

FamilyTALK: Making it Work Leader's Guide

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Family communication that builds positive relationships among family members requires attention on an everyday basis. This FamilyTALK lesson is designed to give participants research-based information for improving everyday communication among family members. It emphasizes skill-building, but is **not** a replacement for families who need counseling or therapy to deal with their family problems.

Mindfulness refers to being fully present when communicating with each other and making communication decisions that take into consideration the needs and circumstances of both one's self and others. The lesson's overall goal is to increase the capacity to help persons engage in mindful and respectful communication with their family members. Please inform participants that this lesson introduces basic ideas about family communication; however, if they are looking for more comprehensive information, refer them to this website to examine the resources related to family communication: www.ksre.ksu.edu/families

Educational Goals

By the end of this lesson, participants will:

- recognize selected basic family communication principles that contribute to positive family relationships, and
- practice communication skills to help them understand these specific principles.

Basic Family Communication Principles Presented in this Lesson

- Nonverbal behaviors are powerful in helping or hindering family relationships.
- Effective listening and speaking skills result in better understanding among family members.
- Showing appreciation and having fun together build family strengths.

Materials Needed

- Copy of the *FamilyTALK: Making It Work, Fact Sheet* (MF2995) for each participant.
- Copy of the lesson evaluation survey for each participant.
- Writing materials for each participant.
- Flip chart or other writing board and markers if recording group responses for all to see.
- (Optional) For additional study on positive communication and other strengths demonstrated by strong families, consider purchasing the book *Family Treasures: Creating Strong Families*. It costs \$17.95 plus shipping. To order, visit: www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/epublic/pages/publicationD.jsp?publicationId=514

Lesson Preparation

As a leader, teaching this lesson will be smoother if you:

- Read through the entire teaching guide and accompanying fact sheet before you present the lesson.
- Try to present the lesson in your own words without reading word-for-word from the lesson guide. Decide which questions and activities to use.
- Prepare yourself for each discussion question or activity you decide to do by thinking about people's reactions and how you will lead the group.

- Prepare materials as indicated under the “Materials Needed” section.
- A leader script is indicated in italics throughout the lesson.

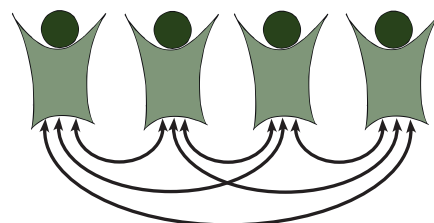
The Lesson

Introduction

Hand out writing materials and ask participants to draw stick figures of their family. “Family” can be defined as they wish. Then, ask them to introduce themselves to the group and briefly describe who is in their drawing. Complete this activity by asking what they hope to learn during the lesson to address family communication concerns. Remind the participants that sharing in the group discussions throughout the lesson is totally voluntary.

Help the participants understand that today’s goal is to put into action what you know and understand about positive family communication. This lesson is to reinforce skills that keep communication open and respectful, and to build family relationships.

Emphasize that communication is the key to building or hindering relationships among family members. Use your own family picture from the warm-up activity to illustrate how many family relations exist within any family unit. For example, if there are four persons in your family, there are six one-on-one relations. Each relationship has its own communication pattern. Among your family members, there may be different communication dynamics when several family members are together as compared to one-on-one communication. Help the group recognize that these relationships and communication patterns become more complicated with stepparents, grandparents, and other family members who are important to the family.



Use the following activities to teach the communication concepts in the lesson. Additional activities are available from the author, Charlotte Shoup Olsen, colsen@ksu.edu. References for this lesson are included in the fact sheet.

Activity 1

Ask the group to think about a specific time when they were satisfied with their family communication. It could be a specific incident or over a period of time. Have them think about how each person communicated with others, how individuals reacted to each other, and what were specific actions, gestures, and verbal or nonverbal behaviors. Spend time having the participants react to their memories, sharing their thoughts and feelings. Also, ask them to share times when they felt appreciated and times when they showed appreciation to others. Here are possible follow-up questions with a summary of key points to emphasize:

What did you learn from these stories?

What did you learn about family communication?

What were things in common mentioned during this discussion?

What are the messages sent when family members show appreciation to each other?

There are similarities and differences in how families communicate. A family member may communicate differently with individual family members. Family communication is impacted by many things: timing, setting, individual personalities, family history, the community, economic situations, and other happenings outside the family. For the most part, family communication tends to be spontaneous talk when no one is particularly thinking about it. It can be enjoyable just listening and talking to each other. The signals of appreciation to each other build strong relationships, too. It can be as simple as a truthful ‘thank you for doing that’ with nonverbal behaviors that show you are honest and sincere. Families who do the opposite – devalue and belittle each other – are moving their relationships along a bitter, negative path. Then families who do not pay attention to each other and are indifferent to each other can find family relationships declining with more of a sad note than one of bitterness. There are some basic communication principles that strong families use — and are very important to use — especially when family members don’t agree with each other for one reason or another.

Activity 2

Let's turn our attention to nonverbal behaviors that affect family communication such as facial expression, body language, and other messages that we get from others without a word being spoken.

Ask the group to stand up and walk around without acknowledging or smiling at each other as they meet. Next, tell them to continue walking and look and smile or whatever they want. Ask them how it felt to not acknowledge each other. Ask them to pair off and get six feet apart and try to talk. Ask them to get nose to nose. Then tell them to get comfortable, as individuals may have differences in how close they like to be when communicating with another person. This is called body space boundaries.

