently that the others probably know nothing about. It could be silly. ("I betcha didn't know that I'm wearing purple underpants today.") Or it could be a little more serious. ("I betcha didn't know that last night I dreamed there was a new baby in our family.")

Pillow Talk

Use bed time to spend a few minutes reviewing the highs and the lows of the day by taking turns completing the following: "If I could repeat this day all over again, one thing I'd definitely want to change about it would be... and one thing I wouldn't change would be..."

Best/Worst

Take turns telling each other one of the best things and one of the worst things that's happened in the past few days. (Or describe one of the funniest and one of the saddest things, or one of the most exciting and one of the most boring things.)

Parents communication checklist

It takes determination and energy for parents to deal with the “busy-ness” that can clutter up their lives. It’s worth the effort, however, because taking time for your child is one of the best ways to build a supportive and lasting relationship. Here are some things to keep in mind:

1

Make sure your children know they have your love and support.

Children need to know they are loved unconditionally—regardless of what they do or don’t do. Even though you get angry and upset with them at times, make sure they know you love them anyway.

It’s not enough to assume children know they are loved. They need to be told through your words and actions. Building warm and loving relationships is hard to do if the feelings they’re based on never get expressed.

2

Be available.

Get in the habit of paying attention when your children need you. If they interrupt when you’re busy, let them know when you’ll be finished. For example, you might say, “*Honey, I want to hear about this, but I can’t listen now because I’ve got to get these bills paid. I’ll be done in about 15 minutes. Can we talk then?*”

Be alert to non-verbal clues and changes in mood or behavior. “*I’ve noticed you’re just not your usual bouncy self today. Is everything ok?*”

3

Listen.

Sometimes children are afraid to talk because they assume they’ll be criticized, yelled at, lectured or blamed for what they say. To really listen you’ve got to make an attempt to be open to what your child is trying to tell you.

4

Share your values and opinions without preaching.

Parents have the responsibility for helping children learn what’s right and wrong. But preaching and lecturing about these things usually doesn’t work. Instead, use movies, TV programs and ads, and things that happen at school and in the community as “teachable moments” for talking about the way you feel.

5

Work with your child to establish clear limits and guidelines for behavior.

Children need clear and consistent messages about what’s appropriate and not appropriate. It’s not fair to assume they’ll figure out these things all on their own.

Instead, be sure to talk with them about what’s expected when it comes to homework, social activities, telephone and television use, household chores and other issues.

6

Take time to enjoy the relationship you have with your child.

Your life will always be full of things that need to be done. But your children will grow up all too quickly. It will be a shame if all you have to remember of their childhood years is how busy you were.

What about television?

In typical American homes the TV set is blaring for seven hours a day. That's a pretty big chunk of a family's time. Here are a few ideas for correcting the situation without getting rid of your TV set.

- Decide how many hours your children can spend watching television. (This is important for adults as well!)
- Be selective about what you watch. Don't even switch on the set unless there is something you've picked out in advance. Make a project of trying to see how many hours each day you can keep the TV set turned off.
- Look for programs that relate to things family members find most interesting (projects, hobbies, activities, etc.).
- If your family has more than one TV, consider designating some "TV-free zones" in your home—comfortable places to read, talk and listen to one another, without the interruption of television set.
- Finding times to turn off the TV is like giving your family a gift of a few extra hours each day. It can give you a chance to get at some of those other things that never seem to fit into your busy schedule.

Caution

A heavy-handed approach to selective TV viewing probably won't get you very far. Kids resent overly rigid rules and policies and often find ways to get around them. For example, ordering a child to turn off the TV and pick up a book instead isn't the best way to drum up enthusiasm for reading!

When it comes to communicating, most people would much rather do the talking than the listening. Good communication means talking clearly. It also means listening attentively. Here are some things to keep in mind about both.

Tips For Listeners

1. Pay attention.

- Lean forward and look at the other person.
- Concentrate on what he or she is telling you instead of thinking about other things.
- If you're too busy to pay attention, let the other person know when would be a better time.

2. Let the other person finish what he or she has to say.

- Resist the temptation to finish the other person's sentences for him or her.
- Try not to interrupt while the other person is still talking.

