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Creating a Strong Family **Appreciation and Affection: Developing an Emotional Bond**

John DeFrain, Extension Specialist, Family and Community Development

If I were to use one word to describe families, I would choose the word emotion. Families are about emotion. When you are focusing on strong families, you are talking about positive emotional bonds with each other.

Back in the days when I was a family therapist, it often felt like the hair would stand up on the back of my neck as I walked into a roomful of family members who were angry with each other. The hostility seemed to give a dangerous electrical charge to the environment. Everyone could feel it. Almost instinctively.

Likewise, when you walk into a roomful of family members who have genuine appreciation and affection for each other, there also is something in the air: a warm, fuzzy, indescribable feeling that fills the family's world with a positive glow.

People in strong families care deeply for each other and let each other know this on a regular basis. They feel good about each other and know how important it is to continually express these feelings. One divorcing husband told us, "She cooked dinner every evening, but it never occurred to me to thank her for it. She didn't thank me for going to work every day." But we can't afford to take loved ones for granted and giving sincere thanks builds a positive atmosphere where bonds of emotional connection are nurtured.

Interviews with families in our research have led us to "guesstimate" that the ratio of positive to negative interchanges in strong families may reach the 10-to-1 or even 20-to-1 level. For every negative interaction, family members have at least 10 positive ones. As one father told us, "You pay a

This is one of a series of eight NebFacts, including two publications which introduce the series and provide a broader perspective.

- [What Is a Strong Family, Anyway?.](#) NF00-439
- [Qualities of Strong Families.](#) NF00-446
- [Appreciation and Affection: Developing an Emotional Bond.](#) NF00-440
- [Commitment:](#)

big price when you verbally attack your loved ones. You hurt them deeply, and they don't forget quickly. I always feel like I need to pay a bit of penance after attacking them and try very hard to focus on their strengths as much as possible."

I gave a homework assignment in a college class on parenting I was teaching. Students were encouraged to tell their parents about the good feelings they had for them. This never happens in many families, and it can be quite difficult for family members to be more verbal about their deepest emotions. "I can't do that," one 6-foot-6 farm boy complained to me. "Do it or you'll flunk the assignment," I teased him.

The next week he came back to class. "How'd it go?" I asked. "I couldn't do it," he replied, looking down at his shoes. "Do it!" I urged. The next week he came back to class, this time with a big smile on his face. "What happened?" one of the other students asked.

"Dad and I were working on the tractor stuck in the mud out in the field. We were in our overalls, covered with mud. I said to him, 'Dad ...' He looked at me kind of funny.

"I said, 'Dad, I love you,' and I threw my arms around him. And he stood there like a stunned rock for a second and then he hugged me back and said, 'I love you, Son,' and we stood there together in the mud, patting each other on the back and hugging each other and crying. It felt so good."

Express the strong, positive feelings you have for each other in your family, and they will grow.

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- [Enjoyable Time Together: A Journey of Happy Memories,](#)
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- [Spiritual Well-Being: Sacred Connections,](#)
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