



# Sharing Family Strengths

ACTIVITY BOOKLET

## Tips from families like YOURS!

- > Learn how other families stay strong
- > Celebrate your family's strengths
- > Set new goals to make your family stronger
- > Find support and advice for your family
- > Have fun together



Family & Children's Service  
[www.everyfamilymatters.org](http://www.everyfamilymatters.org)

# What makes your family strong?

Is it family unity? Beliefs that you share? Activities you enjoy? We asked two thousand people what makes their families strong.

Here's what they said:

- 1 Communication
- 2 Health
- 3 Time together
- 4 Spirituality
- 5 Support
- 6 Respect
- 7 Unity
- 8 Cultural traditions
- 9 Extended sense of family



Check online for electronic versions of the activities in this booklet at [www.everyfamilymatters.org/booklet](http://www.everyfamilymatters.org/booklet)

This booklet explores each family strength, one by one. Everything you read comes from families just like yours!

## About Family Strengths

The Minnesota Family Strength Project included telephone interviews with 1,000 adults across the state, questionnaires completed by 400 families, twelve “talking circles” with families of various ethnic groups, and five Family Forums. While most projects study problems or weaknesses, this project studied strengths — what families do well. Learning from families of diverse cultural backgrounds also made this research unique.

## About Family & Children's Service

Family & Children's Service is a Minnesota-based nonprofit organization that builds strong families, vital communities and capable children. Since 1878, Family & Children's Service has helped more than one million people using a holistic approach — helping people solve problems like family violence, school failure, or mental health concerns; helping prevent problems through training on life skills, parenting, and conflict resolution; and changing community conditions through grassroots leadership development, community organizing, and policy advocacy. For more information, visit [www.everyfamilymatters.org](http://www.everyfamilymatters.org).



Photos by Mandy Dwyer

**Family & Children's Service**  
**[www.everyfamilymatters.org](http://www.everyfamilymatters.org)**

**It's who YOU count on as family that COUNTS.**

People who counted the most members as "family" reported the most family strengths.

Most people said their family was large — with 22 or more members.

Many of these members included friends; some even included pets.

In my family there are:

\_\_\_\_\_ people    \_\_\_\_\_ children

\_\_\_\_\_ adults    \_\_\_\_\_ pets

Our house is filled with:

\_\_\_\_\_

My one wish for my family is:

\_\_\_\_\_

My name is: \_\_\_\_\_

I was named after: \_\_\_\_\_

**ALL ABOUT ME!**



# 1 Communication

Families strongly agree that communication builds strength. African American families also talked about respectful communication on the streets and in neighborhoods. Many adults remember times as children when neighbors corrected their behavior or “checked-in” about them with their parents.



Photo by Mandy Dwyer

## Ideas from families:

- We set a regular time to talk each day — at the dinner table, at bedtime, and during rides to school.
- We leave notes for each other in the same place — on the refrigerator or in a notebook.
- We turn off technology during family time — no radio, TV, or phone calls during dinner.
- We designate a time and place each week to resolve conflicts peacefully — a “safe zone.”

## AN ACTIVITY FOR YOU - BIG BALL OF QUESTIONS

**SUPPLIES:** Beach ball (or other big, bouncy ball) and a permanent marker

Write questions on the ball. Have your family stand in a circle. Throw the ball across the circle to each person. He or she will answer the first question they see, and then throw the ball to the next person. Questions may include:



- > Your favorite thing about our family?
- > If you had one wish, what would it be?
- > Favorite movie? Favorite book? Favorite food?
- > How is your life different than one year ago?
- > Something nice someone did for you?
- > Your dream trip?
- > Your role model, and why?



### How We Stay Connected:

Leave notes, call home, read stories, post schedules, make household lists, share success stories, discuss problems, tell the truth.

# 2 Health

For many families, health is a combination of things. It includes physical, emotional, and financial health.



