WHAT IS CONTENTMENT?

Why learn to be content?
Trying to live up to the myth of the "perfect" family sometimes causes discontentment or stress. No family is perfect, and no one is happy all the time. We can learn to be content with what we have and determine if it is necessary to try to improve the situation. The first part of this activity should help family members understand what is valuable to them. It should also help them begin to appreciate the things they take for granted. The second part of the activity should help them see that they may have to change their attitudes or behavior if they want unpleasant situations to change.

What do we need?
paper; pencils or pens

How long will it take?
20 to 30 minutes

What do we do?

Part 1
- List ten things that are important to you. They may be material things (your home, family photographs, a treasured stuffed toy) or nonmaterial things (values, people, relationships, education, freedom).
- Narrow the list to the three things that are the most important to your happiness.
- Now decide the one thing that is most important for your happiness.
- Discuss the following questions with family members:
  - What things do you think are important that other people think are important too? How are your values similar? How are they different?
  - What do you value more than others do?
  - What do you value more, material or nonmaterial things? Why?
- What ideas that are important now will change as you grow older? Why do you think your ideas might change?
- What values do you make a part of your lifestyle? How do they matter in the way you live every day?
- Share an example of something you did or continue to do because of your values.

Part 2

• List ten things that make you unhappy. You may list either material things you don't like, or you may list situations you don't like—for example, someone saying you can't do something you want to do, losing money, or missing the bus.
• Answer the following questions about each of the things you listed:
  - Can I change the situation?
  - If I can't change the situation, can I change the way I react to the situation?
  - What has to change—me, the situation, or both?
• Now discuss these questions with family members:
  - Are you surprised at how many things can be changed? At how many things cannot be changed?
  - What changes could you make in yourself in order to become happier?
  - What changes are you willing to make to become more content?

Hints for this activity: Family members should take turns leading different parts of the activity so no one person appears to be the leader.

What happened?

- What were some of the things you and other family members valued?
- What were some of the things that made you and other family members unhappy?
- How comfortable was it to discuss these issues with family members?

What did you learn?

- What did you learn about yourself from this activity? About others in your family?
- How did values differ among family members?

Why was this activity important?

- How can knowing what you value help you make decisions?
- How will acting in agreement with your values make you feel?

What's next?

- How can you put what you learned in this activity to work in your life?