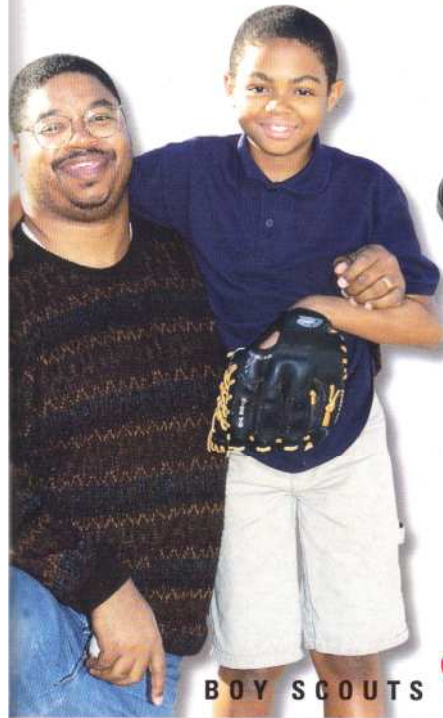


Troop 1292 #129A  
MERIT BADGE SERIES



# FAMILY LIFE



## HOW TO USE THIS PAMPHLET

The secret to successfully earning a merit badge is for you to use both the pamphlet and the suggestions of your counselor.

Your counselor can be as important to you as a coach is to an athlete. Use all of the resources your counselor can make available to you. This may be the best chance you will have to learn about this particular subject. Make it count.

If you or your counselor feels that any information in this pamphlet is incorrect, please let us know. Please state your source of information.

Merit badge pamphlets are reprinted annually and requirements updated regularly. Your suggestions for improvement are welcome.

Send comments along with a brief statement about yourself to Boy Scout Division • Boy Scouts of America • 1325 West Walnut Hill Lane • P.O. Box 152079 • Irving, TX 75015-2079.

## WHO PAYS FOR THIS PAMPHLET?

This merit badge pamphlet is one in a series of more than 100 covering all kinds of hobby and career subjects. It is made available for you to buy as a service of the national and local councils, Boy Scouts of America. The costs of the development, writing, and editing of the merit badge pamphlets are paid for by the Boy Scouts of America in order to bring you the best book at a reasonable price.



## BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA MERIT BADGE SERIES

# FAMILY LIFE



BOY SCOUTS  OF AMERICA®



# Requirements

1. Prepare an outline on what a family is and discuss this with your merit badge counselor. Tell why families are important to individuals and to society. Discuss how the actions of one member can affect other members.
2. List several reasons why you are important to your family and discuss this with your parents or guardians and with your merit badge counselor.
3. Prepare a list of your regular home duties or chores (at least five) and do them for 90 days. Keep a record of how often you do each of them.
4. With the approval of your parents or guardians and your merit badge counselor, decide on and carry out a project that you would do around the home that would benefit your family. Submit a report to your merit badge counselor outlining how the project benefited your family.
5. Plan and carry out a project that involves the participation of your family. After completing the project, discuss the following with your merit badge counselor:
  - a. The objective or goal of the project
  - b. How individual members of your family participated
  - c. The results of the project

6. Do the following:
  - a. Discuss with your merit badge counselor how to plan and carry out a family meeting.
  - b. After this discussion, plan and carry out a family meeting to include the following subjects:
    - (1) Avoiding substance abuse
    - (2) Understanding the growing-up process and how the body changes, and making responsible decisions dealing with sex
    - (3) Personal and family finances
    - (4) A crisis situation within your family
    - (5) The effect of technology on your family

Discussion of each of these subjects will very likely carry over to more than one family meeting.

7. Discuss the following with your counselor:
  - a. Your understanding of what makes an effective father and why, and your thoughts on the father's role in the family.
  - b. Your understanding of the responsibilities of a parent





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## What Is a Family?

The family is the basic unit of society and is important to both individuals and communities. The world we live in is rapidly changing, making today's society much more complex than ever before. As you earn this merit badge, you will realize why it is important to know more about family life and how to strengthen our families.

Strong families are the foundation of strong communities. You know that a strong foundation is needed to construct a sturdy building. Think of society as the building, the family as the foundation of that building, and individuals and the community as pieces of building material. All the parts are important and none can be left out, but it all starts with a strong foundation. Just as these parts are necessary to have a strong building, your basic understanding about families and how to strengthen them will help you, your family, your community, and society, now and in the future.

A family is made up of people who care about one another. All members of a family give and receive love and support from the others. Family members reach out to one another and share both happy and sad times together. They talk and listen to one another, and they share ideas, thoughts, and concerns. They share fun as well as sorrow and help heal one another's hurts. All of this makes the foundation stronger.





When times are difficult, family members learn how to pull together. This helps them get through those tough times.

Learning begins in the family, where basic physical and material needs are met, training takes place, and character and lifelong behaviors develop. Family is the foundation for physical, emotional, social, intellectual, and moral development. Families feed, clothe, and provide shelter to their members. They also provide love, nurturing, and protection from harm. People learn to speak, think, and trust, and to feel and express emotions from being a part of a family. Mature family members teach the younger ones important skills like how to get along with others and how to know right from wrong.

Family life will always have its ups and downs as family members go through both good times and unpleasant ones. But in most strong families, people give support and show concern and loyalty to one another when needed. Communities and society care about families, too, by creating laws and providing services to help families.

Many families also share faith and religious activities with one another. As a Scout, part of your duty is to do your best to make your family strong and help your family thrive. By doing this, you are helping to lay the foundation for a stronger community and society.

### The Family Structure

No two families are alike. For many Scouts, the family is made up of parents, brothers, and sisters who all live under the same roof. But there are other types of families, too. Some Scouts may have a single parent; some have stepparents and stepbrothers and stepsisters. Some Scouts may have adoptive or foster parents or no parents at all. Some families may be large, while others are small.



In today's families, the father may go to work, both parents may work, or the father may stay at home while the mother goes to work, or vice versa. In some families, both parents may be home due to early retirement or other factors. In other families, grandparents and other relatives may share the home; there may be aunts, uncles, and cousins who live nearby. The family might live near other family members or might live in another city, state, or country.





Each family forms its own set of values and decides what is most important to them. Discipline also varies among families. Families have different ways of dealing with different issues. In some families, one or both parents make all the decisions with no input from the children, while other families may encourage input from all family members before decisions are made. Perhaps you know of a family where there is equal decision making among family members.

There is no one family style for everyone. A family's style develops based on each family's individual situation and the values they care about. For example, your family may be laid-back, while another family is very active and hurried. Many different ways of living together can work. What makes a family strong is not just the number of people in it, whether its members are related, or their pace of life; people caring for one another and sharing their lives is what really matters.

No family is ideal or perfect. Most real families are very different from what you may see on television or in magazines. Do not let these images mislead you.

## Types of Families

- Nuclear family (father, mother, children)
- Extended family (members beyond the nuclear family such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins)
- Single-parent family (one parent with children)
- Blended family (made up of stepparents and stepbrothers or stepsisters)
- Adoptive family (family with children who are not biologically linked to their parents)
- Childless family (couple who does not have children)

### Who Is Your Family?

Think about your own family. Who are the members? You may be a member of a small family or a very large one. You may live with one or both parents or have to share your time between them. You may be an only child or have brothers and sisters. You may be the oldest, middle, or youngest child. You may also have other relatives living with you, near you, or far away. You may be adopted or have stepparents. Perhaps you have no parents and are cared for by other relatives or guardians. You may live in a foster home or in a youth home. Remember that every family is different.



Your family provides you with shelter, food, and clothing. They make you feel safe and loved. They want you to be the best person you can be. No matter what your age, you can make the most of your family life and help your family grow strong.

