



SOUTH CAROLINA FAMILY AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

Affiliated with National Volunteer Outreach Network, Country Women's Council, U.S.A., Associated Country Women of the World and in partnership with Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service
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Leader Training Guide

Keeping Families Active: Getting the Most out of Family Activities

Objectives:

1. Participants will recognize the benefits and negative aspects of family recreation.
2. Participants will make individual plans of family recreation goals and steps they will take to maximize benefits and decrease negative aspects of family activities.

Lesson Overview/Introduction:

1. Family recreation is an important part of life for many families.
2. Family recreation can have many benefits for families.
3. Family recreation can also have negative impacts on families.
4. Steps can be taken to increase the benefits and reduce the negative aspects of family activities.

Lesson:

Ask (have participants make a list on their own and/or discuss as a group):

What benefits do you experience (or does your family experience) from activities that you do together as a family?

Researchers for over 70 years have identified the following benefits of family recreation:

- Improved communication¹
- Increased cohesion, flexibility, and overall family functioning³
- Increased satisfaction with family life⁴
- Improved family interaction and stability⁶
- Increased collective efficacy and conflict resolution efficacy⁷
- Reduced relationship anxiety⁸
- Strong sense of family²
- Opportunity to teach children about healthy lifestyles and moral values²
- Communal coping and growth-oriented change⁵
- Opportunity to have fun together⁵

- Development of individual family members²
- Formation of family identity and memories^{9, 10}
- New roles and opportunities for family members^{9, 10}
- Development of trust¹¹
- Improved problem-solving skills¹¹

Negative Aspects of Family Recreation

Ask: *What is hard about doing things together as a family?*

Researchers have identified the following as potential negative aspects of family recreation:

- Work (especially for mothers)¹²
- Increased conflict¹⁴
- Finding activities that meet the interests and skills of all family members¹⁵
- Difficulty of meeting idealized expectations of activities together¹³
- Difficulty leaving work behind and focusing on family activities.

Activities:

Getting the Most out of Family Activities

Even though family recreation often comes with challenges, there are things you can do to reduce the negative aspects and increase the benefits that you and your family members receive from activities together. Coming up with specific goals and steps you will take can help your family get the most out of family recreation.

Ask (have participants write down on paper):

- *What goals do you have for your family? For individual family members?*
- *What activities can you do together as a family that will help you achieve those goals?*
- *What will you do to reduce the negative aspects of family recreation in your family? (Go back to the list you made of what is hard about doing things together as a family; what can you do to address those challenges?) For example, what will you do to make family recreation less work for the mom in your family? Or what will you do to find activities that all family members can do and enjoy?*

Family Fun Tips:

- Be realistic.
 - Think about the needs of your family members and what activities they will be able to do and enjoy. Also, don't expect every family activity to go perfectly---if people don't get along or someone doesn't have fun, it's not the end of the world. Some family activities will be wonderful experiences for everyone involved, but that won't happen every time.
- Share the responsibility.
 - If you are in charge of planning and preparing everything for the activity, ask for help! Share the workload between parents (or extended family members if available) and get older children involved. For example, kids can help prepare food for the picnic rather than mom needing to do everything on her own.
- Get out there and do it.
 - Make doing things with your family a priority---set aside the time for family activities on a regular basis. If you are overwhelmed about doing certain activities with your family (does loading everyone up and going camping seem daunting?), start with small and basic activities (such as going out for a picnic and hike) and gradually work up to activities that require more energy and time. Doing even small activities with your family, such as playing catch in the backyard or having family game night, can provide wonderful benefits!
- Be prepared!
 - Plan for contingencies. Do you have a backup plan in case it rains or the museum is closed? Do you know how to get where you are going? Bring what you think you will need with you. Taking time to prepare before the activity will help decrease the stress and potential problems during the activity, giving you more time to enjoy having fun with your family.
- Be flexible.
 - Expect the unexpected---remember that things often don't go as planned, and that those times are often when the best memories are made. Look at everything that happens as an adventure and, if things go wrong or are challenging, as an opportunity to build certain family and individual strengths such as problem-solving and adaptability.
- Have fun!!
 - Enjoy the opportunity you have to be with your family. Of course there are challenges that come with every family life stage, but try to look for the good in whatever stage of life your family is at. Try to find activities that all family members can enjoy, or if family members have very different interests, switch off who gets to plan the activity. Do fun things together and enjoy getting to know each other and strengthening your relationships with one another.

Lesson Prepared by: Sarah Taylor Agate, Ph.D., Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism Management, Clemson University.

Lesson Reviewed by: Deborah J. Thomason, Ed.D., CFLE, Professor & Extension Specialist, Clemson University

Resources:

- 1 Huff, C., Widmer, M., McCoy, K., & Hill, B. (2003). The influence of challenging outdoor recreation on parent-adolescent communication. *Therapeutic Recreation Journal*, 37(1), 18-37.
- 2 Shaw, S. M., & Dawson, D. (2001). Purposive leisure: Examining parental discourses on family activities. *Leisure Sciences*, 23, 217-231.
- 3 Agate, S. T., Zabriskie, R. B., & Eggett, D. (2007). Praying, playing and successful families: An examination of family religiosity, family leisure, and family functioning. *Marriage and Family Review*, 42(2), 51-75.
- 4 Agate, J. R., Zabriskie, R. B., Agate, S. T., & Poff, R. (2009). Family leisure satisfaction and satisfaction with family life. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 41(2), 205-223.
- 5 Hutchinson, S. L., Afifi, T., & Krause, S. (2007). The family that plays together fares better: Examining the contribution of shared family time to family resilience following divorce. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, 46(3/4), 21-48.
- 6 Driver, B. L., Brown, P., & Peterson, G. (Eds.). (1991). *Benefits of leisure*. State College, PA: Venture.
- 7 Wells, M. S., Widmer, M. A., & McCoy, J. K. (2004). Grubs and grasshoppers: Challenge-based recreation and the collective efficacy of families with at-risk youth. *Family Relations*, 53(3), 326-333.
- 8 Homer, M. M., Freeman, P. A., Zabriskie, R. B., & Eggett, D. L. (2007). Rituals and relationships: Examining the relationship between family of origin rituals and young adult attachment. *Marriage and Family Review*, 42(1), 5-28.
- 9 Aron, C. S. (1999). *Working at play: A history of vacations in the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- 10 Lofgren, O. (1999). *On holiday: A history of vacationing*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- 11 Palmer, A., Freeman, P. A., & Zabriskie, R. B. (2007). Family deepening: A qualitative inquiry into the experience of families who participate in service expeditions. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 39(3), 438-458.
- 12 Shaw, S. M. (1992b). Redefining family leisure: An examination of women's and men's everyday experiences and perceptions of family time. *Leisure Sciences*, 14, 271-286.
- 13 Shaw, S. M. (1997). Controversies and contradictions in family leisure: An analysis of conflicting paradigms. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 29, 98-112.
- 14 Eichler, M. (1983). *Families in Canada today: Recent changes and their policy consequences*. Toronto, ON: Gage Publishing.
- 15 Orthner, D. K., & Herron, R. W. (1984). Leisure counseling for families. In E. T. Dowd (Ed.), *Leisure counseling: Concepts and applications* (pp. 178-197). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.