3. Encourage the other person to keep talking.

- Smile, nod, and let your facial expressions tell the other person that you're really interested in what's being said.
- Use reassuring words. ("Go on. I'm listening. And then what happened? Mmmmmhmmmmn.")
- Ask encouraging questions to let the other person know you want to hear more about what he or she is telling you. ("What happened the next day? How did it feel when you found out about it? Where did you go then?")

4. Repeat what you think you heard

- If you're not clear about what you think the other person told you, ask him or her to help you understand.
- Use your own words to describe what you think you heard.

Remember:
listening is one of the
nicest things you can
do for another person!

Tips For Talkers

When you need to let someone know you're upset, try to avoid using the word "you." It often puts the other person on the defensive and can lead to an argument. Other words to avoid are "never" and "always." There's a better way to get your point across. Can you tell the difference between the following statements:

- "You get out of doing the dishes every night and I always get stuck having to do them. It's not fair. You never have to do anything around here."
- "I think we need to take turns doing the dishes because it's not fair the same person gets stuck doing all the work."

Here's how "I-Messages" can help you get your point across without blaming, criticizing or putting down the person to whom you're talking:

- | | | |
|--|-----------------------------|---|
| • Start with the word "I" | I..... | "I |
| • Add what you are thinking, feeling, needing or wanting: "think we need to take turns doing the dishes each night" | <i>think (or feel)</i> | think we need to take turns doing the dishes each night |
| • Explain why without being argumentative or critical: "because it's not fair the same person gets stuck doing all the work." | <i>because</i> | because it's not fair the same person gets stuck doing all the work." |

Remember:

What you say isn't the only way you communicate. Your tone of voice (especially if it's sarcastic) speaks loudly. And so do your gestures and facial expressions.

Refusing to talk when someone is trying to communicate with you is a childish way of telling him or her you aren't willing to cooperate.

Message box

It's important for family members to be able to let one another know how they feel about things. But arguing, fighting and saying mean things doesn't help. A better way is to be honest about feelings without blaming them on other people.

1. Turn an old shoe box into a "message box."
2. Keep a supply of paper and envelopes close by.
3. Review the "I-Message" method (see p. 6).
4. Encourage family members to write "I-messages" explaining how they feel about things that are upsetting them. If they want to talk about it a little more they can put that in the note too.

Family members can check the message box regularly but may only read notes that have been addressed to them personally. You might want to have the family make up a penalty for breaking the rules. For example, anyone who reads somebody else's note has to do a chore for that person.

Make sure everyone knows that it's against the rules to write notes that blame or criticize the another person.

Examples:

Dear Mom,

I feel angry when people barge into my room without knocking first because I need my privacy. Could we get together and talk about this?

Love, Samantha

Dear Jody,
I feel hurt when I get teased about being the baby of the family because it makes me wish I could run away and live somewhere else.

Your brother, Kyle

Family meetings

Scheduling periodic meetings can help a family keep things running efficiently. It's a good way to make sure everyone gets to share ideas, feelings, concerns, and suggestions.

Don't wait until there's a problem before calling a family meeting. Why not start a new tradition and plan monthly family meetings that everyone will look forward to instead of dread? The trick is to make them fun. Here are some possibilities:

Remember:

The key to successful family meetings is fun. That's why it's important to follow the "business" portion of the meeting with something enjoyable to do—a picnic, a special family game, or a video movie for the whole family.

1

Encourage everyone to suggest topics that need to be discussed and then let family members take turns being in charge of running the meeting.

2

Ask for a volunteer to be "secretary" to take minutes so they can be read at the next meeting. (Keep minutes from your meetings in a notebook for future reference.)

3

Don't let a meeting drag on and on. In general, it should be no shorter than 15 minutes and no longer than one hour.

4

Make sure the meeting includes a chance to recognize positive things. Consider having each family member take turns mentioning something nice about whoever is sitting on either side of him or her. Or end the meeting with a list of all the things that have happened recently for which the family is grateful.

Family meetings need to be run smoothly and efficiently. Everyone deserves a chance to be heard and that often means reminding others not to interrupt. Ground rules are important.