### Ideas from families:

- We get physical check-ups and follow doctors' advice.
- We exercise. We walk, play catch, ride bikes, or rake the yard together.
- We plan healthy meals together.
- We keep an eye on each other's moods. If someone seems down longer than usual, even kids, we talk to a professional.

#### >> What Do Families Find Most Stressful?

Families say they really come together in a big crisis.

Daily hassles like these cause them the most stress:

1. Lack of time to relax and unwind
2. Children not completing chores
3. Arguments between parents and children
4. Lack of time to complete household tasks

Families today say they are more focused on health than older generations. They talk about not drinking alcohol, especially in front of children, and trying to exercise and eat healthy when they can.

- We are mindful of the way we talk to one another.
- We talk about finances BEFORE a crisis.
- We get the whole family involved in sticking to a budget.

### AN ACTIVITY FOR YOU - FAMILY BANK

**SUPPLIES:** Empty coffee can with lid, crayons, scissors, and tape

Color this label, cut it out, and attach it to an empty coffee can. (Add glitter and colored paper, too, if you like). Cut a slit in the lid of the can, big enough to fit coins or bills through. Have family members decide together how to use the savings in this family bank. You could use the bank to save for family outings or as a money jar to encourage positive behavior.



#### How We Stay Healthy:

Set a budget, go to school, exercise, stay away from drugs, eat right, build a support system, express feelings, forgive.

# 3 Time Together

Families agree that spending time together is very important to family strength.



## Ideas from families:

- We create a family time each week. Family members help plan activities for that day.
- We eat together as a family two days a week. We cook together, too.
- We volunteer together at a neighborhood school or community center.
- We set a good example as adults by committing to preserve family time.
- We read to each other. Adults read to kids, even as teens. Children read to adults.
- We escape together to a friend or relative's house, go on a camping trip, take a day trip to a park or nature center, or venture off on a bike ride.

>> For many families, outdoor events are important times when families come together and celebrate. Whether it's a fair, cultural activity, or a neighborhood festival, plan ahead to be together at these events.

## AN ACTIVITY FOR YOU - FAMILY STORY

Parents: Here's a great activity other families have enjoyed at bedtime, on car trips, or on rainy days. Start a story and then allow each child or family member to complete it using his or her own creativity. Watch how the story grows!

### Example:

(Mom)

"Once upon a time, there was a family..."

(Samuel)

"They lived in a castle at the top of a huge hill."

(Dominique)

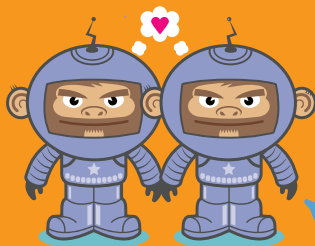
"The castle was pink!"

(Mom)

"And nobody inside was allowed to wear any other colors."

(Samuel)

"Except one - the king. He was..."



### How We Hang Out:

Cook a meal, take a family walk, play games, share a meal, do homework together, share quiet time, travel together, share chores.



love + hope

# 4 Spirituality

Spirituality means different things to different people. Families defined spirituality as faith in a higher power — or as a feeling for what came before, and what will live on.

>> A family's spirituality may involve more than one tradition. For example, Native American families often participate in both church activities and Native American spiritual practices.