Family life is all about touching each other's lives so everyone benefits. But that takes work because you are all helping to build a solid foundation. Remember that there will be ups and downs. You can play an important role by always doing your best to help your family flourish and be happy and by building bridges of mutual respect and love. You also can help lay the foundation to strengthen your community and society.

### Positive Family Traits

Just as an athletic team works and plays together, each person who is part of a family can affect everyone else for better or worse. Strong and supportive families do not just happen. Like a winning team, each family member needs to develop certain traits and skills and then practice being a strong and supportive member of the family.



Here are some positive traits that will help form and maintain a strong family. Most of these will be discussed further in this pamphlet.

- Love
- Security
- Acceptance and respect
- Mutual trust
- Good relationship and communication skills
- Shared roles and responsibilities
- Cooperation and interdependence
- Time spent together
- Good management skills (for example, financial or organizational)



### Love

There are many different ways that family members show they love one another. Caring about how other family members feel, sharing their hurts, helping them solve problems, and being there for them at important times are just a few ways to show love. Knowing they are loved unconditionally can help loved ones through difficulties and bring them a feeling of security, happiness, peace, and contentment.

You can show love for your family through special words, deeds, and actions such as not being afraid to say "I love you," spending time with your family, doing favors for family members, listening to what they have to say, being patient, and doing things without being asked. In what other ways can you show love to your family?

### Security

Security refers to physical and psychological safety. Families can provide security. People feel secure when they know that their physical needs are being met and that they are protected and safe from harm. Receiving encouragement, guidance, and training from the family makes family members feel secure.

By contrast, troubled family members who feel insecure may be distrustful and suspicious of others. This can create an unstable environment. Financial problems, health troubles, divorce, and other kinds of problems also can cause insecurity in a family. How can you help make yourself and your family members feel more secure?

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Loving family members even when you do not always agree with what they do, say, think, or feel is called unconditional love.

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### Acceptance and Respect

You are important. Of all the billions of people in the world, no two are exactly alike. There is no one else like you. You are special. Without you, your family would not be the same. You are important to your family, because you fill a special place in your family that no one else can fill.

Part of growing up is learning to accept and respect yourself and others. It is important to recognize that each person has strengths and limitations. Each person has some talents, gifts, or strengths that makes him or her unique. Everyone should respect these qualities and understand how they can make positive contributions to family life.

There are many ways you can add to the strength, happiness, and well-being of your family. Ask yourself the following questions.

- Do you live by the Scout Law and set a good example for other family members?
- Are you dependable and honest?
- As a Scout, are you always prepared to help your family members, neighbors, and friends in an emergency?
- Do you have a positive attitude that makes others enjoy being with you?
- Do you understand and respect the unique structure and style of your family?
- Do you understand the importance of your family to the community and society?
- Do you understand the traits and skills needed to make your family stronger?
- Do you enjoy helping care for younger family members such as reading to them or teaching them to do worthwhile things?
- Do you help carry on family traditions?
- Do you let other family members know you care about them and appreciate what they do for you?
- Are you willing to help around the house?
- Do you offer to help without being asked?



### Mutual Trust

Your parents or guardians know you better than anyone else. They know your strengths and weaknesses. They know what things might tempt you. They have probably set guidelines to help protect you, help you grow, and help you make thoughtful decisions.

What does trust mean to you? Perhaps you think it means that you should be permitted to go anywhere and do whatever you want to do. That's not really trust. However, if you make good decisions and show that you keep your word and follow the guidelines set by your parent or guardian, you prove that you can be trusted.



Trust is something that must be earned. You can earn trust by keeping your word and by being truthful, reliable, unselfish, and caring. Remember, being trustworthy is one of the 12 points of the Scout Law.

**Good Relationship and Communication Skills**

Good communication helps prevent misunderstandings and involves both listening and talking. Sometimes people make the mistake of talking too much and listening too little.

All families have disagreements from time to time. There may be times when you feel that others in your family do not understand you. You may disagree with the way a family member does something. One of the best ways to maintain understanding in a family is to listen to each other. When people listen, they learn to respect the opinions of others, to cooperate to meet each other's needs, and to be sensitive and responsive to others. As a result, disagreements can be resolved. Listening is the beginning of understanding.

People usually are better at communicating their thoughts rather than their feelings. Communicating feelings helps family members better understand one another as opposed to using methods such as blaming, shouting, denying, bottling feelings inside, or even physical abuse. Learning how to communicate feelings takes work and practice.

A good way to improve family communication is to send clear messages. "You" messages can put down or make the other person feel guilty. "I" messages tell what you are thinking or feeling without blaming or offending the other person. Here are some examples.

Instead of Saying This	Say This
"You are the meanest person in the world!"	"I really feel angry with you because you won't let me go out tonight."
"Will you shut up?"	"When you tap on the table with your fork, it makes me mad because it's noisy and I can't concentrate on my homework."
"You never ask if you can use my bike; you think it's OK to ride my bike without my permission!"	"When you take my bike without asking, I feel angry."

Here are some roadblocks to good communication.

- **Criticizing.** No one likes ridicule, sarcasm, or negative comments. These hurt and put down a person.
- **Judging.** Quick judgments cause tension and close communication channels.
- **Labeling.** Assigning negative labels such as *lazy*, *sloppy*, *slow*, *mean*, and *stupid* to someone is hurtful. Sometimes people begin to live up to those labels.



**When communication is good, people say what they mean to say. There are no hidden meanings to guess or worry about. Unclear communication creates insecurity.**

**Shared Roles and Responsibilities**

Think of all the responsibilities involved in running a home and raising a family. Managing a home is a lot of work. Doing your share in the family will help make things run more smoothly. It is also a good way for you to prepare for the future and the responsibilities that will be required of you as an adult. A good way to show your responsibility and commitment to your family is to do your chores without complaining or being asked. When you carry out these responsibilities, you are letting the family members know that you love them and that they can depend on you.

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As you depend on your family members, they also will depend on you. This is called interdependence.

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### Cooperation and Interdependence

The more each family member cooperates by participating in the management of the home, the more smoothly things will go. Think about some of your own responsibilities and how you might help other family members with their chores. Here is a list of suggested duties. You might already be doing some of these. See if you can add other ideas to the list.

#### Your Room

- Make your bed.
- Hang up your clothes.
- Put all your belongings away.
- Clean the floor.
- Keep all surface areas clean and neat.



#### Family Meals

- Set and clear the table.
- Help prepare the meal.
- Help with meal planning and food shopping.
- Carry in the grocery bags and put the groceries away.
- Wash, dry, and put away the dishes.
- Sweep the floor after meals.

### General Chores

- Take out the trash or recycling.
- Wash the family vehicle.
- Help with simple home repairs.
- Clean the bathroom.
- Dust and vacuum.
- Mop the floors.
- Help younger brothers and sisters or elderly relatives.
- Help care for family pets.



#### Laundry

- Wash, fold, and put away the laundry.
- Iron your clothes.
- Make simple clothing repairs such as sewing on buttons.



**Yard Work**

- Clean up the yard.
- Mow the lawn and trim shrubs.
- Shovel snow.
- Plant and care for a family garden.
- Water plants (indoors and outside) and the lawn.
- Paint when needed.

Use this sample home duties chart to create your own. Most of these tasks need to be done every day.

Home Duties	Day Completed						
	S	M	T	W	TH	F	S
<b>1. Your Room</b> • Make your bed. • Hang up clothes. • Put belongings away.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>2. Family Meals</b> • Set and clear the table. • Put away the dishes.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>3. General Chores</b> • Take out the trash.* • Clean the bathroom.* • Feed the family pets.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>4. Laundry</b> • Fold and put away laundry.* • Iron your clothes.*	X			X			
<b>5. Yard Work</b> • Rake the leaves. • Water plants.*		X			X		

\*Denotes a chore that should be done as needed or at least once a week.