Ground Rules For Family Meetings

The secret of successful family meetings has to do with creating an opportunity for people to express what's on their mind without having to worry about what someone else will say. Make sure everyone agrees to the following:

1. Only one person talks at a time.
2. Persons should try to follow the I-Message approach (p. 6) when expressing feelings or concerns.
3. Family members agree to listen carefully and ask questions courteously if they don't understand what's being said.
4. Family members must refrain from criticizing or insulting one another.
5. No fair making fun of what someone else has said.

Hint:

Family members should be excused from attendance if they don't want to come—but they need to know that important decisions might be made in their absence.

Conflict happens in every family. The important thing is knowing what to do with the tensions, stresses, and hassles that can make family life a challenge. Strong communication skills can really make a difference. The following suggestions can help:

**Home is
where the
hassle is**

1. Choose a neutral time for those who are involved to get together to discuss the problem.

It's hard to talk things over with someone who's in a bad mood, or when strong emotions are involved. It's better for the parties involved to choose a time to get together later—after they've had a chance to cool down.

2. Find a time and a place where you won't be distracted.

Talking through problems takes concentration. People have a hard time paying attention if they're in a hurry or if they're constantly being bothered by other things—like the telephone, television or other interruptions.

3. Set some ground rules.

It's important for people to know that the reason for getting together is not to find someone to blame for the problem, but rather to work together to figure out what to do about it. That can only happen if everyone understands it's okay to disagree with someone else, but it's not okay to insult, criticize or berate a person because of what he or she has said.

4. Use the five-step process on the next page to discuss the problem and collaborate on a solution.

Remember that listening is as important as talking. Using I-messages to help you frame what's on your mind can make it easier for other people to listen to what you're saying.

5. Be willing to call a halt to the discussion if necessary.

Sometimes, despite your best efforts you may find that nothing seems to be helping. Instead of going over and over the same discussion, take a time out and agree to return later to try again.

Consider talking to a trusted friend to gain a fresh perspective. If the problem persists, the wisest course of action could be to enlist the help of a professional who is trained in dealing with these kinds of issues.

Five steps for dealing with conflict

Step One:

Identify the problem.

Focus on one specific problem, rather than to try to tackle a number of different things all at once.

Example:

The problem is the kitchen always seems to be a mess.

Step Two:

Give each person a chance to say something about the problem.

Listen as each person describes his or her frustrations or concerns. Try not to judge, criticize or become defensive about what you hear. Keep the focus on describing things about the problem rather than blaming specific people for causing it.

Examples:

"I get upset when I come home from work and find dirty dishes stacked up all over the place."

"I hate trying to do my homework at the kitchen table because it's always full of junk."

Step Three:

Work together to brainstorm different ways to deal with the problem.

Have everyone list as many solutions as they can think of. Talk about people's suggestions with an open mind—it's against the rules to criticize, insult or berate each other's ideas.

Examples:

"We could take turns doing dishes every night. If you dirty a dish, you wash it and put it away. The kitchen table is off limits for anything except meals and doing homework."

Step Four:

Negotiate a solution.

Choose the suggestions that seem most practical and fair. Decide what needs to be done to make those suggestions work, including what the consequences will be for not cooperating.

Step Five:

Agree to try the plan for a specific period of time and then meet again to see if it's working.

Make sure to agree on what to do in case people aren't satisfied with the way the plan is working.

Here's a fun game for two family members to play whenever they have a few minutes to be by themselves.

Tell it to me

Directions

1. Decide how much time you have to play the game so that each person gets a chance to be the talker.
2. When it's the talker's turn, he or she gets to choose something from the "topics" list (or make up another one.) A good way to start talking is to begin with an "I-Message" (p. 6).
3. Meanwhile the other person must work very hard to pay attention and keep his or her partner talking. Remember to use the "Tips for listeners" on p.5.

Ground Rules

Talkers

No fair saying mean, insulting or critical things about the listener.

Listeners

No fair making fun of what the speaker says—or telling him or her not to feel that way.

Topics

For kids:

1. What is it like to be in your grade at school?
2. What do you think it will be like to be an adult?
3. Describe something you don't like about being your age.
4. Describe the things you like about living in this family.
5. Describe something you would like to be allowed to do and explain why you think you would be responsible enough to do it.
6. What would you do if you didn't have to go to school every day?

