

2001

Do You Have Tips For Strengthening Family Bonds?

Tom Lee

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Recommended Citation

Lee, Tom, "Do You Have Tips For Strengthening Family Bonds?" (2001). *All Archived Publications*. Paper 264.
http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/extension_histall/264

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A weekly question/answer column

Do You Have Tips For Strengthening Family Bonds?

Tom Lee answers:*

All of us want good family relationships, but it can sometimes be hard to know how to improve them. Each family is unique and no one set of “rules” will work in every family, but there are some things strong families have in common.

- **Appreciation.** Strong families notice the efforts of family members and express appreciation for each other often.
- **Kindness.** Kindness is a simple but powerful idea in families. It consists of doing small, unselfish things for others in the family that could be called “love gifts,” such as listening with patience, helping with a task when someone in the family is busy, avoiding an angry reply, giving a small surprise gift or fixing a favorite meal.
- **Time together.** Strong families make conscious plans to create time together doing things they enjoy. They also attend and support each others activities.
- **Values and standards.** Parents in strong families have well-defined values and they communicate these values clearly to their children.
- **Strictness and permissiveness.** In strong families, parents are the authority figures in the home, but reasons for rules are explained, and children have input into the family’s rules.
- **Problem solving.** All families have conflicts but strong families tend to face and resolve them with an expectation that they can work things out. They face problems openly, and try to be flexible and creative in finding solutions.
- **Traditions.** Traditions are shared experiences that give meaning to family life and strengthen family bonds.
- **Fun and laughter.** Family jokes and a playful attitude can preserve a sense of humor in difficult situations.

Each family will have a different blend of these characteristics of family health, but each family has the potential to build stronger and more satisfying family relationships. Don’t try to tackle all the areas at once. Identify one or two that seem like good places to start. Remember, all families are still works in progress.

* Tom Lee is Utah State University Extension Family and Human Development Specialist