**SPECIAL PROJECTS FOR YOU**

In addition to your regular duties, you can do many other things around the home that would benefit your family. Take some time to think about what projects need to be done and which ones you could do. You might ask other family members to give you some suggestions. See how many other items you can add to the list shown here.

- Build or create new storage areas for your room.
- Organize the clothes in your closets and drawers.
- Paint your room or another room in the house.
- Prepare a family meal on your own.
- Clean and organize a kitchen cupboard.
- Wipe down the stove or refrigerator.



Go through all your clothes and belongings, and fill a box with items that you no longer need. Donate them to charity.



Take down the window treatments and wash the windows.





Give the family pet a brush.

- Clean the garage, attic, or basement.
- Give the family pet a bath.
- Do the laundry for another family member.
- Assist other family members by helping them do their chores or providing some special help if needed.
- Create a home video or digital scrapbook of family events.
- Teach a family member how to use the computer and the Internet (with your parent's or guardian's permission).
- Help a younger brother or sister with homework.
- Read a story to a younger sibling.

### Time Spent Together

As part of the Scout Oath, you pledge "to help other people at all times." There are many projects you can do to help others, but there are lots of projects you and your family can do together.

Working on requirement 5 is an excellent opportunity for your family to work together on a special project. It can be a service project for someone else or a project that can benefit your family. To get ideas for a project, think about activities you like to do with your family and some of the things that your family needs done. Select a project that will involve as many family members as possible and that is fun and enjoyable. There might even be some activities that you can do together that may help the members of your community.



Many schools promote *service learning* to help students become more aware of the many benefits of helping others. It is a wonderful feeling to know that you have provided help to others, such as elderly or disabled people. Thoughtful acts of service can be fun and will not only strengthen your family but will also provide much needed help to your neighborhood, community, or state, or even the nation.

You may want to do some service activities on your own at another time. This also might inspire you to earn one of the citizenship merit badges.

Before you decide on and carry out your project, you will need the approval of your parents or guardians and your merit badge counselor.

Here are some suggestions for family projects.

- Create a scrapbook or video of your family's history. Learn about your family roots. (This may spark your interest in the Genealogy merit badge.) Include family customs and traditions. Interview elderly family members so they may share their memories of earlier years. Be sure to record this information. You may also want to use scanned photos or a digital camera to create a CD-ROM.
- Can, preserve, or freeze fruits and vegetables.
- Prepare a week's worth of meals together to freeze for future use.
- Plan, prepare, and conduct a family reunion or party for a special event.
- Plan and conduct a garage sale.
- Start a new family tradition. Here are some ideas.
  - Have a regular family night once a week. You can even vary the theme.
  - Celebrate family birthdays in special ways.
  - Plant a tree to commemorate the birth of each new family member or those whom you have lost.
  - Make a list of thoughtful gestures that can be done for the family. Have each family member choose one every Sunday and do it during the week.



Do home repairs for elderly people in your neighborhood or community.

Your family might decide on a project that will benefit the community.

- Plan, cook, and deliver a meal to a person who is confined at home.
- Bake items for a bake sale that benefits a local senior citizens group.
- Spruce up a community center by painting, cleaning, doing yard work, etc.

- Help out at a food bank by stocking shelves, making deliveries, assembling food baskets, or conducting food or clothing drives.
- Assist with a community beautification project such as picking up trash, raking leaves, planting a garden, or creating a bike path.
- Run a bike-repair clinic for children or senior citizens in your community.
- Assist at a local animal shelter.
- Clean and deliver toys to needy children.
- Plan a program for people in long-term care facilities.
- Help local citizens put up flags for display.
- Volunteer at an ethnic community festival to learn about a culture different from your own.

### PLANNING

Be sure you know the objective or goal of your project.

- Think about what needs to be done. Do you want to do a project that will benefit your family? Your neighborhood? Your community? Your state or the nation? To choose a project, you may need to ask people or read about current issues in the newspaper.
- Decide what you will do, why you are doing it, and who will benefit.
- Be sure that it is OK to do your project before you begin. You may need to get permission from the group or agency you intend to help. Some groups have specific rules for anyone who wants to volunteer their services.
- Be sure you have all the supplies you will need.

### PERFORMING THE SERVICE

Before you begin, answer the following questions.

- What activity will you do?
- How will you do it?
- Who will do what?
- When will it be done?



**REFLECT ON WHAT YOU HAVE ACCOMPLISHED**

Afterward, think about your project and what you have achieved.

- What did you accomplish?
- How did doing this make you and your family feel?
- What did it do to make your family feel closer?
- What did this mean for the group that benefited from your project?
- What could you do in the future?
- How might you improve the project?
- How has doing this project changed the way you feel about helping others?



Be sure to celebrate a job well done with your family!

**Good Management Skills**

Effectively managing a family requires balancing time and money. It means taking the time to do what needs to be done so that the family will have time to do fun things together, too. It means making responsible financial decisions that do not put the family at risk.

**TIME MANAGEMENT**

You may have heard the saying "A family that plays together, stays together." Well, in order to have time to play and relax, families need to plan and use their time wisely. Setting goals and priorities will help your family stay on track.

Say that your family is thinking about buying a new car. It's Saturday, and you, your dad and stepmom, and your sister want to see the auto show in town. The family van needs to be washed. If all of you pitch in, the chore will take far less time. Best of all, you will have plenty of time left to see the auto show. Solving time problems takes a little planning and some cooperation, but it pays off in the long run.

- Things to Do Today
1. Do homework right after school.
  2. Pack football gear.
  3. Grab some grub.
  4. Head to the field for the game.
  5. Beat the Cougars!

### Saturday

1. Do chores.
2. Call Brad.
3. Hang out at the mall.
4. Call Grandma —

Stop and ask yourself, "What is the best use of my time right now?"

- Be flexible, and make adjustments if necessary.
- Ask for help or instructions if you need them.
- Eliminate low-priority items from your to-do list.
- Determine important priorities. Be prepared to say no—to yourself, to family, to friends—to things that might interfere with your schoolwork.

### MONEY MANAGEMENT

"Take care of the pennies and the dollars will take care of themselves." This old saying suggests that doing without little things now can help you save for bigger, more important things later on. In other words, do not waste money on items you do not really need.

Money is important, but it is not the most important thing in life. Some of the more important things include your family, friends, and faith.

Here are some ways you can manage your time more wisely.

- Reward yourself for accomplishments along the way, like enjoying a juicy apple for a snack after your homework is done.
- Schedule some relaxation time each day; everyone needs some down time.
- Schedule "emergency" time for activities that take longer than expected or for unanticipated matters.
- Create a to-do list and check off each item as you complete it so that you can see your progress.
- Try to schedule the most difficult tasks at a time when you are the most productive, such as in the morning if you are a morning person.

You may earn money for mowing lawns or pet-sitting, or you may receive an allowance. This is your *income*, the money available for your use. Regardless of where your money comes from, it is still important to know how to handle it wisely.

Record your spending patterns for a few weeks to find out where your money goes. You may contribute money to family expenses or charity, or be expected to help pay for your clothing, entertainment, or school supplies. These are your expenses. Some expenses are *fixed*, that is, the amount you need to spend on them stays the same from month to month. Examples of fixed expenses are what you pay for school lunches, transportation, and school activity fees. Other expenses are *flexible*, which means they vary. Some examples of flexible expenses are purchases of CDs, computer games, and school supplies.

