

12-1-2003

## Using a Family Memory Book to Strengthen Families

Alayne Torretta

*Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Warren County*, [torretta@aesop.rutgers.edu](mailto:torretta@aesop.rutgers.edu)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

---

### Recommended Citation

Torretta, A. (2003). Using a Family Memory Book to Strengthen Families. *The Journal of Extension*, 41(6), Article 19. <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/joe/vol41/iss6/19>

This Tools of the Trade is brought to you for free and open access by the Conferences at TigerPrints. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Journal of Extension by an authorized editor of TigerPrints. For more information, please contact [kokeefe@clemson.edu](mailto:kokeefe@clemson.edu).



December 2003 // Volume 41 // Number 6 // Tools of the Trade // 6TOT1



PREVIOUS  
ARTICLE



ISSUE  
CONTENTS



NEXT  
ARTICLE

## Using a Family Memory Book to Strengthen Families

### Abstract

The Family Memory Book is a useful tool designed to facilitate communication among family members. It is an ideal supplemental activity for family-strengthening programs. Many parents and grandparents today want their families to bond or simply get along better. One of the ways families can give themselves a "gift of bonding" is to make a family memory book. Because the book is a collection of pictures and feelings, it is a powerful, lingering statement of the strengths of the family. Putting these thoughts and feelings in an attractive book gives the family a precious keepsake.

### Alayne Torretta

County 4-H Agent  
Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Warren County  
Belvidere, New Jersey  
Internet Address: [Torretta@aesop.rutgers.edu](mailto:Torretta@aesop.rutgers.edu)

Families who meet any of USDA's poverty risk factors typically have children who are susceptible to a number of negative outcomes such as child abuse and neglect, substance abuse, crime, teenage pregnancy, violence, poor health, underachievement, and various other outcomes (Sherman, 1998). Strengthening families becomes key in reducing these risk factors and increasing protective factors (USDJ, 1998).

A *Family Memory Book* (Torretta, 2003a) is a useful tool designed to facilitate communication among family members. It is an ideal supplemental activity for family-strengthening programs. Many parents and grandparents today want their families to bond or simply get along better. The memory book is most effective as a supplemental activity in a structured family-strengthening program where goals are increasing healthy communication. It encourages communication among family members and allows parents to communicate their hopes and dreams for their children. It also provides for youth to share what they enjoy about being a member of the family.

As a part of a family-strengthening program, the memory book assists members in internalizing concepts of acceptance, family values, and trust explored during the program. Family members are also less likely to be defensive or mask their feelings for fear of ridicule after participating in activities where the emphasis lies in trust, bonding, and communication.

When all family members participate in the completion of the book, it acknowledges the importance of each member in the family unit and reinforces that each member has something positive to contribute to the family. While the family memory book has room for pictures, it is much more. It is a collection of feelings and thoughts from each family member. Putting these thoughts and feelings in an attractive book gives the family a precious keepsake.

Using a three-ring binder encourage families to add pages through the years. After the family completes pages of the book, they insert into three-hole clear plastic covers for inclusion in the binder. It is important to select a notebook with a clear plastic cover so that families can create individualized covers. Rutgers Cooperative Extension has created starter pages and a *User's Guide* (Torretta, 2003b) that includes tips on how to make the family more comfortable about sharing feelings. Following is a description of the contents of the Family Memory Book and how they are used.

## Contents and Use of the Family Memory Book

### Cover

The cover is an 8.5 x 11 sheet of paper with a blank renaissance shield divided into four fields. This is for the family to create their own family crest. Inside each field, families indicate their values. When exploring values in a strengthening families program, consider the six pillars of good character from the Character Counts!™ movement listed on the Families of Character page. The values can be drawn or written in the shield. If a 1.5 x 2 inch space at the top for the family name(s) is left, it becomes the title of the book. The 8.5 x 11 size paper fits into the clear plastic cover of the three-ring notebook.

