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### Family Strength : Getting Along Together

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# Family strength: GETTING ALONG TOGETHER

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# family strength:

## GETTING ALONG TOGETHER

Merle L. Gunsalus

### WE LIKE TO SEE FAMILIES GET ALONG

Someone has said that the family is the most important factor in our society. It is certainly the oldest and the most important of all human institutions. Granting this importance, it follows that families must gain in strength so that the larger community of the world can accomplish its goals for growth and harmony.

Happy family life gives us the richest and most lasting satisfactions that we experience. Individuals do not grow and develop healthily as persons with pleasing personality and good character unless they have felt warmth of affection, closeness, and belongingness in the family circle. A good family life helps in the development of well-adjusted individuals. It helps to lessen tensions and conflicts. Each of us react to a situation in a certain way because of the influence of the relationships in our families.

Each of us should have friends and relatives in our living experience. Today it is impossible to live alone. In fact we are dependent on others for much of what we formerly provided ourselves. We all need someone to sympathize when the going is tough, someone to encourage and approve our actions, and someone to share all the activities that we enjoy.

Wouldn't it be nice if each of us could say, "I get along with everyone, I have no problems and I'm completely happy"? Unfortunately this is not the case for many of us. We wish that

we could have better relations with our families, friends and acquaintances. If we say through our words, attitudes, or actions, "I don't care what people think of me" or "It isn't my fault that people don't like me," we are being dishonest with ourselves.

Good relationships don't just happen, neither are they inborn; they must be worked at conscientiously throughout life. Getting along with people will take the major share of our time even though we are inclined to think that the demands of our homemaking job or our out-of-the-home job take first place. Life would be uninteresting without people and no one ever has too many friends.

### MANY FAMILIES DO GET ALONG

Isn't this a challenge to improve our relationships with our own family as well as other people? We can do so if we want to. The wonderful thing about people is that they keep on learning. When we were born we knew nothing about getting along with people. As babies we wanted only to be fed, dry and warm.

As we grew bigger and older we learned that it was necessary to get along with people if we wanted them to like us. This was a painful process because it had to be learned just like the three "R's". The lessons of learning to live together are more difficult than learning school subjects, because they are so numerous and are rarely recorded in writing or print. They do

not exist in the form of rules, theories or guides to be strictly followed. While people are different in many ways and react differently to similar situations, they also have many likenesses. Even with all our likenesses each person has a different reason for behaving the way he does.

It is difficult to build a harmonious family life that satisfies each member. The job takes not only hours and days but months and years of the most careful planning by Mother, Dad, and other family members. With this complex reality facing us, it is no wonder that we find it hard to see a true picture of ourselves in relation to others. Many methods may have to be tried in order to achieve an enriched and happy family pattern because no two families are any more alike than any two individuals.

### EXCUSES

When we encounter hardship in getting along, we hunt for something that will let us "off the hook". We often try to shift the blame to some-

**"Everything happens to me  
and I get the short end every time."**



one else. "It's his fault." Or we say, "Why doesn't she do it?" In this case we just sit back and wait for someone else to help us out of the situation.

Perhaps we say, "It just isn't fair, everything happens to me and I get the short end every time". When we react in any of these ways, we are doing nothing to improve relationships and we are wasting energy.

### WE MUST UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER

We need to understand 'why' people behave and act the way they do. Playing detective in an effort to find out why Johnny pushes other people around, or calls names, or is rude will help increase our understanding. It is necessary that we place ourselves in the other fellow's shoes to completely understand his feelings and motives. This we call 'empathy'. We would then be on the way toward finding better answers. In addition, we need to take a honest look at our own feelings. Why do we forget our manners and want to rebel? We need to understand the feelings behind actions because behavior is a result of feelings.

This insight is the first step in understanding. We can go further by taking a clear look at our own assets and liabilities as we consider what we can do or how we can act to improve personal relationships.

Lets take a look at the people we like and those we do not like.

#### **We like people who—**

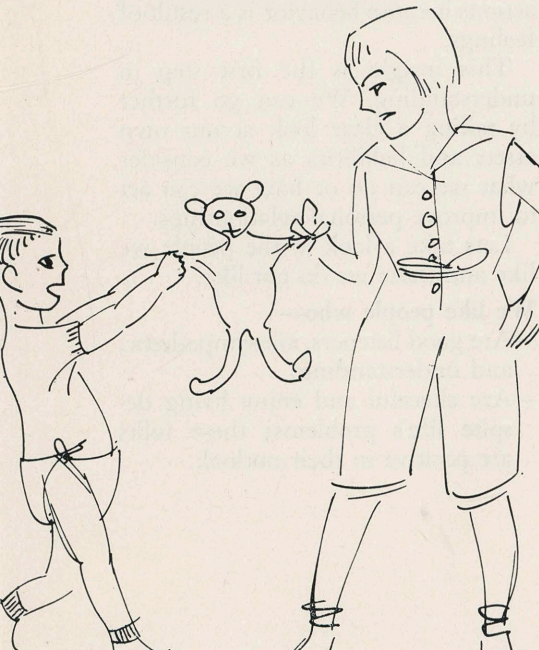
- Are good listeners, are sympathetic, and understanding.
- Are cheerful and enjoy living despite life's problems; these folks are positive in their outlook.