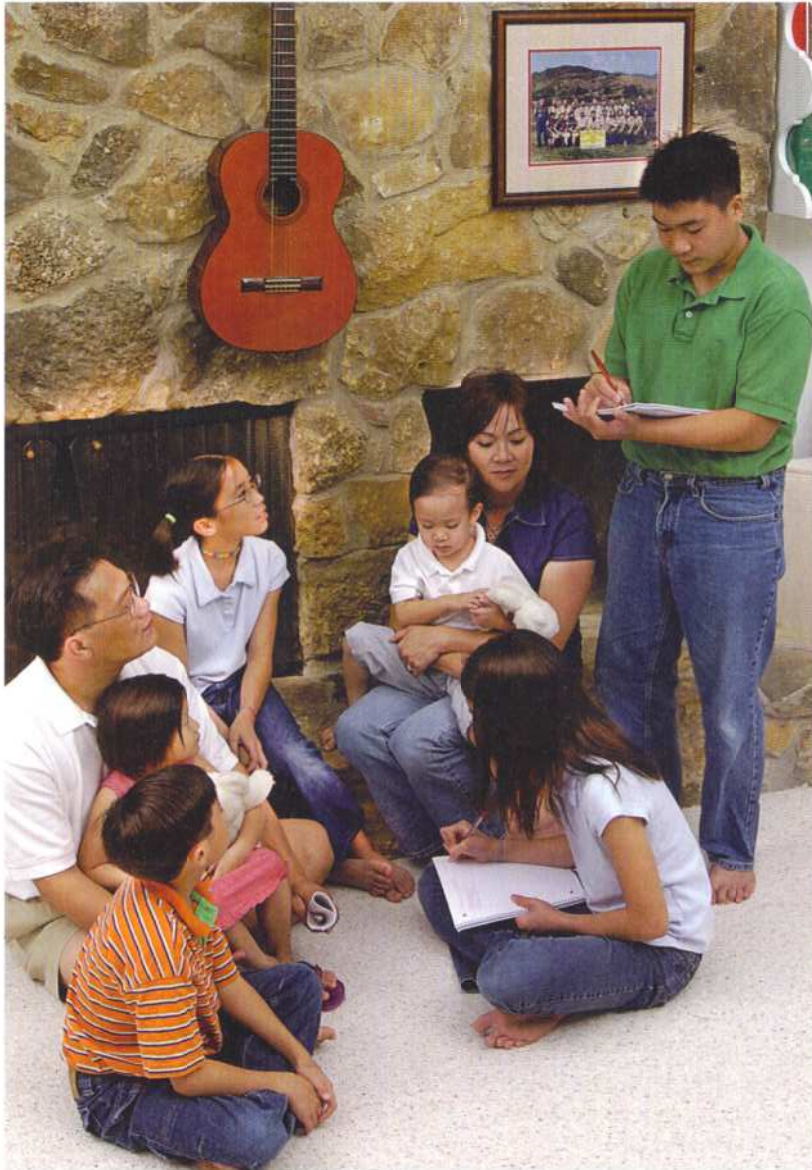
Here are some money-management tips.

- **Develop a budget.** A *budget* is a plan for spending and saving the money you have available. It helps you prioritize what you need and want.
- **Limit impulse purchases.** For example, suppose you are at a concert and everyone is buying T-shirts. You might want to buy one, too, but if the shirts are overpriced and you already have a drawer full of T-shirts, buying it would be a waste of money. Don't feel the need to purchase a CD just because your friends are buying CDs, too.
- **Avoid shopping when you are under the influence of a strong emotion.** Some people use shopping as a form of therapy when they are angry, hurt, or disappointed. Buying yourself something is not going to solve the problem.
- **Stay within your budget limits.** If you go over your budget, you will need to remember to earn more and spend less.



If you have ever saved for something expensive that you really wanted, you know how rewarding it feels.





## The Family Meeting

It is important that family members talk and listen to one another. With today's hectic schedules, families often do not take the time needed for this. Scheduling a family meeting on a regular basis is a good way to make sure this happens. It also is a good way to handle small concerns while they are still manageable.

### Guidelines

Include in the meeting all family members who live in the household. In some instances, family members who live elsewhere, such as married siblings or grandparents, might attend if their input is relevant to the current discussion.

Set a day, time, and place in advance. This may vary from week to week depending on the family's other obligations, but it works best if the day and time remain the same. Once a week is a good start. Some issues may take more than one meeting to resolve.

One person should lead the discussion. The choice of who leads should rotate among all members who are old enough. Another person should be responsible for keeping a written or taped record of the proceedings. This task also should be rotated.

To stay on track during your family meeting, always develop an *agenda*, which is determined by what is happening in the family. Any aspects of family life are open for discussion. It also is a good idea to review the issues and accomplishments from the previous meeting. This task can be rotated among family members.

**Posting an agenda that can be modified if necessary is a good idea. Having this agenda in a visible place also helps family members know what to expect.**

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Set aside a specific time so that your family can discuss family life, current issues, and ongoing events (both happy and unpleasant), and share in decision making.

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Nov. 7  
Tuesday Night Family Meeting

Agenda:

1. Talk about how well the new yard work schedule is working.
2. Discuss ideas for a family vacation.
3. Schedule a time when we can all get together and clean the basement.
4. Set a time for the next family meeting.



### Ground Rules

Use a drop box for current issues and hot topics. Talk about any critical items first, then take turns drawing for the other topics to be discussed that week.

The topics should be about situations, not individuals. For example, phrasing a question as, "How can we make sure to get the trash out before the garbage truck comes?" rather than "How can we get Brent to take out the trash?" will help prevent anger and hurt feelings. Avoid bringing up old hurts or disagreements or turning the meeting into a gripe session.

Family members must listen without interrupting. Having family members hold up a card or raise their hand when they wish to speak may be useful. Everyone must be treated with respect and must avoid making criticisms or judgments.

It is fine to discuss complaints, but the person raising the issue should try to offer a suggestion for a solution. Having a family suggestion box with ideas can be helpful.

Many leadership skills you will learn and practice in the family meeting, such as conflict resolution and problem solving, will serve you in other situations throughout your life.



Before the close of the meeting, have each person state at least one good thing that is happening within the family. End the meeting by reviewing the discussion, the tasks at hand (if necessary), and the date, time, and place of the next meeting.

## The Problem-Solving Process

**Identify the problem.** Be sure that everyone understands exactly what the issue is and the feelings that it evokes. Be sure to put the issue into words.

**Identify options.** Come up with different ways the problem might be solved. All family members can generate ideas. Use a suggestion box if you have one.

**Evaluate options.** Decide on the strengths and weaknesses of each idea. Consider whether a suggestion is realistic, whether it solves the main problem, and whether family members are happy with this solution. For each option, determine the possible consequences.

**Choose the best option.** The right choice may become very clear as you review and evaluate the options. You may need to use a process of elimination to choose the most suitable option.

**Make a plan.** Decide on steps that need to be taken to put the chosen option into action. Consider who needs to do what and what resources are needed. It also is a good idea to put your plan in writing.





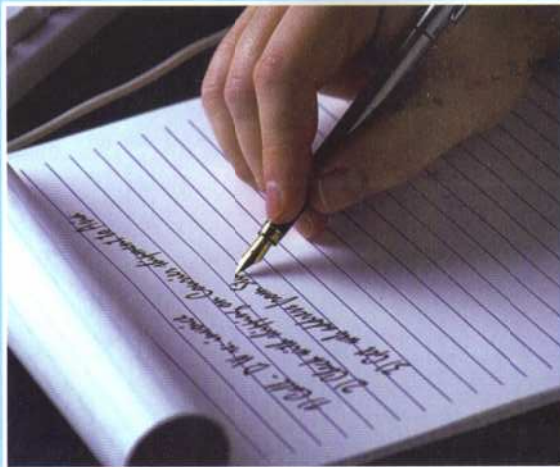
## Conflict Resolution

You can use the problem-solving process to successfully resolve a conflict. Bring the issue out into the open as soon as possible. Keep emotions under control, and make sure everyone sticks to the issue and avoids blaming, name-calling, and making accusations.