For adults:

1. What do you enjoy about being a parent?
2. What is it like having to get up and go to work every day?
3. Describe the kind of person you were when you were the same age as the person to whom you are talking.
4. Describe the toys you played with and what you did for fun when you were a child.
5. What do you remember about your grandparents?
6. What is something your parents taught you that has made a difference in your life?

For anyone:

1. Describe a time you were treated unfairly and how you felt about it.
2. Describe your most embarrassing moment.
3. What is something that happened recently that made you very happy?
4. What is something you're quite worried about?
5. Describe one of your most cherished possessions and how you would feel if you lost it.
6. What is something you are hoping will happen in the next year and why are you looking forward to it.

How well do you know each other?

One of the nice things about being a family is the chance to discover what makes each person tick. Here's a fun way to find out some things about other family members.

Directions

1. The person whose turn it is selects the appropriate list of questions (see next page) and reads them one by one to the other family members.
2. The other family members jot down their answers on a sheet of paper.
3. When everyone is finished have the person whose turn it is give everyone the correct answers to the questions.

- What was the most difficult question to answer? Why?
- Did any of the answers surprise you? Why?

Ground Rules

1. Insulting or making fun of what someone says is not allowed!
2. No fair bragging if you get most of the answers right!
3. No fair feeling bad if you get most of the answers wrong!

Special ideas

This game makes a great activity when the whole family is together for birthdays, holidays or family reunions. It's fun to find out things you never knew before about one another, and it can lead to some interesting discussions. For example, you might want to talk about why some questions were harder—or easier—to answer than others were. It's also fun to talk about why some of the answers came as a surprise to other family members.

Supplies needed: paper and pencils

Amount of time: 15–45 minutes depending on how many people play

When to do it: Anytime the family can be together for a little while

Questions for kids to ask their parents or grandparents:

How well do you know me?

1. Name one or two of my best friends:
2. What do I like to do in my spare time?
3. Name one of my favorite music groups or recording artists:
4. What is something I like to do on Friday nights?
5. Name a famous person I would probably love to meet:
6. What is something I've done that I'm really proud of?
7. Who is my favorite teacher?
8. Name something you do that really upsets me:
9. What do I want to be when I grow up?
10. If I won a \$100.00 gift certificate to a shopping mall, what would I probably spend it on?
11. What chore do I most dislike?
12. Where would I like to go for a vacation?
13. What has been my biggest disappointment this year?
14. What causes me the most stress?
15. What are some of my favorite foods?
16. If I were going away on a trip, what is one article of clothing I would definitely want to take along?
17. Name something I am looking forward to:
18. What is something I like about you?
19. What is something I would like to be able to do more often with you?
20. Make up a question of your own.

Questions for adults to ask their kids or spouses:

How well do you know me?

1. Name one or two of my friends:
2. What do I like to do to relax?
3. Do I like to drink coffee (if so, do I use cream or sugar?)
4. Name my favorite football team and player:
5. Name a famous person I would probably love to meet:
6. What was my favorite subject in high school?
7. Did I have a nickname as a child? (If so, what was it?)
8. Name something you do that really upsets me:
9. What was one of my most enjoyable extracurricular activities in high school?
10. What is my favorite family occasion?
11. What chore do I most dislike having to do?
12. Where would I like to go for a vacation?
13. How old was I when I went on my first date?
14. What causes me the most stress?
15. Name a few of my favorite foods:
16. How old will I be on my next birthday?
17. Name something I am looking forward to:
18. What is something I think is really special about you?
19. What is something I would like to be able to do more often with you?
20. Make up a question of your own.

Sharing a love of books with your children

Reading aloud is a great family activity because books can bring parents and children together in a special way. Appreciating a good book involves our minds and imaginations, and there's something warm and magical about reading aloud. Here are some read aloud tips for busy families:

1 Find out who's interested in reading aloud together and involve them in the decision about what to read.

- Explore a variety of books and styles of writing—adventure stories; biographies; travel writing; etc.
- If you need help, ask your librarian for recommendations.