- Have good manners in everyday affairs at home and in the community.
- Help us feel that we amount to something.
- Accept us for what we are, not who we are.
- Are good sports.
- Are sincere and loyal.
- Do their share, assume responsibility, and are dependable.
- Are independent but able to cooperate with others.
- Show appreciation.
- Communicate easily with others.
- Are self-centered, show off, talk all of the time, insist on having their own way and take all the credit.
- Gossip or tattle.
- Make us feel unimportant, laugh at us, ignore us, tell us how to do everything, criticize us, draw attention to our faults, or brag about what they have or can do.
- Show poor manners.
- Never cooperate and do their share.
- Deceive us.
- Are too dependent.

#### **We do not like people who—**

- Are fault-finding and bossy.
- Are always permitting their emotions to get out of control—especially anger, fear, envy and hate.
- Impose on us or fail to keep appointments, ask too many favors, continually borrow without returning, and show no respect for our belongings.

**“We do not like people who lack respect for our belongings.”**



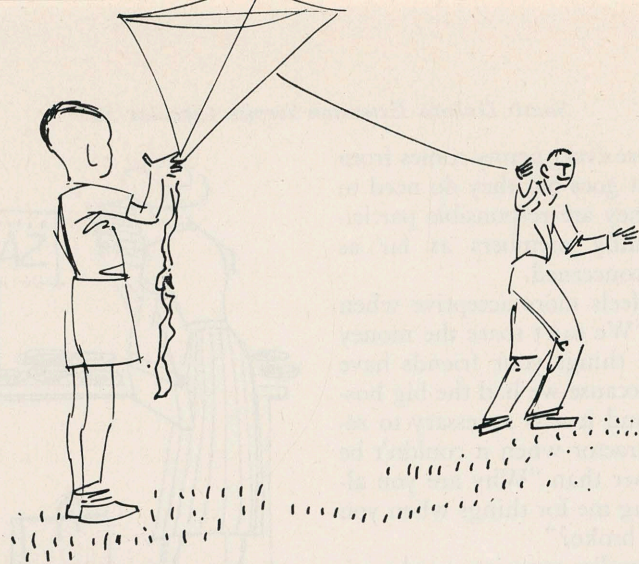
#### **WE CAN IMPROVE OURSELVES**

Our relationships improve when we develop a sense of humor. A well-timed laugh or joke can save the day. It is easy to take our failures, disappointments, or inability to act so seriously that they become all out of proportion to their importance. Children respond to a smile or a family joke. Adults should laugh with their children and not at them.

We improve our relations by being patient. Anything good usually takes patience. Time often corrects a situation or helps us to see things in a new and more tolerant way.

We get along easier when we know how to apologize and how to accept one. A “big” person can admit that he is wrong without feeling inferior. We all have faults and make mistakes. Have you discovered how very often the families and people you know have the same things happening to them that have happened to you? Parents, comparing notes over a cup of coffee or talking together in a study discussion group, discover this truth the very first time they get together.

We can increase our understand-



**“Dads recognize the importance of playing and working with sons and daughters.”**

ing. Trying to understand why other people behave as they do does not always mean that we approve of all their actions but it helps us to see the other side of the story and to realize why that person acts as he or she does.

Our family will benefit when we try to improve family relationships. Provide an atmosphere that promotes good relationships. Mother and Dad take the lead here by setting good models of behavior for other members of the family. The old saying that “human nature can’t be changed” is false. We may not wish to change our ways but it is not impossible to do so if we want to.

Nowadays Dads are doing things with the entire family as well as with each of the children. Dads recognize the importance of playing and working with sons and daughters. They have lots to give and lots to receive from that relationship.

Do you know parents who force their standards of excellence or accomplishment on their children?

Surely you know a father who insists that his son be a basketball star because he himself was one in high school; or the mother who says her daughter must learn to be the best cook and seamstress in the county because she won so many blue ribbons when she was a girl? This does not mean that parents cannot interest their children in the things they like best. It does mean, however, that common interests are developed and shared in the family and that the child is participating in these things because he wants to and not because he’s afraid of Dad and Mom’s disapproval if he does not. There are many things to be enjoyed mutually in the family—everyday chores, vacations, holidays, surprises and family traditions, birthdays, church activities and community affairs.

Most families can improve their handling of financial problems by open and free discussion of many phases of income and spending. Junior and his sister don’t always need to

know where every penny comes from or where it goes but they do need to feel that they are responsible participating family members as far as money is concerned.