Wishing a problem away may not solve it, but there are a few wishful strategies you can use to help make you feel temporarily better about a problem. Write your problem on a piece of paper and

- Put it in a balloon that you can blow up and then pop.
- Put it in a box and revisit it in a week.
- Tear it into tiny pieces and toss it in the trash.

Alternatively, you might imagine that you are an advice columnist. The person with whom you are having a problem has sent a letter complaining about you. Put yourself in the other person's place and think of ways you might work things out together.



Putting yourself in someone else's place is called *empathy*.

Many topics may be addressed in a family meeting. Here are some suggested topics for discussion that are usually important to every family.

- The dangers of drugs and substance abuse (how to avoid using drugs, recognizing signs of substance abuse)
- Personal and family finances
- Crises within the family (various types)
- The effect of technology on your family (the impact of computer and e-mail use; mobile phones; the advantages, disadvantages, and abuse of technology)
- Understanding the growing-up process, how the body changes, and making responsible decisions concerning sex

Having regularly scheduled family meetings gives all family members an opportunity to discuss their concerns, share news, and make suggestions.



Choose your friends carefully. Practice refusal skills. Do not apologize for saying *no* and suggesting other activities. If your friends are not Scouts, maybe they would benefit from joining the Boy Scouts.

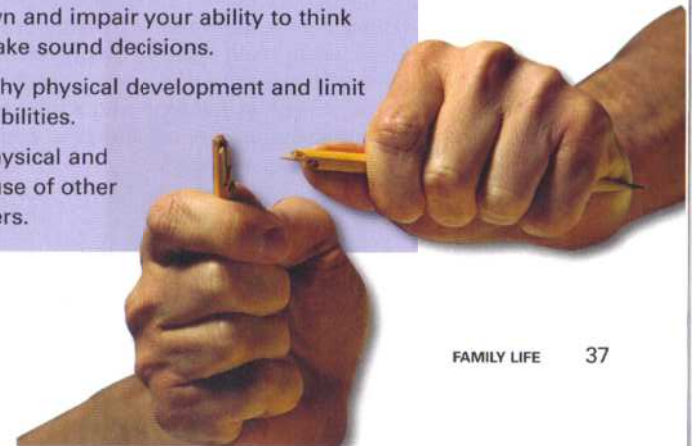
## The Dangers of Drugs and Substance Abuse

Peer pressure can be a big influence in your life. Everyone wants to be liked and accepted by friends, but you should be cautious about the price you could pay for popularity. Some people may think that they can become popular by trying cigarettes, alcohol, or drugs. Doing so will not make you popular, build your confidence, or solve problems. What these things *will* do is harm your mind and body.

Abusing substances is not cool. It does not make you popular or adult, and it hurts the people who love you. If your friends want you to use drugs, then find new friends who care about what happens to you. There are better ways to have fun.

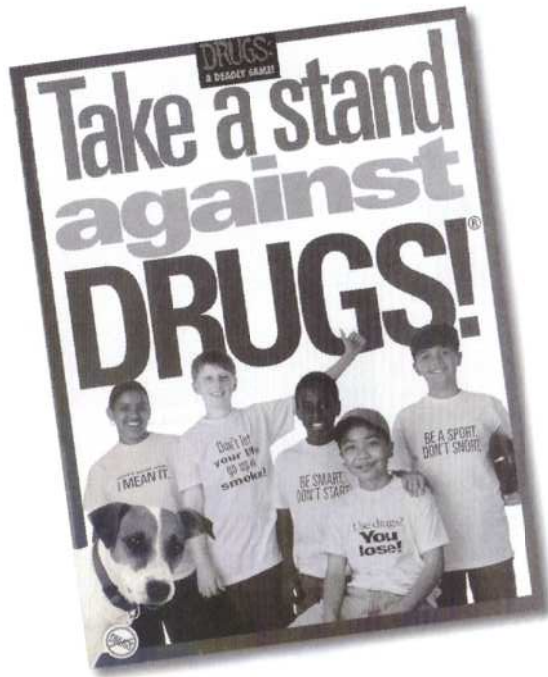
Harmful substances can affect your mood, concentration, and memory. They also can

- Interfere with learning and impair your performance in school.
- Cause behavior problems, mood changes, and sleep disturbances.
- Slow you down and impair your ability to think clearly and make sound decisions.
- Interrupt healthy physical development and limit your athletic abilities.
- Lead to the physical and emotional abuse of other family members.





Teens consume and abuse alcohol more than any other drug. Alcohol is a drug—a dangerous one—and its use by minors is illegal.



The Boy Scouts of America has a helpful resource called “Drugs: A Deadly Game.” Ask your parents or guardians to read it, too. This pamphlet has valuable information to help you make wise decisions about drugs. Friends, parents, teachers, religious leaders, and your Scout leaders all can help, too.

Drugs and alcohol affect different people in different ways. Having a drink may make one person happy and energetic or funny, while another person may become verbally abusive or physically aggressive. It is easy to identify a heroin addict or a drunken driver as someone with a substance-abuse problem, but substance abuse is not always so extreme. As a matter of fact, it often is very subtle.

Here are some signs to help you recognize a substance abuser.

- Physical changes such as dilated pupils, flushed skin, and a tired, sloppy, or disheveled appearance
- Behavioral changes such as moodiness, irritability, unreasonable bursts of temper, or wanting to be alone much of the time
- A change in friends
- A change in study habits often accompanied by falling grades or truancy
- Irregular eating habits
- Memory lapses and blackouts
- Evidence of drug paraphernalia
- Loss of interest in activities previously enjoyed
- Changes in sleep patterns

If someone you know is using drugs, talk to a respected adult to get help. There are many resources available to help with these kinds of situations. Al-Anon, for example, helps those who are dealing with an alcoholic family member or friend.



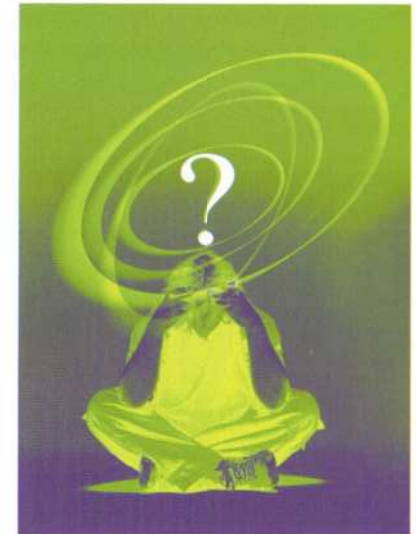
## Family Matters

All families have ups and downs, but strong families know the importance of sticking together—especially during the tough times. To stay close and be able to rebound from setbacks, family members need to learn how to support one another and keep family goals in mind.

