



DEVELOPING A STRONG FAMILY LIFE: WHAT CAN CHURCHES DO?

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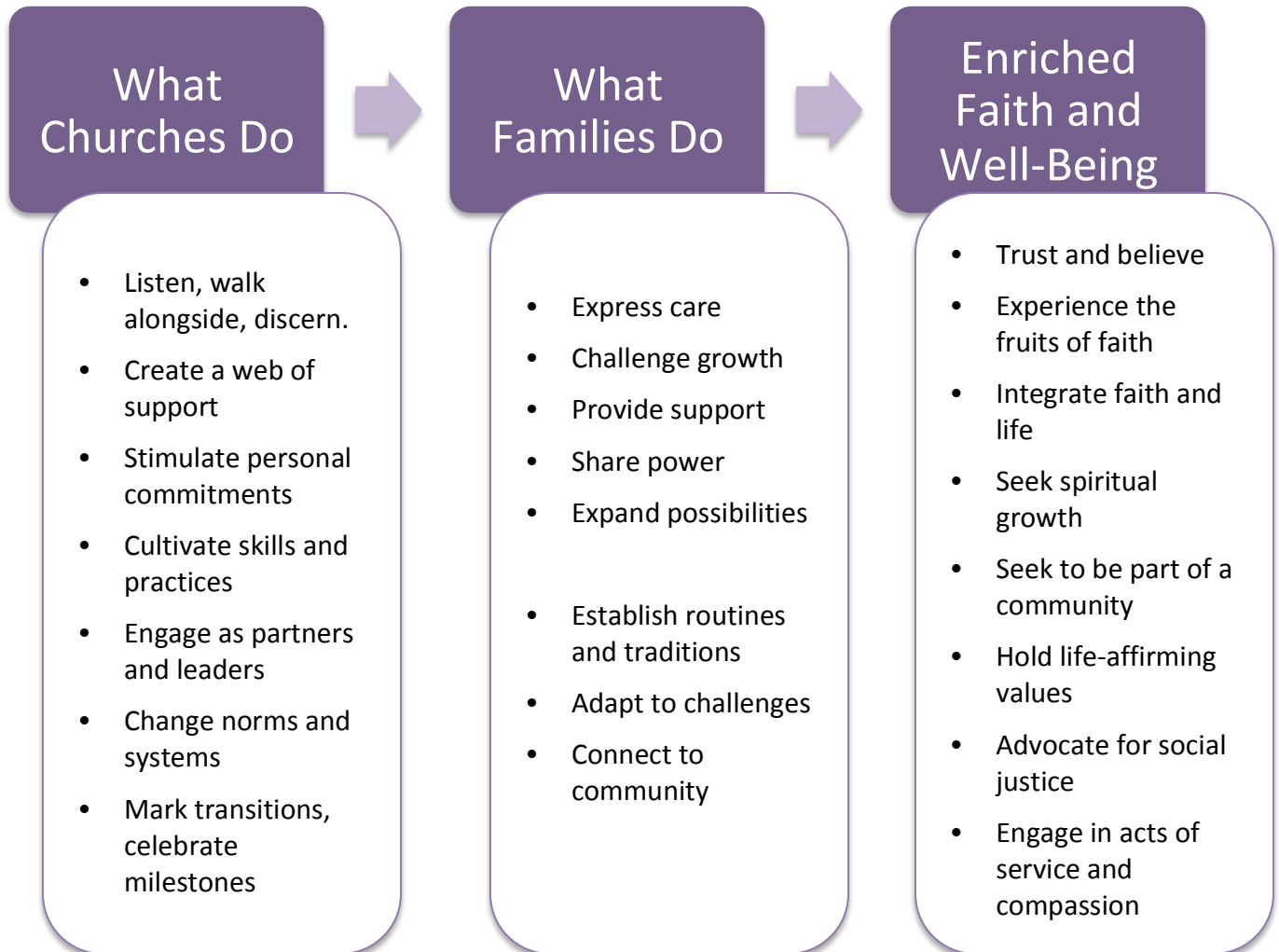
Minneapolis, MN

Session Overview

1. The Big Picture: A Theory of Change
2. Refresher: Why Family Strengths
3. What Makes Families Strong?
4. What Can Churches Do? Seven Strategies
5. Ideas to Take Home

The Big Picture: A Theory of Change

A “theory of change” is a tool that seeks to articulate the ways actions influence or impact behaviors, which shape longterm goals. The diagram below is a simple theory of change that aims to connect faith maturity (the longterm goal) with family strengths, and then showing what congregations do that can influence family strengths. Obviously, other factors come into play as well.



When Families Are in Crisis: 10 Strength-Based Responses

A common question is: How do you approach families in crisis from a strengths-based perspective? Consider these options.

