

Family Leisure Toolkit



Temple University
Collaborative

On Community Inclusion of Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities

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Contents

Intro.....	4
Family Wellness.....	5
Family Physical Health	5
Family Cognitive Strength	6
Family Spirituality/Meaning	6
Family Social Well-Being.....	6
Family Emotional Health	7
Suggestions for Family Leisure	8
Games & Activities.....	8
Outdoor Adventures.....	8
Volunteer	8
Fitness	9
Educational	9
Leisure in unexpected places	9
Planning Activities.....	10
Things to Consider.....	10
Pick an activity.....	10
Guests.....	10
Location	10
Cost	10
Date & Time	10
Transportation.....	10
Food & Drink.....	10
Check List	10
On the day of the activity.....	11
After the activity	11

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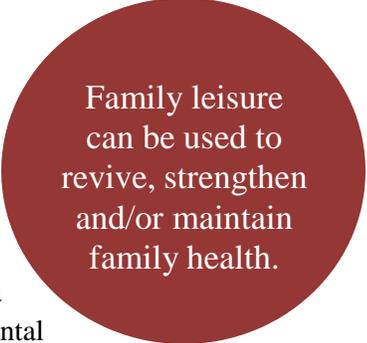
Collaborative on Community Inclusion

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Intro

As we refer to family in this toolkit, understand that we are not only talking about biological relations. Today's families often do not look like Leave it to Beaver. Families might include close friends, single parents, step-parents, adopted families, two moms/dads, grandmom/grandpa as primary care taker(s) of children... Many of us create our own families with people we love. There is no simple contemporary definition of family. You get to decide who is in your family. Who offers you acceptance and love? Who do you turn to when you when you need support and encouragement? Who celebrates your accomplishments and fills you with joy? Who comes to you when they need help? Consider these people as we discuss family.

There are many things that can hurt family dynamics. Mental illness is one. Diagnoses can become a source of family stress. There are various reasons this might happen. It may be due to misconceptions about the illness, medication side-effects or changes in relationships as some people become care takers to others. People diagnosed with psychiatric disabilities might feel anxious, depressed or guilty about their illness and its impact on the family. They may feel that they are a burden. For many, their role in the family is reduced or taken away. Remember, a mental



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illness diagnosis doesn't take away your role as a sister, brother, cousin, son, daughter, aunt, uncle...

Family leisure can be used to revive, strengthen and/or maintain family health. Novel experiences can also help break negative family cycles. Care givers and the people they help can use this as an opportunity step out of these roles and enjoy each other's company. Fun activities provide a foundation on which we build connections, memories and personal/familial growth. For the family who is dealing with stressors related to mental illness, this adjustment from illness-focus to fun-focus is good for everyone.

Families benefit most when they diversify their leisure and recreational activities. A mix of core and balance activities are recommended for complete family wellness. Core family leisure is "depicted by activities that are common, everyday, low-cost, relatively accessible, often home-based, and are participated in frequently (Freeman & Zabriskie, 2003)." These activities might include family dinners, board games, playing catch in the yard, or watching movies. Balance family leisure activities are novel, out of the ordinary and less frequent (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2004). They often occur outside of the home and require greater planning and costs. Balance activities might include family vacations, hiking, or attending theater performances and concerts. Core activities inspire cohesion, interpersonal bonds and a feeling of stability. Balance activities are less predictable and require family members to work together to be flexible and/or overcome challenges. Together, they can increase cohesion and adaptability.

The options and benefits of family fun are almost endless! Just as families don't fit a cookie-cutter image, neither does family leisure. Activities can happen in various settings with diverse group sizes and they may be planned or spontaneous. There are so many ways to have fun. In this spirit, we encourage you to consider how you can use family leisure activities to build strong bonds and to enhance your overall health and well-being. This toolkit will help you to get started with information about the benefits of various types of family recreational activities, suggestions for activities and a guide to planning activities.

Enjoy reading and be sure to have fun!