## Ideas from families:

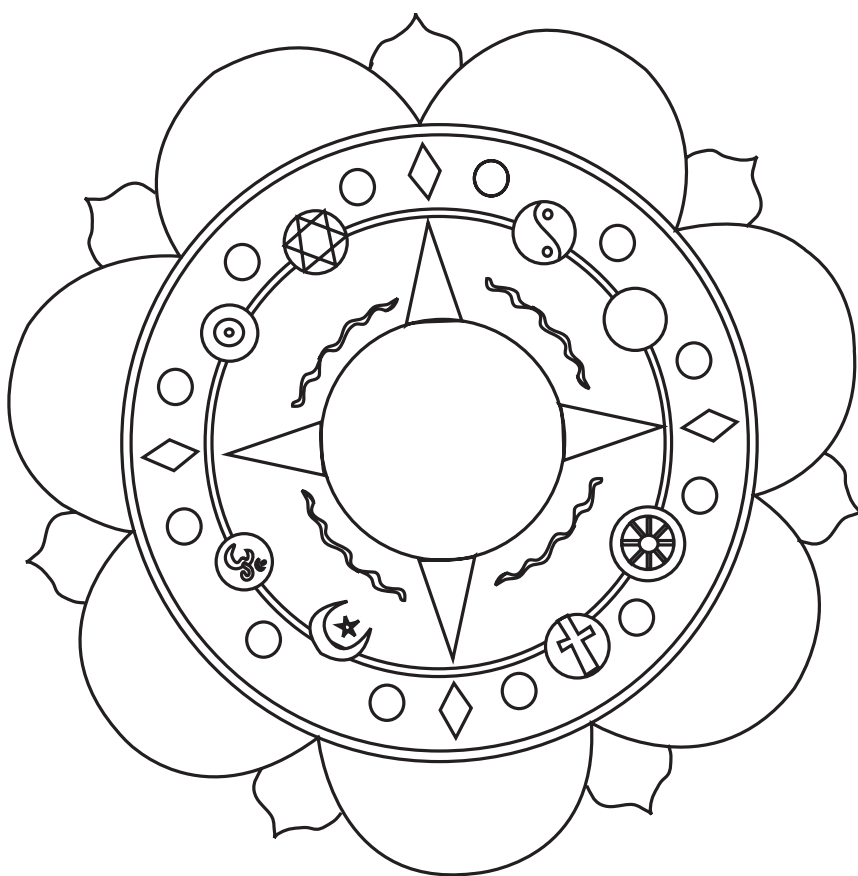
- We talk about spirituality and what it means to us in everyday life.
- We discuss spirituality when it comes up in conversation.
- We participate in classes and programs together at a place of worship.
- We attend religious services together.
- We learn about religious rituals — our own, and those from other faiths. We talk as a family about what these rituals mean to us.

## AN ACTIVITY FOR YOU – MANDALA

A mandala is a picture representing spiritual ideas or beliefs. Mandalas of different kinds are used by many different religions.

Looking into a mandala is relaxing and can bring the mind to a different place.

This mandala shows symbols from many world religions. Fill it in with colors you like, and add symbols that are meaningful to you. In the center, draw something that matters most to your family's spirituality. You can even put on some music if you like, or sit in a peaceful place while you color. You may find yourself thinking of ideas that are important to you and your family — whether they are cultural, religious or personal.



### How We Reflect:

Spend time talking about belief, tradition, faith, hope, love, charity, solidarity, purpose, plan, humility, signs, prayer, myth, parable, sacred words or books, nature, rituals, refuge, meditation, sacrifice, creativity, wisdom.



give a hug!

## 5 Support

In strong families, members ask each other for help and speak up when they need somebody to listen or just to know someone cares.

>> Men's roles in the family are changing. One man shared: "I do more of the things around the house that only my mother did when I was young. I play a different role than my father did. I've had to think of myself as not so much the 'decision-maker' who is 'in charge' of the family, but as more of an equal, who shares in the housework and cooking."

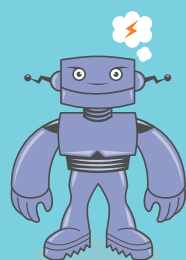
### Ideas from families:

- We listen, understand, and ask questions.
- We show affection. We give hugs, kisses, and say "I love you."
- We create a nourishing bedtime ritual. We tell each other, "What I liked best about you today was..."
- We go to each other's games, music performances, school events.
- We look for opportunities to help out, instead of looking for reasons why we can't.
- We help with chores, run an errand or fold the laundry.
- We compliment each other every day. We write a friendly note. We talk about what we like about each other.
- We don't mix compliments with complaints. We say something nice and leave it at that.
- We smile a lot. We laugh and have fun.

