



“The family is the cornerstone of our society. More than any other force, it shapes the attitude, the hopes, the ambitions, and the values of the child.”

-Lyndon Baines Johnson, former U.S. President

Objectives

Define what family means and the importance of having a strong family.

Explore qualities that contribute to building a strong family.

Share strategies for building enduring family bonds.

Family

There are many ways to define a family: Nuclear families, stepfamilies, single-parent families, foster families and others types of families.

All families need to be nurtured and strengthened over time.

They must endure challenges like deployments, separations, frequent transitions, and make it through tough uncertain times.

Military life has unique challenges and benefits that lead to circumstances where military families learn to lean on an extended family offered/network in the civilian world.

Family Strengths

Five qualities of strong families:

1. Caring and appreciation
2. Communication
3. Commitment
4. Community and family ties
5. Working together

(See the definitions of the Five Qualities of Strong Families on Page 2)

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Family Strength #1—Caring and Appreciation

- Recognize your child's positive attributes
 - * Verbal praise and encouragement
 - * Written notes
 - * Physical affection
- Spend quality time with your child
 - * Create an activity list

Family Strength #2—Communication

- Make time to talk
- Make it fun
- Face the tough stuff

Family Strength #3—Commitment

- Practice family traditions
- Compile a family history

Family Strength #4—Community and Family Ties

- Teach children and youth to think beyond themselves

Family Strength #5—Coping

Family Strength #5—Coping

- Family meetings

Discussion Points for Family Meetings

1. What went well in our family this week?
2. What things could we improve in our family?
3. What things will you commit to working on this week?
4. What help do you need to reach your goal?

Nelson, P. T. (2012) Adapted from 5 Family Strengths. In Families Matter! A Series for Parents of School-Age Youth. Newark, DE: Cooperative Extension, University of Delaware.
<https://extension.udel.edu/factsheet/building-strong-family-relationships/>; <https://pal.ua.edu/2017/08/21/six-characteristics-of-strong-families/>

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Resiliency

The ability to bounce back from adversity.

Turning adversity into a way for a family to grow and become stronger.

The 7 C's of Resiliency

The 7C's are the components of resiliency as defined by Dr. Ken Ginsberg, the creator of the American Academy of Pediatrics Model of Resiliency and pediatrician specializing in Adolescent Medicine at The Children's Hospital in Philadelphia.

Resiliency is a skill set that can be developed.

1. Competence
2. Confidence
3. Connection
4. Character
5. Contribution
6. Coping
7. Control

Fostering Resilience and the 7 C's.

<http://www.fosteringresilience.com/7cs.php>

The 5 L's of Strong Families

1. Learning: Learn new ways to interact and solve problems
2. Loyalty: Unite and pull together when things get tough
3. Love: Find ways to both receive and give love to all members regularly.
4. Laughter: "Laughter is the best medicine". Use humor to ease tension.
5. Leadership: Lead the way when the family needs outside help. Seek out resources.

Remember to remain flexible. Strong families bend, change, and adapt, and when the storm is over they are still intact. Military families must have even more flexibility.

Conclusion

The family really is the cornerstone of our society.

Strong families are made and grown.

Families should continually assess ways to strengthen their bonds

Learning and understanding the qualities of strong families will provide a better quality of life for our children by giving them a nurturing environment in which to grow.

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Creating a Family Activity List

Spend quality time with your child: Nothing shows caring more than spending quality time together as a family. Children want parents to be available to have time, to show interest, to do things with them, and to talk with them. But what do you do when your time is so limited? How do you ensure that what little time you have is used in a way that means something to the child? Here is an idea: create an activity list.

Ideas for creating an activity list:

1. Call a family meeting. Ask family members what activities you have enjoyed in the past as a family. Include simple things such as taking a walk, fishing at the pond, or playing board games. Write them down.
2. As a family, on a scale of 1 to 5, rate how much you all enjoyed each activity in the past. (See check box below). 5 equals "We enjoyed it a lot." 1 equals "We didn't enjoy it much at all." Be sure to let the kids help decide the rating. Listen for those 5's from the kids! Those are the things they enjoy doing with you the most!
3. Then think about the activities that you haven't done before as a family that you think you would enjoy. Add them to your list.
4. Rate those activities based on how much you imagine you will enjoy them.
5. As a family, review the activities on your list and consider those that you rated as a 3 or higher on the enjoyment scale. **Choose to do one per week.**
6. After doing the activity, talk together as a family and discuss how the activity went. How did each of you feel about it? What small adjustments can you make next time to make the event even more special or enjoyable for each family member? Rate the activity after you do it.
7. Use the results to refine the family activity list for the following week. After a while, you will have compiled a list of activities that your families enjoys the most.