Family Wellness

This tool-kit has family wellness sectioned into five domains; physical, cognitive, spirituality/meaning, social and emotional wellness. Much like the overall wellness of an individual, family wellness is composed of various components that interact to create a healthy balance of the mind, body and soul. This balance occurs when both the individual development of family members is promoted as well as the collective well-being of the family as a whole. When taking family wellness into consideration it is important to recognize it as many parts all working towards creating something larger. As mentioned above, family leisure activities are a great way to build strong bonds and to enhance your overall health and well-being. Family leisure then works as a resource that helps create an environment that facilitates opportunities experience positive emotional experiences, while working on cognitive and physical functioning.

Participating in family leisure activities creates an environment for all members of the family to build a network of skills that are transferrable to other aspects of daily living. Leisure can be used as an opportunity to practice autonomy, develop skills needed to adapt to various situations, create supportive and empowering roles throughout the family and even skills associated with dealing with stress effectively (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2000). When considering family wellness, all of these opportunities play an important role in maintaining a balance of the wellness domains and creating the stepping stones to improve overall health and quality of life.

Family Physical Health

Physical health is related to the way our bodies feel, our physical strength and stamina which is also impacted by diet and exercise. Making physical activity a priority and encouraging good habits within the family unit is important and can help family members develop the skills they need to continue being active throughout their lifetime. Being active with your whole family is a great way to connect with each other, while doing something good for your mind and body that all family members can experience health benefits from.

Becoming more physically active can reduce the risk of a number of general medical conditions, including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, respiratory difficulties, and certain cancers. As of 2008, World Health Organization (2011) recorded 31% of adults were insufficiently active due to a lack of physical activity during leisure time and domestic activities. Individuals diagnosed with a psychiatric disability are at higher risk of being overweight, which is generally associated with lifestyle factors as well as illness and treatment-related factors (Hert, Correll, Bobes, Cetkovich-Bakmas, Cohen, & Asai 2011).

When trying to pick an activity to participate in, try making a list of family favorites and take turns doing different activities. Another suggestion is to think about things like what games or activities did you enjoy throughout your childhood? Did you enjoy hockey, skating or baseball? Or perhaps trail walks or going to the park for Frisbee? Think of activities that can be done both in and around your home as well as throughout your neighborhood such as gardening, or playing a game on the Wii Fit. Also, think of all-season activities that can keep your family active all year long. Try inviting other family members to participate, aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins, and see how many people you can get involved! And try to choose activities that will be fun for everyone or take turns choosing to ensure that everyone has an enjoyable experience.

Family Cognitive Strength

Cognitive strength is brain strength. Just like your physical health, it is different for everyone but essentially it involves how well you can make decisions, and understand and remember information. As a family there are many ways that you can utilize opportunities to exercise your brain power together. Planning activities, developing a budget, following established rules are all ways to work on brain power while you're participating in activities as a family. One of the best ways to exercise your brain is to try something new, what better time to use a family leisure activity to do so! The more interested and engaged you are in the activity, the more likely you'll be to continue doing it and the greater the benefits you and your brain will experience.

The process of scheduling leisure activities in itself is something that can be an exercise in research, planning and organizing as a family. Play games, puzzles, memorizing songs are all simple activities that can be done as a family unit and usually something everyone can enjoy, that allow you to flex your mental muscles. Doing things throughout the activity like taking pictures or keeping a family activity journal to record your favorite part of the day, are great ways to document the day. Utilizing quick and easy opportunities such as this allows family members to work on improving memory through recalling the day's fun activities. As your brain power grows, you enhance your memory, reasoning, and problem solving skills and can move forward with new goals for your family leisure activities.

Family Spirituality/Meaning

While it is true that for many people, religious activities like prayer and attending religious services do inspire them to feel a connection to a higher power, others may sense a connection to something greater through meditation, nature or art. Families differ greatly in the ways that we as people experience spirituality and meaning. In general, spirituality makes us feel that we are connected to something greater than ourselves. One may find spirituality and meaning in the things they do related to their religion. Others may find that spirituality and meaning might come from separate sources.

For some families utilizing leisure activities can help improve overall spiritual health as a unit. This could be a range of activities done as a family, all meant to create a sense of purpose, inner peace, comfort, or a connection to others. These activities may include doing community service or volunteer work as a means to be part of a larger role in the community. Praying, meditating, singing devotional songs can be done as a family to enhance spirituality and meaning. Even reading inspirational books and sharing your thoughts about what you're reading, or taking nature walks can benefit the family as well. Other ideas are having quiet time for thinking, doing yoga, playing a sport or attending religious services. What inspires us to experience the feelings of spirituality and meaning are very personal. While working on your spiritual wellbeing as a family, remember that everyone is different, so what works for others may not work for you and your family. It is important to identify the things in your life that give you a sense of connection as a family.

