

# Flowerpots and Families

## Lesson Plan

Activity	Materials Needed
<p><u>Introduction</u>            Divide students into small groups.            Allow a few minutes for students to work in their small groups to write a definition for the word "Family."            Ask each group to share the definition they have written.            As each definition is read, discuss aspects of the definition that fit and don't fit what a family is. (All or most of the definitions will probably be found inadequate or incorrect in some way.)            Conclude that it is very difficult to define "Family." In fact, even many textbooks which deal with the topic do not provide a definition.</p>	<p>newsprint            markers</p>
<p><u>A Definition</u>            Distribute a medium-sized flowerpot to each group.            Announce that the flowerpots can help us define families.            Ask, "In what ways are flowerpots and families similar?" (see attached notes for ideas)            Present the following definition as a workable definition for family: "A group of people who share a common household and common resources."            Build on the "flowerpot" theme to outline some of the characteristics of families. (see attached notes)</p>	<p>1 flowerpot for each group</p>
<p><u>The Fragility of Families</u>            Distribute a large brown paper bag to each group, and have them put their flower pot inside and roll the top down.            Distribute hammers, and tell each group to pound the flowerpot with the hammer until it breaks.</p>	<p>large brown paper bags             hammer(s)</p>

<p><u>The Fragility of Families</u> (continued)  Have each group open the bag and empty the broken pieces of the flowerpot out onto the table.  Now, ask them to use the markers to write on each piece some kind of problem that may "break families apart."  When all of the groups have finished, ask them to share the family problems they have identified.  (see attached notes)</p>	
<p><u>Mending Broken Families</u>  Direct students to work together to put their flowerpots back together. (This may take some time.)  Ask students to write on the tape any ideas they have for what would be required to mend a broken family.  When the flowerpots have been mended as well as possible, lead a discussion about how problems change families, the process of working through problems, and the ability of families to function after experiencing problems, using the Flowerpot metaphor as a guide.  (see attached notes for ideas)</p>	<p>Scotch or masking tape  glue or rubber cement</p>
<p><u>Building Strong Families</u>  Using the "Characteristics of Strong Families" as a guide, discuss how the flowerpots can help us remember the common characteristics of strong families.</p>	<p>"Characteristics of Strong Families"</p>
<p><u>Conclusions</u>  Guide students to draw some conclusions about families from the Flowerpot Activity. Explain that these concepts will be discussed during this unit of study.  As a concluding activity, have students plant seeds in their mended flowerpots. As your class progresses through the various topics of the Family Relationships unit, remind them to check on the growth taking place in their flowerpots.  At the end of the unit or class, you may wish to give each student a miniature flowerpot to represent your wish that their families will be strong, healthy, and whole.</p>	<p>student study guide</p> <p>potting soil  garden tools  seeds  watering can</p> <p>miniature flowerpots</p>

# Flowerpots and Families

## Teacher Notes for the "Flowerpots and Families" Metaphor

### A Definition of Family

Family: "A group of people sharing a common household and common resources."

Flowerpots can represent this definition of families in that it is a common household (the flowerpot) sharing common resources (the soil, fertilizer, water, light, and air). The family members (plants) can range from one to many in a single flower pot, may be all of the same kind (related) or different, and may each have different requirements for growth and survival.

Flowerpots, like families:

- Are designed for the purpose of nurturing life and growth.
- Come in many sizes.
- Come in many styles (some plain, some fancy; some inexpensive, some expensive; some of universal design, some representing particular regions).
- Have no two exactly alike.
- Contain imperfections, even when new.
- Are strong, yet fragile.
- Can withstand tremendous pressure.
- Can tolerate all kinds of conditions.
- May change over time.
- Must be handled with care.

### The Fragility of Families

Some of the problems that may "break families apart" include:

- Death
- Divorce
- Health Problems
- Financial Problems
- Addictions
- Infidelity
- Unwanted Pregnancy
- Conflict
- Abuse
- Mental Illness

(These are some of the things that could be written on the broken pieces.)

## The Fragility of Families (continued)

The broken pieces of the flowerpots are like the problems families may encounter in that:

- Some are big and some are small.
- They can be a combination of sizes and types.
- Sometimes, only a few big problems break a family apart; other times, many small problems may slowly chip away at the family a little at a time.
- It is impossible to predict the final blow that will cause the break.
- Unless repaired, the family cannot survive.

## Mending Broken Families

Broken families can be mended with:

- Reaching out.
- Communication.
- Good decision-making.
- Conflict resolution.
- Forgiveness.

(These are some of the things that could be written on the tape.)

From mending the flowerpots, like families, we see that:

- They break apart much easier than they go back together.
- It takes a lot of work to mend them.
- They are not the same.
- They have permanent scars.
- Some may never be whole again.
- Some you would rather replace than repair.
- They are not as strong as before.
- They are more likely to break again.
- It is possible to put them back together.
- They can still nurture life and growth.

## Building Strong Families

Flowerpots can help us remember the characteristics of strong families because:

- They spend a lot of time together.
- They allow room for individual growth.
- They provide mutual support.
- They accept differences.
- They "worship" the sun together.

# Developing Family Strengths: The Affirmative Family

## Examples of family strengths

Having enough time together  
Allowing freedom to be alone  
Having common interests  
Liking, loving and caring for each other  
Demonstrating mutual commitment  
Sharing faith  
Providing mutual support  
Holding common beliefs, values and goals  
Sharing of feelings  
Agreements on handling family finances  
Willingness to forgive (or accept)

Fostering spiritual growth in each other  
Maintaining an intimate network of friends  
Enjoying time and activities together  
Allowing freedom of expression  
Demonstrating respect  
Expressing appreciation and affirmation  
Sharing hopes and dreams  
Dividing labor and sharing in it  
Developing self-awareness  
Encouraging development of talents  
Developing a sense of responsibility

Capacity to reach out beyond the family  
Building family tradition and celebrations  
Willingness to accept differences  
Allowing freedom to grow as individuals  
Fostering creativity in one another  
Developing and using a sound structure for problem-solving  
Meeting basic physical needs (food, clothing, shelter, etc.)  
Having a sense of family mission  
Maintaining good communication  
Having a sense of humor

(This list is derived from Herbert Otto, "Developing Human and Family Potential" in Stinnett, N., Chester, B., and J. DeFrain, *Building Family Strengths: Blueprints for Action*. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1979. Pages 39-50.)

## Characteristics of strong families

In the Family Strengths Research Project, Stinnett and his colleagues identified six patterns of interaction characteristics present among strong families:

- Expression of appreciation
- Spending a lot of time together
- High degree of commitment to the family group
- Productive communication
- High religious orientation
- Positive conflict resolution

It is also interesting to note that these family members rated themselves high on marital happiness and child satisfaction. Family members also felt support, encouragement and acceptance of personal interests. Family interaction occurred largely through agreement.

**Note:** The absence of these characteristics is frequently observed in disrupted or dysfunctional families.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Class Period \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

# Flowerpots and Families



Write a definition of "Family."

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List five ways that flowerpots are like families:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

Name five problems that may cause families to break apart:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

Describe how the broken pieces of the flowerpot are like the problems in families:

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Identify five ways that the mended flowerpots have changed:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

Summarize what this activity means to you in terms of building strong families:

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