

Daily Union Article  
Saturday, October 13, 2018  
Title; "Making Your Family Stronger"

Last week was the first article in a series related to parenting. Because nearly one-third of Geary County's population falls in the age range of 18 and under, it is a relevant topic to have conversations about. Jessica Partida, Life Skills Instructor for the Eighth Judicial District Court and I have been teaching a community class Strengthening Families 7-17 (SFP7-17.)

The class focuses on parenting and youth life-skills training for parents and children ages 7-17 to attend together. It offers a variety of activities that help families improve their communication, develop stronger bonds, develop and/or nurture routines that improve daily family functioning, increase the awareness of trust and understanding in the family, and enjoy having fun together as a family.

A key activity the program promotes to improve family relationships is called "My Time." This activity directs parents or caregivers to set aside targeted time for each of their family members. Daily one-on-one play time for 10-15 minutes with each child during "My Time" creates happy bonding feelings, nurtures emotional health, helps alleviate sibling rivalry, and protects kids from alcohol and drug use.

There are some basic rules to "My Time" to make it a positive experience for all of the participants.

First, do your best to make it a daily event of fun play time with each child. If you have several children, rotate turns with your partner so that each child gets a turn with one of you nightly.

Second, let your child pick the activity without squelching their idea. If you want to add variety, you and your child can make a list of fun games that you can play in 10-15 minutes, cut the list into strips, and put them in a jar or coffee cup. Draw one out each night and play it together.

Third, cheerfully give your child your undivided attention for 10-15 minutes. By enjoying these moments together you can have fun while building stronger, more meaningful bonds.

Fourth, make note of the good your child does and use this time to emphasize making positive comments to them. A rule of thumb in child development is that for every negative comment made to a child, it takes 5-7 positive comments to offset the impact the negative statement had. "My Time" offers a great opportunity for you to make sure your children are hearing more positive statements in their day than negative ones.

Fifth, if it is a "skill-based" game, give yourself handicap points to even out the playing field so that your child can sometimes win. "My Time" is not designed to be the time when you exhibit your authority of your child. It is a time to simply have fun and enjoy being with each other.

There are also some things you should NOT do during "My Time." If you as the parent or caregiver overstep these boundaries, you are likely doing more harm than good.

Don't be reluctant of the time together. It will pay big dividends over time.

Don't correct, criticize, or offer suggestions for improvement.

Don't ask "leading questions" to teach a lesson or push your point of view.

"My Time" is a great tool to use with any age child. When you give them the opportunity to choose what they want to do, they will naturally adjust it to something that is age or interest appropriate. My teenage boys love to play cards. It can be WAR, Slap-Jack, Kings Corners, Pitch, or any of the prepackaged card games we have bought from the discount store. Sometimes they want to show me one of their electronic games and teach me how it is played. Again – it's their choice so I learn a new game whether it's interesting to me or not. The focus is on positive enjoyable time spent together. Even grandparents could use this strategy to help support their grandchild's growth and development.

SFP7-17 is an interactive, hands-on class created by Dr. Karol Kumpfer in 1982 and has extensive research data supporting its success in making a positive proactive impact on families. It lives up to its name: Strengthening Families 7-17.

No doubt, parenting is an amazing, fulfilling, never-predictable life journey, but it comes with a lot of detours, bumps, and U-turns. Don't be afraid to stop to ask for additional directions along the way. The people you will meet, the "short-cuts" to ease the journey, and the experiences you'll have when keeping adding to the journey can add a richness like no other.

For more information about the SFP 7-17 program, child development or parenting, contact me at the Geary County K-State Research and Extension office at 785-238-4161. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!