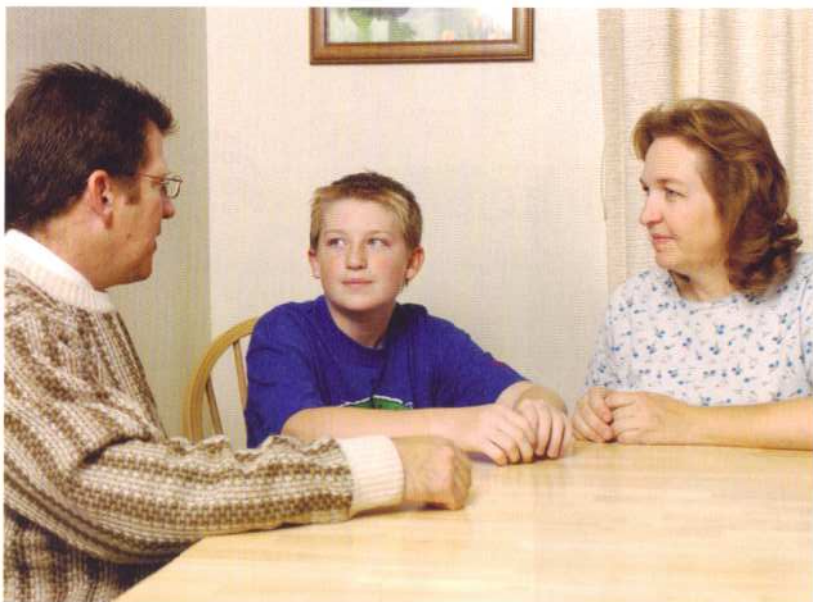
### Crises Within the Family

Crises are experiences or events that cause major changes in someone's life. Sometimes a crisis causes the persons affected to be unable to carry out their normal functions. Even if just one person is affected, a crisis has the potential to affect all members of the family. The crisis may cause additional stress when

- There are a number of other stressful events occurring at the same time.
- There are a number of people in the family involved in the crisis.
- The family has difficulties identifying, relating to, and handling the event.
- The resources available to the family for dealing with the crisis are limited or not easily accessible.







Examples of crises can include a death, a damaging storm, or a burglary. Other stressful events that can affect an entire family include moving to a new house or state, the loss of a parent's job, or unexpected events such as a divorce or serious illness.

Crises can affect a family adversely and often are unexpected. It is important to understand the situation and help your family seek solutions. The family meeting and problem-solving process might be very useful at this time. It also is useful to know where to get help or find support from family, friends, or community resources.

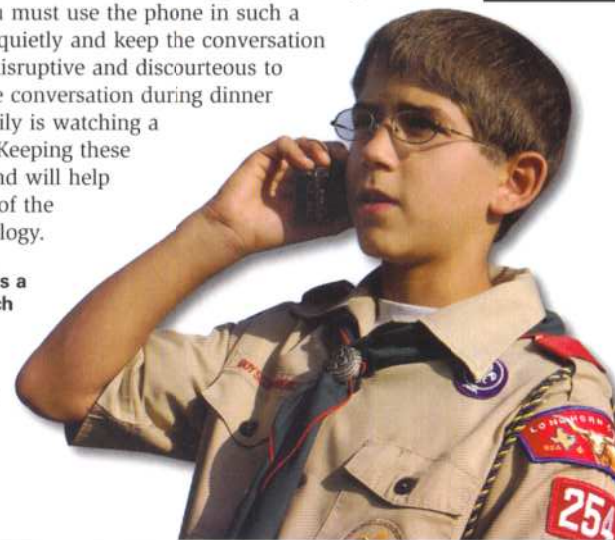


### The Effect of Technology on Your Family

A unique cause of stress in today's family is the impact of technology. Technology can help make life easier. For example, you might use the family computer for schoolwork or to keep in touch with friends and relatives. Your grandparents may be thrilled to get e-mails from you on a consistent basis. But bear in mind that spending a lot of time on the computer can take time away from other important activities.

If you have a mobile phone, use it wisely and respectfully. For instance, never talk on the phone while you are driving. Be considerate of others while out shopping or dining in a restaurant. If you must use the phone in such a situation, speak quietly and keep the conversation short. It also is disruptive and discourteous to carry on a phone conversation during dinner or while the family is watching a program on TV. Keeping these guidelines in mind will help you avoid some of the pitfalls of technology.

**A mobile phone is a great way to reach someone in an emergency or to keep in touch with your family.**



Some young people spend more time playing computer games than taking part in outdoor or more active forms of recreation. Another negative development is the temptation to investigate forbidden Web sites or become acquainted with unprincipled or dangerous people.





## Understanding the Growing-Up Process

During this time of your life, your body will change more rapidly than it ever will again. This stage of life, between childhood and adulthood, is called *adolescence*. It is an exciting time, yet it can be frustrating, too. One minute someone may tell you that you are too old to do something, and the next minute they may say that you are too young for something else.

This time of your life is called *puberty*. Your *hormones* (chemical substances in your body that control growth, development, and reproduction) reach a very high level. This phase will start at different times for each person, and, on average, will last about three years. At times you may sometimes feel like you are on an emotional roller coaster. Your feelings will vary from highs to lows within minutes. Don't worry. This is a normal part of growing up.

You also will experience intellectual changes. You will learn how to solve more complex problems, face more choices, and make more difficult decisions. The choices that you make are important because they will lead to actions that affect your life and the lives of other family members. With every choice you make there is a consequence. Using the problem-solving process can help you make wise decisions.





Suppose you want to decide whether to try out for the high school swim team. Here is how you could use the problem-solving process to help you make a decision.

**Identify the problem.** Should I try out for the swim team?

**Identify the options.** I could try out for the team. I could not try out for the team.

**Evaluate the options.** In this case, it is helpful to make a list of pros and cons, also known as *consequences*.

**Pros**

- I would get exercise on a regular basis.
- It would be fun.
- I would be part of a team and learn the value of teamwork.
- I would win the respect and admiration of my family and friends.
- I probably would make new friends.
- It would improve my self-discipline.
- It would be an activity I could list on college applications.

**Cons**

- It would be an additional expense for my family.
- I would have less time for family and friends.
- I would have less time for homework and other school activities.
- I would have less time for household chores.
- I might get injured.
- There could be a lot of pressure to perform well.
- I might feel embarrassed if I do not perform well.
- I would be disappointed if I did not make the team.

**Choose the best option.** As you evaluate the pros and cons, the right choice probably will become clear.

**Make a plan.** If you choose to try out for the swim team, decide which steps you need to take and what resources are needed to participate. Put this plan in writing and share it with your family.

Considering all the consequences, options, pros, and cons helps you see the big picture. It gives you a good foundation for making wise decisions.

## Friendships

During this time in your life, you also will change and grow socially. Friendships are important and will enrich your life. A good friend is one who accepts you for who you are and seems to bring out the best in you.



**Making new friends and getting along as part of a group is a wonderful experience. Some of these friendships will last a lifetime.**

This is also a time of your life when you begin to view females from a different perspective. When you were younger, spending time with girls may have been the last thing on your mind. You might even have avoided being around them. You may or may not feel differently now, but remember that not all teens develop an interest in the opposite sex at the same time.

One of the first steps in dating is going out together in groups. This can be a lot of fun and helps build an understanding of how to get along better with girls and to develop social skills. Do not let anyone pressure you into being paired off with someone. There will be plenty of time for this when you are ready.



Poor decisions about sexual activity can affect the rest of your life.

A friendship with someone of the opposite sex will help you

- Understand different points of view.
- Develop social skills and friendships.
- Develop the positive aspects of your personality.
- Identify the traits you would like in an eventual marriage partner.

**Abstinence Before Marriage Is Best**

These days, sex is flaunted on television, the Internet, in music, and in advertising. Just as abusing drugs is ill-advised, engaging in sex before marriage can lead to a lifetime of regret. Nearly two-thirds of sexually active teenagers recently surveyed expressed regret about their initial sexual activity. Responsible sexual behavior can bring lifetime happiness.

The commitment and devotion generally found in a marriage form the basis for genuine intimacy and love. Sex before marriage contributes to marital failure in adulthood. If you abstain from sex until marriage, your married life will be more rewarding.



Abstinence is a sign of maturity. It shows that

- You are responsible to young women and want what is best for them.
- You will not burden someone you care about with a child neither of you is ready to raise.
- You are responsible in your beliefs. Most faiths approve of sex only between people who are married to each other.
- You understand the importance of waiting until you are physically, emotionally, socially, intellectually, and financially prepared to have a child.

When you begin your marriage free from the guilt and burdens caused by careless decisions about sex, it will be an even more special and rewarding partnership.





## Your Future Family

Many factors help young couples determine their readiness for marriage and family life.

