

Ten steps to strengthen and support families

1. Take time to strengthen family relationships

Balancing the demands of being with family and working to make ends meet can often be a challenge. Plan to have some time when the family is together and engages

in a shared activity like cooking a meal, visiting relatives, going to a park, or organising the photo albums. Family time need not be private or expensive to be valuable. Integrating leisure time with some service to others not only builds up the family but contributes to the community and brings a sense of satisfaction. Do some small jobs for friends or neighbours. Join a parish or community group that supports vulnerable people, particularly young families, the elderly or people with disabilities.

2. Learn to repair relationships

Building relationship includes learning to work with the conflicts that inevitably arise. Restorative justice gives priority to repairing harm done to relationships rather than to blaming and punishing. We can all apply restorative justice practices in our day-to-day lives – in our families, schools, parish and communities.

Here is a simple exercise.

When things go wrong:

- What happened?
- What were you thinking at the time?
- What have you thought about since?
- Who has been affected by what you have done? In what way?
- What do you think you need to do to make things right?

For further information, visit:

- http://www.transformingconflict.org/Restorative_Justice_in_School.htm
- <http://www.iirp.org>
- http://www.cg.catholic.org.au/faith_education/default.cfm?loadref=373
- <http://www.varj.asn.au/About-restorative-practice>

3. Work-life balance

For well over a century Australia pursued the goal of an eight-hour working day, safeguarding time for relaxation and rest. (Statement p. 4)

Check the policies in your workplace and your state or territory on work-life balance.

Take a look at the work-life balance in your family. How many hours are spent on work, family, relaxation? Draw a diagram, paint a picture, make a collage. Who gets the most leisure time? Who gets the least? Does everyone get enough rest? Decide on some strategies to keep your family life in balance. Check it again in a month's time.

4. Take time to pray together as a family

Link your family prayer times to particular events – for example, a meal, a particular day, special events such as birthdays, or issues that arise. Get some resources from a Christian

bookshop or from the Web. Write your own prayers; make a family prayer book. Include: what you want to give thanks for, what you need to ask for, the people suffering in your local area and around the world, blessings you want for your family and for others.

5. Take time to celebrate the Sabbath

... the true meaning of the Sabbath is not simply a prohibition against labour, but a time for the full development of people through relaxation, worship and freedom from the demands of the working week. (Statement p. 12)

Our day of worship lifts us out of the normal daily demands, which are so often dominated by work or consumerism, to reveal the deeper meaning of our time together. (Statement p. 13)

Participate in the Parish liturgy as readers, musicians etc. Before or after attending Eucharist, do something special together, for example a walk, a leisurely coffee, a visit to friends or people who might be lonely. Take the paper to an elderly or housebound neighbour.

6. Reflect on your wealth today

Compare your wealth to the wealth of your parents and grandparents. How much did they earn? How did their income change over the years? What housing did they have? What did they do for entertainment? What household appliances did they have? What luxury goods could they afford? Make it a family project, be creative, use photos and drawings, make a mural!

In the last 2 to 3 years, many Australian families have had to decide what things to save from impending floods or fire. They had to decide what things they valued the most. What things would you take with you if you had to leave in a hurry? Discuss as a family.

7. Concern for vulnerable and families living in poverty

God's gifts are fully realised when they are shared with others. How we receive and use those gifts will be ultimately judged by how we treat our neighbours – particularly those who are most in need. (Statement p.7)

Who are the vulnerable families in your parish, town or suburb? How are they supported in your parish?

Offer your help through community or parish groups such as St Vincent de Paul Society. Use your skills for projects such as knit4charities.webs.com.

Go through your cupboards and take the clothes, toys, appliances you don't need to Vinnies or another charity. Stretch yourself and include one or two things you think you do need.

8. Who are the Indigenous people in your area?

Every part of Australia was/is part of an Aboriginal nation. See www.aiatsis.gov.au/asp/map.html or www.abc.net.au/indigenous/map/.

Who are the Aboriginal people in your area?

If there are none there now, what happened to those who used to live there?



What Indigenous language is or was spoken in your area?

What Indigenous cultural activities happen in your area: art, dance, music, literature? Attend a local event as a family. Read books written by Aboriginal authors. Watch a film about Indigenous Australians, for example *Rabbit Proof Fence*, *Ten Canoes*, *The Tracker*, *The Sapphires*.

9. Asylum seekers and refugees

Get the facts on refugees and asylum seekers. Visit the websites of Australian Catholic Migration and Refugee Office (www.acmro.catholic.org.au), Refugee Council of Australia (www.refugeecouncil.org.au) or Jesuit Refugee Service (www.jrs.org.au).

Many families came to Australia as refugees. Is your family an example? Is someone in your neighbourhood? Where have they come from?

Reach out to refugees in your area, by visiting them, inviting them to your place, helping them to get to know the local area.

Read stories written by refugees such as *The Happiest Refugee*, by Anh Do.

10. Assist and support people with a disability

Are there people with a disability in your parish? What is in place to support them, like assistance with transport to Church activities? Give your time so carers can have some time off. What Disability Support Services are in your area? Visit them to see if you can assist by volunteering in some way. Access the resource kit *One Body in Christ: Welcoming people with a disability*, produced by the Australian Catholic Disability Council (02 6201 9850).

