

FS 320  
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# Protecting Family Ties

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## What Defines Family?

“Family members are individuals who by birth, adoption, marriage, or declared commitment share deep and personal connections, and are mutually entitled to receive and obligated to provide support of various kinds to the extent possible, especially in times of need.”

— Carol Levine, New York City volunteer

Researchers have noted several characteristics possessed by strong and healthy families. They include the following:

- In response to changes in individual members and changes in society, the family also changes and grows.
- Members show respect and trust for one another.
- They have a common spiritual ground, a world view, based upon a firm conviction that the world and people around them must be valued and respected.
- By tradition and ritual, they find a link to the past and hope in the future. They often have a sense of family history, a feeling of connection to their roots.

## Activities to Protect Family Ties

Make frequent telephone calls to family members.

Audiotape mealtime conversations or musical activities to exchange with other family members.

Photograph, videotape, or draw family activities such as a grandfather reading a story to a child. Let the picture tell a story about family bonds.

Make a small photo album for each child with pictures of you with the child. If the child lives far away, send pictures of you in your everyday setting, such as in your garden, with your pets, or at work. This will help children understand more about your life.

Keep a notebook of poems, stories, newspaper articles, and drawings on subjects of interest to a specific family member and give this collection to that person on a special occasion.

Encourage children to write to you. If they can't write, ask them to send drawings about themselves.

If you have creative talents, create items as gifts for special people. Grandmother's quilt, for example, can be a memory quilt, a priceless gift for future generations.

Have family reunions. Be fair about the distances involved; locate them where all family members have a similar distance to travel.

Write frequently. Make your letters appropriate to the age and interests of the receiver. For example, if a child is an avid baseball fan, try to keep up with her

favorite team. A few words about the latest score will be a meaningful communication.

When you send cookies or candy, include the recipe and where you found it. Your uncle's recipe may become a real favorite with your grandchildren just because it is a historical family recipe. Also include in the recipe notes about the person from whom it originated.

Develop a “round robin” family letter. Ask each person to add a page and send it on to the next family member. When it makes a complete circle, take out your page and send a new one. Consider the responsibility level of family members and their interest in participating in the round robin. People could have the option of passing if they agree to send the letters on to others when they arrive.

Send surprise packages occasionally.

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Send seeds for a special garden. Send pressed flowers from your garden.

Do a traveling crossword puzzle with a child. You do one part and send it to the child. Have the child do what he or she can and return it to you. You do some more and return it, passing it back and forth until it is completed.

If you read a book you think another family member might enjoy, send a copy. This might give you something to discuss or write about in the future.

Write stories or make tapes about yourself in your youth. Include stories that you've heard about your parents in their youth. Share with family members.

Take photos or videos of special events such as birthdays, holidays, weddings, anniversaries, play activities, sports, graduations, and vacations. Keep a scrapbook of clippings and pictures about individuals to be shared with others. Rotate copies among family members.

Research your family history and share findings with other family members.



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