

The Daily Union Article
Saturday, August 31, 2019
Title: Strong Families, Strong Society

I recently walked through a department store and found a wide range of home décor...for Halloween, Thanksgiving and yes, Christmas. Summer is not over yet, but it seems we are supposed to keep our eyes (and pocketbook) focused on the next celebration or event.

Before we say goodbye to summer, I thought I should give one more shout out for celebrating family in the midst of all the hustle and bustle that our upcoming holiday season will bring.

Our society is built upon the strength of the individual families it is comprised of. Our family teaches us how to function in the world as we grow from infancy to adulthood. Our family teaches us to communicate – both in listening and in expressing our own thoughts. It teaches us how to be polite by sharing a sincere “thank-you” or “please” at the grocery store. Family is the first place we learn to take turns. It teaches us core beliefs and values such as honesty, commitment, faith, and responsibility, to name but a few. It teaches us to love and express our love through a gentle touch, warm hug, or simply say the words “I Love You” with sincerity. Family gives us a sense of who we are as individuals, as members of a household, neighborhood, community, and beyond.

With all this in mind, it is no wonder that a family struggling with toxic stress in the home likewise struggles with maintaining its strength. The more struggling families our society has, the more our social struggles as a whole. The stress families are under comes from a variety of sources, but the toll it can take on each family is the same. It diminishes their strength if left unaddressed.

What is a strong family? Recognizing the characteristics of a strong family may be difficult if you are in a family that is struggling. It can also become more difficult if other families, who also struggle, surround you.

However, strong families can evolve from ones that are struggling. With encouragement, resources, positive role models, and intentionality, a family can overcome challenges and emerge stronger than ever before.

What does a strong family look like or act like? Research conducted at the University of Nebraska by Nick Stinnett and Jack DeFrain with over 3,000 families. The participants represented a wide variety of families, some rich and others poor, some from an urban setting, others from farming communities, single parents, two-parent families, as well as families of many different races and ethnicities. Through their extensive research, six traits of a strong family emerged.

Strong Families Spend Time Together: These families are intentional about spending family time together. Family time helps one to not feel lonely. It helps create a feeling of family.

Strong Families Show Affection and Appreciation:

Showing respect and affection for the uniqueness of each family member is important.

Strong Families Possess Spiritual Wellness:

Strong families believe in a greater power. Shared beliefs help to create a bond between family members.

Strong Families Demonstrate and Ability to Cope:

Strong families pull together and draw strength from each other when problems arise.

Strong Families Show Open Communication and Good Listening:

Families who share beliefs and feelings and listen to one another feel more connected. Communication is one of the key elements of family relationships – whether it is spending time talking about little things or big issues.

Strong Families Have a Strong Commitment to Each Other:

Strong families make their relationships a high priority. They face the same difficulties and problems we all do. But the bad times do not destroy them. They work together to solve their problems.

Six Traits of a Strong Family Source: Children, Youth, Families & Communities; Michigan State University Extension; 2009 Michigan State University Board of Trustees; www.togetherwecan.fcs.msu.edu

Look over these six characteristics and reflect on where your own family stands with each one. Are you doing great or do you need lots of work? What can you do to make a difference in families who are struggling, even if it is not your own. Can you volunteer with a community organization that works with families? Would you be willing to invite the young family across the street over for a Labor Day picnic? Have you set time aside for your kids that didn't include screen time? If you were to prioritize the responsibilities you have in your schedule, where does your family fit in?

These are tough questions for many families. Recognizing our existing strengths is important but we cannot stop there. Every family has struggles eventually. It is how we equip ourselves or help equip others to face those struggles and strive to build strength that is just as important.

How? Our community has many programs designed to help families. Reach out to these organizations to find out how you can volunteer or how you can access the services they provide. Many of these organizations are listed in the L.I.F.E. publication available free of charge at the Dorothy Bramlage public library at 230 West Seventh Street in Junction City. Look for the Parents and Parenting section that begins on page 13 of the Fall 2019 edition.

You can also check out the family resource directory posted on the Geary County K-State Research and Extension office at <https://www.geary.k-state.edu/health-home-family/> or call me at 785-238-4161. I would be happy to connect you to the right information or organization to help you build on your family's strengths and work on the challenges. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!