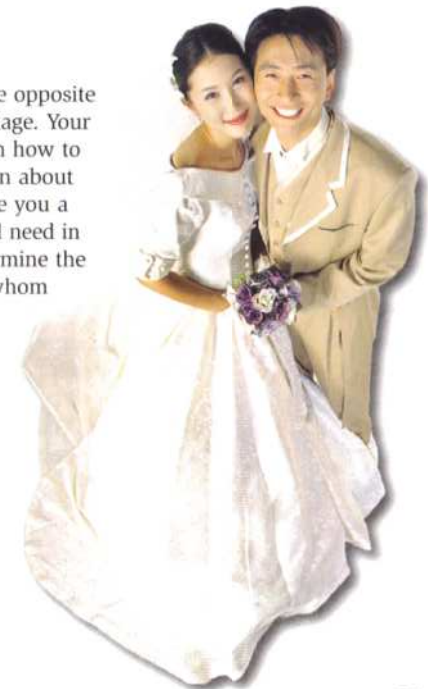
**Age.** The age of the couple is a very important factor. The older they are, the better their chances for a strong marriage. Older couples have had time to

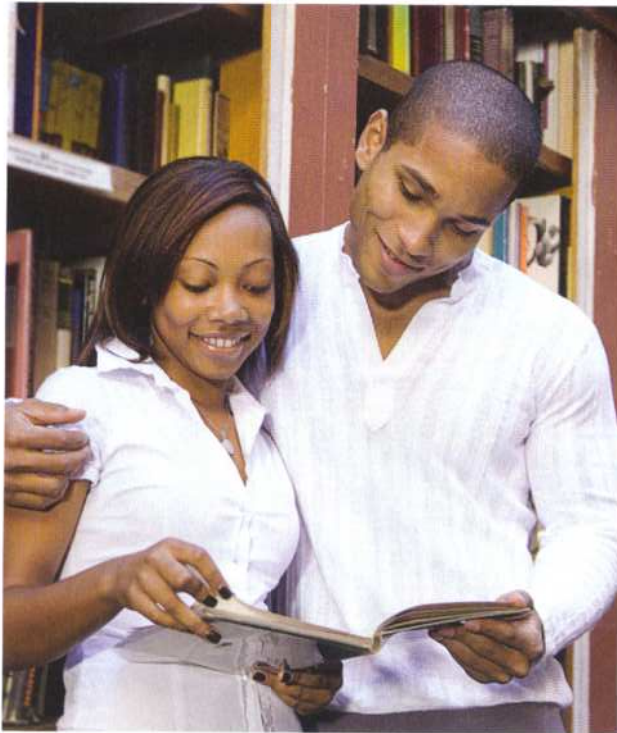
- Complete their education.
- Date a variety of people and find their true partner.
- Have a variety of life experiences.
- Learn to be self-supporting.
- Learn to manage and save money.

**Social experience.** Friendships with the opposite sex help prepare young people for marriage. Your friendships with girls will help you learn how to get along in a relationship. You will learn about different types of people, which will give you a better perspective on what you want and need in a relationship. It also will help you determine the traits you would like in someone with whom you plan to spend the rest of your life.

**Emotional maturity.** People who are emotionally mature understand how to express their feelings in appropriate ways.

**Financial security.** The more time and experience you have had in managing and saving money, the better prepared you will be for marriage.





**Education.** A couple who has the same level of education has a better rate of success in a marriage and more than likely will be able to communicate on the same level.

**Goals and desires.** A couple must want the same things out of life or they will be sure to have problems. The more mature the individuals, the better their ability to work things out. The ideal situation is to find someone with whom you agree on important issues such as religion and ethics.

### Issues to Deal With in Advance

Insisting on doing things the way your family always did them is bound to cause problems. As you and your partner set your own pattern as a couple, you will need to compromise. Imagine two people trying to build a house together with two different sets of blueprints. In a marriage you will need to formulate a plan that you create together as a team.

Trying to make your partner change after marriage does not work. If there are things that irritate you about the person you want to marry, these sources of irritation will deepen after you are married. Do not marry someone with the idea that this person will change later. It just does not happen.

It is important to talk openly and honestly before marriage. Waiting until you are married to bring up issues, such as not wanting to have children or wanting to move to another state, may leave you wondering why you married this particular person. People often are on their best behavior when dating. Some people want to avoid conflicts, so they do not speak their minds. This is not being totally honest. It is better to be realistic and get important issues out in the open before you commit yourself to another person for the rest of your life.

You must study, practice, and take a test before you can receive a driver's license. Unfortunately, the same does not apply to getting married and having children—yet these are two of the most important things you will ever accomplish. Marriage and parenting are not easy. There are challenges, but there are great rewards.



## Parenting

Being a parent is one of the most exciting things you will ever do. You will have joys, laughter, and sometimes worry and sadness. All this is part of the important role you will play in helping to shape another person's life.

Not everyone wants to have children. There are couples who choose to remain childless, and this works for them. If you do want children, you must realize that it is a lifelong responsibility. Children are wonderful and can make life more rewarding for you and your wife. For example, the first time your child smiles at you or has his or her first day of school, you will feel great pleasure. By the same token, children are hard work. They are your responsibility every day, all day. If you are tired, sick, in a bad mood, or out of money, they will still need you to love them and take care of their needs.



A good way to help prepare for your future role as a parent is to baby-sit young children. Check with your city or local American Red Cross for classes on baby-sitting.

The factors that help determine readiness for parenting are similar to those for marriage. In addition, you and your spouse will need to

- Want a child.
- Be in good health.
- Be emotionally mature.
- Be partners in a strong marriage.
- Have enough time, space, and money to raise a child.

Addressing all these factors will give you both a strong foundation for starting a family.

## Being an Effective Father

As a father, you will play an important role in your child's life. You will be your child's role model. You will be the example for your child of what husbands and fathers are like.

To be an effective father, you must have a good relationship with your wife, be ready to parent, and really want to have children. You will need to be involved in your child's life and concerned with his or her physical, emotional, social, intellectual, and moral well-being.




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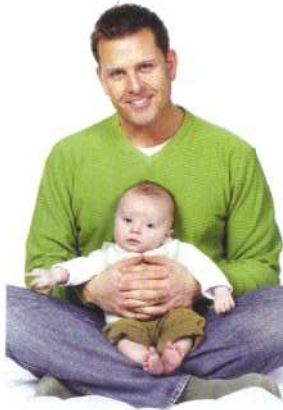
Research shows that children with involved fathers do much better in life. They have better self-esteem and fewer problems in school. They also are less likely to engage in substance abuse, crime, and violence.

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Parents need to understand, acknowledge, and support their children's feelings. For example, if your child is upset, it is better to say, "I know you are feeling sad right now about your broken toy," as opposed to saying, "Don't cry about such a silly thing."

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### Responsibilities of Parenthood

There are many responsibilities you will need to share with your wife when you become parents. Learning about them will better prepare you for this important role. See if you can think of other things to add to this list.

**Taking care of physical needs.** Children need food, clothing, and shelter. As a parent you will need to make sure that your children have enough nutritious, properly prepared food to eat. For example, hamburger that is not cooked thoroughly may pose an extreme danger to young children. You also will need to be sure that your children's clothing is adequate for your climate.

**Providing love and emotional support.** Your children will need to know your love for them is unconditional. You should never say anything like, "If you don't behave, I won't love you anymore." There are ways to discipline children without threatening to withdraw your love. Children need to know that you always love them even if you do not like their behavior.

**Offering guidance and discipline.** Every child needs guidance and discipline. Children want and need limits to help make them feel safe and secure. Think of it as letting a child play in a backyard with a fence. The child can play freely in the yard but is protected by the fence. When you set limits for your children, you are protecting them and giving them freedom at the same time. It will be up to you as a parent to guide your children by setting limits and teaching them right from wrong.

