

Self-help groups Neighbor to Neighbor

Session 4—Family strengths

To get ready	Activities	Materials	Time
<p>Obtain the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Session 4 leader guide/discussion materials* (one per group member) 2. (Optional) Session 5 leader guide/discussion materials* (one for next leader) <p>This session will help people look at their own family strengths and think of ways they would like to improve their family's relationships.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greetings and settling in • Introduction to session (leader reads out loud) • Individuals read and fill out • Large group discussion • Wrap-up of family inventory 	<p><i>I get by with a little help from my family</i> (4A)</p> <p><i>How's your family?</i> <i>An inventory</i>, p. 3</p> <p><i>Questions about your family inventory</i> (4B)</p> <p><i>Families: Complex, strong, imperfect</i> (4C)</p>	<p>10 minutes</p> <p>3 minutes</p> <p>5 minutes</p> <p>20 minutes</p> <p>7 minutes</p>
<p>* Also available on the World Wide Web: http://www.extension.iastate.edu/pubs</p>	<p>Leader reads out loud the summary of family strengths. Then individuals check the strengths their families have and write examples of their family strengths.</p>		
<p>Reviewed by Colleen Jolly, family life specialist, Iowa State University Extension.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stretch time and refreshments 		<p>5 minutes</p>
<p>... and justice for all The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Many materials can be made available in alternative formats for ADA clients. To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call 202-720-5964.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structured sharing time 	<p>Allow all group members a chance to speak by using a kitchen timer. Each person in turn sets the timer for approximately 5-10 minutes depending on the size of the group. Be flexible on those occasions when someone may need to take more than his or her share of the time.</p>	<p>60 minutes</p>
<p>Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Stanley R. Johnson, director, Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University of Science and Technology, Ames, Iowa.</p>	<p>Respond: How can farm families use strengths to deal with present problems?</p>		
<p>File: Family life 3</p>	Additional resources	<p>Approximate total = 1 hour, 50 minutes</p>	
<p>This ISU Extension publication was formerly published as FE-F-270f.</p>	<p>These publications are available from ISU Extension.</p>	<p><i>Stress—Taking charge</i> series</p> <p><i>Managing stress in young families</i>, PM 1660b</p> <p><i>Managing stress in families with teens</i>, PM 1660c</p> <p><i>Managing stress in midlife families</i>, PM 1660d</p> <p><i>Managing stress in later life families</i>, PM 1660e</p>	

I get by with a little help from my family

Activity 4A

Introduction

The toughest kind of change to deal with is change we do not expect and/or do not find desirable. Examples might be an unexpected death of a loved one, unemployment, or loss of a farm.

The need to make significant life changes can be extremely stressful for a family. How family members respond and how successfully they “regroup” depend on several factors. The better the physical health and well-being of family members, the more each will be able to withstand stress.

Having positive self-esteem and remaining hopeful about the future are assets that contribute to the emotional health of family members.

Families may need to obtain money and material resources from relatives or helping agencies while they reconstruct life.

Family strengths like open communication, freedom of expression, acceptance, affection, and appreciation provide comfort. Positive family relationships can be energizing fuel needed to deal with change.

Last, but not least, having a personal or family support system can make a difference in how successfully families adjust to changed circumstances.

How's your family? An inventory**(Activity 4A, continued)**

The following statements of strengths are true for some families, not so true for others. Please circle the number that best indicates how true each statement is for your family.

	Almost never true	Sometimes true	Almost always true
1. We live in a caring community.	1	2 3 4	5
2. Our family talks things out when differences arise.	1	2 3 4	5
3. We have a sense of humor.	1	2 3 4	5
4. All members of our family are permitted to be unique individuals.	1	2 3 4	5
5. There are activities that we all enjoy doing together.	1	2 3 4	5
6. We respect each other's feelings.	1	2 3 4	5
7. In our home, we feel loved and cared about.	1	2 3 4	5
8. We have many contacts and connections with friends and acquaintances.	1	2 3 4	5
9. Discipline is moderate and consistent.	1	2 3 4	5
10. There is a sense of belonging in our family.	1	2 3 4	5
11. We spend a good deal of time together.	1	2 3 4	5
12. We can count on one another to be dependable.	1	2 3 4	5
13. In our family, not much blaming or fault-finding occurs.	1	2 3 4	5
14. We establish reasonable goals for ourselves.	1	2 3 4	5
15. We encourage one another to grow and develop.	1	2 3 4	5
16. We show appreciation for what we do for one another.	1	2 3 4	5
17. The members of our family know what the others believe in and stand for.	1	2 3 4	5
18. In our family, everyone has a voice in plans and decisions.	1	2 3 4	5
19. We spend a lot of time talking about our feelings, hopes, aspirations, joys, sorrows, wants, and needs.	1	2 3 4	5
20. In our family, differing opinions and viewpoints are welcome and listened to.	1	2 3 4	5
21. Religion is important in our family.	1	2 3 4	5
22. Members of our family readily admit their mistakes.	1	2 3 4	5
23. Our family is open to change and is flexible regarding rules and roles.	1	2 3 4	5