2 Take advantage of the best times and places for reading.

- Choose a comfortable place where you won't be interrupted or distracted. For many families bedtime is the perfect setting for a short reading session.
- Experiment with reading aloud when you're together in the car. If it works, take along a book on family outings and trips.
- Take a book along if you'll be together in a doctor or dentist's waiting room or even in a crowded airport.
- Try an outdoor setting—on a blanket under a tree, at the beach, around a campfire or in a treehouse.

3 Give people a chance to share what they're thinking or feeling about the book.

- Guess what the book is going to be about, based on the title alone. Afterwards, find out if anyone can suggest a better title.
- As you read stop now and then to get reactions to the story or the characters.
- Talk about what's happening in the book and things that happen in real life. How are the characters like you or different from you?
- At the end of the book, find out what people liked or disliked about it. Who were their favorite characters? Should the story have ended differently?
- If necessary, remind everyone to respect one another's opinions. It's "off limits" to criticize or make fun of someone else for what they have to say.

4

Don't ignore the pictures and illustrations.

- Guess what the book is going to be about by studying its cover. At the end of the book, vote on whether or not the artist did a good job of capturing the spirit or theme of the story.
- Watch for details or characters that appear again and again. Talk about why they were so important. Find out whether any of the illustrations reminded people of experiences, people or events in your own life.
- Ask family members what they would draw or paint if they were doing the artwork for the book. Suggest that they create their own illustrations.

Start a “family journal”

Many people record their experiences and describe their feelings and thoughts in private journals or diaries. Families can do the same thing. It's a great way to end up with a history of things that have been important over the course of a lifetime.

There is no one method for keeping a family journal. The best way is to create a system that suits your own individual family. For starters, here are some suggestions to consider:

1. Use a sturdy 8½" x 11" blank book with unlined pages so there's plenty of space for people to make entries.
2. Keep the book in a central place where everyone will know where to find it.
3. Discuss ground rules with family members regarding the use of rude and obscene language. Make sure everyone agrees not to write mean or hurtful things about each other. It should also be against the rules to make fun of or criticize what someone else has written.
4. Young children, as well as artistically inclined family members, should be encouraged to add drawings and illustrations. It might also be worth including a photograph or two along the way.

Hint:

Don't be concerned if you can't get the entire family to participate in this activity. Even if there are only a few of you, it can still be a lot of fun to keep a common journal and take turns writing back and forth to each other.

A Book of Special Events

Some people record observations and feelings about special occasions and events that happen during the year. It's a chance to make sure the kinds of things that make these events so memorable will not be forgotten.

Examples: the birth of a baby, moving to a new house, getting a driver's license, the first day of high school, confirmation or first communion, a new job, etc.

A Birthday Book

In some families there's a special book that only gets used when someone has a birthday. It becomes customary for the birthday boy or girl to jot down a few thoughts about what it's like to be another year older.

Holiday Book

Many families have a special book tucked away with their box of Christmas or holiday decorations. When it's time to get the box out, the book comes out too so family members can record special moments during the holiday season.

There's something I've been meaning to tell you

People in families often take their feelings for one another for granted. It's easy to assume others know they're loved and appreciated without having to be told. Sometimes family members think it's corny or childish to talk about these things. Unfortunately, it's easier for some people to point out the things they don't like about one another than it is to say something positive and supportive.

Children gain much of their self-worth from knowing they are loved and valued by the people who are most important in their lives. Parents and spouses need to know it too. In fact, knowing we are loved and valued for who we are is important for all of us. Here are some suggestions for expressing these kinds of things:

Wear a rubber band loosely around your wrist for one week. Give it a snap each time you find yourself criticizing, nagging or complaining about another family member. Use it as a reminder to look for something positive to say instead.

Get into the habit of saying, "Thank you." Gratitude needn't be reserved for special occasions or expressed solely in response to gifts and special favors. "Thank you" can be used in everyday situations too. Some people feel it's unnecessary to thank someone for doing what they're supposed to be doing anyway. On the other hand, it's easier for family members to be cooperative about chores and other responsibilities when they know their efforts are noticed and appreciated.

