Family

Grades 4-6, lesson #2

Time Needed

30-90 minutes

Student Learning Objectives

To be able to…

1. Recognize that there are different kinds of families.
2. Give examples of two purposes of families.
3. Recognize that all members of a family (including parents) have needs.
4. Name something he or she values about each member of his or her family.
5. List at least three behaviors that contribute to good listening.
6. Describe the feeling he or she has when someone listens to him or her or talks to him or her in a serious, personal way.

Agenda

1. Explain purpose of the lesson.
2. Define “family.”
3. OPTIONAL: Show the documentary video *That’s a Family* and discuss it.
4. Diagram families.
5. Use brainstorm to identify purpose and importance of families.
6. Use contrasting role-plays to identify “good listening behaviors” and to highlight their importance.
7. Use case study to point out that speaker and listener BOTH benefit from good communication.
8. Answer “Anonymous Question Box” questions about family.
9. Summarize the lesson.

Materials Needed

Classroom Materials:

- OPTIONAL: Documentary film ***That's a Family*** (DVD or streamed live)
  Available from Women's Educational Media, as part of their *Respect for All* series: 415-641-4616; http://www.womedia.org/thatsafamily.htm

Student Materials: (for each student)

- One sheet of white or manila construction paper per student
- Several crayons or colored pencils per student

Activity

1. **Explain that this lesson will help students understand what families are *for*, and how they (your students) *contribute* to their own families.**

2. **Define family.**

   A family is two or more people who love and take care of each other. Usually they are related and/or live together. Families come in all shapes, sizes and descriptions.

3. **OPTIONAL: Show the 35-minute documentary film *That's a Family* and discuss it.**

   The film tells the stories, in their own words, of children in families with parents of different races or religions, divorced parents, a single parent, gay or lesbian parents, adoptive parents or grandparents as guardians. Each child discusses the configuration of their family, what's special about their family, what's challenging about their kind of family and what they want other children to understand about families like theirs. It comes with a wonderful *Discussion and Teaching Guide*.

   - The film portrays children and families that are happy and highly functional at this point in time. Acknowledge that most families have times when things are not so happy and people aren't getting along so well.

   - The film also does not introduce every *configuration* of family. Discuss which kinds of families were not portrayed (two-biological-parent families, foster families and group homes, couples without children, bigger and extended families living together).

   - Invite people to comment on the ways their own families are similar to and different from the families in the film, thinking about, for instance, the ways they have fun together, the ways they change over time, the ways that different family members take care of one another.

4. **Diagram families.**

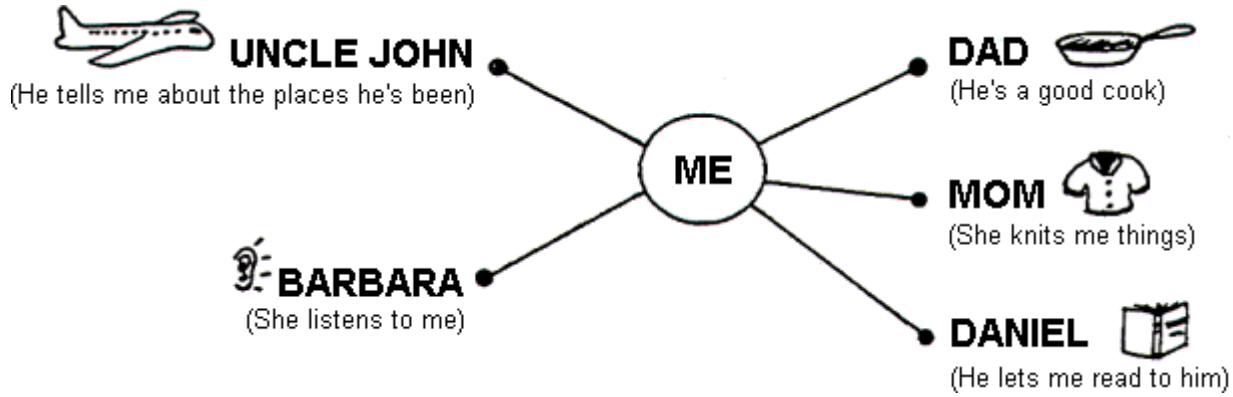
   Have each student draw a small circle in the center of a sheet of construction paper. They should write the word "me" inside the circle. You can do the same on the blackboard, diagramming your own family. From the circle, draw one spoke for each member of your family. At the outside end of the spoke, write the person's name or nickname and draw a little picture of something special about that person. (It might be a soccer ball for the sister who is a "soccer-nut", or a smiling mouth for the brother with the wonderful laugh, or a hairbrush for the grandmother who lets you brush her hair and style it.)