Family Social Well-Being

Social wellness as a family involves our ability to relate to and connect with other people. This includes the ability to establish and maintain positive relationships within the family itself as well as, friends and peers. Leisure activities allow for the social skills within the family unit to flourish. Discussing common interests and even talking about the positive experience after the activity are ways to enhance the family's social experience by debriefing the positive experience together as a family.

When leisure activities involve other people, you and your family have the opportunity to exercise social skills, laugh, share stories and form friendships with families who have similar interests. By finding family friends with similar interests it can help you and your family get and stay motivated to participate in an active leisure lifestyle. Making family connections is a way for us to also share our joys and give support during tough times, and connections to help us avoid feeling isolated.

Planning a weekend getaway with another family, or looking for things to do locally such as bowling, ice skating, visiting a park, are all ways that you can utilize your friendship network and connect with others through a shared experience. While planning activities as a family, consider the people in your life who might want to join you and your family for an outing. And, always remember, as you meet new families, to consider inviting them to future activities.

Family relationships offer meaning through the roles we assume. You may be a caring uncle/aunt, son/daughter, parent, or spouse. These roles give us purpose and a sense of belonging. When a mental illness diagnosis is added into the family equation, it may become a source of family stress due to things such as medication side-effects or changes in relationships as some people become care takers to others. For many diagnosed with a psychiatric disability, their role in the family may be reduced or taken away causing new strains in the family relationships. Remember, a mental illness diagnoses doesn't take away your role as a sister, brother, cousin, son, daughter, aunt, uncle...Participating in family leisure also gives family members an opportunity to take on new roles within the family where new individual strengths may be recognized and then utilized.

Family Emotional Health

The emotional well-being of a family relates to the unit's ability to understand and cope with life's challenges. By having the ability to share feelings of anger, fear, sadness or stress as well as hope, love, joy and happiness in a productive manner, it contributes to positive emotional wellness. Participating in leisure can be used as a chance to experience positive emotions with different members of the family such as joy, pleasure, happiness, etc. Sharing the positive emotions successfully opens pathways for sharing other emotions such as concerns or fears. Families with good emotional health are resilient in the face of challenges, have found ways to express their creativity, and understand the importance of social connections.

Leisure activities are a great way to develop positive emotions and it can be a great medicine to alleviate boredom and to give you a break from any usual daily frustrations you may be experiencing. Participating in recreation and leisure activities allows for opportunities outside of the daily norms to see members of your family succeed at different things. This success allows for individuals to feature their strengths instead of their weaknesses, helping to build a new respect that may not have been present within the family prior to the activity. Participating in activities together as a family can make everybody in the family feel closer emotionally to each other and build a stronger emotional bond. By practicing activities as a family that help you feel emotionally centered, you can enhance your emotional wellness and ability to cope with difficult situations that you and your family may face. Take note of the positive emotions and feelings you have towards your family members. Try to focus on these even in times of stress.

Suggestions for Family Leisure

Your family's leisure interests might be very different from what other families enjoy. Before selecting an activity, consider what each participant would consider fun. Would your family prefer getting dirty in nature, swimming at the beach, playing an interactive board game at home or sharing a nice dinner at a restaurant? There are many possibilities for types of activities. Before planning, ask key members of the family what they would enjoy and which activities would inspire the most joy and connections. If you're not sure what everyone would enjoy, try lots of things. Don't let fears of the perfect activity stop you from trying.

It might take you a little time to find the activities that are right for you and your family, but remember the effort is worth your time. In addition to this list, you might try Googling, "outdoor activities," or, "family crafts." You'll be shocked how many responses you receive. Look for recommendations and then modify them to your family's needs. Most cities also have visitor's centers and websites that highlight upcoming special events and local businesses that cater to families. Below you'll find a few recommendations and tips for family fun but this is by no means an exhaustive list.

