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Families...Take Time

Abstract

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If you're too busy for your family, you're too busy! That's the message conveyed in a six-lesson home study course called *Families...Take Time*, developed by two Iowa Extension home economists.

Course evaluation showed that most participants did indeed set aside a regular "family time." As a result of their involvement with the program, nearly all respondents to a follow-up survey had tried a variety of family time activities, including family recreation, how-to nights, and family councils. These families reported that their increased commitment to family members paid dividends far beyond their expectations. One mother wrote, "I can see how much it means to our children to do things together!"

The course was developed in response to continued concern in the counties about family problems such as divorce, child abuse, and suicide. The target audience for this effort was families with elementary school-age children. A home-study course was selected as the best method, because of the difficulty in recruiting these families for face-to-face meetings.

Research from the University of Nebraska identified six major characteristics of strong families: (1) mutual appreciation, (2) family time, (3) communication, (4) commitment, (5) values and religious orientation, and (6) ability to cope with crisis.

Each of these attributes was developed into a three-to-four-page lesson. A cover letter, reference list, and Extension bulletins were included in the lessons. A core piece of the course was the manual, *FamilyTime: A Revolutionary Old Idea*,¹ which gives many ideas for family

activities. Each lesson gave a variety of ideas for activities related to the characteristic discussed. Families were encouraged to set aside a regular "family time" and to strengthen relationships through group activities.

The course generated considerable community involvement. Life insurance agents donated copies of the manual. School administrators and teachers distributed flyers for school children to take home to their parents. Home economics committee members gave ideas for format and development of the course and helped publicize its availability.

A grant from a university foundation made the course available to low-resource families in the second year of the program. A small fee to cover mailing costs was charged to other families.

Enrollment in the course exceeded expectations. In the first year, 145 families in a three-county area enrolled. Some indicated an existing commitment to strengthening their families and were seeking ways to support and develop that commitment. Others wanted help in making this commitment and in getting other family members involved. During the second year the course was offered, more than 200 additional families participated. The program is now being used statewide.

Footnote

1. Grady Nutt, *FamilyTime: A Revolutionary Old Idea* (Washington, D.C.: FamilyTime Committee of the Million Dollar Round Table and the American Family Society, 1977).

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