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Support for parents and families: A
retrospective look at family life articles in
Broome County Living magazine 1986 – 1988

Local and Regional Projects

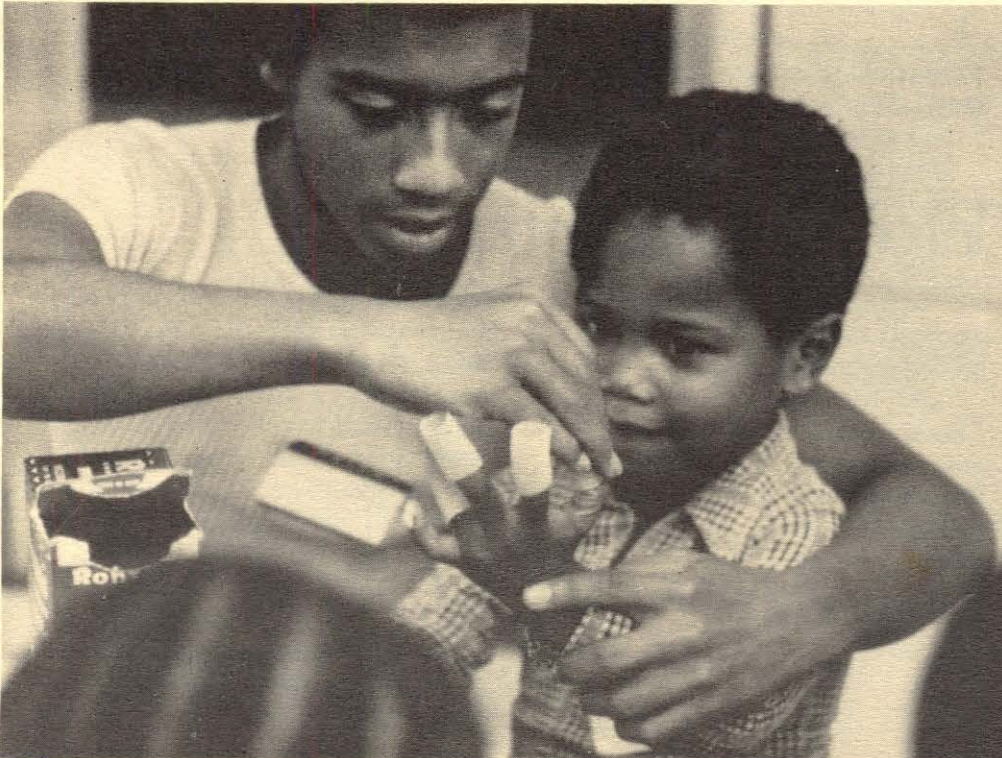
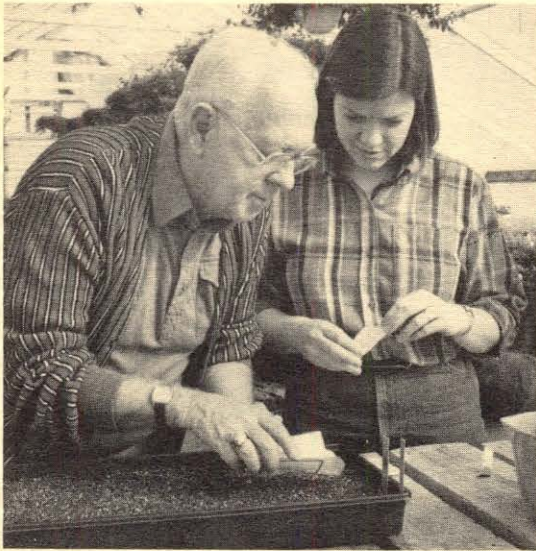
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What's right with families?

V. Sue Atkinson

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Living



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Living

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Information Center Tip

Our Information Center has several fact sheets available to give you gift ideas.

We have fact sheets on "Master Mixes." These are mixes that you can make up ahead of time and then use what you need in cake and cookie baking.

For fun, try making

leathers. Leathers are pureed fruits and vegetables that have been dried to a chewy, leathery consistency. They may be sweet or sour and can be used in a variety of ways. Call or visit our Information Center for a free fact sheet on "Fruit & Vegetable Leathers."

Cover: Volunteers help us help you put knowledge to work in many ways.

What's Right With Families?

V. Sue Atkinson
Home Economics Program
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The family, despite troubles and changing needs, remains important to us all. Consider:

- In a recent Harris poll, when asked "What is most important in life?" 96 percent of those polled answered, "To have a good family life."
- In a Gallup poll, eight out of every 10 people said family was the most important facet of their lives.
- School children asked, "What do you think makes a happy family?" most frequently answered, "Doing things together."

Yet much of what we read and hear today is about families in trouble. Families do face many stresses, economic and personal. Families are changing, and change causes stress.

But some families weather the storms, cope with the stresses, and remain strong. What is special about these families? Nick Stinnett and John DeFrain, in Secrets of Strong Families, identify six common characteristics:

- **Commitment.** Members of strong families value the unity of the family and are dedicated to promoting each other's welfare and happiness.

- **Appreciation.** Members of strong families feel and show sincere appreciation for each other a great deal.

- **Communication.** Members of strong families have learned good communication skills and spend a lot of time talking to each other.