### AN ACTIVITY FOR YOU - IT TAKES A VILLAGE

It takes a lot of people to make a family strong. Many of them live outside the home, and some may not even be blood relatives (like neighbors or family friends).

Color the village pictured here. Draw or write the names of the many people outside your family that help your family, and how they do it.



### How We Support Each Other:

Give someone a hug, ask about each other's day, cooperate, share responsibilities, go to games and recitals, meet kids' teachers and friends, do extra chores, anticipate tasks that need to be done, make dinner, listen, be honest.

# 6 Respect

Families agree: respect is an attitude and an action. The attitude is about appreciating each family member's special qualities. The action is behaving considerately towards all people, inside and outside the family.



Photo by Sarah Bonvallet

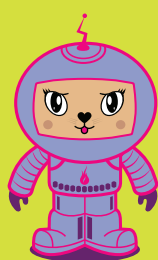
## Ideas from families:

- We listen — when someone is talking, we give them our full attention with an open mind and heart.
- We respond — we use words and actions to show we are listening.
- We wait to speak until family members have finished talking.
- We recognize each other's strengths — we know the skills, intelligence, experience and personality of each child and adult.
- We share appreciation of each other — we say encouraging things to each other at birthdays, holidays, and family nights.
- We follow family rules — this shows respect to everyone in the family.

>> Are there ways to express ideas that may seem disrespectful? What words or gestures show respect in different cultures?

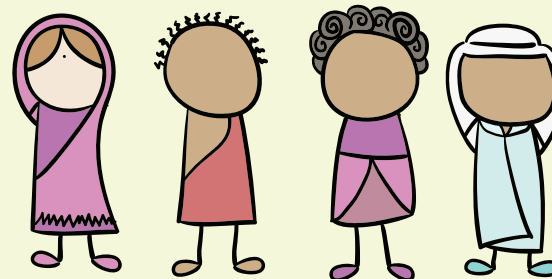
## AN ACTIVITY FOR YOU - SIGNS OF RESPECT

In some cultures, respect for elders is shown by looking at the ground instead of looking at an elder's face. In other cultures, it is most respectful to look at a person's face when he or she is talking. Draw some respectful hand gestures and facial expressions on the figures below.



### How We Practice Respect:

Pay attention, have patience, use a gentle tone of voice, practice serenity, take turns, accept each other, believe in each other, set boundaries, follow rules, be polite, respond, appreciate and reward honesty, be helpful, stay involved.



togetherness

# 7 Unity

Families agree: strong families pull together, not apart. In good or bad times, we can take steps to build unity in our families.

>> *Many new immigrant families say unity is an important part of staying strong. It helps them preserve traditions and customs that are different than values in this country. Vietnamese elders talk about compromising with younger generations to keep family unity.*

*Somali families\* said that physical, social, psychological, and spiritual unity strengthen their families and community. "Together the Teeth Can Cut" is a proverb showing the power of working together.*

\*From "Somali Family Strength: Working in the Communities," a report by Dr. D. Lynn Heitritter.

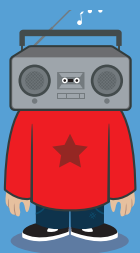
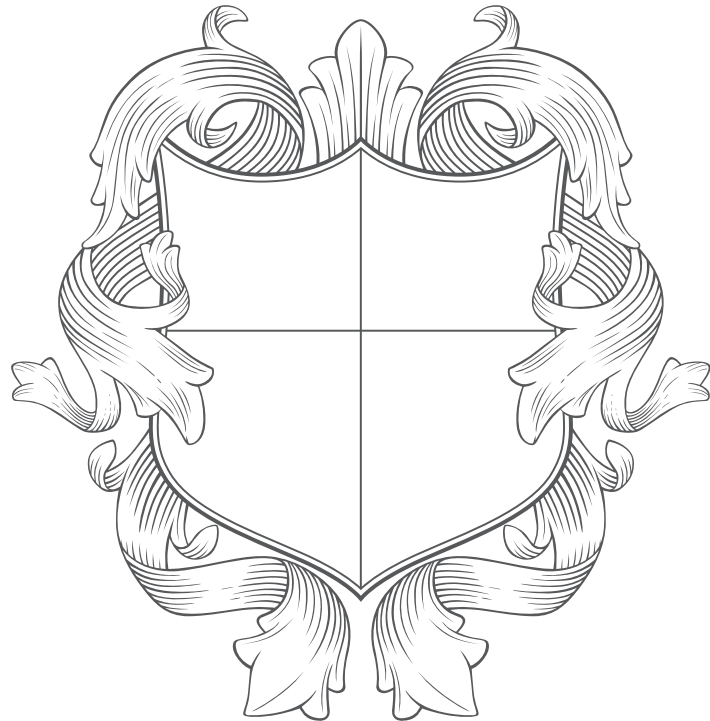
## Ideas from families:

