

Stop Family Friction Before It Starts

Stress resistance begins at home. What better way to help your family withstand the rapid change, constant disruptions, and various surprises life dishes out than to establish a stable “base of operations” at home. Psychologists and other mental health professionals have found that families who work and play together as a cohesive unit can survive a crisis like unemployment or illness better than those with poor coping skills.

Here are some guidelines for insulating your family against stress.

- Take time to talk things over and be good companions to one another.
- Hold regular family conferences or meetings. Use this time to set mutual goals, present grievances, or discuss future plans. Take turns heading these meetings. Plan an agenda so everyone gets an opportunity to speak and so that important issues aren't overlooked.
- Teach the value of being a good listener. Pay attention to what others say. Learn to “hear between the lines.” And ask questions if you don't understand what your spouse or children are trying to tell you.
- Establish family traditions tied to significant occasions, like birthdays or holidays, that can be celebrated together.
- Learn the value of compromise.
- Be flexible, and shift gears if the situation calls for it. Flexibility is especially important if one parent goes back to work after managing the household full time, or if one wage earner loses his or her job or gets sick.
- Allow for individual strengths and interests. Don't compare brothers and sisters to one another, and allow family members to have “their own space.”
- Discourage competition between family members.
- Don't overemphasize academic and financial status.