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# My Family Heritage



## 4-H MEMBER MANUAL 2

According to a nationwide survey, eight out of ten American families believe their families play an important part in their lives. Studying your family is not only useful, but can be interesting as well. In Level II of the *4-H Family Strengths Project*, you can learn about

- why we live in families
- the family life cycle
- roles in families
- your family heritage
- strong families
- families around the world.



### What To Do

- Read the *Family Strengths 4-H Project Planning Guide*, 4H PG-10-24.
- Talk with your 4-H leader and project leader about your plans.
- Join the 4-H Family Strengths Project group or ask your leaders to check the *4-H Family Project Leader's Guide* for ways to help you.
- Talk with your family about your plans. Discuss some activities in which the family can participate.
- List your learning plan in *My 4-H Plan*, 4H R-1-80.
- Keep appropriate project records.
- When you finish the *4-H Family Strengths Project*, *My Family Heritage*, *Level II*, review your work and complete *My 4-H Plan*.
- Share what you did with your family, your leaders and others.
- You will be awarded a certificate when you complete the project satisfactorily.

## MY FAMILY HERITAGE

### Why We Live in Families

Families are as ancient as history itself. We have learned, for example, about early family life through cave drawings and excavations. Stories handed down from one family to the next generation are another way we know about our ancestors.

Even though families were formed because it was the best way to care for babies and children, families do more than provide for the young. Families care *about* each other.

Living in a family offers you a good chance to learn about yourself. You can see what you are like compared with other people, especially those in your own family. It is in families when you learn what it means to be male or female. What is masculine or feminine?

As part of a family, you discover your uniqueness: You are not like anybody else in the world. You understand what it means to be in your particular family. You become one of the "Jones" boys or one of "John and Mary's" children. You have identity as a special person in a particular family.

Living in a family teaches you how to get along with other people. You learn what is expected of you and how to behave outside the family. This is because families teach values to their children.

One reason why families are important as you get older is the need for a home base. People need to belong to a group in which they feel comfortable. Families can help during troubled times, also.

### The Family Life Cycle

Families grow and change, just as family members do; they go through stages. For example, you could say that families are in the expanding stage until the children are grown.

Then families enter the contracting stage, or get smaller as the children leave home. You could divide families into four stages.

- Stage 1.** Families with all their children under six years old
- Stage 2.** Families with children in school
- Stage 3.** Families with children in their teens or older and living at home
- Stage 4.** Families with grown children and living away from home

Many families go through more than one stage at a time. What stage or stages is your family in now?

Families go through cycles, each containing two generations — parents and children. The second cycle begins when those children grow up and have children. At any time during this course, this cycle may continue or stop short of completion, depending on whether or not a couple choose to have children.



### Roles in Different Families

To some degree, living in a family is like acting in a play. Everybody has a part or role to play. In real life though, you don't know how the next act or scene will turn out.

What are the parts or roles in your family? One role is money earner. Who is the money earner in your family: your father, mother, a son or daughter? You?

Another role in families is homemaker. Who buys the groceries and cooks? Who keeps the home straightened up, beds made, trash put outside? Who washes clothes and puts them away? Who is a homemaker in your family: your father, mother, your brothers or sisters? Your grandmother? You?

Who does the extra things that families need done? Who takes care of the yard, tends the garden or keeps the car in running order? Who takes care of you when you aren't sick enough to go to the hospital? Who taught you to read?

In most families these roles are shared. There may be more than one money earner, while everybody in the family has the homemaker role. Some roles are shared outside the family; for example, the schools accept the part of teaching you to read and exposing you to other facts.

Families need the flexibility to share roles and switch them around sometimes. Then, when one can't do his part, someone else in the family can help. What other roles could you perform in your family?

## Your Heritage

When something is handed down to you from an earlier generation, we say you inherited it. You inherit certain physical characteristics, like hair and eye color and blood type. A few diseases or the tendency to have them can be inherited, as can some personality characteristics. For example, some babies at birth are more energetic and alert than others; or one newborn may like to be held, while another does not want to be touched.

You also receive a cultural heritage from your ancestors. You inherit customs, food preferences and ways to prepare foods. Songs, sayings and crafts pass from one generation to the next. What are some examples of your family's cultural heritage?



Part of your cultural heritage contains family heirlooms or treasures. What kinds of things did your grandparents, great grandparents or other older persons have that your family considers special?

You inherit family names. In our country the children use the last name of the father called the surname. In some countries the mother's family name is used. What are the family names of your father's father and mother and your mother's father and mother?



## Strong Families

Families vary in size. They may be one-parent, two-parent or stepfamilies. Some families are stronger than others. The word "strong" is used to mean how that the family doesn't give up or fall apart when problems show up. The strong family keeps on doing its job of helping people grow.

What makes families strong? You can learn about strong families by watching how they live and talking to them. Here are some things that strong families do.

1. People who live in strong families appreciate each other and what each one is doing in the family. They give compliments, say thank you and show consideration.

2. Strong families have plans or goals for the family. They talk about what each person wants to accomplish. What career or work does each person want? What kind of education or training will be necessary? What skills does each person want to learn? What will it cost? Where do the family members want to travel and what do they want to own? Then, the whole family decides which of these individual goals or plans they can all accomplish. Some plans will cost the family too much money. Other plans will require space or equipment the family doesn't have. When everybody in the family agrees and helps work on the same goals, more can be done.