Ask pairs to sit facing each other. Decide which one will be the speaker and the listener. Ask the listener to use active listening skills. Active listening skills can be defined as paying respectful attention to the speaker and showing signs that show you are listening such as nodding the head, etc. When you clap your hands, the listener is to look away, yawn, lean back, and pay no attention. Have the speaker talk about something that happened last weekend in their family. Have them reverse roles. Here are possible follow-up questions and a summary for this activity:

How did the speaker feel when the listener looked away?

How did the listener feel when looking away?

Why do you think you had these feelings?

What would you like most from a family member who is listening to you?

What have we learned from this experience? Nonverbal messages are powerful. Think about facial expressions, body postures and actions, body space boundaries, and appropriate eye contact and how they are important in knowing if your family member is listening. The term "appropriate eye contact" is used since some families consider direct eye contact with elders and authority figures to be disrespectful.

Also, it is wise to resist the temptation to make a judgment about someone's nonverbal behaviors and verbal messages, too, until you have checked it out. You may think that a family member is ignoring you purposely when, in fact, it may have been a bad day at school or on the job and this person has nothing on his/her mind but that situation. Poor communication can occur when a family member interprets both verbal and nonverbal messages differently than the other family member may have intended. Family members who carefully listen and observe can share in a respectful manner, whether they agree or not, what they think are the messages coming from the other person. Getting the message right avoids misunderstandings and conflict. However, it takes much patience and no interruptions to do this when there is a disagreement. Families who develop patterns where each person gets a chance to share and be correctly understood are building skills that help protect and build their relationships with each other.

Activity 3

Ask for participant reactions to the following two messages:

Message #1

You NEVER pay attention to me at home. YOU come in the house after work and go straight to the computer. YOU seem to care more about playing your silly computer games than me. YOU really make me feel lousy.

Message #2

I get frustrated when we don't pay attention to one another. I really appreciate spending time together when we get home and talking about our day rather than going off and doing separate activities like you playing computer games and me cooking dinner.

Follow-up questions and summary:

How did you feel when the first message was read?

Did you feel differently with the second message?

What was the difference in the feelings?

What was the difference in the words?

YOU messages escalate conflict because the other person feels put down, blamed, accused, or guilty. The immediate reaction is to become defensive or to shut down and not communicate at all.

Persons who learn to talk about a conflict in a way that is not offensive to the other person are protecting family relationships. They are respecting each other. Talking in this manner can often surprise family members, especially if YOU messages have been the usual way to communicate. They may be taken aback to learn how you really feel, but it may take time before the family member adjusts his/her usual response. Additionally, it helps when messages that bring up a conflict are well thought out, brought up softly, and discussed at a time that makes sense to both persons. Timing is very important. Interrupting an activity that another person is enjoying will likely produce disappointing results.

In conclusion, you rarely think about communication with loved ones. Family communication is important and determines relationships between individuals, setting the tone for family life. Of course, families will have difficulties, but family communication delivered in respectful ways during these stressful times helps family members protect their relationships with each other. Families who have fun together also are building strong ties. It can be spontaneous fun in everyday living as well as planned activities together. Positive family communication and enjoyment with each other have been found to be strengths of strong families worldwide, regardless of their family structure or living situation.

FamilyTALK: Making It Work Evaluation Form

Directions: Please answer the following questions; however, completing this survey is voluntary. You do not have to answer every question. You will not be identified with your answers in any way.

1. How do you rate this lesson?

Check one: Excellent___ Good___ Average___ Poor___ No opinion___

2. Do you think this information will be useful to you in your own life?

Check one: Yes___ No___ If yes, how?

3. Because of this lesson, when I communicate with a family member:

I am more likely to use positive nonverbal behaviors. Yes___ No___

I am more likely to use effective listening and speaking skills. Yes___ No___

I am more likely to talk and listen respectfully when there is a disagreement. Yes___ No___

I am more likely to show appreciation to each of my family members several times a week. Yes___ No___

I am more likely to encourage enjoyable family activities. Yes___ No___

4. What did you learn that you did not know or that surprised you?

5. What have we left out in this lesson that you feel should have been included?

6. Will you share this information with others? Yes___ No___ If yes, check those that apply:

FCE___ Other organization___ Family___ Friend___ Other___

7. A. Are you: Female___ Male___

B. What is your age?___

C. Are you: Single___ Married___ Single, living with partner___ Separated or divorced___ Widowed___

Other comments about the lesson:

Thank you! Please give this survey to your lesson leader. The information you provided will help us improve family life education. If you are interested in being contacted in the future on the impact of this lesson in your family life, please provide the following:

Name_____ Address_____ Phone_____ Email_____

For Leaders Only:

Leader's name: _____ Phone number or email: _____ County: _____

Type of group: FCE___ Other _____ Date when lesson was given: _____

Number of people attending: ___ Number of men: ___ Number of women: ___

Please return completed surveys to your county/district Family and Consumer Sciences agent, or mail directly to:
Charlotte Shoup Olsen, Kansas State University, 343 Justin Hall, Manhattan, KS 66506

If questions, contact Charlotte Shoup Olsen at colsen@ksu.edu

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