

# Family Keys

Self-Care Resources for Children & Their Families

## Strong Families – Confident, Safe Children

# 13

KEY

Children react differently to being on their own. Some enjoy the added responsibility and show few negative effects, while others dislike being alone

and may show signs of stress.

How children react will depend on many things, including their age and maturity, their self-care skills, the circumstances under which they are left alone, how secure they feel in the neighborhood, and their relationship with adult family members.

Strong family ties are important for children in self-care. Children from cohesive families are more likely to follow family rules, and not want to disappoint their parents.



### What makes a family strong?

Although every family is unique, researchers agree on some traits of strong families.

#### Strong families:

- ▼ **Start with healthy, caring adult relationships.** Where two parents don't live with the children, the single parent has supportive adult friends.
- ▼ **Communicate honestly, openly, and clearly.**
- ▼ **Listen carefully, accept and appreciate what others say, and avoid interrupting.** Family members never rush someone or try to finish sentences for them. This builds trust.
- ▼ **Settle differences by listening to and respecting everyone's opinion, sharing power, and accepting responsibility.**
- ▼ **Work together to solve problems.**
- ▼ **Explore options** before making a decision, and treat problems as challenges that foster growth.
- ▼ **Allow each member to be human** — to express feelings and make mistakes.

*continued on page 2*

What makes a family strong?  
*continued from page 1*

**Strong families:**

- ▼ Adapt to change and loss.
- ▼ Help members view the world positively.
- ▼ Spend time together by choice, sharing meaningful rituals and traditions and enjoying activities and events together.
- ▼ Balance togetherness with individual activities. Individual uniqueness gives families something to treasure, share, and talk about.
- ▼ Encourage every member's growth, self-esteem, and mental health.

**Parents can help:  
 Building self-confidence**

Children who are confident about their ability to care for themselves are more likely to have a positive experience when home alone.

Here are some ways you can help:

1. **Help children identify personal strengths.** Help them find areas in which they can excel, especially in things they do well on their own. Express pride in their accomplishments. Be truthful, so children trust your opinion.
2. **Help children set reasonable goals.** Self-confidence is strengthened by success and weakened by failure. Begin with short periods of self-care so the child experiences success.  
  
Limit household chores to tasks that your child can easily accomplish without help — for example, setting the table rather than making the entire dinner.  
  
Gradually increase the length of time and level of responsibility in self-care.
3. **Teach children the skills they need.** Learning real skills provides the quickest boost to self-confidence. Take a few minutes each week to teach each child a new self-care skill: try a new recipe together, show another first aid skill or how to do some of the laundry.

With children this age, teaching requires more than talk. Always demonstrate the new skill yourself, and then let the child do it. Avoid trying to teach too much at one time. Most important is to keep each learning experience fun and successful.

4. **Point out the good feelings** that accompany learning a new skill. When children accomplish a task or learn a new skill, ask them how they feel — for example:

*"Hey, you can fix this yourself now! That's a good feeling, isn't it?"*

This will create a link between the behavior and increased self-confidence.

5. **Give children opportunities to work in groups.** Participating in group activities builds goal-setting and cooperative learning skills. Opportunities include dance, team sports, scouting and 4-H.
6. **Praise yourself and others, and encourage positive behavior.** Children learn by imitating adults. Never put yourself down in your parenting role. Practice saying things positively. Acknowledge children's and others' successes. Encourage positive efforts without comparing them or slighting someone else.



# Identify Family Strengths

*Adapted with permission from Building Emotionally Healthy Families B3204 by Charles Hennon, (Madison, Wis.: UW-Extension Cooperative Extension), 1982.*

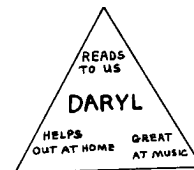
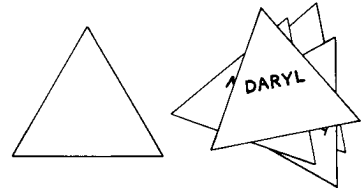
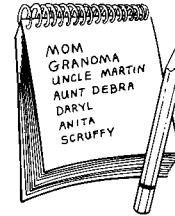
**E**veryday tensions and distractions — from outside and from within the family — can make it hard to share family time together, and easy to forget how strong and truly unique your family is.

## Here is an activity that will help.

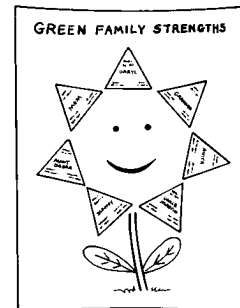
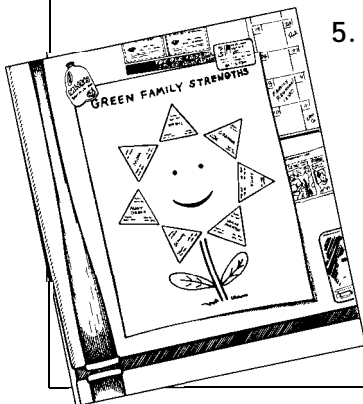
Gather your whole family together, along with the following supplies: blank paper, scissors, poster board, tape or glue stick, pens and a marker.

