



# WINGS FOR LIFE

Emotional Wellness for Families

**ESS406.5S | Fifth Grade** **Series II**

*This is an informational fact sheet. The purpose of the publication is to provide basic information. It is not intended to be used for assessment or treatment of mental health. If you suspect your child or teen needs help in the emotional wellness and mental health areas, please contact a mental health professional immediately.*

*An online directory of mental health services in South Dakota, searchable by town, is available at [www.sdkidsmentalhealth.org](http://www.sdkidsmentalhealth.org). Other mental health resources are at this site as well. Information can also be obtained by calling 211 in Rapid City or Sioux Falls or calling toll-free 1-877-377-0941 from other areas of South Dakota.*

*We would appreciate your feedback on this “Wing For Life” newsletter. Please take three minutes to complete the on-line survey: [www.seuw.org/wings.aspx](http://www.seuw.org/wings.aspx)*

## IN THIS NEWSLETTER:

- Building a Strong Family
- Building Character: Diligence is Working Hard
- Busy or Overscheduled?
- Talking to Your Child about Disaster and News

## Building a Strong Family

Life can be a challenge for your family with pressures on time, money, and emotions. Sometimes the home becomes the place where everyone is exhausted or grouchy. Still, there are ways for your family to be strong and happy and make your home a haven. The following are common traits identified in resilient families who deal positively with life stressors. Together you can identify strong traits of your family and then build on that base by choosing one or more traits to work on as a family.



### Caring and Appreciation

Using good manners and everyday courtesy toward your child or spouse go a long way to let them know you care about them. Complimenting good behavior and thanking efforts are important as well as showing your appreciation. A quick pat on the back, a hug, or a handclasp can also mean a lot to people of all ages. Avoid saying things that are unkind or sarcastic.

### Time Together

While quality time gets a lot of attention, quantity time is just as important. The more time you spend together the better chances are that you will share quality experiences. Do everyday things together, such as eating meals, doing chores, talking about the events of the day, or popping some popcorn and playing a game. Your child learns how much she is valued and loved when you give her the precious resource of your time.

### Encouragement

In resilient families, members feel accepted for who they are. Help your child find and build his own unique talents and interests. Don't try to make him into something he's not. Believing in your child and his abilities will teach belief in oneself. While time together is crucial, it is also important to encourage individual involvement in activities outside the family. These experiences help to develop self-sufficiency and an individual identity.

Celebrate each family member's successes within and outside the family and help each other learn from mistakes.

### Commitment

Build commitment in your family by valuing things that make your family special. One way to build commitment is to practice family traditions.

Traditions could include stories and prayers before bedtime, Saturday morning pancakes, making cookies for the

These parenting guides are a gift to you from the Sioux Empire United Way. They were adapted and written by the South Dakota Cooperative Extension Service. We hope the information is helpful and gives you additional resources to assist in your efforts to raise healthy and successful children.

For additional resources on children's mental health, visit [www.sdkidsmentalhealth.org](http://www.sdkidsmentalhealth.org).

This is a United Way partner program that connects you to all available services for your family.



holidays, or an annual camping trip to a favorite spot. A family tradition is any activity or event that occurs regularly and holds special meaning for your family.

### **Communication**

Talk and listen to each other. Share feelings, hopes, dreams, fears, joys, sorrows, experiences, growth, and needs while driving in the car or while sharing household chores. You can encourage talk by saying, “Tell me more;” “Wow. That must have been exciting;” “What was the best part of the day for you?” Play a talking game. Write questions that range from silly to serious, draw out of a box, and respond.

### **Adaptive Ability**

Routines and patterns give stability to the family; however, adaptability is also a signature of strong families. Often the change or event itself is not stressful, but the way you react

to or perceive the event causes you stress. There are a number of common changes most families face. Children get older. Adults switch jobs or retire. Families are reshaped by birth, adoption, marriage, divorce, sickness, and death. Families move to different communities. Understanding that change is a common, healthy part of life can give you a more adaptable perspective.

### **Spirituality**

The belief in something greater than you can build family resiliency. Shared beliefs provide your family with purpose, meaning, and guidelines to live by. Being a member of a religious community, having faith in humanity, behaving morally, feeling unity with living things, taking walks in a natural setting, and stargazing can all enrich your family’s spirituality.

## **BUILDING CHARACTER:**

### **Diligence is Working Hard**

What does it mean to say, “Genius is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration?” One meaning is that people may think that you are a genius for accomplishing a difficult task but you may recognize that it was really a matter of rolling up your sleeves and just doing the hard work required to finish the task. Your diligence and hard work are what paid off in the long run.

Your child can learn about being diligent at an early age through school experiences in the classroom and with homework. What are the key components of diligence?

- Approach the important tasks in life with discipline and focus.
- Work hard and don’t give up.
- Persevere even when things become difficult or discouraging.
- Try creative solutions to challenges.
- Always do your best.

How do you instill an awareness that hard work is good and valuable? Discuss these ideas with your child.

- There is pride and dignity in doing one’s best, even if the result does not come out exactly as you hoped it would.
- Be productive, participate, show up! People who sit on the sidelines and don’t try will never know if they could have succeeded.

- Be inventive. Sometimes the answer is to approach a challenge in a completely new way. Don’t be bound by what has always been done before. Use your imagination and creativity to think of an original approach to this situation.
- Have pride in what you have accomplished. Others may not notice it but if you have set goals for yourself and you accomplish them, there will be the self-satisfaction of knowing that you achieved what you set out to do.