- **Time.** Strong families spend time - quality time in large quantities - with each other. Family time is truly given priority over the ever-encroaching demands of jobs and other outside activities.

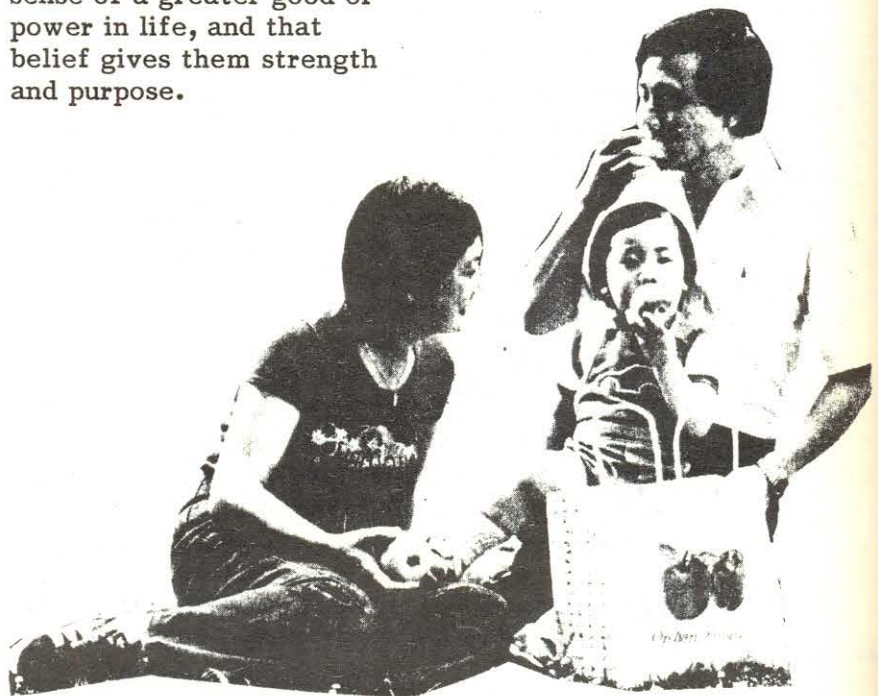
- **Spiritual Wellness.** Whether they go to formal religious services or not, strong family members have a sense of a greater good or power in life, and that belief gives them strength and purpose.

- **Coping ability.** Members of strong families are able to view stress or crisis as an opportunity to grow.

Strong families are not free from problems. Many of the families studied by Stinnett and DeFrain had faced financial crises and serious personal problems. Some were single-parent families or step-families. Both one and two wage-earner families were represented. There was no right number of children or correct lifestyle.

STRATEGIES

What can we learn from these families about handling the everyday problems and



annoyances of life as well as major crises? The strong families described dealt with problems that would break many families apart. How did they do it?

- Strong families emphasize the positive: the water glass is seen as half-full rather than half-empty.
- Strong families see crisis as an opportunity for positive change. Stinnett and De-Frain give the example of Paul, who is faced with severe medical problems and then a layoff from his job as a school administrator. Paul and his wife, Carol, while appreciating the seriousness of their situation, choose to view things in a positive light. ". . . it's a good time to move on. I've been in education twenty years, and this will be an impetus to try something new."
- Members of strong families support each other. Problems are seen as something to be solved by the family as a team. Extended family (grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins) as well as neighbors, church members, and friends are also looked to for help.
- Strong families are supported by their spiritual beliefs. Family members draw strength and comfort from shared beliefs that give them perspective on the problems as well as the joys of life.
- Strong families have open communication among family members when a crisis comes. Many of us feel that people as close as our own family should instinctively know how we're feeling, but strong families find that communication must be deliberate.

- When a crisis comes, strong families draw on a "bank account" of positive experiences - good times spent together - and feel a commitment to work together to save something worth saving - their family.

DEFINING 'CRISIS'

We are told that the Chinese symbol for the word crisis has two meanings - "danger" and "opportunity." My Oxford American Dictionary defines crisis first as "decisive time" and second as "a time of acute difficulty." Families remain strong when they see both possibilities in times of trouble.

RESOURCE:

Nick Stinnett and John De-Frain, Secrets of Strong Families, Little, Brown, and Co., 1985.

Who Is the American Family?

V. Sue Atkinson
Home Economics Program
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The typical family includes a wage-earning father, mother at home, and two children, (and perhaps a dog . . .) right? Wrong! Surprisingly, only seven percent of American families fit this description, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

The increase in employed mothers, particularly those with young children, accounts for much of the change, as 48 percent of mothers of children under age six are now in the workforce. Single-parent fami-

lies account for over 20 percent of all families with children. Step families or "blended" families are increasing.

What does this mean? To some it means trouble - the traditional family is dying and we must restore it. To others, the trend seems like a good one - the traditional family is dying because it no longer meets our needs in our society. A third view is that while families are changing, they remain the best way to meet our need for intimacy and provide a setting for

raising our children.

Meanwhile, we go on with our lives, nurturing our children, struggling with the difficult balance of work and family, dealing with crises, resolving disputes, and trying to provide for our needs and those of our families. We all need a place, as the poet Robert Frost said, "where, when you go there, they have to take you in."