3. Strong families spend time together. Being together is a good way to get to know each other and helps you learn to get along, even though you may have to schedule time to be with one another. This is because so many activities separate family members; one person may go to a meeting here and another person may have a meeting somewhere else. Mothers say it is even hard to get a family together for meals these days.

Some families schedule a certain time every week when everybody is at home. When you value a strong family, you can say no to other activities and be with your family as planned. If all the family can't get

together often, then each person in the family makes an effort to spend some time with others individually. For example, you may talk with your parents awhile one evening when they are at home or do something with a brother or sister another time, and so on.



4. Spending time together helps families to communicate with each other. Talking is part of communication, so is listening. What does the other person think? How does he feel about a situation? What does he believe? Husbands and wives know that family members communicate without saying anything. Can you tell how others feel by their facial expressions or the way they walk? Sometimes people hide the way they feel and don't say what they really mean. In strong families, they try to communicate honestly. Being truthful and understanding helps you live and work together.

5. Members in strong families are able and willing to do another member's job when necessary. If the person responsible for the wash can't get to it, a parent or one of the children can do it. If the father or mother loses his or her job, the children can earn extra money. Or the family can agree to cut expenses or delay buying something they want.

6. Strong families know what they believe and try to live that way. The adults in the family talk with the children about what they believe. They set an example by the way they live. Times change and the younger generation has a chance to do things not available to their parents. Every now and then parents and children need to talk about these changes. Should they change their beliefs and the way they live? Or will they stand up for the old way of doing things? Each family has to decide what is best for the whole family.

What other qualities do families have? Some of these are a happy marriage, good relationships between parents and children, clear rules to follow and good organization for such work as paying bills. Any family member can help improve his or her family by picking one of these items and deciding how he or she can help the family make that quality even better.

## Families Around the World

Some people view our world as getting smaller. The earth isn't really shrinking; we are just learning more about people who live far away. Studying the culture of another country can be interesting. How do they dress? What do they eat? What kinds of work do they do? What do they make and which products do they send to other countries? What are some toys and games the children use? What are some favorite children's songs and stories? What are their holidays and special celebrations? How old is that country's history?

Learning about the culture of other countries helps us to understand and appreciate the people who live there. This familiarity makes it easier for us to become friends. Sometimes it helps us appreciate the heritage of our own family. Where did your ancestors live? In Europe, Asia, Africa or elsewhere? Or were they Indian Americans who were already here? How has the culture of families who lived in another place at another time influenced your present family?



## ACTIVITIES

### Why We Live in Families

1. Talk to a family counselor or read about how families influence a person's development.
2. Prepare a letter to your family describing what they do that makes you feel good about yourself.
3. Talk to or read about someone who grew up without a family and compare with your own family life.
4. Take a poll. Ask 10 people what they feel is most important about living in a family.
5. Read about family life more than 300 years ago.

### The Family Life Cycle

1. Prepare a family tree to include at least three generations.
2. Compare your family at home today with five years ago. What do you expect your family to be like 20 years from now?
3. Interview a family counselor, school counselor or clergyman; or read about conflict between generations in families.
4. Talk to a grandparent or person of an older age about family problems they faced at 13 years of age.
5. Talk to a grandparent about the joys of having grandchildren.

### Roles in Different Families

1. Talk with someone living in a one-parent family about how the jobs at home are divided among family members.
2. Compare the responsibilities and privileges you have with those of a person your age in another family.
3. List the jobs that must be done in the family every week. Check which ones you can do well. Mark other jobs you would like to learn or do better.

### Your Heritage

1. Interview one of your oldest relatives. Learn some customs handed down from earlier generations. Or make a tape recording of songs and sayings of older relatives. Compile a cookbook of family recipes.

2. Learn about some family treasures or heirlooms handed down from one generation to the next. Write a story about one of the treasures.
3. Trace some of your mannerisms and personality characteristics to your parents' and grandparents' generations.
4. Study blood types in your family and study genetic patterns.
5. Trace the course of your family name or surname. Learn other family names you have inherited.

### Strong Families

1. List some of your personal long-range plans or goals. Check the ones that can be goals for your whole family.
2. Plan a family time together.
3. Learn some communication games that help you become a better listener. Share them with your family.
4. Talk with the adults in your family about some of their beliefs and values. Which ones have you accepted as yours, too?
5. Choose one characteristic of strong families in which you think your family can improve. Keep a record of what you do on your own. Write a story about your success.

### Families Around the World

1. Interview a former International Four-H Youth Exchange (IFYE) or International Youth Development Project (YDP) participant regarding family life in another country.
2. Correspond with a person your age in another country.
3. Choose another country to study. Learn where it is, its climate, its products, its wealth and other information. What effects would these conditions have on families that live there? Write a story about families in that country. Compare family life there with your own family life.
4. Talk with a relative or other older person who has lived in another country. Compare family life there with your own family life.
5. Read or talk to old-timers about the history of your county. Were there immigrants from any particular countries? What old customs are still practiced in your county?



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