

Parents' Week



Why Happy Families Are Different

Certainly, there are many causes for unhappiness in families, but in what way are happy families different in their ability to successfully handle adversity?

Defining Your Flight Plan

In his best-selling book, *7 Habits of Highly Effective Families*, Stephen Covey compares a successful family to an airplane pilot with a flight plan. For the pilot, the flight plan identifies the destination and outlines the path to getting there. But during the course of the flight, wind, rain, turbulence, air traffic, human error and other factors act upon that plane. Throughout that trip, there are slight deviations from the flight plan. But barring anything too major, the plane will arrive at its destination. Likewise, happy families have unique “flight plans” that reflect values and principles that enable them to successfully handle problems and reach the desired “destination.”

The 7 Habits Reviewed

The first habit, *being proactive*, can be defined as being responsible for our own choices and having the freedom to choose based on values rather than moods or circumstances. Covey uses the analogy of the Emotional Bank Account to describe the concept of proactivity. The Emotional Bank Account represents the quality of the relationship a person has with family members. It's like a financial bank account in that “deposits and withdrawals” are made that impact the trust levels between family members. Successful families strive to maintain high balances in the Emotional Bank Accounts. Even when mistakes are made in a relationship, the “emotional reserves” will compensate for it. Every problem encountered is seen as an opportunity to make another deposit.

Habit 2 – *begin with the end in mind* – involves creating a clear vision of what your family is all about. Habit 2 is about “destination.” Covey suggests that families develop a family mission statement that describes the kind of family you really want to be and identifies principles that will help you get there.

Put first things first is the third habit. This habit involves focusing on priorities – namely the importance of family. Covey cautions that, “Things which matter most must never be at the mercy of things which matter least.”

Habit 4 – *think “win-win”* – encourages family members to think in terms of mutual benefit. Happy families foster support and mutual respect. They think in terms of “we” not “me” in order to make agreements.

Seek first to understand ... then to be understood is the fifth habit. Family members seek first to listen with the intent to understand the thoughts and feelings of others, then seek to effectively communicate their own thoughts and feelings. Successful families build deep relationships of trust and love by providing helpful feedback.

Habit 6 – *synergize* – is about two or more people working together to produce more than the sum of what they could produce separately. In other words, one plus one equals three or more. The family builds a mutual problem-solving atmosphere based on the dynamics of loving, learning, contributing, and creative cooperation.

The final habit – *sharpen the saw* – recognizes that a family increases its effectiveness through personal and family renewal in four basic areas of life: physical, social/emotional, spiritual and mental. Traditions play a key role in nurturing the renewal of family spirit.

The Challenge

It is in [happy families] that we find our meaning, our strength, and our future. Spend some time identifying your family's strengths. From that foundation, choose additional qualities that you can add to your family dynamics. Become involved in activities that will help your family build those strengths.

By Joan Garrett, Extension Agent, Family & Consumer Services, Clermont County. Adapted from *Family Life Month Packet* 1999, The Ohio State University Extension.

Ohio Parents' Week “You Gotta Love Parents” is September 20-27, 2003. First Lady Hope Taft reminds us that “nothing is more important to our future as a state and nation than making sure our children have every chance to be healthy, caring, productive adults.”

You Gotta Love Parents...