Don't be cheap about giving out compliments. People appreciate knowing their talents and accomplishments are a source of pride to the family. But it's just as important to make sure people know they're valued for who they are as well as for whatever successful and note-worthy things they may have done. Telling a child "I'm so proud of the way you helped your grandfather clean up the garage" can be just as important to hear as "Congratulations for bringing home that blue ribbon on your fair project."

Actions are important when it comes to letting people know they're valued and appreciated. Helping with homework or other responsibilities, offering to lend a hand with a chore, or spending some time together doing something the other person enjoys are all great ways to let family members know you care about them.

Here are some activities to help your family pay attention to the things that make each person special:

The Name Game

Use the letters in someone's name to spell out special things about him or her.

For example

C.....caring, great with **children**, **charming**
A.....cares for **animals**
S.....writes **songs**, is **sincere** and **sensitive**
E.....**energetic**, **earns** blue ribbons,
Y.....helps elderly with **yard** work

Compliment Corner

Use a bulletin board to encourage family members to pay attention to one another's accomplishments. Keep a supply of scratch paper and pens close by for putting up short notes whenever someone does something special.

For example:

"Way to go, Brad. You passed your driver's test!"

Special schoolwork, drawings, newspaper clippings, award certificates or ribbons or other special items can also be tacked to the board to call attention to things that are worth noticing.

Surprise Notes

Brighten someone's day by leaving a little note or drawing in an unexpected place. It could be a compliment, a note of thanks, or simply a way to express how you feel about the other person. Tuck the note inside a lunch bag, backpack or briefcase (or slip it into a coat pocket, shoe, or even under a pillow). It will show up when it's least expected to let someone know you're thinking of him or her.

Birthday People

Just about everyone loves a birthday celebration. Some families celebrate with special gifts and treats. But some of the best celebrations involve traditions and customs that don't cost a penny. Here's how to use birthdays as an opportunity for telling people how much they mean to the rest of the family:

- Write short notes or make hand-made cards to express personal thoughts and feelings about things that make the birthday person unique.
- Present the birthday person with a special tribute from the whole family. Write the birthday person's name across the top of a plain sheet of paper. Starting at the bottom of the page, have each family member write down something they like or appreciate about the birthday person. As each message is written, cover it up by turning up the bottom of the page before passing it on to the next person.
- Keep a family birthday book to bring out each time someone has a birthday. Write the birthday person's name along with the date at the top of a page. Then have everyone else jot down what comes to mind about that person or special things that have happened to him or her during the past year.

Places at the dinner table

Here's a simple idea to try the next time your family celebrates a festive dinner together—perhaps at Thanksgiving or during the holidays.

- Start with a supply of plain 5" x 8" index cards. Fold them in half and write each family member's name on a card.
- While dinner is being prepared, put all the cards in a bowl and have each person take one. (If you draw your own name, put it back and try again.) Use the inside of the card to write a short note to the person whose name has been drawn. If necessary, remind relatives and friends that the purpose of the notes is to say something positive!
- Collect the completed notes and use them for place markers at the dinner table.

Rules of the game

Most people agree that rules are important for lots of reasons. Parents have a responsibility to look after their children's physical and emotional safety and help them grow up to be healthy and happy adults. Establishing sensible rules and guidelines is one of the ways to do that.

Parents have different approaches to “rules.” Some families have none at all. At times this can lead to a great deal of confusion because it’s hard for children to grow up without guidelines and expectations. Other families make so many rules it’s impossible to keep track of them all. Sometimes the consequences for breaking the rules may not be clear or parents fail to follow through on them. In other families the rules are unreasonable or unfair—and the consequences harsh and restrictive. This can lead to resentment and anger which often erupts into all sorts of troublesome behaviors.

The following worksheet can help you discuss the kinds of rules that are necessary at your house by talking them over with your kids. (It might be a good idea to review the tips for Listeners and Talkers on pp. 5 and 6 before you get started.)

In a society that sends kids mixed messages about what's appropriate and not appropriate, parents need to do everything they can to help kids learn how to live responsible and ethical lives.

Busy families run more efficiently when everyone knows what kinds of chores, responsibilities and behaviors are expected of them. Taking the time to talk about why these kinds of rules are necessary helps everyone understand why it's important to follow them.