Johnny feels more acceptive when dad says, "We can't spare the money for all the things your friends have this year because we had the big hospital bill and it was necessary to replace the tractor when it couldn't be fixed" rather than "Why are you always asking me for things when you know I'm broke?"

Many families experience unhappiness over the way money is spent because they are not sharing any part of the picture. Dad too often feels that he is a machine feeding out money, mother too often feels that everything comes first except the things she needs for the house and for herself, and the children too often have no concept of the worries and problems to be met. It may be more satisfying to discuss this problem in front of the children or with them, depending on their ages, matter-of-factly, impartially, and without personal ill-feeling. There are real values in keeping our spending within our means so that all family needs can be met.

The family relationships will also improve when we recognize that people differ and that the needs and desires of individual members are occasionally separate from family needs. Manners were begun because people needed ways to show friendliness and thoughtfulness. All manners cannot be learned from rules. We must make up some of them as we go along. As our manners improve we make more friends at home, at school and everywhere we go. Good manners are



**"There are real values in keeping our spending within our means so that all family needs can be met."**

simply courtesies that make the people around us more comfortable.

Manners within the home are just as important as manners practiced outside the home. Every so often we find ourselves in a situation where our patience is taxed or our temper is short and we become quite angry. Our manners may not be strong enough to overcome our desire to 'fight' the situation. We feel better when we recognize these 'differences' and learn to live with them.

We never reach perfection no matter how logical our reasoning or how idealistic our planning. We can't be perfect as children or as parents, so our homes are going to be imperfect in some respects. This need not be discouraging. Perhaps we can relax a bit, shed our hair-shirts and enjoy daily family occurrences. In doing so we can admit our imperfections and by facing them squarely try to



strengthen and improve ourselves. In getting along with others we add to our skills and at the same time admit that there is always room for improvement. There will be ups and downs surely; snags and rough spots will occur. We learn that conflict is not entirely undesirable.

The difficult job of building a harmonious family life can be challenging and the result will be worth the effort. The important steps are a true desire to be helpful to one's family and friends, an open mind, and a conviction that warm interest in working together used with intelligence and knowledge can do wonders.

The Midcentury White House Conference, made up of representatives from every corner of our country, constructed a pledge to children that is an inspiration to parents to provide good and happy homes for their families. Here it is:

From your earliest infancy we give you our love, so that you may grow with trust in yourself and in others.

We will recognize your worth as a person and we will help you to strengthen your sense of belonging.

We will respect your right to be yourself and at the same time help you to understand the rights of others, so that you may experience cooperative living.

We will help you to develop initiative and imagination, so that you may have the opportunity freely to create.

We will encourage your curiosity and your pride in workmanship, so that you may have the satisfaction that comes from achievement.

We will provide the conditions for wholesome play that will add to your

learning, to your social experience, and to your happiness.

We will illustrate by precept and example the value of integrity and the importance of moral courage.

We will encourage you always to seek the truth.

We will provide you with all the opportunities possible to develop your own faith in God.

We will open the way for you to enjoy the arts and to use them for deepening your understanding of life.

We will work to rid ourselves of prejudice and discrimination, so that together we may achieve a truly democratic society.

We will work to lift the standard of living and to improve our economic practices, so that you may have the material basis for a full life.

We will provide you with rewarding educational opportunities, so that you may develop your talents and contribute to a better world.

We will protect you against exploitation and undue hazards and help you grow in health and strength.

We will work to conserve and improve family life and, as needed, to provide foster care according to your inherent rights.

We will intensify our search for new knowledge in order to guide you more effectively as you develop your potentialities.

As you grow from child to youth to adult, establishing a family life of your own and accepting larger social responsibilities, we will work with you to improve conditions for all children and youth.

Aware that these promises to you cannot be fully met in a world at war, we ask you to join us in a firm dedi-

cation to the building of a world society based on freedom, justice and mutual respect.

SO MAY YOU grow in joy, in faith in God and in man, and in those qualities of vision and of the spirit that will sustain us all and give us a new hope for the future.

### ARE YOU GUILTY, TOO?

These phrases are common expressions frequently heard. Look at them and do two things; decide why the expression should not be used and think of a better way to handle each situation.

"You're not doing that the right way."

"I did a much better job than she did."

"Let me wear that scarf, it looks better on me anyway."

"Why are you always trying to show off?"

"Well I got along without a bicycle when I was your age."

"I'll give you a dollar for every 'A' you get on your report card."

"I'll spank you if you do that."

"Why do you copy all of your dad's faults?"

"Don't think you can tell me a lie."

"It's time to do the dishes now."

"Don't touch that plant."

"You're a bad boy to play with matches."

"It doesn't matter what she thinks because her family isn't important."

"You certainly wouldn't catch me doing that."

"Nice boys don't hit their sisters."

"I've changed my mind; you can't go to the game."

"I don't care if your father did say you could."

"Don't think you can tell me a lie!"