### **Family Creed Page**

This page contains the family creed from Iowa Cooperative Extension's *Iowa Strengthening Families* (Molgaard, Kumpfer, & Fleming, 1997), which reads: "We are strong families who care about each other and have fun together." The framing of the creed is flowers. There is another frame below for inserting a photo of the family.

### **101 Ways to Praise Your Child**

This is a page for supplementing the adults' vocabulary in praising their children. It enhances previous discussions about the value of positive reinforcement and provides adults with verbal tools necessary to reinforce positive behavior. It acts as a pleasant reminder for parents to take home.

### **For You My Child, I Hope**

This page is to be completed by parent/grandparent/guardian of child. There should be one for each child in the family. Adults can reflect on their hopes and dreams for children in their care. By focusing on the long-term goals of child rearing, this page has the potential to open the adults' minds to where they would like to see their children in adulthood. Adults can work together to discuss how they would like to complete the sentence.

### **We Have Fun Together**

This decorative page is for each youth in the family. The design of this page is an open-ended statement to be completed by the child, which states: "I like it when my family \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_." Youth can express such concepts as "gets along" or more simply "watches TV together." The important thing is for children to think about and voice the positives regarding their family and for the adults to see what their children value in their family.

### **Family Jewels**

This page likens family values to jewels, something to keep safe and protect. It is used in conjunction with the adventure game, Family Jewels, which is played with more than one family. Families agree upon and write their values on a scrap of paper. The facilitator puts the "jewels" of one family in a small velvet jewel bag for safekeeping and places it on the floor in the center of the room.

The family must protect the bag by surrounding it, but they cannot touch it. They may only tag other families who attempt to steal their jewels to freeze them in their tracks. Other families must then attempt to swipe the jewels and avoid being tagged. Their values may be similar to those on the cover.

### **Families of Character**

This page provides family members with working definitions of the Josephson Institute's six pillars of good character:

- Trustworthiness,
- Respect,
- Responsibility,
- Fairness,
- Caring, and
- Citizenship.

### **Family Treasure Chest**

This page, adapted from *Building Family Strengths* (Thames & Thomason, 1999), allows members of the family to reflect on what matters most to each at the current time. Each member of the family completes this page. It becomes a "snap shot" of what the family and its members were like on the date it is completed.

### **Family History**

This page, also adapted from *Building Family Strengths* (Thames & Thomason, 1999), allows the family to discuss at least the one thing they have in common: their heritage. The family completes this page together, discussing their ancestors, where their family came from, and where they settled in the U.S.

## References

Molgaard, V., Kumpfer, K., & Fleming, E. (1997). Strengthening families program. Iowa Cooperative Extension, Iowa State University, Ames, IA.

Sherman, A. (1998). Poverty matters: The cost of child poverty in America. *Children's Defense Fund*, [Online]. Available at: [http://www.childrensdefense.org/fs\\_povmat.php](http://www.childrensdefense.org/fs_povmat.php)

Thames, B., & Thomason, D. (1999). *Building family strengths*. Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service, Clemson University, Clemson, SC.

Torretta, A. (2003). *Family memory book* 4H260. Rutgers Cooperative Extension.

Torretta, A. (2003). *Family memory book user's guide*. Rutgers Cooperative Extension.

United States Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency and Prevention Juvenile (1998). *Effective family strengthening interventions*. (Juvenile Justice Bulletin). Washington D.C.: Kumpfer, K.L., & Alvarado, R.

*Copyright* © by Extension Journal, Inc. ISSN 1077-5315. Articles appearing in the Journal become the property of the Journal. Single copies of articles may be reproduced in electronic or print form for use in educational or training activities. Inclusion of articles in other publications, electronic sources, or systematic large-scale distribution may be done only with prior electronic or written permission of the *Journal Editorial Office*, [joe-ed@joe.org](mailto:joe-ed@joe.org).

If you have difficulties viewing or printing this page, please contact [JOE Technical Support](#)