Activity	5	4	3	2	1
Example: Play a board game					

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More Tips on Strengthening Family Relationships

Sharing your life with a happy healthy family is, for many of us, one of our most important goals. There are multitudes of successful families who thrive, contribute to their communities, and nurture future generations to do the same! Researchers have studied carefully the attributes found within successful, happy families, and believe the following six characteristics to be vital foundational principles for fostering strong family relationships.

Spend time together— Relationships are somewhat like a garden. Without proper care and attention the weeds take over. Find activities each person enjoys and participate enthusiastically. If you cannot actually engage in the activity be sure to support one another's interests through attention and encouragement.

Effective Communication— Emphasize that each person's ideas are valid and everyone should have the chance to share happy news as well as what's bothering them. Being a good listener is essential in the communication process. Listening displays respect. It shows family members you care about what concerns them.

Appreciation— Every day family members contribute in ways that are worthy of appreciation. It is important to be aware of their efforts and express your gratitude with meaningful words and gestures. This can be done simply by saying, "Thank you for doing the dishes," or perhaps leaving a quick note where they can find it. It is also important to appreciate others not only for what they do, but also for who they are! This helps to increase the recipient's self-esteem and deepens a caring bond between family members.

Commitment— 'Putting family first' means that everyone takes time to consider how their decisions will affect the other members of the family. They are concerned about one another's welfare and happiness, and seek to structure their lifestyle in ways that promote unity and harmony.

Good coping skills— Members of strong families demonstrate the ability to stand firmly together during a crisis. By utilizing effective communication skills and maintaining a positive outlook, families can deal with difficult times and find strength that will sustain them through any crisis.

Values and convictions— Identifying and practicing a set of deeply held values and moral standards is an essential component of strong families. Some families demonstrate these beliefs through participation in organized religion while others involve themselves in worthy causes. Parents can express values by having open discussions about cultural trends, reading books to children which contain moral messages, or making a written document that states, "This family believes..." and posting it where everyone can see it. The most effective method, however, is allowing your children to observe you practicing your ethical convictions. Children may not hear everything we say, but they see everything we do!

For more information, see Child Development Resources, The University of Alabama:
<https://pal.ua.edu/2017/08/21/six-characteristics-of-strong-families/>

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Videos

“The Family Dinner Project”

<https://youtu.be/6legn6thBPw>

“Importance of Family Routine”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5jLU59JWAYk>

Resources and Links

MCEC OTM November 2018 “Does Staying in Touch with Children during Deployments make a difference?” <https://www.militarychild.org/news>

Dr. Anne Fishel, The Family Dinner Project:

Dr. Anne Fishel, “Home for Dinner”: <https://www.goodnet.org/articles/9-scientificallly-proven-reasons-to-eat-dinner-as-family>

Family Dinner Project on social media platforms:

<https://thefamilydinnerproject.org/>

https://www.pinterest.com/famdinnerproj/_created/

<https://www.facebook.com/thefamilydinnerproject/>

<https://www.instagram.com/thefamilydinnerproject/>

Dr. Anne Fishel, “Home for Dinner”: <https://www.goodnet.org/articles/9-scientificallly-proven-reasons-to-eat-dinner-as-family>

9 Scientific Reasons to Eat Dinner as a Family:

<https://www.goodnet.org/articles/9-scientificallly-proven-reasons-to-eat-dinner-as-family>

Ways to reframe for families: <https://www.verywellmind.com/reframing-defined-2610419>

Resources for families: <https://www.brucefeiler.com/>

Common Sense Media Family Media Agreement: <https://www.common sense media.org/family-media-agreement>

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MCEC[®] Resources

- *SchoolQuest™* is an interactive tool, specially designed to support highly mobile military-connected parents & students:
<https://schoolquest.militarychild.org>
- Military Student Consultants: This program is the portal for all questions student and parent related. You can submit your specific questions concerning transition barriers and receive specialized support. To contact a Military Student Consultant, email msc@militarychild.org
- The MCEC[®] podcast series covers an array of informative and important topics with guests from all walks of life. Visit [Podbean](#), [Google Playstore](#), or [iTunes](#)

MCEC[®] Parent Support Resources

- Find other MCEC[®] Parent Support [webinars](#) related to this topic on our official website MilitaryChild.org
- Contact your local Parent Support team for workshops offered in your community:
<https://www.militarychild.org/programs/parent-to-parent>
- If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to:
Parents@MilitaryChild.org

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