

The Center for Innovative Practices

Resiliency Tool Kit | Resource #2

RESILIENCY RESOURCE #2 | Enhancing Family Strengths

Happy Holidays! Or at least that's what we're supposed to say. It can be challenging to be "happy" during such a busy, unstructured, and potentially expensive season. In addition, many people have extremely mixed emotions about the holidays, due to their own negative experiences from the past or due to personal loss and grieving. Children and youth, who want to enjoy their vacation time from school, can sometimes feel anxious or bored without the daily schedule to provide focus and activities, as well as the social connections they have at school. How can families not only survive, but be resilient throughout the holiday season?

While I was pondering this question, I was invited to attend a **Family Strengths Fair** at Kent State University. Kathy Walker, an associate professor and a friend of mine, teaches a course called Building Family Strengths, offered in Human Development and Family Studies. In this class, they use the American Family Strengths Inventory to assess, identify and build on family strengths. It's a simple model, but it gives the students a framework to view families through a strengths-based lens and offers a language to discuss strengths with families. Within this inventory, there are six characteristics of strong families:

Enjoyable time together	Appreciation and affection
Effective communication	Valuing each other and commitment
Effective management of stress and crisis	Spiritual well-being

The students could choose any of the six characteristics, with the exception of enjoyable time together, to enhance through an activity they designed. The assumption was that if a family participated in any of the activities designed to enhance one of the other characteristics, they would naturally spend enjoyable time together. Dr. Walker organized The Family Strengths Fair to allow her students to showcase their projects. Since **CONNECTIONS**, both social and familial, are a foundational component of resiliency, all of these **activities that increase family togetherness can serve to increase family resiliency**.

All families have both strengths and weaknesses, and often too much attention is focused on our weaknesses. This month, take some time to focus on and increase your strengths, those qualities that contribute to each family members' sense of personal worth and their feelings of satisfaction with each other. In addition to providing the instructions for 5 different activities that families can engage in together, you will find a link for the American Family Strengths Inventory to assess and identify your own family strengths. It's designed to generate positive discussions about the qualities that make a family strong, which can be an enjoyable activity as well. The student designed activities can accommodate 2 or more family members, so any size family can enjoy them. You will need to gather a few materials, but most of them can be found around your home or purchased inexpensively; perhaps you could improvise a quick scavenger hunt to get started!

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Creating a Strong Family

The American Family Strengths Inventory can be found online through the University of Nebraska Lincoln extension. You can view it online or print it out. It has detailed directions and suggestions to celebrate your strengths and have fun doing family activities. <http://extensionpubs.unl.edu/publication/9000016366311/creating-a-strong-family/>

Helping Hands by Sarah Egan

2 or more people, ages 5+

The purpose of this activity is to help parents and their school-aged children enhance appreciation and affection for each other by identifying times when they have helped each other, culminating in a colorful chain of helping hands.

Supplies: A variety of colored construction paper, scissors, pencils and tape.

[Enhancing Appreciation and Affection — Helping Hands by Sarah Egan](#)

Calming Glitter Bottles by Ashley Hausmann

Any number, all ages

This craft project is designed for families to help each other manage stress and crises. Families work together to each create their own bottle to focus on, rehearse relaxing, and facilitate conversations about how to support each other to handle problems and share solutions.

Supplies: 1 16 oz. water bottle per person, glue, glitter, duct tape, and food dye. Beads and a funnel are optional.

[Enhancing Stress Management — Calming Glitter Bottles by Ashley Hausmann](#)

Family History and Collective Timelines by Janelle Nafziger

Any number, ages 10+

Although this activity was designed for families with internationally adopted children, it is appropriate for any family that adopted a child 5 or older. It is intended to increase the family's connectedness and the individuals' sense of belonging and purpose within the family.

Supplies: Construction paper, colored markers/pencils, and a straightedge. Photographs and glue stick optional.

[Enhancing Spiritual Well-Being — Family History and Collective Timelines by Janelle Nafziger](#)

Bringing Photographs to Life: An Intergenerational Activity by Celia Hanzl

Any number, ages 8+

This activity is specifically designed to enhance communication between caretaking grandparents and the grandchildren that they are raising. By looking at family photos, recreating the scene and discussing feelings about it then and now, families can enjoy playful and positive communication across generations.

Supplies: Photographs, pens/pencils and paper. Props and costumes optional.

[Enhancing Effective Communication — Bringing Photographs to Life by Celia Hanzl](#)

Family Land Fishing by Deneese Cameron

2 or more players, ages 10+

This activity can help families who have lost a family member to substance abuse. Strong families are able to communicate effectively about this loss in order to find healing and this board game activity enhance effective communication by prompting discussion and letting everyone take turns sharing and listening.

Supplies: 1 poster board, construction paper, scissors, glue/tape, markers, pens/pencils, a small container or bowl and markers for each player to move around the board.

[Enhancing Effective Communication — Family Land Fishing by Deneese Cameron](#)

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