

Celebrate Family Connections!

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Events of the past few months forced many of us to focus on the really important things in our lives. We quickly realized it was not money, things or stature that were important. It was our family and community connections. It was through our families, friends and neighbors that we drew strength and comfort.

In recognition of the importance of families as a basic building block of society, the United States has celebrated National Family Week during the week of Thanksgiving since 1970. The national event focuses on families and their importance to individuals and society. The week provides everyone a chance to honor the connections that support and strengthen families, both within families and throughout their communities. This year's theme seems particularly appropriate — *Connections Count*.

Since family life is so much a part of our everyday activities, it's easy for us to take it for granted. And since even very healthy families have their struggles, it's also easy to focus on family-related problems and forget the many benefits and joys that spring from healthy family living.

Thanksgiving week is a good time to reflect on the importance of family, including extended family and its older members. It's a good time to think about some little things you might do to celebrate your family and your community connections.

Who are some of the special people and organizations that help your family? Perhaps it's a grandmother or neighbor who watches the kids during the work week, an after school program leader who is a role model for kids, a community leader who made sure a new

park was built to accommodate kids with special needs. Perhaps it's a special someone in the family who is always ready to listen and give you a big hug.

"National Family Week is a wonderful time to honor the connections that support and strengthen families year-round,"

says Peter Goldberg, president and CEO of the Alliance for Children and Families. "Families traditionally connect and celebrate during Thanksgiving week, so it's a perfect time to

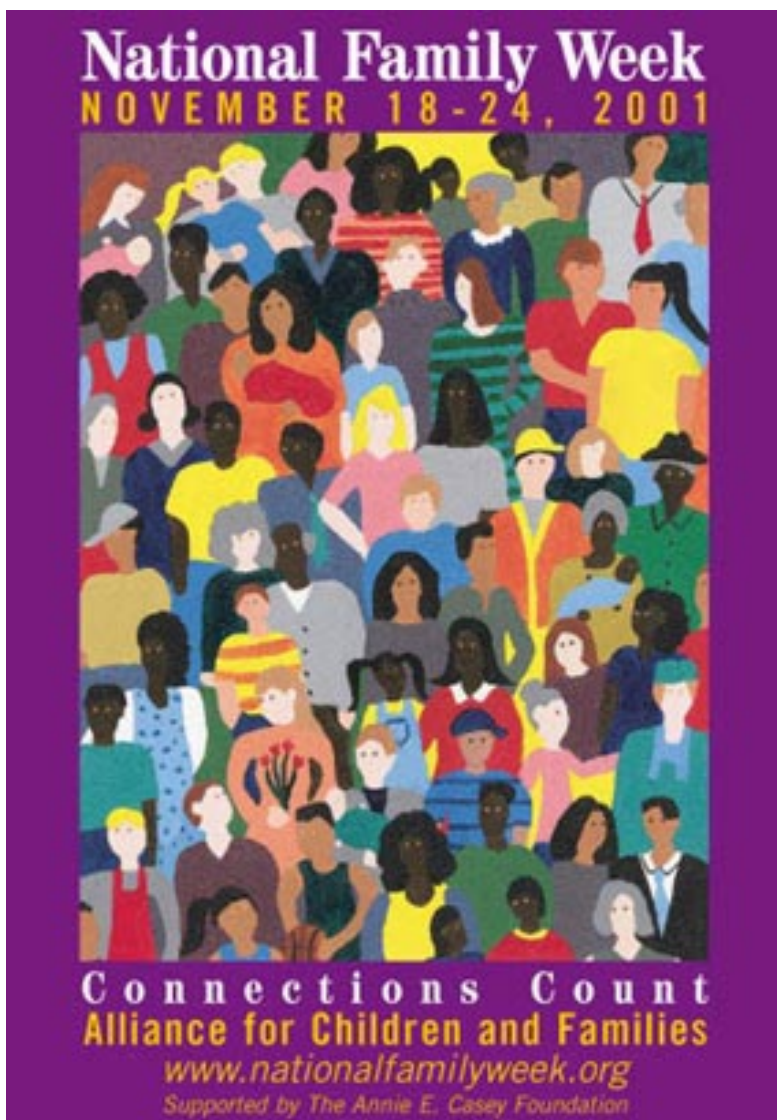
thank one another, as well as the other individuals and organizations who help the family thrive."

Here are some easy ways to celebrate National Family Week with your family:

- Write a letter to thank someone who has made a difference in the life of your family. Think about writing even short spontaneous notes of appreciation to a loved one, a public figure, or a person who provides service for you, such as

"Perhaps the greatest service that can be rendered by anybody to the country and to mankind, is to bring up a family."

—George Bernard Shaw



your child's teacher or the manager of your apartments.

- Discover different ways to spend quality time together, such as volunteering.

• Hold a "family supper" with your neighbors or the families of your kids' friends.

• Select an issue in your community that's important to your family and get involved.

• Visit a local community center and learn what kinds of family activities are available.

• Encourage employers to consider family-friendly work options, such as, flexible hours and time off to attend school functions.

• Take a walk together with a member of your family.

• Make several surprise phone calls to family members you haven't seen in a while.

• After your Thanksgiving Day meal or other family dinner, allow all persons present to tell something they really appreciate about their family. Focusing on the positives in our families creates good feelings and builds family cohesion and strength.

• On Thanksgiving Day or at another time during National Family Week, have an "I Remember When" session. Recall interesting or funny times from the past that hold special memories for the various family members present.

• Invite one or more people who do not have close family ties, or who cannot easily go home to join your family for Thanksgiving Day.

Ideally, it's best to celebrate the spirit of National Family Week all year long. Regularly seizing opportunities to express love, appreciation and forgiveness can go a long way in strengthening ourselves, our families and our nation.

NU for Families is a state-wide effort of Cooperative Extension to celebrate family strengths and bring information to the people of Nebraska. For more ideas visit the Lancaster/Saunders Counties Families Web site: www.lancaster.unl.edu/familiv

communities.

Either first thing in the morning or last thing at night, engage in a couple of minutes of personal silent thanksgiving. Focus on your many blessing, large or small. Then take another minute and consciously rest in the peace that usually results from this practice.

Take Time to be Thankful

Melody Beattie, author and counselor says, "Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and

creates a vision for tomorrow."

The spirit of Thanksgiving is good for bodies, souls and communities. Fortunately, a grateful attitude "doesn't cost anything; it takes very little time; it's always available; and while there are lots of side effects, everyone of them is wonderful," according to Sam Quick, Human Development and Family Relations Specialist.

This is a good time of the year to hone our skill of expressing gratitude. The more we practice, the more keenly we begin to see the good and beautiful in other people, in ourselves and in the world around us.

The spirit of Thanksgiving then becomes a year long celebration of the blessings we enjoy as part of our families and

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