Questions about your family inventory

Activity 4B

A. Which strengths are farm families likely to have?

Possible answers to consider. Numbers refer to the inventory on page 3.

1. Often small rural communities are felt to be caring.
8. Since most farm families live in the same community for many years they usually have many friends and acquaintances.
10. Members of a farm family may have a strong sense of shared commitment and belonging.
11. Farm families often spend more time together than non-farm families do, as they do chores and enjoy leisure activities.
12. Farm family members may learn dependability from roles and responsibilities in the farm business.
17. Many farm families share values and beliefs.
21. Similar to 17.

B. Which strengths may be hard for farm families?

Possible answers to consider. Numbers refer to the inventory on page 3.

2. Some farm families find it difficult to talk about disagreements.
4. It may be difficult for farm families to let individuals have their own goals and plans if they conflict with the farm goals.
14. It may be hard for farm families to establish reasonable goals since many factors (prices, weather) are out of their control.
16. Sometimes it seems especially hard for families to express thoughts and feelings out loud.
18. Because the business and family are so closely related, farm plans may take precedence over family plans and decisions.
19. Farm families may be caught up in farm work and off-farm jobs, and seldom may take time to talk about other things.

C. Which strengths may be different according to your family's age?

Possible answers to consider. Numbers refer to the inventory on page 3.

4. It's harder to allow young children to be unique individuals than it is to allow teenagers or adults to be individuals.
6. It's sometimes difficult for children to respect and appreciate feelings of older family members.
9. Type and amount of discipline vary with the age of the family.
10. Sometimes the sense of belonging is harder in families with older children.
11. Younger families likely spend more time together than families with teenagers.
20. Similar to 4.

Questions about your family inventory

Activity 4B, continued

D. Which strengths may go “undercover” during times of difficulty or stress?

Possible answers to consider. Numbers refer to the inventory on page 3. (During hard times it’s easy to forget that your family has ever had certain strengths.)

1. Even though the family has many friends and acquaintances it is especially hard to reach out for help during times of great stress or loss.
- 2, 3. When family members are hurting or worried, it’s difficult to discuss things with each other or have a sense of humor.
5. Activities that are usually enjoyed are no longer done or don’t bring much satisfaction.
7. At this time it’s hard to feel cared for or have a sense of belonging.
8. Same as 1.
13. Blaming may occur even though ordinarily members do not find fault with one another.

In summary, although your family has many strong points, your family may have difficulty finding or remembering the strong points in hard times.

Families: complex, strong, imperfect

Activity 4C

Think back to strengths your family has had over the years. Identify and celebrate your own family strengths and use them to your advantage. Below are indicators of family well-being. These characteristics are apparent in studies of strong families. They are offered not as “shoulds,” but as “mindjoggers” to help you think of the unique strengths your own family possesses.

Assess family strengths. They are valuable assets. When the going gets tough, let family strengths help you pull through.

Nurture family strengths. Think of them as strong supports under a bridge. In good times, consciously build family characteristics that will serve as support or glue. During hard times, recognize that family strengths are very important. It is possible to build family strengths under adversity. The bottom line is to recognize strengths, and monitor behavior so those strengths are not weakened at the very time “traffic is heavy on the bridge.”

Read the following list of family strengths. Put a check by each strength your family has.

Strong families

- 1. express appreciation for each other
- 2. share responsibility for family chores and decisions
- 3. are flexible and open to change
- 4. talk openly with each other
- 5. share some of the same values
- 6. spend time together
- 7. have interests outside the family

If time permits, write an example of a strength your family has.