### Directions

1. List family members' names. You can include relatives who do not live with you, as well as other important "family members" such as pets or working animals.
2. Cut large triangles from blank sheets of paper, one for each name you listed. Copy each family member's name in the center of the triangle.
3. In the three outside corners, have each family member write something they like about that person or animal. An older person can write down very young children's ideas for them, and read to them what others write.
4. On poster board or across several sheets of paper, print the words "\_\_\_\_\_ Family Strengths" at the top, inserting your family name. Arrange the triangles in a pattern to create a family symbol.



5. Put your family symbol on your refrigerator or some other common area. Whenever you pass by, think about all your "family strengths."



# Encouraging Words

**F**amily members must care about what's going on in each others' lives. They must know they can depend on one another for support and encouragement when life gets a little tough. This activity is one way family members can tell each other they understand and care. It will help your family build self-confidence.

This is adapted from the *Family Times* idea book, which has other ideas for families as well (see below).

Gather your whole family and the following supplies:  
**blank 3 x 5 index cards, scissors, crayons or markers.**

Think of times another family member might appreciate a few kind words from you, such as these:

- Good luck on the test.*
- Go for it!*
- Good job!*
- You look great in braces.*
- Thanks for listening last night.*
- I'm sorry that I snapped at you.*
- Don't worry; we'll work it out.*
- We're behind you all the way.*
- Stay calm; you'll do fine.*
- I'll be thinking of you.*
- Hurry home. I'll miss you.*

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Put these kind words and others you think of on index cards, cut in half. Tuck each where the person is likely to find it at the right time — in a lunch box, backpack, briefcase, luggage, purse, or coat pocket.

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**Source:** Adapted with permission from *Family Times*, copyright © 1987 by the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents, UW-Extension Cooperative Extension and Wisconsin Clearinghouse. Available from the address on the back of this lesson sheet.



## Monitoring children from a distance

Children who are home alone still need to be supervised by parents. This supervision is done from a distance.

Research has shown that compared with children who feel their parents aren't monitoring them, children are less at risk in self-care when they sense that their parents:

- ▼ Know where they are, and
- ▼ Care what they are doing.

### **Open communication is essential to monitoring children in self-care.**

As a family, you've been working together to learn how to be safe when home alone. Each lesson asked you to listen and share your thoughts and feelings. Some lessons were easy, and others required more time. This process helped you make better family rules, learn important information, and agree on responsibilities

The process is not over yet. Building and maintaining good communication among family members takes continued time and effort.

## What is next?

Now that you have completed *Family Keys*, what are your plans?

After completing these lessons, some families decide their child is not yet ready for self-care and needs to practice these skills a bit more. They may try self-care later.

Some families first try self-care for short periods, such as an hour or so while parents are shopping.

Other families decide to try self-care for longer, regular time periods — after school, or while parents go out in the evening.

No matter what your family decides to do, begin on a trial basis. Afterwards, make sure to discuss everyone's feelings about self-care. You may change some of the rules, discover problems you hadn't thought of, or even change your decision to try self-care.

Whether you use the information you've learned now or later, you have made your family stronger by talking about self-care.

### **Congratulations!**

**13**

KEY

**Strong Families – Confident, Safe Children**

is the last in the *Family Keys* series. *Key 13* teaches families how to build on their strengths to support children in self-care.

The true test of what you have learned will be that your family feels confident whenever a child is home alone.

**Resources**

**County or area extension office** — If you would like to learn more about building a strong family, contact your county or area extension office. A family living or 4-H/youth development agent can recommend ideas, activities, programs and publications that your family would enjoy.

Backed by university research, local extension educators work with families to help solve problems and meet family needs throughout the life span — from improving prenatal nutrition and parenting skills to caring for an aging parent and making end-of-life decisions. Extension agents also work with community groups to build strong families. You'll find your local extension office listed in the county government pages of your phone book.

If you have Internet access, visit these Web sites for school-age children as a family activity:

**The Electronic Zoo**

<http://netvet.wustl.edu/e-zoo.htm>

**Get Real! – TV Show for Kids**

<http://www.wpt.org/getreal%21/>

**Kids Web – A World Wide Web Digital Library for Schoolkids**

<http://www.npac.syr.edu/textbook/kidsweb/>

**SuperSite for Kids TM – Games and Fun Facts**

<http://www.bonus.com>

Or visit the University of Wisconsin-Extension Youth Futures Cool Youth Links page:

**Cool Youth Links**

[http://www.uwex.edu/ces/youthfutures/yf.youth\\_links.html#youth](http://www.uwex.edu/ces/youthfutures/yf.youth_links.html#youth)



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