- We take pictures that include all members of the family and display them where everyone can see. We talk about the memories they show.
- We plan family reunions and family events and invite family members who live outside the home, too.
- We include everyone in activities — from children to elders, everyone is welcome.
- We let everyone be a leader and take turns. When someone feels strong, we encourage them to take leadership.
- We help each other out! We offer food or childcare to family members who are facing challenges.

## AN ACTIVITY FOR YOU – FAMILY CREST

In the times of knights, princesses and kings, people created special signs called family crests to represent their families and what they stood for.

Color the family crest to the right. In each square, you might draw a symbol representing something about your family. Examples might be a football if your family loves sports, a food you love to cook together, a group of stars or flowers with one for each family member, or a favorite animal.



### How We Unify:

Act as a team, practice togetherness, love and appreciate each other, stay connected, forgive, bond, pull together, share food, stay with relatives, rally around each other in a time of need, work together, eat together.

## 8 Cultural Traditions

Every family has unique traditions. Families agree that preserving these traditions brings strength. Many families even create new traditions.



### Ideas from families:

- We make a calendar of special days from our culture. We decorate the special days with drawings or stickers.
- We make plans to celebrate these special days.
- We talk to elders and listen to traditions they participated in as a child.
- We share stories from our culture.
- We look through family photos together and use photos to start discussions about important events and customs.

>> *Create new traditions! At your next family mealtime or discussion, take turns sharing what each person would like to do together as a family. Ideas include:*

- Annual neighborhood picnic
- Volunteering as a family
- Reading a book together

### AN ACTIVITY FOR YOU – STORYTELLING EVENT

Some families host a storytelling event.

They invite elders to talk about traditions they celebrated as children.

People of all ages can gather to share stories from their cultures.

It's a great way to discover similarities and differences between their heritages and the traditions of other cultures.

You can also talk about traditions during regular family nights, after meals, or at bedtime.



#### How We Celebrate:

Know your identity, care for each other, teach family traditions, share stories, pass on your cultural heritage, celebrate, participate in rituals, attend commitment or marriage ceremonies, spend time together during holidays, attend neighborhood events, dance together.

# 9 Extended Sense of Family

For many people, “family” goes beyond those who live in one house. It can include: blood relatives, cousins, clan or tribe members, close friends, neighbors, aunts, uncles, grandparents.

>> *In some cultures, ancestors play an important role to guide and inspire. Native American cultures can identify role models in their grandmothers/grandfathers of many generations ago.*

