

## Strengthening your Family

Protecting children is at the forefront of parents' minds. This is an area of concern that is discussed in the majority of homes. There are many ways that parents can strengthen the protection of children simply by strengthening connections within the family. While many of these safeguards may already exist in your home, review the list below to learn about ways to safeguard your children through strengthening your family.

### Create a positive home environment.

- Create opportunities to spend quality time together doing something of your child's choosing, be it daily, weekly or monthly. This will increase her/his emotional attachment and strengthen your relationship. Children often talk more comfortably while engaged in an activity they enjoy.

### Create structure and routines in the household.

- Structure and routine helps build a child's sense of security. Create routines around bedtime, meal times, homework time, participation in out-of-school activities, down time, etc.

### Create family customs.

- Family traditions and customs create "together time" and help build a sense of security in children and help build family connections. Even if children are resistant and aren't participating with genuine enthusiasm, which can be quite typical as they enter into adolescence, the time together is still important. Consider establishing family customs such as walks after dinner, movie night, pizza night, formal Sunday night family dinners, etc.

### Have clear family boundaries.

- Teach your child about personal boundaries starting when s/he is very young. Create family privacy rules for using the bathroom, bathing and changing. Choose a personal space in the home for each person's belongings (e.g. a bedroom, closet, drawers and shelves, etc.).
- Be clear about your child's role within the family. When your child wants to listen to adult conversations, gently correct her/him. Children shouldn't be involved in adult issues.
- Avoid involving your child in adult-related topics and concerns. This can blur a child's role within the family and may cause her/him to feel insecure.
- Monitor relationships your children have with other adults, especially where there is one-on-one time spent with your child. Make sure boundaries are maintained and that there is purpose for the involvement. Ensure that the amount of time your child spends with the individual is balanced (not too excessive).



## Strengthening your Family (cont'd)

### Be involved in your child's life.

- Get to know what your child's interests are and, whenever possible, attend her/his events and activities.

### Supervise your child while s/he is online, playing in the neighbourhood, or during extra-curricular activities.

- As your child becomes more independent s/he will require less direct supervision, however, continue to keep track of her/his activities.

### Build an emotional connection with your child.

- Children typically communicate through their actions, so watch for changes in your child's typical behaviour patterns. Pay attention and respond to your child when s/he seems upset or not quite her/himself. Stay in tune with where s/he is emotionally.

### Enjoy special time together — have fun together!

- Together with your child, choose an activity to do jointly. Create special time for each of your children (e.g. go to a movie, go to dinner, go to lunch, go skating, watch a movie at home, or play a game of your child's choice).

### Monitor your child's exposure to adult information and harmful media messages.

- Set limits on what your child is allowed to view and play (e.g. television, movies, video games, Internet, etc.).
- Discuss both the obvious and hidden negative messages found in media, music, fashion, and advertising (i.e. the glorification of violence, sexual harm, power and control, gender stereotypes, etc.). What does your child think about these messages? Openly share your thoughts about the negative messaging.
- Limit your child's exposure to adult issues and stresses.

### Pay attention and show you value what is important to your child.

- Learn more about your child's strengths and interests. Get to know their favourite school activities, games, websites, TV shows, etc.

### Monitor the relationships your child has with her/his friends.

- Encourage your child to invite her/his friends over. This will help you get to know who s/he is spending her/his time with outside of the home.

