Strengthening Families: Course helps improve communication between youth, adults

Parenting lessons not just for struggling families, says Geary County extension agent

MANHATTAN, Kan. – Parenting, it has been said, could be the toughest job you’ll ever love.

Deb Andres, a K-State Research and Extension family and consumer sciences agent in Geary County, hopes to help families go heavy on the ‘love’ part. She’s part of a group of extension agents in the state who offer the program, Strengthening Families, a series of 11 classes to help set up parents and children for successful relationships.

“We are trying to help people who are raising kids to build skills that will help their children deal with the many challenges that come with childhood, adolescence and early adulthood,” Andres said.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the program was held online, but as restrictions ease in communities, the program will be available in-person and online.

Andres said the program is not just for those families that might be struggling in their relationships.

“The program emphasizes the parenting skills of bonding, setting boundaries and monitoring,” she said. “It is designed for all parents who desire to improve family relationships, and to develop a family prevention program to keep their kids safe from alcohol and drug use.”

Some of the risk factors that the program addresses include:

- Neglect (lack of love, care and support).
- Family conflict.
- Difficulties in communicating respectfully.
- Lax or harsh discipline.
- Lack of supervision.
- Substance abuse by parents (or child).
- Stressful life events.
• Exposure to violence or abuse.
• Low expectations for school success, or failure at school.
• Lack of family customs and traditions.
• Low self-esteem.

“One of the things that is important is for the child to have a feeling of safety, security and trust with their parent,” Andres said. “It’s something that needs to be intentional; it requires special effort by both parent and child.”

One strategy, she said, is to schedule regular ‘My Time’ between parent and child.

“My Time is for exploration of your child’s personality, because in ‘My Time’ you ask them what they want to do,” Andres said.

‘My Time,” she notes, requires no rules. It’s simply an activity chosen by the child during which time the parent gives their full attention. Some kids may want to take a walk, others may want to play ball or another may want to look at magazines.

“Each child has their own interests,” Andres said. “You have to play into that and let them guide you how they want to do things.”

Many more ideas for building successful parent-child relationships are available throughout the 11 lessons, which can be viewed online. The sessions even include ideas on how to maneuver through the sometimes-difficult topic of monitoring a child’s activities.

“Communication is key to every session,” said Andres, noting that children and parents or adult caregivers often attend the lessons together. “We provide activities that require the youth and the adult to work together.”

More information on Strengthening Families is also available from K-State Research and Extension local offices.

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**FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS:** Links used in this story
Strengthening Families (class information), [www.geary.k-state.edu/health-home-family/parenting.html](http://www.geary.k-state.edu/health-home-family/parenting.html)

Strengthening Families (lesson outlines), [https://www.geary.k-state.edu/health-home-family/resources/SFP7-17%20Overview.pdf](https://www.geary.k-state.edu/health-home-family/resources/SFP7-17%20Overview.pdf)

K-State Research and Extension local offices, [www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/stateandareamaps.html](http://www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/stateandareamaps.html)

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