**Providing protection.** It will be your role as a parent to be sure that your children are safe and protected from dangerous situations. You must know where they are at all times and that they will be safe in your home, car, and other places where they are under your care.



**Providing economic support.** You and your wife will be responsible for the financial support of your children. Children cost money—lots of it. Just think of how much your parents paid for your last pair of sneakers or your music lessons or your Scout uniform. Parents often have to give up things they want to provide for their children's needs.

**Taking care of health-care needs.** It will be important that you can assure the health of each family member with adequate medical insurance and periodic visits to the doctor. You also will need to make sure your home provides a sanitary and healthful environment.

**Sharing resources such as time, talent, and ideas.** Your children will need your time and attention. You may find yourself doing everything from helping build cars for a pinewood derby to helping with math homework.

**Teaching independence and responsibility.** Just as you are now learning to prepare for the future by sharing household responsibilities, you will someday do the same for your children. You will find that children as young as age 2 or 3 can begin to learn to help around the house. You also will need to let them try things on their own without interfering. This will build their confidence. Can you remember what it was like when you learned to tie your shoes? You probably were happiest when you could try it yourself and learn from your mistakes.

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Your children will remember more about the time you spent with them than they will about how much money you spent on them.

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**Teaching social skills.** You will serve as a role model by teaching children how to get along in society through appropriate behavior. Children need to be taught things such as how to behave around other people, how to develop good manners, and how to treat others with respect. They will follow your example. If you are polite, they will follow your lead. If you are thoughtless and rude, more than likely they will develop the same behavior.

Playing sports with your children, for example, or taking them on vacations or weekend outings are all part of being an effective parent.



**Providing educational and recreational experiences.** As a parent, you will need to provide an environment that will stimulate your child intellectually. This means reading and playing games with your child as well as providing books and educational toys. You also will need to show an interest and become involved in your child's education and recreation. A first step in becoming involved could be to check on the quality of the school your child will attend. You and your wife could volunteer to help with school-sponsored events and activities.

**Teaching values.** Parents pass beliefs and values that are important to their family on to their children. Think about the beliefs that are important to you that you would want to pass along to your children.

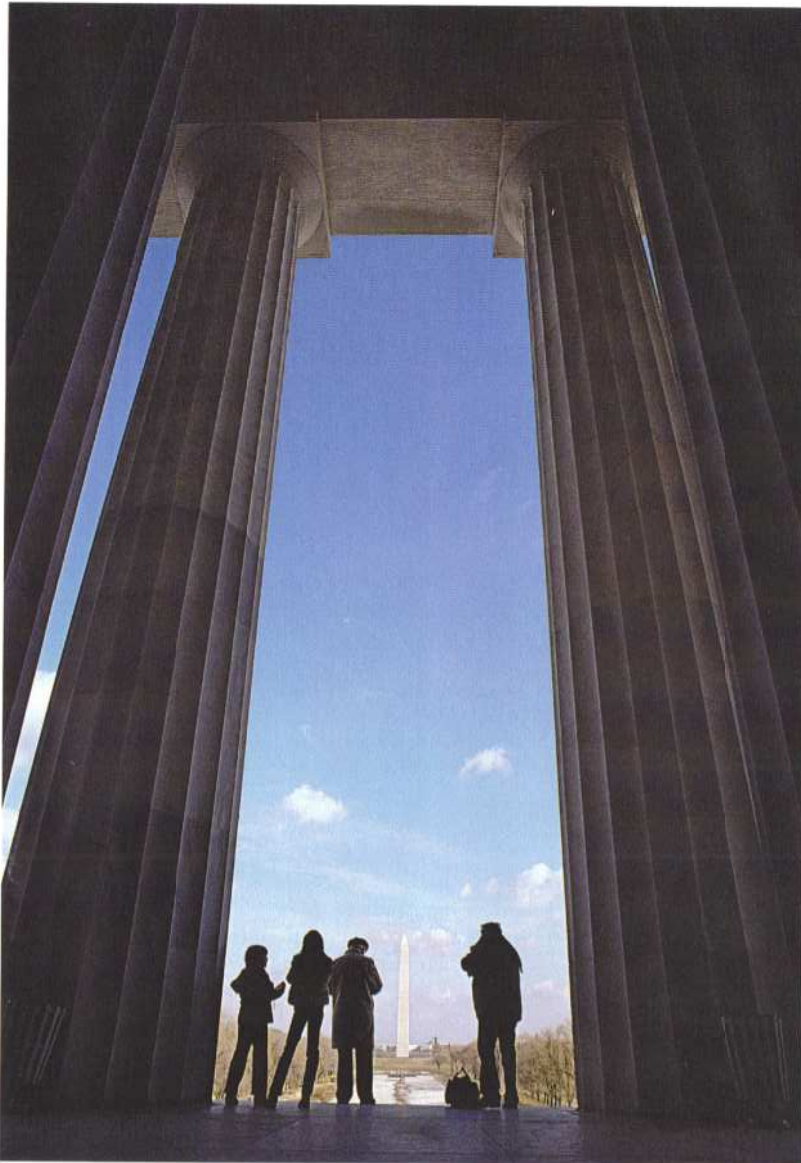
**Nurturing spiritual well-being.** Children usually receive their religious training and principles to live by through the family's faith-based organization. Involvement in a faith-based organization promotes spiritual well-being and plays a major role in keeping a family strong. As a parent, you will set the example for how your children's faith is practiced in your family.



**Which family customs will you want to carry on in your future family?**

**Preserving cultural traditions.** Every family passes on those traditions that will help preserve the culture and heritage of the family. For example, as a parent you will probably want to celebrate certain holidays the same way your family did.

Remember that when you and your partner are ready to make a life-long commitment to one another, marriage between a man and a woman who love each other and are committed to care for each other makes the most solid foundation for a strong family.



## Family Life Resources

### Scouting Literature

*Boy Scout Journal*; *American Cultures*, *American Heritage*, *Citizenship in the Community*, *Citizenship in the Nation*, *Citizenship in the World*, *Communications*, *Cooking*, *Crime Prevention*, *Disabilities Awareness*, *Genealogy*, and *Personal Management* merit badge pamphlets

Visit the Boy Scouts of America's official retail Web site at <http://www.scoutstuff.org> for a complete listing of all merit badge pamphlets and other helpful Scouting materials and supplies.

### Books

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- . *Life Strategies for Teens*. Fireside, 2000.
- Otfinoski, Steve. *The Kid's Guide to Money: Earning It, Saving It, Spending It, Growing It, Sharing It*. Scholastic, 1996.
- Packer, Alex J. *The How Rude!™ Handbook of Family Manners for Teens*. Free Spirit Press, 2004.
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### Organizations and Web Sites

#### American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences

400 N. Columbus St., Suite 202  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
Toll-free telephone: 800-424-8080  
Web site: <http://www.aafcs.org>

#### American Red Cross

2025 E St. NW  
Washington, DC 20006  
Telephone: 202-303-4498  
Web site: <http://www.redcross.org>

#### Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America

1910 Association Drive  
Reston, VA 20191-1584  
Telephone: 703-476-4900  
Web site: <http://www.fcclainc.org>

#### Prepare Tomorrow's Parents

454 NE Third St.  
Boca Raton, FL 33496  
Toll-free telephone: 888-PARENTS  
Web site: <http://www.preparetomorrow-spares.org/home.htm>

#### TeensHealth

Web site: <http://www.teenshealth.org>

### Acknowledgments

The Boy Scouts of America thanks writer Marilyn Swierk for her involvement with this new edition of the *Family Life* merit badge pamphlet. Ms. Swierk is certified in Family and Consumer Sciences and in Family Life Education and is a consultant and speaker in the realm of family life and education.

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