

Seven Tips for Family Togetherness

Dr. Martin Rovers, Marriage and Family Therapy

Family means that no one gets left behind (Lilo and Stitch). Maintaining family togetherness is not automatic, and will take work. And I would think that there is a direct relationship between family efforts to be together and family satisfaction and emotional security. Here are seven tips for family life.

- 1** **Having Dinner Together Matters:** Families who have dinner together do better across pretty much every conceivable metric. Meal time is “meet and greet” time; it is talking time; it is touch time; it tells all family members that I care enough to be with you.

Family communication plays a significant part in building and nurturing a family. Good communication among husband and wife and between parents and children, as well as between siblings fosters a harmonious and loving family relationship. Improving family communication cultivates love, trust and respect and more importantly, it helps the family cope up with life's ups and downs and all its twists and turns. Communication is an art that needs to be learned, from the parents down to the children.
- 2** **Talk Nice! Listen well! Don't be scared!** Family communication incorporates all three aspects: talking nice means that I say things in a way that others can hear me. It means keeping the volume and anger down, and using thoughtfulness and respect to say what I need to say. Listening well means that I am attentive, listening, and hearing every sentiment of the other family member(s). No interruptions allowed. I have to listen: I do not have to agree. And do not be scared to say all necessary things because stuffing them down and away can only lead to explosions later.
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- 4** Take Interest in each other. Nothing says I love you and I belong to this family better than people taking interest in your thoughts, your work, your ideas, and your feelings. A genuine interest means I delight in seeing you and being with you.
- 5** Be part of a larger community is crucial: research shows that families that have extended families or families that are part of a larger community like church or sports, are better able to manage differences and feel as one.
- 6** Family meetings: Kids do better when they have a say in family matters. One big aspect of family life is a clear parenting plan in which parents and children work together to establish the rules, rewards and consequences of the family. Some parents even allow kids to have a say to pick their own punishments as this can create more motivation to obey the rules. This can also mean have the kids choose their own rewards.
- 7** Family celebrations: The family that plays together stays together! Fun and laughter are the best memories of all that we can take along the journey of the rest of our lives. There are the usual season celebrations and the birthdays and family celebrations, and there is the surprise dropping in.