

## The American Counseling Association's "*Counseling Corner*" Weekly Columns

### Simple Steps to Stronger Family Ties

from the American Counseling Association

Most of us are well aware of how important family is. Our family members are the ones we turn to for love, support and comfort.

But all too often we simply assume that good family relationships just happen. The reality is, however, that relationships within a family need to be worked on just as much as the good relationships we may have with friends or co-workers.

Instead, many of us end up putting "family time" on the back burner. We have busy schedules and lots of activities already taking up a great deal of our days. All of that can make it difficult to make special efforts to cultivate family relationships. Yet if we don't do so it's easy for problems to develop unnoticed and for a family to grow apart.

Fortunately, it isn't all that difficult to strengthen relationships within a family. One of the simplest yet most effective steps is to hold family meetings. This doesn't mean simply hoping that everyone will be around for dinner on Thursday night, but rather it means actually planning a time and place when everyone can get together for a family discussion.

The purpose of a family meeting is to catch up on what has been happening to family members, and to work out everyday hassles that may have arisen. Try to make such meetings enjoyable, but first agree on basic ground rules. Such meetings require that everyone be present. And keep it civilized with only one person speaking at a time, and no name-calling, yelling, accusing or blaming. The point is to work together to iron out family issues, problems and plans. Meeting twice a month is an effective schedule for many families.

For busy families, another way to strengthen those family ties is simply to spend some relaxed, quality time together. Maybe it's just agreeing that everyone will sit down together for dinner one set night each week. Scheduling a regular family game night with no TV or phones is another way to enjoy one another's company.

Our lives today are all quite busy, but making an effort to give family members more personal attention can pay big benefits. Spending just a few minutes each day to catch up with your spouse or your kids can keep you current on their lives and help catch small issues before they become major problems. It's well worth the effort.

*"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to [ACAcornet@counseling.org](mailto:ACAcornet@counseling.org) or visit the ACA website at [www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org).*

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words: 397