   Point out that each person will define "family" differently, in deciding who to include. Some will draw their parents and brothers and sisters. Some will draw all their blood relatives. Some will draw a single parent or two parents of the same or different genders. Some will include step-parents or grandparents or others who live with them. Some may draw two households if their parents live apart and some will draw foster families. Some may count a loved one serving in the military overseas or in a nursing home or a correctional facility.

They should include whomever THEY think of when they think of their family. Some will count pets as family. They get to decide who counts.

Allow fifteen (15) minutes.

Here's an example:



a. Invite 3 or 4 volunteers to describe their diagrams to the class. Help each volunteer to articulate the characteristic he or she values about each family member.

5. Examine the purposes of families.

Explain that families meet two kinds of needs we have: physical needs and emotional needs. Make two columns on the blackboard and ask the students to brainstorm all the needs a family can meet. You may end up with something like this:

PHYSICAL NEEDS	EMOTIONAL NEEDS	
shelter	to feel you belong	to feel understood
food	to feel appreciated	to laugh, cry, etc.
clothes	to feel useful	to feel listened to
medical care	affection	to feel needed and special

Make sure they realize that ALL family members have needs and that all help MEET one another's needs. Even the adults have needs. Even the elderly person and the infant help meet other people's needs. Even your students help meet some of the needs their families have.

6. Examine communication within families.

If one of the needs a family can meet is the need to feel listened to, how can a person listen well? How do you know if somebody's really listening to you? How do you feel? How do you know when they're not?

Choose your most dramatic student to role-play with you a conversation between a brother and sister. You play the older sibling. The younger sibling is upset over something that happened at school.

Play the scene twice. The first time you exhibit poor listening skills (allow yourself to be distracted/interrupted by the phone of the T.V., don't make eye contact, cross your arms and lean backwards, tell the other person they don't really feel upset, and change the subject). The second time, you exhibit good listening skills (allow no distractions, look the person in the eyes, uncross your arms and lean forward, check out whether you understand the person's feelings by asking, and nod). EACH time, ask your fellow role-player how they FELT in the scene.

After the second scene, ask the class to tell you exactly what they saw you do differently in the two scenes. Write the class's observations on the blackboard, entitling the list "Behaviors That Contribute to Good Listening."

7. Examine WHO BENEFITS from good communication.

Tell the class you want to share a Case Study with them and get their reactions to it. Read aloud:

> *"Leo and Kristen were both in sixth grade and they were best friends. One day Leo came to school grouchy. He wouldn't take his coat off. He hit someone who tripped over his foot by mistake. He didn't even sing during music, and he was usually the best singer in the class. Mrs. Smith, his teacher asked him what was wrong and he wouldn't tell her. The music teacher, Mr. Bailey, came out to talk with him during recess and he just pulled away. Finally, at lunch he told Kristen that his dog had been hit by a car and killed. He told her he couldn't tell anybody but Kristen because he was embarrassed that he might cry. As he said this, one tear slid down his cheek and Kristen offered him her sleeve to wipe it."*

Ask the class how they think Leo felt. Ask them also how they think Kristen felt. The point is that both persons feel good: Leo, because she didn't laugh at his feelings, and Kristen, because Leo trusts her so much that he will talk to her when something is too personal and private to share with anyone else. He feels listened to and she feels needed and special.

8. Answer "Anonymous Question Box" questions about family.

Remember that your role is not to judge any one family's lifestyle but to help students appreciate similarities and differences and PURPOSES of families. For community resources to refer students (divorce, alcoholism, domestic violence) see Appendix F.

9. Summarize the lesson by asking the class to tell you what a family *is* and what it is *for*.

Related Activities For Integrated Learning

A. Reading
Have students do a specialized book report, not about the PLOT of a book, but about the *family* of the main character. Who is in the family? How does each one help meet the needs of the others? What is special about each one? Books that give examples of different kinds of families include: ***Heidi***, ***J.T.***, ***Now I Have a Step-parent and It's Kind of Confusing***, ***Tom Sawyer***, and ***The Little House on the Prairie***.

B. Social Studies
Have students report on families in different cultures, by doing library research and/or contacting cultural organizations.

C. Language Arts
Have students add "communication" to their glossaries.

Homework

Students' options:
- Take home their family diagrams to discuss with an adult member of the family*
- Diagram a family from a television show or a book they have already read, as if they were one of the characters.

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*see "Preparing Parents" page 6-7