Games & Activities at Home

Family game and activity gatherings can be inexpensive and require little advance planning. Games might include card games, board games, and/or interactive video games. Activities might include building a time capsule, creating a scrapbook, and/or making sock puppets. These things can be done regularly, in any weather and adaptations can be made based on skills and abilities.

Games and activities can be purchased at many places, including: discount stores, toy stores, book stores and on-line. For bargains, consider visiting flea markets and thrift stores. No cost games might include charades, tic-tac-toe, and hangman. These require nothing more than a pencil and paper.

Consider games and activities that will be challenging enough for the older participants but not too difficult for younger kids. To avoid giving the advantage to older or more skilled participants, consider making teams of people based on skill level. This will balance out the ability for everyone to participate. Remember the purpose for your game gathering. Is it to win or to assure that everyone enjoys being together?

Outdoor Adventures

Get some Vitamin D and enjoy time with the family while stretching your legs and breathing in some fresh air! Consider the various places that are available in your city or neighborhood. Visit historic areas, or enjoy walks along nature trails, water-front parks, forests, and beaches. Many cities offer special events like parades and street festivals. Days out might include: picnics, hiking, neighborhood walks, jogging, swimming... Really the potential for fun goes on as far as your imagination.

When planning an outdoor adventure, consider a back-up activity in case of bad weather. If weather doesn't cooperate with your plans to walk on a nature trail, you might adjust plans to walking in a museum or mall.

Volunteer

Consider volunteering as quality time multiplied. You spend the day together, learn the joy of helping others and make the world a better place. This is an opportunity to exhibit characteristics of kindness, compassion and helpfulness. It's also an opportunity to have fun together, socialize and build memories that strengthen bonds.

To find the right volunteer opportunity, consider your family's values and what you enjoy. Your family might love festivals, cooking, pets or kids. There are many volunteer opportunities that will allow you to support local events, prepare meals for the ill or homeless, walk dogs and entertain children. Families, like yours, can get involved and have a blast!

Fitness

Fitness is extremely important and the earlier kids learn the value of exercise, the better. Remember, exercise can be fun and easily built into your daily routine. Consider leaving the car in the driveway and sharing after-dinner walks or walks through shopping centers, parks and museums. When your favorite song comes on the radio, dance like you mean it! Exercise during commercial breaks. Team up for gardening. Walk the dog, play with the cat! There are many ways to increase your daily movement and when you do it as a family, you increase the potential for fun!

Your family might enjoy some friendly competition through sports like tag football, tennis or baseball. You could play with each other or join a local team. Sports are a great way to exercise both the body and enjoy socializing with new people while building confidence.

Consider sharing your fitness and exercise goals with a trusted family member. Consider joining forces to motivate each other. When your goal involves spending time with someone you love, you are more likely to enjoy working toward the goal.

Educational

Learning together can be a great way to enhance family discussions, inspire curiosity and increase understanding. Reading to kids is a great way to relax at the end of an evening while also inspiring a love of literature. Visiting museums will allow the family to walk while learning about art, science or history. What interests your family? Get out and enjoy learning together. Or, during game night, consider games that incorporate memory, trivia knowledge, and spelling. These activities inspire creativity, thought and curiosity.

Leisure in Unexpected Places

Chores don't have to be a bore! Cooking is a great example. This can be a great family time for bonding and discussions. Teach kids traditional family recipes or create a new tradition of exploring new foods from around the world. Grow herbs, learn new vegetables, and get excited about preparing new dishes together. When it's time to clean-up, add music and a little dance-time to the mix. Adding laughter and story swapping can make any activity more fun.

Other family activities can become fun family time with some thought. Put on a family favorite movie when folding laundry, organizing or doing chores that keep you in a smaller area for a stretch of time. Consider using a ten-minute timer to challenge kids to finish tidying up a room the fastest. When entertaining, invite a few people to come early to help with clean-up and set-up. Be sure to tell adults how much you appreciate their efforts. Kids might enjoy rewards like stickers. Everyone loves a high five!

Planning Activities

Select activity

What will you do? What will be fun for everyone? What activities will offer both challenge and excitement?