1. Reinforce, don't replace, family's strengths
 - Reinforce their capacity and self-efficacy

 - Maintain a sense of agency or autonomy

2. Give them time to talk things through (when they're ready)

3. Be proactive (not pesky) in offering support

4. Help family connect with people they trust

5. Walk alongside (more than giving advice)

6. Offer practical, specific support

7. Connect family to networks, resources

8. Advocate on the family's behalf, when needed and when requested

9. Encourage them to take breaks (and make it possible)

10. Let families make meaning in ways that work for them (not necessarily for you)

Family Strengths: Relationships and Family Systems¹

DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| 1. Express Care | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be dependable—Be someone I can trust. • Listen—Really pay attention when we are together. • Believe in me—Make me feel known and valued. • Be warm—Show me you enjoy being with me. • Encourage—Praise me for my efforts and achievements. |
| 2. Challenge Growth | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expect my best—Expect me to live up to my potential. • Stretch—Push me to go further. • Hold me accountable—Insist I take responsibility for my actions. • Reflect on failures—Help me learn from mistakes and setbacks. |
| 3. Provide Support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Navigate—Guide me through hard situations and systems. • Empower—Build my confidence to take charge of my life. • Advocate—Defend me when I need it. • Set boundaries—Put in place limits that keep me on track. |
| 4. Share Power | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect me—Take me seriously and treat me fairly. • Include me—Involve me in decisions that affect me. • Collaborate—Work with me to solve problems and reach goals. • Let me lead—Create opportunities for me to take action and lead. |
| 5. Expand Possibilities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspire—Inspire me to see possibilities for my future. • Broaden horizons—Expose me to new ideas, experiences, and places. • Connect—Introduce me to people to help me grow. |

FAMILY SYSTEMS DYNAMICS

- | | |
|--|---|
| Establish Routines and Traditions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoy time together—Regularly do everyday things together as a family. • Share family meals—Eat meals together most days in a typical week. • Balance priorities—Navigate competing activities and expectations at home, school, and work. • Celebrate milestones and traditions—Make holidays, rituals, and celebrations meaningful part of family life. |
| Adapt to Challenges | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage daily commitments—Family members effectively navigate competing activities and expectations at home, school, and work. • Be adaptable—The family adapts well when faced with changes. • Solve problems—Family members work together to solve problems and deal with challenges. • Democratic decision making—Family members have a say in decisions that affect the family. |
| Connect to Community | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect with neighbors—Look out for one another in the neighborhoods where we live. • Participate in enriching activities—Take part in programs and activities that help family members learn and grow. • Tap community resources—Have people and places to turn to when help is needed. • Lead and serve together—Work together on issues and causes we care about. |

¹ Primary source is the Olson Circumplex Family Systems Theory. See Olson, D. H. (2000). Circumplex model of marital and family systems. *Journal of Family Therapy*, 22, 144-167.

Reflecting on the Family Strengths Framework

What opportunities do you see for nurturing this strength with families in your congregation and community?

Families in the Congregation

Families in the Community

DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS

1. Express Care

2. Challenge
Growth

3. Provide
Support

4. Share Power

5. Expand
Possibilities

FAMILY SYSTEMS DYNAMICS

6. Establish
Routines and
Traditions

7. Adapt to
Challenges

8. Connect to
Community

Strategies to Partner with Families to Tap their Strengths

1. Listen. Walk Alongside. Discern.

Two Parts

- Listen to families' hopes, fears, strengths, and challenges
- What is the church called to do?

How?

- Conversations
- "Embed"
- Partner
- Surveys, focus groups

2. Create a Web of Support.

- Within and across ages/ stages
- Formal and informal
- General and specific needs, challenges
- Short-term and long-term
- Invitations from trusted friends

3. Stimulate Personal Commitments.

Triggers

- Challenges, pledges
- Assessments
- Transitions
- Invitations

Focus

- Self-directed goal setting
- Growth, improvement

4. Cultivate Skills and Practices.

- Start where they are
- Tap strengths (positive deviance)
- Low-risk opportunities to learn, practice
- Tools and tips
- Progressive steps, growth
- Learning from each other
- Learning by doing

5. Engage as Partners and Leaders.

Why?

- Enhance growth
- High trust of peers ("been through it")
- Expand capacity

How?

- Informal
- Advisory
- Peer leaders
- Apprentice
- Tap gifts

6. Change Norms and Systems.

Internal

- Does what we do reinforce strengths across diverse families?
- Culture: Examine and address inclusion and bias
- Develop policies that reflect family strengths
- Welcoming schedule, opportunities, communication, members

External

- Opportunities and supports
- Advocacy with and for families
- Partnerships

7. Mark Transitions, Celebrate Milestones.

Monitor Growth

- Check in on progress, growth, challenges
- Formal and informal
- Adjust and set new goals

Mark Transitions, Milestones

- Public & private
- Diverse paths
- Identify what's next; help repattern

Ideas to Take Back to Our Congregations

7 Strategies to Partner with Families to Tap their Strengths

1. Listen. Walk Alongside. Discern.
2. Create a Web of Support.
3. Stimulate Personal Commitments.
4. Cultivate Skills and Practices.
5. Engage as Partners and Leaders.
6. Change Norms and Systems.
7. Mark Transitions, Celebrate Milestones.

Select one of these strategies to explore with others here. (You can explore others later.) Join others focused in that area. (If too many have picked that area, choose another.)

Discuss these questions:

1. How might an intentional focus on this strategy enhance how your church partners with families for faith formation?
2. How has your church (or others you know about) successfully used this strategy?
3. What other ideas come to mind?
4. Based on your discussion, what are 1-2 ideas that have the most potential to enhance your congregations' ministries with families? (Be prepared to report these to the whole group.)