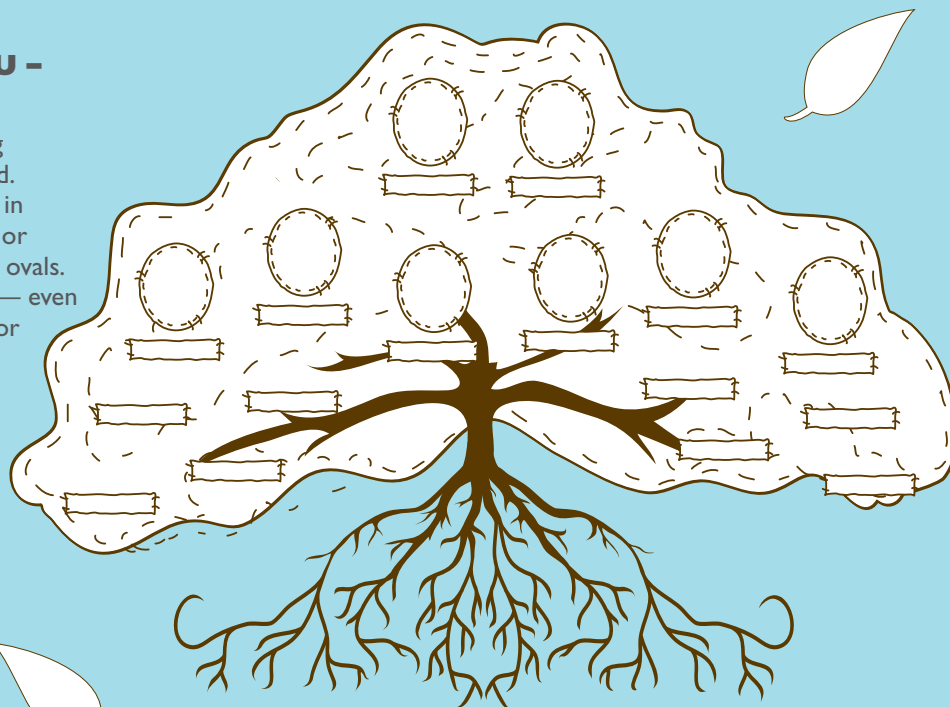
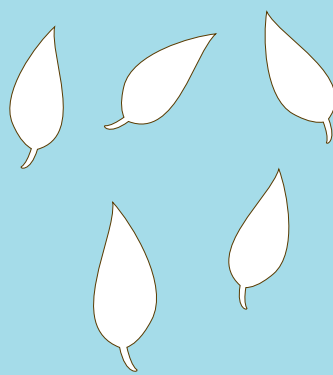
Who is in your family?

## Ideas from families:

- We say thanks to extended family members who have helped and encouraged us by sending a card.
- We say thanks to those who have stepped into a parental or mentoring role in our lives.
- We seek advice from trusted elders, friends or youth in the community.
- We build a circle of support and give love and care to family members who are struggling. We make a plan for each person to support and aid the person in trouble.
- We keep family and friends informed of important family events.
- We include neighbors by inviting them to family get-togethers and celebrations.

## AN ACTIVITY FOR YOU - FAMILY TREE

A family tree is a picture showing how people in a family are related. Color your family tree and write in the names of its members. Draw or put photos of each person in the ovals. Include neighbors, family friends — even teachers — as smaller branches or leaves shown below.



### How We Grow Our Family:

Include your neighbors, mentors, friends, aunts, uncles, teachers, elders, grandparents, nieces, nephews, in-laws and everyone else you can think of!

## We're a Strong Family.

Every family has strengths...including your family! Answer these questions as a family. When you're finished, hang it on your refrigerator as a reminder that your family is strong.

What are your family's greatest strengths?

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Write three things your family has done or is doing to become stronger.

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As a family, what three things from this book would you like to do to strengthen your family even more?

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Draw a picture of a time when your family showed its strength.

# Hopes & Dreams

## AN ACTIVITY FOR YOU - IF YOU COULD...

1. If you could live anywhere in the world, where would you live?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. If you could give yourself any new first name, what name would you choose?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. If you could choose only one meal that you had to eat every day for the rest of your life, what would you eat?

\_\_\_\_\_

4. If you could meet any famous person you wanted, who would you choose?

\_\_\_\_\_

5. If you could have an unusual pet, what would it be?

\_\_\_\_\_

6. If you could drive, what kind of car would you want to drive?

\_\_\_\_\_

7. If you could be in any movie, what movie would you choose to be in?

\_\_\_\_\_

8. If you could play any sport professionally, what sport would you play?

\_\_\_\_\_

9. If you could never have to eat one vegetable ever again for the rest of your life, what vegetable would it be?

\_\_\_\_\_

10. If you could be the President of the United States for one week, what would you want to change about our country in that week?

