



IDEAS FOR FAMILY FUN

A survey to determine characteristics of a healthy family listed the following traits (note the last one). The healthy family:

- communicates and listens,
- affirms and supports one another,
- teaches respect for others,
- develops a sense of trust, and
- has a sense of play and humor.

Another survey listed one of the top 10 family stresses as not having enough playtime together.

Strong families make time to be together and have fun together. Planning family fun time is one way to make sure the family talks to one another and builds connections that help them through rough times. It's also a good way to learn more about an individual family member away from the role they play in the family (such as parent, child, or grandparent).

You need two things to create family fun time: time together and a desire to spend time together. The following are just a few ideas for family fun time.

Mailbag

Ask each family member to add something from the week to a mailbag (envelope) that will be sent to relatives who live far away. Not only do relatives see what you've been doing, but each family member sees something that other family members feel is important about their week. The item might be a homework assignment, a ticket stub from a movie, a good recipe you just tried, an interesting newspaper article, or the name of a new CD you like.

An Encouraging Word

We often learn quickly what we've done wrong, but hardly ever hear what we've done right. The family is one place that can give that positive reinforcement. Write a note of encouragement or love for other family members. You can e-mail the note, slip the note in a lunchbag, write through the steam created on the mirror in the morning, or slip a note under a pillow. Notes can range from "Thanks for not yelling at me last night" to "Good luck at work today." Adults or older children can help write notes by younger children who are still learning to write. For parents who travel a lot, this is a good way to connect with children when you're out of town.

Free Fun

For many activities you need money, but family fun can be free. Have each family member write activities they suggest the family do that don't require any money. Write one activity per slip of paper and put them in a box or cup. When the whole family or most of the family is together, pull one slip of paper out of the box and do that activity. This is one way to get a reluctant teen or children from another marriage more involved with the family. Hopefully everyone will be willing to do the activity that other family members suggest.

TV Time

Lots of families watch TV together. Talking about what you are seeing and how you feel about it is a way to interact on the same level about one subject. Family members can learn how other members feel about violence, relationships, or money from lots of different TV programs. During commercials, have a race to do 20 jumping jacks or 5 sit-ups or some other type of exercise.

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Non-TV Time

When the cable goes out or the TV is off, use the time to watch the storm outside or read out loud by candlelight. Toast marshmallows in a fireplace or outdoor grill. Play cards or a board game; team up members of the family who normally don't spend a lot of time together such as dad and teen son, or younger and older sister. Look through family photo albums and tell family stories, such as, "Do you remember the time we took a hike in the mountains?"

Household Chores

Family members rarely think that cleaning the house is fun, but the process can be enjoyed a little more by letting people have some choice in what they clean. Write weekly cleaning jobs of equal difficulty on slips of paper. For example, three chores that are about equal in the time and effort they take are vacuuming the living room and dining room, dusting the living room, and cleaning the toilet and bathroom sink. Place the slips of paper in a box and on the weekly cleaning day, have each family member pull out one, two, or three slips of paper. These are their weekly housekeeping chores. Daily chores can be handled the same way.

Making Decisions

Families are often faced with decisions, such as whether or not to move to another town, how to spend a vacation, or whether or not to invite grandpa to live with them. One way to get the whole family involved in the decision is to divide a sheet of paper into two parts: pros and cons, or for and against, the decision.

Pros (For)

Cons (Against)

Each family member calls out ideas that fall into the pros or cons. Ideas are written down and the family can add to, take away, and review the list for a time until they have completely discussed the decision. All family members may not agree on the decision, but everyone has a chance to let others know what they think.

Happy Hour

The first hour after everyone gets home in the evening can be declared happy hour. To curb hunger before dinner, family members can eat some yogurt or snack on some crackers and veggies or fruit. Beverages such as juice or water with lime slices can be served. Music from the radio or sound system can be played softly, while everyone relaxes and talks about

their day. Take turns playing different kinds of music selected by different members of the family. Happy hour reduces the stress of getting dinner on the table right after work and gives family members a chance to interact in a positive way. An extra bonus is finding out the kinds of music that each family member likes to play.

MEASURING FAMILY STRENGTH

Families that try to make their homes happy and plan family fun time become strong families. What are your family's strengths? Take the following test.

- | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|--|----------------------------|------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|
| <i>almost
never</i> | <i>once in
a while</i> | <i>sometimes</i> | <i>most of
the time</i> | <i>always</i> |
| <hr/> | | | | |
| _____ 1. Our family enjoys doing things together. | | | | |
| _____ 2. Each person helps make decisions in our family. | | | | |
| _____ 3. We are proud of our family. | | | | |
| _____ 4. We think the same things are important. | | | | |
| _____ 5. We build each other up in our family. | | | | |
| _____ 6. We can say what we really think in our family. | | | | |
| _____ 7. We know we can work out problems that come up. | | | | |

Look over the list and star those statements that have the highest scores. These are your family's strengths. These are the areas that provide the "glue" that holds your family together. This "glue," along with creating a happy home and planning family fun, creates strong families.



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