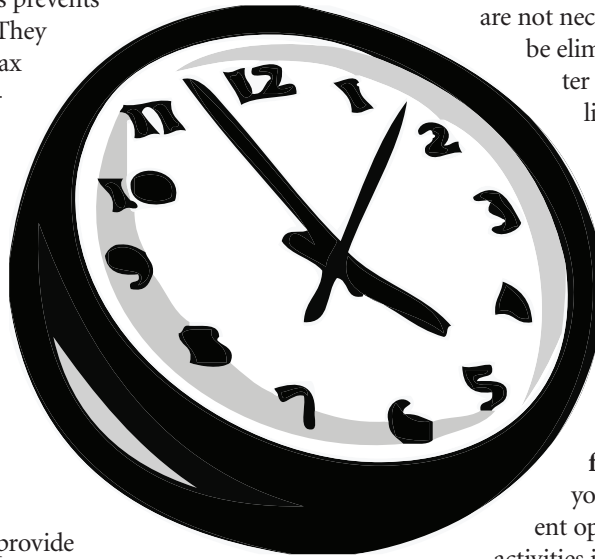
Beyond school, there are other areas where children can practice diligence:

- Learning to play a musical instrument.
- Becoming skilled in a sport.
- Overcoming a disability, such as dyslexia, stuttering, or fear of public speaking.
- Developing a personal quality, such as patience, punctuality, kindness, politeness, helpfulness, listening.

Encourage your child to be a contributing member of his world — family, school, or community. Expect him to be a contributing member of your family by giving him responsibilities. Support him in developing a sense of pride in his school. Encourage your child to improve all aspects of his classroom and school environment, program, or activities. This will help him feel more like part of his community.

## Busy or Overscheduled?

Parents hope to provide their children with many activities to enrich their lives and help them become successful adults. However, families can quickly find themselves overscheduled. This prevents children from just being kids. They don't have opportunities to relax between activities, actually creating more stress in their lives. Even the everyday, common stressors may seem overwhelming. Parents especially feel the chaos of overloaded children's schedules. Parents attempt to juggle, not only their own work and civic responsibilities, but also their children's multiple obligations for school, sports, and extracurricular activities.



Here are some tips on how to provide opportunities for your child without overloading your family's schedule.

**Allow kids to be kids.** Ensure plenty of time for relaxation and play without organized or structured responsibilities. Don't try to keep up with other families. As a family, decide on how many activities per semester or summer is appropriate.

**Don't forget about family time.** Building a strong family connection helps provide support for your child. Too many distractions and a hectic pace leave too little time to build supportive relationships. Make the most of any opportunity for one-on-one conversations with

your child. For example, take advantage of car trips between events to have a real conversation with your child.

**Evaluate schedules.** Are there some things that are not necessary in the schedule and could be eliminated? How could time be better managed? Are your priorities in line with what's best for your family? Does your child even want to be in a particular activity? Keep in mind your child's interests may have changed from one year to the next. Take time to talk to your child about what is important to him.

**Make organized activities family activities.** If you want your child to participate in different opportunities, try making these activities into family events. Without adding another practice or responsibility to an already busy schedule, you can turn many activities into family outings. Your child's soccer game might be followed by the whole family staying in the park for a picnic.

Your child needs time for creative play, imagination, reflection, and relaxation. Carefully examine your family's current "obligations" to see if they are meaningful and worth the time invested. Talk to your child about his feelings toward the things he participates in. Spending more time as a family rather than going to activities may provide a stronger foundation for your child's emotional and mental development.

## TODAY'S ISSUE

### Talking to Your Child about Disaster and News

Children react to a disaster in different ways. They don't have to be directly in the disaster zone to be affected emotionally. They could be affected simply by hearing about the event and seeing the images on TV or by discussions with their peers. It is important for parents to know how children might respond to disasters and how to talk to them about it.

It is normal to see changes in sleeping and eating patterns, along with unexplainable aches and pains. Children may withdraw from their play groups or friends, compete for

more attention from their parents, fear going to school, allow their performance at school to drop, and find it hard to concentrate. They also may become more aggressive.

When talking to your child after a disaster here are some tips to follow:

- Provide the opportunity to talk about what is in the media and to ask questions.
- Tell your child your feelings and fears about the situation.
- Tell your child the truth about what occurred but do not create a sense of panic.
- Don't be afraid to admit that you can't answer all of his questions.

## WINGS FOR LIFE

- Answer the questions at a level your child can understand. Don't use big words that will confuse your child.
  - Provide opportunities for your child to talk about the event more than once because there will probably be more questions as time goes on.
  - Use this as an opportunity to create a family emergency plan. This may be very comforting to you and your child.
  - Allow your child to discuss other fears and questions since the communication lines are open.
  - If your child does not want to talk about what happened, suggest other ways of expression such as drawing pictures, playing with toys or writing stories and poems.
  - Monitor your child's exposure to the media. Some parents may wish to limit how many graphic and troubling scenes their child views. If possible, watch the news reports with your child as this is when he might develop questions.
- Talk with your child about the difference between the news and real life.
  - In addition to the tragic views, help your child see the heroic actions and assistance offered by people to disaster victims.
  - You may want to help your child find a way to help those affected by the disaster. Children can send drawings and cards to the victims or volunteer with community organizations that are assisting the victims.

If you are worried about your child during this time or feel your child is overly anxious or depressed, please contact your physician, school counselor, or local mental health professional.

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For information on children's mental health services in South Dakota, [www.sdkidsmentalhealth.org](http://www.sdkidsmentalhealth.org).

*The term "parent" is used throughout this newsletter. It is intended to encompass guardians and primary caregivers as well.*

Printing and distribution provided by



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