\_\_\_\_\_

## AN ACTIVITY FOR YOU - DREAMS OF MY OWN

A special dream I have for myself is to: \_\_\_\_\_

I want this for myself because: \_\_\_\_\_

Someone who could help me accomplish my dream: \_\_\_\_\_

I will try to keep this dream alive by: \_\_\_\_\_

Some of my special talents and gifts include: \_\_\_\_\_

## Resources for Families

Family & Children's Service has many resources on its website for parents, educators, healthcare professionals, social workers, counselors and kids: [www.everyfamilymatters.org](http://www.everyfamilymatters.org).

## About the Partners

The Minnesota Family Strength Project was a collaboration of four nonprofit organizations.

**The Allina Foundation** promotes innovation that engages citizens and changes systems to improve the health of our communities.

**Family & Children's Service** has used the results of the Family Strength project to help create new and improved programs and services to strengthen Minnesota's families and communities in all their various forms. The organization shares this research with policy makers, community leaders and other organizations.

**The Minnesota Public Radio Civic Journalism Initiative** amplifies citizens' points of view on important issues — like family strength — as a catalyst for positive community change.

**The Minnesota Historical Society** is committed to preserving and sharing the stories of Minnesota families to help its citizens achieve a greater sense of community and add meaning to individual lives.

The research was commissioned by Family & Children's Service and was conducted by Judy Watson Tiesel, Ph.D., a family psychologist and expert in family issues research, in consultation with David Olson, Ph.D., professor of Family Social Science at the University of Minnesota, who has published numerous books and articles in the field of marriage and family.

This edition of "Sharing Family Strengths Activity Booklet" was published by Family & Children's Service © 2008. To order a free copy, visit [www.everyfamilymatters.org](http://www.everyfamilymatters.org).

Printing and distribution of this publication was made possible by a generous grant from the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation.

## A Message from Family & Children's Service

Dear Families,

The strength of individuals, families and communities is interconnected — and each of us can contribute to that strength. I am proud to be a part of an organization with a legacy of helping families be the best they can be for more than 130 years. While families have changed in many ways since 1878, our need for family has not.

The changes taking place today are complex and profound. Raising a strong family is a challenge for most of us, but at Family & Children's Service we are particularly disturbed by the widening gaps between families — those with resources and those without, racial divides, and geographic disparities. We remain committed to helping those who are most at risk of being left behind, by helping families solve problems, prevent problems, and change community conditions to support families in their most important job — raising children.

So, whether your family needs help or whether your family is in a position to help others, this book is here for you. Because every family matters.



Molly Greenman, President and CEO  
Family & Children's Service  
414 South Eighth Street  
Minneapolis, MN 55404-1081  
612-339-9101

# Word Search

It's who YOU count on as family that COUNTS.  
Look carefully — your family may be bigger than you think!

r r r e k r o w o c e e r y m  
e o e a m n l e n e u b i e e  
p i b t e s i s t e r y n r t  
e b m h t u e c s o p h a g o  
e s e b g i i d t h a h e y z  
k e m r r i s h r m n t e h s  
p v y l g e e y d u t t v w t  
o o t e e r u n b a e p o t e  
h c i t y b a n c a d s l e p  
s d n e i r f n c e b u n r p  
l u u a g s i h d l h o h g a  
a a m g e s e e e p e o l m r  
c h m o u r y l i m a f b e e  
o t o o m l o n a m n a m e n  
l e c e i n o l f d b s a o t  
b p e t x t n e r a p c q u g

## WORDS TO SEARCH FOR:

family	community member	brother
friend	local shopkeeper	coworker
neighbor	grandma	niece
aunt	grandpa	nephew
uncle	dad	love
teacher	mom	pet
cousin	parent	stepparent
babysitter	sister	



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