Guests

Who is invited? Consider family members and close friends who will contribute to the spirit of cohesion and joy. Who would like to participate in the planning, decorating, preparation and clean-up? Family activities don't have to rely on one person doing all of the work. Recruit a team. Lots of bonding happens while planning and preparing for a family gathering.

Location

Where will the activity take place? Will someone host it at their home or will it occur in a park or restaurant? Decide where your family will feel comfortable and have the most fun. Consider noise levels, crowds, and child-friendliness. Also be sure that activities are accessible to everyone.

Cost

How much money can each family member afford to spend on the activity? Will each individual contribute? Be sure everyone knows what is expected of them in advance.

Date & Time

Pick a date and time when everyone is available. Be sure to give reminders when the date is getting close.

Transportation

Does anyone need a ride? Will guests take public transportation? Consider the needs of travelers to assure everyone will be able to commute.

Food & Drink

Hungry kids are grumpy kids (some adults too). Think about snacks and water. Also, think about whether alcohol is appropriate. Has it previously been an issue? Consider its impact on family relations.

Check List

Create a check list of things you need on the day of the activity. A checklist will be very different depending on the type of activity, possibly including (medications, sunscreen, towels, snacks/food, first aid kit, bug spray, bathing suit, maps, toys, games...).

Things to Consider

Activities don't always go the way you want. Below are some potential challenges to consider before a gathering.

Screen Time

Screen time includes television, texting and internet. These things might divert focus from the family or they might add to the fun. Decide your family's opinions on screen-time during family gatherings and let others know how you feel.

Costs

Activities do not have to be expensive. There are plenty of low cost and free activities. Potluck meals allow everyone to contribute and allow people to pay what they can afford.

Lateness

Try to be on time and keep appointments. But, remember that difficulties come up for all of us. We all have bad days. Try to be compassionate when faced with a family member who arrives late or misses gatherings.

Participation

Welcome everyone, but avoid forcing participation. Remember, family activities are intended to be fun and one can participate in various ways, including with preparation, cheering-on, or just observing and being with the family.

Accessibility

Everyone should be able to participate in family leisure. This might require planning, depending on individual needs. Consider cognitive difficulties, mobility issues, sight/hearing impairments, reading difficulty, age and skill levels.

Weather

Create alternative bad-weather plans. Move a picnic inside, turn a nature walk into a museum walk. Or, do the opposite on a beautiful day. If it's sunny, move to the patio. If snow comes, build a snowman, snow woman, snow family! Weather happens, don't let it ruin your day.

On the day of the activity:

Check the weather and alter plans if necessary. If it's raining, a hike in the woods could become window-shopping at a mall, museum or a family game day!

If your activity requires tickets, reservations or special accommodations, confirm that these things are ready prior to arrival at the location.

Assure all phones and cameras are fully charged. Take pictures for memories, but don't be so involved that you remove yourself from the fun.

To avoid arguments between kids, select car/train seating assignments in advance. Also, consider a buddy system for the day to assure kids don't wander off. If you are participating in an event in the community with a large group, do a head-count when you arrive and at various times during the day to assure that the group remains together.

Review your check-list to assure you've packed everything you need. Consider toys, games and music to occupy children and teenagers. Keep them engaged during down time, like commuting and standing in lines. This may decrease the potential for frustrations. Also, remember to pack medications, proper clothing and snacks.

Remind kids of what is expected from them (i.e., stay close to the family, appropriate behaviors for a museum visit).

When you arrive at an activity location, select a meeting place that everyone can easily find if you get separated. Tell small children where they can find help if they are separated from the family.

Give kids/family ten minute and five minute reminders when the activity is coming to an end so they can prepare. This increases the chances that everyone will be ready and help to avoid tantrums.

Most importantly, have fun. Stay present. Remember the things you like about people and focus on those things.

After the activity

Thank helpers for their participation and for anything they did that added to the success of the day. Did someone take a more active role in watching the children, preparing for the activity, serving food...? Let them know that you recognized their efforts.

Ask kids what was best (and possibly worst) about the day. Encourage them to consider ways they can do more of the best and less of the worst in the future.

Tell kids and teens what they did that was great during the day.

Plan the next activity! Why wait until the day is over and everyone has returned home? Start planning the next gathering while you're having fun.

Most importantly,
Have fun.
Stay present!

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