Tip:

Researchers tell us kids are much more likely to follow rules when they understand why they are needed in the first place. In addition, kids benefit from the opportunity to have some input into making the rules they'll be expected to follow and what the consequences will be for breaking them. It's a chance for them to show their parents how serious they are about learning to act responsibly.

Family Rules Worksheet

Rule	Why Needed	Considerations or Guidelines	Benefits if Followed	Consequences if Not Followed

Babies and toddlers grow up quickly. While it's a busy time, most parents cherish those first years of a child's life. Once children learn to talk, it's even more exciting because of the imaginative, often endearing, things they say to express themselves. Now is the time for parents to begin making good communication a priority by looking for opportunities to pay attention to what their children are saying. Here are some activities that can help.

Bed-time Rituals

Children often settle down for the night a lot easier when they're able to rely on a parent's reassuring presence at the close of the day. Children need a certain amount of structure in their lives and so the little routines that surround bedtime become very important: brushing teeth, having that last minute drink of water or trip to the bathroom, cuddling up with a familiar blanket or stuffed animal. In many families, bedtime also includes a quick story or prayer. Consistently doing these kinds of things at bedtime lends stability and consistency to children's lives.

Bedtime rituals also help build solid communication skills. Consider getting in the habit of having a nightly "tuck in-talk" as soon as your child has climbed into bed. Turn off the light (and switch on the night-light if needed.) Then take a few minutes to review the events of your child's day. Ask him or her about the best thing (or funniest, silliest, saddest, scariest, etc.) thing that happened. Or, ask about something he or she is looking forward to doing tomorrow.

A Book About Me

Any parent knows that toddlers and very young children have a knack for saying the most amazing things. It's always a good idea to listen to what your little one has to say about his or her unique perspective on the world. By paying attention, you're letting your child know how much you value the things he or she is telling you. Here's a simple and enjoyable project the two of you can do together. When you're finished you'll have a treasured keepsake to remind you of your child.

Purchase a spiral bound notebook with blank pages and tell your child that it's going to be his or her "special book". Explain that you will use it to write down whatever he or she wants you to write. Consider making it a special activity that's done on a fairly regular basis. Regardless of how often you write, it will be helpful to focus your child's attention on something specific. You may want to ask a question to get your child talking. ("If you were the mommy or daddy in this family, what would you do tomorrow?" "Tell me about the house you're building in the sandbox" "What did you see when we took Grandpa to the airport?") Make sure to copy, word for word, the things your child tells you and then read it back to make sure you've got it right. Consider asking your child to illustrate each story with a special drawing. And don't forget to date whatever you write.

Another idea is to paste a few snapshots into the book and copy down what your child tells you to say about them. Just be sure to use archival quality adhesive and acid free paper! For more ideas about family writing activities, be sure to check out page 15 of this booklet!

Taped Books

Little children love listening to the sound of a familiar voice reading a favorite story. Grown-ups enjoy it too, and that's why reading aloud is a time-honored tradition in many families. Even though people in today's families don't always live in the same house, they can still keep that tradition alive. Divorced parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other relatives can tape record themselves reading aloud to a child who lives far away and has a cassette tape recorder handy.

Purchase a blank cassette tape and a children's book. Tape-record yourself as you read the book aloud.

Send both the book and the tape to the child. He or she can follow along and turn the pages of the book while listening to the sound of your voice reading it aloud.

For more suggestions about sharing books with children, be sure to check out page 14 of this booklet!

Unbirthday Parties

Waiting for a year to go by until it's time for another birthday can seem like an eternity to a young child. An unbirthday party is the perfect solution—especially since it's always a good idea to find reasons for having a family celebration. Depending on the size of your family, you may want to have one big unbirthday party for everyone. Or if you have a smaller family, consider scheduling individual parties.

Little children can get involved in making party decorations and help decide what to serve for refreshments. Make sure there's a birthday cake with a candle for each person in the family, and don't forget to sing "Happy Unbirthday to Us". Gifts, on the other hand, should probably be discouraged on the grounds that it's nice to have something special to look forward to when real birthdays roll around. But if your family insists on having presents to unwrap, keep things simple. Wrap up ordinary household items—a tube of toothpaste, box of crayons, package of raisins, bar of soap, etc.—to be put into a grab bag so each family member gets something.



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